



Book Reviews, Book Lover Resources, Advice for Writers and Publishers

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Reviewer's Bookwatch

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Reviewer's Choice

Classic Celtic Music from Smithsonian Folkways
 Richard Carlin, compiler
 Smithsonian Folkways Recordings
www.folkways.si.edu
 c/o Shore Fire Media
 SFW CD 40560, \$11.99 / \$8.99 MP3, www.amazon.com

Andy Jordan
 Reviewer

"Classic Celtic Music from Smithsonian Folkways", compiled by music historian and folklorist Richard Carlin, is the 20th volume in the impressive 'Classic Series' from Smithsonian Folkways, a nonprofit record label of the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. in direct service of their stated commitment to cultural diversity, education, increased understanding, and lively engagement with the world of sound. Celtic music offers a distinctive musical genre which reflects centuries of culture of the British Isles and Ireland and was carried on through the immigrants to America. Drawn from Smithsonian Folkways

archives the 23 selections comprising "Classic Celtic Music from Smithsonian Folkways" spans the diversity of Celtic regions and showcasing a fascinating spectrum of styles . Of special interest are the liner notes offering cultural and historical insights context of each selection. The individual recordings comprising "Classic Celtic Music from Smithsonian Folkways" include:

1. Love at the Endings / John McGrath's Reel Kevin Burke 2:21
2. As I Roved Out Sarah Makem 0:54
3. Border Spirit Billy Pigg 1:20
4. 'Twas Early, Early in the Spring Margaret Dirrane 1:51
5. De'il Among the Tailors Bob Hobkirk 1:43
6. The Rocks of Bawn Joe Heaney 3:20
7. Whiskey Island Polka Pat O'Malley and Frank Keating 1:32
8. D-tigeas O Deabhasa (Children's Game Song) Sorcha Ni Ghuairim 1:03
9. Trip O'er the Mountain Willie Clancy 2:39
10. The Strayaway Child / The Lark in the Morning Michael Gorman and Margaret Barry 2:54
11. The Queen of May Shirley Collins 1:48
12. The Bonny Bunch of Roses Patrick Clancy 4:44
13. The Galway Rambler Tom Byrne 1:16
14. The Mountain Road Denis Murphy 1:03
15. Bushes and Briars Isla Cameron 2:14
16. Tifty's Annie Lucy Stewart 4:34
17. The Pearl Wedding / Nancy Taylor's Reel Willie Taylor 2:38
18. Derry Hornpipe Joe Shannon and John McGreevy 4:23
19. With My Pit Boots On Louis Killen 1:46
20. The Young Sailor Cut Down in His Prime Harry Cox 1:54
21. Bonnie Kate /Jenny's Chickens Jean Carignan 3:05
22. Glenlogie Ewan MacColl 5:12
23. Martin Wynne's Nos. 1, 2, 3, and 4 Brian Conway, Pat Mangan, Felix Dolan 4:43

The production values are superb, making "Classic Celtic Music from Smithsonian Folkways" an enduringly popular, important, and highly recommended contribution to personal, community, and academic library CD Music collections.

The Billionaire's Beck and Call
 Delilah Fawkes
 CreateSpace
 100 Enterprise Way, Suite A200
 Scotts Valley, CA 95066
 9781481893718, \$10.99, delilahfawkes.blogspot.com

Clint Travis
 Reviewer

Our true desires may be things we never even considered. "The Billionaire's Beck and Call: The Complete Series" is a paperback compilation of the best selling erotic romance series from Delilah Fawkes. Isabeau Wilcox doesn't know what to make of her sudden promotion to the assistant of infamous billionaire CEO Chase Drake. Drake has her do far more than run copies, seducing her to his dark secret that lies beneath his mansion, opening a whole new world of pleasure that Isabeau never thought possible. As their romance grows more intense, things heat up at the office with a business partner gone corrupt that could destroy the company. For lovers of dominance and submission and romantic plots, "The Billionaire's Beck and Call: The Complete Series" " is an excellent addition to any collection looking to expand its selection of erotic romance.

Out of Circulation: A Cat in the Stacks Mystery

Miranda James
Berkley Prime Crime
375 Hudson Street, New York, NY 10014
9781624901928, \$26.99, www.catinthestacks.com

Deacon Solomon
Reviewer

Landlady plumps for icky lit. She used to think Al Gore was a great writer. Then she read dog mysteries for a while. After that she read (and still reads) Amish mysteries. Lately she's ingesting a lot of cat mysteries. She thought I might like 'Out of Circulation' because the feline protagonist lives with a lot of books -- "Just like you do, Deacon!"

Looking at the book, I remember when I was a little boy. I got a lot of hand-me-down kiddie lit from my older sister. Authors named Albert Peyson Terhune, Thomas C. Hinkle, Frances Montgomery, and Marshall Saunders trot through my memory. I recall them fondly.

Now comes Landlady with 'Miranda James.' When I open Ms. James's 'Out of Circulation' at random and start to read, it comes clear to me that Landlady wants to wreck my life. I holler down the stairs: "This 'Miranda James' broad is a man!"

"How would you know?" comes Landlady's response.

I answer: "Because she writes like a man. She doesn't know how to write like a woman!"

Landlady pounces on that one like a tigress. "Oh yeah? Tell me Sir," she sneers. "How do women write? How can you tell the difference? Sexist asshole!"

"Well, one reason I can tell is that I looked up 'Miranda James' on the Web. Another reason I can tell is that the book is copyrighted by somebody named 'Dean James'. And finally," I said, "this Dean James person is a lousy writer. He can't write like a real broad. I guessed 'Miranda' was a man right away. That's why I took the trouble to look her up. I wanted to be sure before I lit a fire under you."

There's a haze of smoke in the stairwell, now. It's warmer in the house than it was a few minutes ago.

"Another thing," I said: "If I hear about one more lard-assed Maine Coon cat named 'Diesel,' I'm gonna reach me down my 20-gage and change that cat's name to 'Gravy Train.' Has this bogus, cross-dressing writer -- or its editor -- got a memory hole? (S)he doesn't know that 'reality' television used up 'Diesel' as a nickname for 'Two-Ton Tommy' years ago? What is it, anyway: (S)he can't spell 'Kenworth,' or 'Peterbilt,' or 'Mack'?"

Stuff like Out of Circulation is fine for those who like it, I guess. I just wish the folks who like it wouldn't try to inflict it on the rest of us.

My Last Summer with You: No Fanfare for a Withered Rose
Fidelis O. Mkpuru
Dog Ear Publishing
4010 West 86th Street
Indianapolis, IN 46268
9781457512582, \$15.99, www.amazon.com

Fran Lewis
Reviewer

Life can change in the flick of a moment or in this case when answering the phone. As one man now comparing himself to a withered rose, or flower reflects on his aging body a voice from the past will bring back memories that will flood into his present. What happens when one woman decides to leave you part of her own legacy in order to enrich your later years? When Joseph remembers Wendy and hears the voice of Francesca we go back 31 years to 1977 and enter the halls and dorm of a small town college in Chicago and learn more about this remarkable man.

As Joseph takes us back in time we learn a lot about his culture, his feelings and his discipline. Arriving at a new school and being a foreign student created certain obstacles when it came to registration and getting assigned to classes. Having to fill out certain required papers and completing them the rest seemed to flow with ease. Entering the registration room is where we meet Wendy. Wanting to get to know more about Joseph she invites him to lunch at the cafeteria but not before he buys his textbooks, takes his first class and makes it abundantly clear that his main focus are his studies. Bright, astute and definitely into what the professor is teaching, his questions are right on target, insightful and extremely well thought out.

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder and sometimes can be considered quite superficial. But, when one young woman tries to sell the attributes of another to Joseph his disappointed is aired, his feelings expressed as he was hoping to have a private lunch with a new friend that turned in a different direction.

Cultivating his friendship with Wendy was paramount as she enveloped him in so many different worlds. Science, art, music, world politics and more learning about her family and background explaining to him that seeing and feeling what he learns in school would help in rise in the future. Her experiences are vast and her knowledge base wide as he went further into the areas of plant species and art.

Told in the voice of the young college student we hear his thoughts, understand his changing feelings and fears as he enters Wendy's world, meets her family and becomes accustomed to her style. But, Joseph never loses sight of his goals and when the Chairman of the Department asks to see him he has no idea, feels uneasy but soon finds out that his future is in this department and with the help of this professor and a mentor he was considered for a job as a research assistant during the summer something unheard of for a freshman student. Imagine his excitement when given a tour of this man's research lab first and assigned a student mentor. Complimenting him on his achievements but letting him know that he needed to live up to standard, Joseph wondered if she were his mentor or mother. So, when the visit was over Joseph learned he was directly working with the head of the department had to report his progress to his student mentor and could use the departmental library for his studies.

Like all men or some men Joseph was doing well academically but began to feel stifled in other ways. Having his career and his movements channeled and monitored by so many women was overwhelming at times and confining. As we learn more about his feelings about Wendy's friends, their backgrounds, his take on them and the friction that he encountered at times. Meeting Lisa and her boyfriend Bruce brought to light for Joseph and the reader the definition of the words prejudice and bigot. But, this would not be the last time he endured racial slurs, rejection and the feeling that he did not belong. Getting to know Wendy created mixed signals and situations throughout his first year. Asked to join her at the family home and at her talent show he learned the extent to wish a father would go to prevent his friendship from Wendy from continuing. Although he was an A student, award winner and scholar the fact that they were of two different races should not have mattered when it came to their friendship. But, sometimes people read more into things that are there and Joseph as the reader will learn is quite perceptive, analyzes each situation and decides on a solution that is not always what is best for him but for the other person. Students that escaped from South Africa enlighten him even more, others in some of his classes realize the value of his friendship and help as experiments are done in class and he receives enough college credit to become a junior after one year.

But, Wendy is special to him and no matter how hard he tries the connection is there but will never be permanent. Respecting him, valuing his knowledge she alerts him to the fact that Francesca, the cheerleader, model and her very beautiful friend needs his help in physics and then things change for

Joseph even more.

The author brings to light many important issues within this novel that were not only prevalent in 1977 and 1978 but in the present too. *My Last Summer with You: No fanfare for a withered rose* is a story that envelops the reader from the beginning. This story takes place over 30 years ago but the storyline could bring it into the present. Joseph could be any foreign exchange student, that at the age of 17 wants to find his own way without the distraction of a social life, girl friends and withstanding the disregard at times for who he is and the disrespect of some of the other students. But, as some would rebel and take action Joseph is centered and does not take the bait when called names or rejected by a close friend. You hear both Wendy and Joseph's thoughts in their short yet intimate notes as the story continues.

Some are taught that inter-racial friendships are wrong and parents frown upon them. Joseph put is all into his studies and his belief in God. Wendy although at times the reader feels she is truly a good friend to him we can see deeper into her character and realize that she used his kind and caring ways to better herself. With parents that did not want her to continue her friendship, listening to their demands she still could not divorce herself completely from Joseph. His personality is quite compelling. Francesca becomes his friend but to whose advantage? With his limited funds he still soars and when Francesca has trouble paying for school he rallies to her aid. Francesca enlists Joseph's help and he pays her way in more ways than one. But, when he is invited to meet her family we realize that cultural differences do matter, prejudice rears its ugly head and very few if any accept inter-racial relationships no less marriages. When things seem to get estranged Francesca leaves for a while and returns with a modeling contract in New York. Almost tied to her apron strings and setting up the rules for their relationship to discounting it all in a heartbeat as if they are two blossoms that are slowly fading away. His life changes and his friends leave and now it is up to him to decide his future.

How this all ends you will have to read for yourself. Friendships that are strong often do not last. Life takes many unpleasant turns and then we have to recycle them in a more positive direction. An ending so raw and so heartfelt yet understandable that you have to decide for yourself what will happen next for Joseph. Friendships are valuable but when others play too strong a role then the end result will be: *No Fanfare for a Withered Rose*. This is one novel that college students, high school students and study groups can use to learn how young people often judge people by their color and not by what they are within or inside.

About the book: In his first novel, Fidelis Mkpuru tells a story of Joseph, a seventeen year old student who leaves his family and continent to attend college in a new world. As his friends abandon him, Joseph realizes that wealth and fame are more powerful threat than ethnic prejudice to his cross-cultural relationships.

Crazy Quilt

Paula Paul

University of New Mexico Press

1717 Roma Ave. NE

Albuquerque, NM 87106

www.unmpress.com

9780826337047, \$17.95, www.amazon.com

Mayra Calvani

Reviewer

The last time I cried because of a book was years ago and the culprit was *Marley and Me*. *Crazy Quilt* is such a different book yet so alike in many ways. Both deal with death and loss, both are incredibly moving stories, and both remind us how short and precious life is.

The story begins when our protagonist, Flora Adams, decides to visit her hometown of Lubbock, Texas,

following her recent breast cancer treatment. In a way, she's running away from a dull marriage and from her newly near encounter with death. However, unexpected events compel her to stay in Muleshoe, a little town in the New Mexican border. There, her life becomes entangled with a quirky, wise old man who's dying of cancer and who's being evicted from his home, as well as with his troubled teenaged granddaughter. By helping the old man through this difficult time and by becoming a mother figure to the girl, Flora is able, at least partly, to heal herself and deal with her own fears. Ultimately, she's able to empower herself and find the courage to live her life to her full potential, based on what she really wants and needs and not on somebody else's agenda.

I absolutely loved *Crazy Quilt*. Not only is the prose beautiful and interlaced with vivid images and perceptive observations about life and death, but the characters are so incredibly real and compelling that I felt myself there with them, sharing their emotions and tribulations. There are also segments and lines of dialogue that are straight-out funny and made me laugh out loud--a nice relief from the usual heaviness of the subject. This is a novel that will make you ponder, will make you cry and will make you have those "A-ha" moments. Once in a while a novel comes along that has so much substance it makes you think about your own life. This is one of those novels, and one you won't forget in a long time. Highly recommended.

The Girl: A Journey in Memories through Self

9780977124329, \$17.99

Zarat: Notes of the Becoming

9780977124343, \$18.99

Existing: A Present Solution

9780977124374, \$TBA

Written by Stephan Pacheco

Pacheco Humility Foundation

www.LibertyCore.org

Samuel Drake

Reviewer

I suspect we have a genius at hand. After you get into the pace of this modern writing style which is meant to represent the erratic breaking of the important thoughts that come to define us as a person, the reader starts to see what this really is. The Heroes' thoughts occur in nearly random, but fatefully important events which symbolizes the makeup of all our streaming lives. In essence, I believe that it is a link between what classes in the US/American society fight for and against each other for; a sense of place that works out to a sense of superiority which this Author proves is utterly imaginary. I believe that Pacheco believes that Human Equality and Utopia itself are just a mindset away. To reach this mindset we have to face what's illogical and only self-serving in ourselves, while embracing our absolute, non-sinful, Humanness; which allows us, as people, to honestly connect with each other without fear of one another. In the Works of Stephan Pacheco, we're meant to explore ourselves, our sex, and interact deliberately with the world without fretting concern but with Compassion toward the emotions people around us may be trapped in. The character's anger only arising in non-negotiable conflict against people attempting to assume authority over others in order to have a sense of false self-righteousness; a sense the character's are certain, is impossible. Pacheco is open and is easily reachable for commentary. He was reached through his LibertyCore.org website. When asked, "What is the ultimate intention of these no-holds-bar aggressive books?" he responded to me via an email that said, "Ultimately, they are meant to address the pitfalls that secret and unaddressed fear turn a person into; a person that they never wanted to be, that they originally thought they were fighting against. In the US we are on the verge of personal Nazi-esque imperialism spread throughout our families and jobs, or a personal Utopia. I choose Utopia, and anyone can at any second, but it takes courage to bust our egos. Total courage. Without censorship. Because an Internal War is required like every achievement of Human Freedom, a revolution is required. Strong minds should read these books, the paradox is, is that it's the weak minds that need them which is why I'm branching back to my roots in Film and visual Entertainment in order to reach them. However, we are

going to make this an audio book and will likely do something with it visually, eventually." These Heroes are the people that do what others want to do but wind up repressing to be non-confrontational, because of their relationship with fear, and a fictional judgment, thereby harming their sense of self, their society and definitely their government.

It's the Freedom that's impressive. It is the character's non-willingness to compromise the Equality they know they permanently have that expels them from a world created in a society's super-consciousness where the will to be the best enslaves lower classes with a false assumption of supremacy; a supremacy that these characters know is a factual impossibility. These works raise the question of, why does American society keep using something, anything to create a supremacist ranking system; once racial, now educational, or financial; to create restrictions of involvement, when all humans are created, live and die in Equality. Pacheco leads these characters to break away from every lie that fear makes up in a person's mind to reach Freedom from our parents, our teachers, our bosses, our society, its paid officers, and anyone attempting to use another person to validate and glorify themselves by coercing answers and reactions from Individuals. The only exception in Pacheco's Works seems to be allowing the function of educational, compassionate management devised to enable and not control a populace that I believe Pacheco realizes leads to and that we are at the dawn of the "Future Knowledge Society." For these characters, it's about where they found that particular caring guidance, and what led them there. In a time of increasing regulation, we're looking at a Free future, where regulation will ultimately be supplemented by compassion, leading to a less stressed and aggressive mindset. These Utopian ideas really coming after the first attacks a person must face in the early parts of Stephan Pacheco's Manifest Utopia Series. Pacheco also responded to me, "Without the brutally honest War there is no Utopia. We must care enough to bring War upon ourselves. It's the only path to real Peace."

These are books for the People and should be embraced by Intellectuals and enjoyed by the entertain-able, as Pacheco takes no credit for writing these books, but gives the credit to his characters.

Global Crusoe
Ann Marie Fallon
Ashgate Publishing Limited
110 Cherry Street, Suite 3-1
Burlington, VT 05401-3818
<http://www.ashgate.com>
9781409429982, \$ 89.50, www.amazon.com

Shreesha Udupa
Reviewer

"Whether we speak of comparative literature as a work or as a discipline, it always claims to be at once on the side of the comparing and of the compared" - Derrida

When one is engaging with the discipline of comparative literature in postcolonial context, one cannot escape the double bind- the predicament posed by the historical event of colonialism and the resultant epistemic ruptures. Crusoe being one of the epitomic figures of the spirit of colonialism, Global Crusoe: Comparative Literature, Postcolonial Theory and Transnational Aesthetics by Ann Marie Fallon (2011) lends itself as an interesting case regarding how comparative literature engages with such a figure since both are emerging from common sources.

Fallon acknowledges that Defoe's Robinson Crusoe "created an early script for the European colonial project at the beginning of eighteenth century" (Fallon 1). Also she identifies the text as reproducing a kind of myth of the modern condition. The island castaway theme became a genre by itself in French Robinsonades: this was the genre which retold the story of an island castaway in multiple languages celebrating European colonial power. With expansion of conquest- territorial as well as imaginative- it became a manifesto of the spirit of imperialism with Crusoe figure becoming the symbolic ideal of an

imperialist. Fallon's study identifies that the nineteenth century Robinsonades largely focused solely on the island section of the novel establishing firmly the Crusoe myth as a story of celebrating colonialism in popular imagination.

Global Crusoe attempts to identify the association between the Crusoe figure and the spirit of imperialism as a nineteenth century construct by maintaining that "we can productively understand Defoe's project as not just a rehearsal for colonialism... but as expression of emergent cosmopolitan self of the early eighteenth century that typifies modernity" (Fallon 1). Continuing this assertion, she holds that "this newly and uniquely cosmopolitan selfhood emerges before the dominating English colonial project takes hold" (Fallon 1). This assertion is quite problematic with it being a simultaneous two-folded act- it is linking the emergent model of cosmopolitan selfhood with the phenomenon of European modernity and delinking it from the colonial project by arguing that historically such a construction of new selfhood preceded the imperial project. It should account for the predicament which surrounds as the locus of the study: the cosmopolitan self as well as the colonial project both had emerged from the European modernity just like comparative literature, the platform which is enabling the study to take place: the latter is evident if one looks at the foundational statements that Herder or Goethe make, or even in Marx when he states about the transition from national and local literatures to a world literature (Marx and Engels 39): comparative literature is emerging from the colonial couch.

Further the study proposes that today Crusoe is no longer a lone, struggling survivor- an individualist figure as it has been argued by various studies, Ian Watt (1997) for instance, but "a cosmopolitan figure of connection to and a representation of our own moment of anxiety around a rapidly globalizing world" (Fallon 2). Thus in a significant shift, it identifies Crusoe figure as "a warning against the dangers of individual isolation and colonial oppression" (Fallon 2). At the outset, Global Crusoe specifies the limits within which the study is being carried on: it is using feminist and postcolonial approaches for its re-examination of Defoe's Crusoe as well as the consequent Robinsonades.

The initial move itself commences the dislocation that is at work in the study: a very innovative dislocation indeed which functions as a gesture of clearing space for a comparativist to move further: Crusoe figure in Defoe is seen as re-inscription of an experience involving "traumatic dislocations inherent in creating a transnational social imaginary" (Fallon 2); further it is posited as a split between national and cosmopolitan desires. The act of positing the split in desire as lending into traumatic dislocation is apt, but formulating it as national vis-a-vis transnational prevents it from engaging with the resultant predicament involved here.

Various retellings of Crusoe story in twentieth century narrate Crusoe as Friday's confrontations with the other rather than that of Crusoe, or present him as an immigrant and focus on the transitional transnational anxieties that Friday has to undergo. The anxiety is at once an anxiety of groundlessness as well as of being oppressed rather than that of a colonizer entering into a new found land with imperial project at his hand. Hence an engagement with retellings that develops alternate models of reading have to account for this shift.

Starting from the comparative model and then moving onto the framework of world literature, Global Crusoe arrives at, what it identifies as, the transnational literary aesthetics. This, it claims, furthers one's ability to imagine and inhabit cultural differences and interactions beyond the acquisition of knowledge about such difference and interaction (Fallon 3). Fallon pronounces that the study is interested in "how transnational or supranational metafiction... serve as structural condition for the imaginary of other worlds which exist between the global and the local, the utopic and dystopic, the heterogeneous and the homogenous" (Fallon 3). It identifies the other worlds contained in the literary as "contact zones of shared human experience" and hopes their reading one "can learn to critique the consequences of globalization in terms of its agency within local social conditions and transnational cultural production" (Fallon 3).

Global Crusoe renders Crusoe journey and his life in island as fundamental question of "what does it mean to be at home in the world?" (Fallon 3) and identifies it as a basic question which it going to address

throughout while examining various texts like Nadine Gordimer's "Friday's Footprint", Coetzee's *Foe*, Bessy Head's "The Wind and a Boy", Walcott's *Pantomime*, Elizabeth Bishop's "Crusoe at Home", Marianne Wiggins' *John Dollar*, Maxine Hong Kingston's *China Men*, Victoria Slavuski's *Musica para olvidar una isla* etc.

The first chapter of *Global Crusoe* surveys the problems of literary revision and intertextuality keeping Defoe's *Crusoe* in focus. This act of re-envisioning is both political and aesthetic: politically it is an engagement with a colonial text and a way of staking out independence from the project of colonialism. Aesthetically it is a receptive response to literary influences that move across the boundaries of nation-states. Next it examines the problems of revisions in Defoe's text itself: revisions of source materials like Selkirk's accounts and Ibn Tufail's *Hayy ibn Yaqdham*; further it considers motifs of revision found in the text: the footprint, the journal, the parrot. The narrative practice of revision - of space and identity- is also identified as a way of coping with the disorientation of fictional colonial spaces.

Later *Global Crusoe* discusses the Caribbean retellings of *Crusoe*- by Derek Walcott and Sam Selvon. Here the revision is a significant political and literary strategy with the backdrop of postcolonial ethos: Both Selvon's *Moses Ascending* (1975) and Walcott's *Pantomime* (1978) engage in literary revision at multiple levels- inventing *Crusoe* as the "first Creole", reversing racial identities, altering the meaning of "discovery" and parodying the creation of autobiography.

Africa exists as absence in Defoe's *Crusoe*: after his return, remembering how he found himself stranded on a raft on the edge of the formidable shore of an unknown continent, Defoe's *Crusoe* thanks that at least it was not in Africa. *Global Crusoe* looks at African retellings of *Crusoe* story: Coetzee's *Foe* (1986), Gordimer's "Friday's Footprint" (1960), Bessy Head's "The Wind and a Boy". Coetzee uses the literary persona of Robinson *Crusoe*, now an old man in Bristol, to deliver his Nobel Prize lecture (2003). Then Fallon studies the feminist retellings of *Crusoe* in the fifth chapter: like Africa, woman is almost completely absent from Defoe's *Crusoe*. Marianne Wiggins (*John Dollar* 1989) repopulates *Crusoe*'s island with women; further the voice of the narrator here is that of a female. John Dollar brings the question of gender into centrality in its reworking of *Crusoe* myth. Argentinean novelist Victoria Slavuski's *Musica para olvidar una isla* (*Music to Forget an Island By*, 1993) plays on this issue of absence further: the characters in the novel actually live on the *Crusoe*'s "real island" and they know about the novel to debate among themselves, but none of them have read it.

Finally *Global Crusoe* examines the literatures from North Americas looking at the fragments of *Crusoe* scattered across the continent. It begins with studying *Crusoean* revisions of Jan Martel's *The Life of Pi* (2001), Maxine Hong Kingston's *China Men* (1977), Cormac McCarthy's *The Crossing* (1994), Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water* (1994), Louise Erdrich's *Tracks* (1989): some of them also represent re-appropriation of *Crusoe* as American myth.

The study identifies that "*Crusoe* himself circulates in these texts as an object of shifting and indeterminate value" (Fallon 15): the referent of the figure of *Crusoe* constantly defers: as a symbol of British colonialism, the capitalist in the emergent bourgeois system, a poet of the new world, the slave trader, the Chinese laborer, a foil to the female artist etc. there is an oscillation between the idea of colonialism and the terrain of colonies, the land and the idea of nation, local and global.

The new incarnations of *Crusoe* offer alternative models of reading after passing through the prism of postcolonial experience: it is also an experience of a postcolonial immigrant who has moved from margins to the erstwhile colonial center.

A man on an island story, Fallon argues, is representing transnational anxieties: it is also a response to the confrontation with the Other/Otherness: in Defoe's *Crusoe* when *Crusoe* sees 'Friday's footprint', the anxiety invoked by this trace of the other makes him flee and retreat- like an animal burrowing into his shelter himself: This is the first encounter of *Crusoe* with Friday, or rather with the trace of Friday- his footprints: it makes the inconsistent nature of the border between human-animal evident, whereby, at a

later stage they mutually interchange their positions once Crusoe begins to undertake the 'civilizing mission.' This surfacing of the repressed at the face of unhomely other and the consequent strategic movement to tame the other by altering the rules of the game and making a home out of that which was unhomely there by rendering the other as an alien in its home is also a story of modern colonial experience.

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Ann's Bookshelf

Mrs Robinson's Disgrace
Kate Summerscale
Bloomsbury Press
175 Fifth Avenue, Suite 315
NY, NY 10010
www.bloomsbury.com
9781608199136, \$26.00, www.amazon.com

Kate Summerscale's book is more than just the story of a Victorian wife's romantic indiscretions and a scandalous divorce case. It is a glimpse of a changing society. One in which a woman's sexuality could be discussed in terms of hysteria and insanity caused by disorders of the womb. One in which gynecology and psychology were new medical disciplines and homeopathy, phrenology and hydropathy were accepted and resorted to by such eminent figures as the Brontes, George Eliot (Mary Evans), Darwin, Dickens and even members of the Royal family. And one in which the new Court of Divorce and Matrimonial Causes was established, making divorce easier and less expensive to obtain on the grounds of adultery and (for women petitioners) one additional "matrimonial offence" (i.e. desertion, cruelty, bigamy, rape, sodomy or bestiality). The law was beginning to recognize a married woman's rights and the need to protect her property, but a husband could still claim custody of his children and, as in the Robinsons' case, ownership of all his wife's papers.

Isabella Robinson was an intelligent, well-read and imaginative woman. In 1844, as a thirty-one-year-old widow with one child, she married Henry Robinson, a successful civil engineer whose business building steam-ships and sugar-cane mills often took him overseas. Henry already had a mistress and two illegitimate children, and he proved to be, in Isabella's words, an "uncongenial partner...uneducated, narrow-minded, harsh-tempered, selfish, proud". He also persuaded her to hand him control of the money which had been settled on her by her father.

Isabella's real misfortune was that like many lonely, romantically inclined women of her day, she was fatally inclined to foster romantic obsessions and to confide her most secret thoughts to her "secret friend" - her diary. How much of what she wrote there about her "wretchedest and wickedest hours" was romantic fiction, modeled on such books as Flaubert's *Madam Bovary*, we will never know, but when her husband discovered the diary and read it he was incensed and determined to ruin the man Isabella had set her heart on. A Divorce Court judge, too, deemed it convincing enough to consider Henry's petition for divorce for three months before pronouncing judgement.

The case was a public sensation and poor Isabella had to endure parts of her diary being read out in court and published in the newspapers. Fictional diaries were popular reading at the time but Isabella's was, apparently, shocking fact. She was deemed by one newspaper editor to be either "as foul and abandoned a creature as ever wore woman's shape" or to be a madwoman. And insanity was one plea open to Isabella in her own defence.

Summerscale's research for this book sits lightly on a scandalous story but her endnotes show the care she has taken. Like the well-known sequence of paintings 'Past and Present' by Leopold Egg, which depict the discovery and the sad results of a wife's indiscretions, divorce was still a disaster for women and, too often, for their children as well. And although I never really warmed to Isabella in spite of her plight and the prolonged ordeal she underwent, Summerscale kept me reading to the end, when the result of the court case and the outcome for all those involved is revealed. I will not spoil the suspense by revealing what it was.

Schroder
Amity Gaige
Twelve Books
c/o Hachette Book Group
237 Park Avenue
New York, NY 10017-0010
9781455512133, \$21.99, www.amazon.com

"What follows is a record of where Meadow and I have been since our disappearance."

So, begins the opening statement of Schroder, and it is prefaced by the e.e.cummings poem "here is the deepest secret nobody knows". This sounds tantalizing, especially when you know from the cover blurb that Meadow is the narrator's six-year-old daughter and that he has abducted her. As far as he is concerned this is not a premeditated abduction, not really, he just decided on a "spontaneous trip", and failed to return Meadow to his estranged wife after a parental visit. Now that the law has caught up with him, he has been persuaded to write down everything that happened.

Yet, the first thing he tells us is how, as a child, he lied about his own life in order to win a major competition, and, in the process, he gave himself a false identity which he then chose to keep. By his own account, Eric Schroder, alias Kennedy, is a liar and a fraud, a man who neglects his elderly father, has forged qualifications for his c.v., has deceived his wife and her family for years and, now, has run off with his child. He is also researching 'pauses' and he adds footnotes to his document in order, one assumes, to impress us with his essential seriousness and intelligence.

With his glib account of his failings, his protestations of love for his estranges wife, and his hints of childhood trauma documented in interspersed fragments describing a childhood escape, with his father, from Communist East Germany, Eric Kennedy comes across as a self-serving sociopath. Whether this is what the author, Amity Gaige, intended, I don't know, but I quickly began to lose patience with her narrator.

So why did I go on reading? I don't know. But that's what sociopaths do - they draw you in, tell you just

enough to make their actions sound plausible and justified, and play on your emotions to keep you hooked.

Yes, by the time I got to the end of Eric's story I did feel sorry for the things which happened to him in his childhood. I did think that maybe they might explain why he had chosen a different identity and had made up a different childhood for himself. And I did understand how he came to live a lie. I also understood how he loved Meadow and how he justified his own actions once he and Meadow were evading the law.. But I couldn't forgive him for never phoning Meadow's mother - the wife he said he loved so much - to let her know that their child was safe and well. And I couldn't forgive his self-indulgence or his casual parenting, which ultimately put Meadow's life in danger. Given his lifelong skill at weaving stories and convincing people of his essential honesty, I wouldn't trust this narrative to be completely true, either. And I certainly would never advise his wife to take him back.

In Shroeder, Amity Gaig has created a character who is so persuasive and convincing that you begin to believe in him, although you know you shouldn't. Bit in the end it is her skill at evoking tender emotions, the complexity of family relationships, the joys and the worries of parenthood, and the thrill and danger of unexpected adventures, which makes his narrative compelling.

Granta 122: Betrayal

John Freeman

Grove Press

c/o Grove/Atlantic, Inc.

841 Broadway, 4th floor

New York, NY 10003

www.groveatlantic.com

9781905881659, \$16.99, www.amazon.com

Granta's theme 'Betrayal' offers scope for many things, from love to war, from politics to survival, and more. As usual, the pieces included come from authors around the world and their contributions are unexpected, innovative and excellent.

Janine di Giovanni, who has reported on wars for more than twenty years, begins 'Seven Days in Syria' with her baby son, whose tiny nails she finds herself unable to cut. She charts this same sense of vulnerability in the lives of the Syrian people as she sees the effects of war gradually seep into their lives. Her account is personal and vivid. "There is no template for war", she writes, only the agony, the uncertainty and the fear, which is constant.

Karen Russell, too, writes of the effects of war but she weaves a sort of magic into her fictional story. Beverly, a professional masseuse, begins therapeutic massage on an Iraqi war veteran whose body tattoo is a "skin mural" of the war-landscape on the day his friend was killed. "Healing is a magical art" said a pamphlet which attracted Beverly to her career, and her ability to empathise with a customer and to use her massage skills to feel and relax the tensions expressed in the physical body is remarkable. But her expert physical work with this particular customer has inexplicable results, the tattoo does strange things, and there are unexpected psychological effects for both of them.

As well as reportage and stories, Granta includes photography and poetry. Darcy Padilla's photographs of 'Julie' chart a life affected by poverty, abuse and AIDS but they show happiness, partnerships and children as part of her struggle to survive. And John Burnside's poem, 'Postscript', echoes some of Robert Frost's well-known lines and offers a modern perspective on an evening in snowy woods. It tells of a passing moment in which a search for a mobile phone signal prompts musings on the ephemeral nature of beauty, a cup of tea, a welcoming home and "no promises to keep". And the only path is the one back to the car.

Mohsin Hamid tells of a young boy's text-message based love affair with a local girl who has the ambition, it is suggested, of sleeping her way to a better life. Samantha Harvey's small-scale apocalypse-survival

scenario set on a fictional island could well be a true story. Andre Aciman documents an editor's experience with a young woman writer with whom he begins a strangely satisfying relationship. Neither of them seem fully able to commit themselves but perhaps it is just his reading of the situation, or perhaps he is just a man who cannot make big decisions. The result? I will not spoil the story by revealing it.

Colin Robinson learns about group loyalty and Paddleball. Ben Marcus imagines a dystopia in which group and family loyalties are tested. Lauren Wilkinson writes of the fatal attraction of guns. And Jennifer Vanderbes writes of a lone woman fire-mapper in the forests of New Mexico whose isolated life is briefly disrupted by a male forestry worker with whom she shares friendship and memories. Both, it turns out, have reasons for choosing to work with fire.

Callan Wink's 'One More Last Stand', introduces us to a man who participates in historical re-enactments of General Custer's last stand but who is inclined to tell tall tales to tourists and to fraternize with the 'enemy'. It can also be read on the Granta web site at <http://www.granta.com/>, along with other material not included in this quarter's magazine.

Granta 122: Betrayal is excellent reading and a fine addition to Granta's long tradition of fostering new writing.

Ann Skea, Reviewer
<http://ann.skea.com>

Bethany's Bookshelf

Plants, Passion and Patronage
Kristina Taylor & Robert Peel
Artifice
c/o IL Book Distribution
575 Prospect Street, #301
Lakewood, NJ 08701
www.artificebooksonline.com
1908967021, \$29.95, www.amazon.com

Descended from fourteenth century king known as Robert the Bruce, the Bute Family were avid landscapers with a keen interest in architecture and the arts. Compiled with commentary by Kristina Taylor and Robert Peel, "Plants, Passion and Patronage: Three Hundred Years of the Bute Family Landscapes" is a seminal work of remarkable scholarship. This superbly and profusely illustrated, 192 page compendium provides an informed and informative historical overview of Bute family accomplishments spanning three centuries -- from the 18th century down to the present day. Of special note are the chapters devoted to Kew, Luton, Highcliffe, Cardiff, Falkland, Dumfries House, Old Place of Mochrum, and St. John's Lodge. Enhanced with the inclusion of a bibliography and an index, "Plants Passion and Patronage: Three Hundred Years of the Bute Family Landscapes" is an impressive contribution the growing library of British art, architecture, landscaping, and an evolving esthetic culture.

The Way It Turned Out: A Memoir
Herant Katchadourian
Pan Stanford Publishing
Penthouse Level, Suntec Tower 3
8 Temasck Blvd., Singapore 038988
www.panstafor.com
9789814364751, \$34.95, www.amazon.com

Herant Katchadourian was a teacher and administrator whose career spanned seven decades and three continents. **"The Way It Turned Out: A Memoir"** is his 478 page autobiography in which he lays out the fascinating story of his personal and professional life. From his teen years in the city of Beirut, to his adult experiences in the culture of northern California, his life story is narrated with candor and detail. Of special note are his philosophical reflections while staying on a remote island in the Baltic Sea. Superbly presented and highly recommended reading, **"The Way It Turned Out: A Memoir"** is also available in an ebook format (9789814364768, \$19.22).

Primary Physics: The Principles Behind Roman Machines

Marti Ellen

Sunshine Educational

9780958670159, \$22.00, www.primaryphysics.com

Machinery is a cornerstone of man's technology and has been for centuries. **"Primary Physics: The Principles Behind Roman Machines"** discusses these archaic devices and how they serve as the grandfathers of modern machinery, and how the engineers of the day made their machines work without electricity or other concepts we take for granted. Outlining basic engineering concepts and how they were made complex, **"Primary Physics"** is a strong addition to history and science collections, not to be missed with its countless informative diagrams. Also from Sunshine Educational in their Primary Physics Collection is **"Primary Physics: The Principles Behind Leonardo's Science"** (0958670110, \$22.00), exploring the higher concepts that genius of the Renaissance Leonardo Da Vinci used in his many excellent inventions.

The Magician's Secret

Kam Kaminske

CreateSpace

100 Enterprise Way, Suite A200

Scotts Valley, CA 95066

wwwcreatespace.com

9781479251322, \$7.95, www.kalvinthekamel.com

The power of the mind can open any possibility. **"The Magician's Secret"** is the story of Pete, and his search to find meaning in life. Pete encounters Calvin the Kamel, a being from another dimension, who offers both guidance and friendship. In the process, Pete learns about the role that his own subconscious plays in creating the mysterious and wonderful experience that is life itself. **"The Magician's Secret"** is a thought-provoking parable that transcends genre and era.

Island of Dreams

Aline P'Nina Tayar

Ondina Press

9780957378308, \$10.28, www.alinetayar.com

As a family is scattered by tragedy, trying to tie everything together again can prove oh so difficult. **"Island of Dreams"** is an novel from Aline P'Nina Tayar who presents a story of conflict, tragedy, and its effects on the people of a small Maltese family scattered through the following four decades. A moving story on the changes between generation and lives, **"Island of Dreams"** is a choice pick, not to be missed.

A Dream of Good and Evil

Anne Hendren

Ring of Fire Publishing

9780615696003, \$9.99, www.amazon.com

There are many opportunities to do good in life. **"A Dream of Good and Evil"** is a novel following Loisann "Lou" Cooper as her life falls apart and she struggles to piece it back together in the process. As those

close to her face many crises, she realizes the root cause behind all this may give the architect a better shot at settling the score with the old boss. "A Dream of Good and Evil" is a snazzy twist of storytelling, much recommended.

A Teacher Grows In Brooklyn

Albert Mazza

Mill City Press

9781936780112, \$14.95, www.millcitypublishing.com

A good teacher never stops learning. "A Teacher Grows in Brooklyn" is a memoir from Albert Mazza, as he shares his experiences as a Brooklyn teacher with plenty of opportunities to see the world, often with his students through New York's sister city programs and so much more. An enticing and riveting read of an educator's education, "A Teacher Grows in Brooklyn" is a fine collection of thought, not to be missed.

After Beauty

Yvonne Postelle

Red Berry Editions

9780981578132, \$22.00, www.amazon.com

There is a poignancy to our life, and our living. "After Beauty" is a collection of poetry from award winner Yvonne Postelle who presents a poignant and airy sort of poetry, that offers and provokes much to ponder about what comes next. "After Beauty" is a strong addition to contemporary poetry collections, not to be missed. "Warm Eyes": Ellen says I must take/life's ugly face between/my palms and love it.//God knows I try. That's why/I'm here at Grief Counseling:/But what if I never love again?//What if no eyes are as warm/as your eyes? None as blue?/No one to love me as you loved me?//Not wanting to children to remember me/an old crone undone by grief/I pretend to go on.

Finding Gloria

Marianne Curtis

CreateSpace

100 Enterprise Way, Suite A200

Scotts Valley, CA 95066

wwwcreatespace.com

9781456422332, \$17.99, www.amazon.com

Trying to find a place where you belong proves harder for some than others. "Finding Gloria" is a memoir from Marianne Curtis who shares her insights on struggling to piece together her life growing up a s award of the state and adoptee, growing up under abuse, and finding acceptance through family. "Finding Gloria" is an insightful and moving story of facing the demons of the past and coming out with something of happiness.

The Prophet's Protege

Perry L. Westmoreland

Lee and Vance Publishing Company

9780979324826 \$32.99 www.amazon.com

The Prophet's Protege is a grand historical novel, set during the twentieth century when the Cold War fostered a pervasive and ongoing thread of global nuclear annihilation. At first, Communism controlled the Soviet Union, rejecting all faith; then gradually, the people started to turn back to Christianity. Amid this backdrop of a tenuous balance of power, with all human life potentially in the balance, there are those gifted with the holy burden of prophecy. The Prophet's Protege is epic in its scope, a sweeping chronicle of the power of human faith and a nation's collective spiritual journey.

Susan Bethany

Reviewer

Buhle's Bookshelf**The Dark Lake****Anthea Jane Carson****Privately Published****www.antheajanecarson.com****9781478192695 \$8.95 pbk. / \$2.99 Kindle www.amazon.com**

The Dark Lake is a novel of psychological suspense, inspired by a true event in Oshkosh, Wisconsin in the 1980's. The story follows a mentally disturbed woman, living with her parents and unable to fully provide for herself even though she is in her thirties. Her mind is trapped into endlessly reliving an echoing memory of a party that turned horrific when her car fell through ice in Lake Winnebago. As much as she tries to stay sober, hold down a steady job, and restart her life, the past keeps bubbling to the surface even as the local police dredge up her lost, water-wrecked car. Alternately harrowing and thoughtful, The Dark Lake dramatically mirrors the hidden depths of the human psyche. Highly recommended.

Upload**Mark McClland****Lulu Publishing****3101 Hillsborough Street****Raleigh, NC 27607-5436****www.lulu.com****9781300335610, \$17.00, www.uploadthenovel.com**

The future may be in cyberspace. "Upload" is a novel exploring the concepts of mental uploading and its effects on humanity, focusing on what it could mean for love and life, exploring the philosophy of a completely online world that has conquered biology. "Upload" is an exciting work of science fiction, very much worth considering for fans of the genre who seek something discussing the effects of a possible near future technology.

Seasons of the Soul**Cynthia Redfern****iUniverse, Inc.****c/o Author House****1663 Liberty Dr. Suite #300****Bloomington, IN 47403****9781475956344, \$22.95, www.iuniverse.com**

The first generation after a major conflict sees the attempts at a new world come to light. "Seasons of the Soul" is a memoir from Cynthia Redfern as she shares her own story of growing up in London's reconstruction following the second World War. Telling the stories of her tragedy, her relationships with her grandparents, and how she forged her own success through life, "Seasons of the Soul" is a must for international memoir collections.

Unraveling Charlie**Donald McLean****CreateSpace****100 Enterprise Way, Suite A200****Scotts Valley, CA 95066****www.createspace.com**

9781475224115, \$13.99, www.unravelingcharlie.com

What leads us to harm a child? "Unraveling Charlie" is a fictionalized memoir from Donald McLean, as he recounts his episodes of being molested by the man he refers to as Charlie Schoeler. McLean is most concerned with the explanation of why, trying to understand Charlie and how their two lives have diverged since these traumatic events. "Unraveling Charlie" is an enticing addition to memoir collections focusing on child abuse and its repercussions.

Dark Matters

T. Joseph Browder

CreateSpace

100 Enterprise Way, Suite A200

Scotts Valley, CA 95066

wwwcreatespace.com

9781475192063, \$6.99, www.amazon.com

There is a dark side to the world, and it can tough to understand. "Dark Matters" is a collection of short fiction from T. Joseph Browder as he seeks to touch on the underside of human nature and the things we see in our lives but would so much rather forget. Intriguing and insightful, "Dark Matters" is worth considering for short story compilations.

The Blasphemer

John Ling

CreateSpace

100 Enterprise Way, Suite A200

Scotts Valley, CA 95066

9781469951218, \$12.99, www.amazon.com

To speak out often carries hard consequences. "The Blasphemer" is a novel following Abraham Khan as his publication condemning radical Islam gains him many enemies and he is forced to live in fear of violent reprisal. Working with security in the form of Maya Raines, an exploration of the right to free speech and how far it extends goes. "The Blasphemer" is an intriguing touch this topic, recommended.

Friends in Deed

Susan Sachs Goldman

Highmark Press

c/o Sgarlat Publicity

PO Box 4204, Charlottesville, VA 22905-4204

9780615589572, \$23.00, www.highmarkpress.com

The Quaker movement in America continues unknown, despite their major impact on American life. "Friends in Deed: The Story of Quaker Social Reform in America" tells the story of how throughout American history, the Quakers have been the leaders of social justice, pushing for equality on many levels for many individuals, from treating the mentally ill as human beings to allowing women to take on male jobs, to working with Martin Luther King during the tumultuous civil rights period. "Friends in Deed" is a strongly recommended look at the quiet impact the Quakers have had on American culture.

Willis M. Buhle

Reviewer

Burroughs' Bookshelf

The Power of Magnetic Leadership**Dianne Durkin with Carey Earle****Loyalty Factor, LLC****9781453751237 \$19.00 www.loyaltyfactor.com**

The Power of Magnetic Leadership: It's Time to Get R.E.A.L. distills the wisdom and experience of multiple company leaders into a resource filled with tips, tricks, techniques, and strategies to encourage the best possible results from one's organization. The acronym in the subtitle refers to (R)ecruiting and retention efforts; (E)mployee engagement, empowerment, enrichment, and environment; (A)ppreciating, rewarding, and recognizing employees; and a culture of (L)eadership that needs careful cultivation. Chapters cover how to identify one's own leadership style and strengths, how to discern which aspects of the workplace are top priority to improve, how to visualize a plan for the future, and much more. "When we become involved in the interview process, it is easy to forget we are not the only one doing the evaluation. We have to remember the candidates are also evaluating us and our company. They have their own criteria that they want met... What is important, special, right, wrong, good, bad, desirable, or undesirable for that person? You can learn this by asking candidates, 'What questions do you have for me?' Their first question provides you with an indication of what is of prime importance to them." Also highly recommended, especially for anyone in a business leadership or human resources position, is author Dianne Durkin's previous guide, "The Loyalty Factor" (\$19.00, 9781453762691).

Ramjet**Roger Blake****Outskirts Press, Inc.****10940 South Parker Road, #515****Parker, CO 80134****9781432786564, \$24.95, www.outskirtspress.com**

War tears apart the mind and the full damage may not be seen for years. "Ramjet: My Secret Life with PTSD" is a memoir of Vietnam veteran Roger Blake who tells his life's story and how post-traumatic stress disorder has altered the course of his life in many ways. An enticing tale of where trauma can intrude on our lives, "Ramjet" is a strong pick for any collection dealing with military veterans and their struggles with PTSD.

Left Behind**Jonathan Hollingsworth****Dewi Lewis Publishing****9781907893254, \$45.00, www.dewilewispublishing.com**

The pursuit of a more secure border has left many dead, and lives forgotten. "Left Behind: Life and Death Along the US Border" is a collection of full color photography from Jonathan Hollingsworth looks at the remains of those who failed to cross successfully, left to rot in the desert, forgotten. Detailing the efforts of the Pima County Forensic Science Center as they try to bring identities to the lost souls, presenting a very human picture of immigration and those struggling to survive. "Left Behind" is a choice addition to the immigration debate and the coffee table of concerned individuals.

Never Climbed His Mountain**Julian Gladstone****Infinity Publishing.com****c/o Buy Books On The Web****1094 New Dehaven Street, #100****West Conshohocken, PA 19428-2713****9780741469892, \$29.95, www.amazon.com**

Many people have secrets, and we keep those secrets because we believe no one will understand them.

"Never Climbed His Mountain" is a memoir from Julian Gladstone as he shares his story of being a lifelong heterosexual cross dresser, attempting to share the story of the many individuals who share this harmless quirk and coping with the pressures they face from society, so quickly labeled as deviants. **"Never Climbed His Mountain"** is an intriguing and insightful tale of the secret lives of men who may be closer than you think.

The Power of Patient Stories

Paul F. Griner

CreateSpace

100 Enterprise Way, Suite A200

Scotts Valley, CA 95066

9781478178309, \$15.95, www.amazon.com

Stories educate us and equip us for the many other complexities of life. **"The Power of Patient Stories: Learning Moments in Medicine"** is a memoir from doctor Paul F. Griner, who shares his stories of being a doctor and working with his patients, struggling with their own diagnoses of life. From deferring treatment until later life, to the value of lying to a patient, **"The Power of Patient Stories"** is an enticing and much recommended addition to memoir collections focused on health and medical issues.

Secrets of the Red Box

Vickie Hall

CreateSpace

100 Enterprise Way, Suite A200

Scotts Valley, CA 95066

wwwcreatespace.com

9781479330546, \$9.99, www.amazon.com

Secrets can wreak havoc with our lives. **"Secrets of the Red Box"** is a novel set in the 1940s, focusing on those hidden secrets we keep, as Bonnie copes with them, running from life and maybe running from love. As her secrets come undone, she has to face what she left behind and presents an enticing and riveting read with plenty of mysteries to keep readers reading. **"Secrets of the Red Box"** is well worth considering for historical fiction collections.

Hand in Hand

Kathleen Pepper

Polair Publishing

9781905398218, \$19.95, www.polairpublishing.co.uk

To take note of the spiritual world around us allows us to more effectively bond with the world as we know it. **"Hand in Hand with Angels"** is a powerful spiritual read as Kathleen Pepper encourages readers to bond more effectively with their own personal angels, use their guidance and push themselves forward to find a much greater level of happiness for themselves and make a difference around them as well. **"Hand in Hand with Angels"** is a strong pick for spirituality collections, not to be missed.

John Burroughs

Reviewer

Carson's Bookshelf

In the Kingdom of Dragons: Rose and Thorne Book One

Effertrux Publishing

PO Box 694

Sun Prairie, WI 53590-9998
9781479129072 \$22.95 www.Effertrux.com

In the Kingdom of Dragons: Rose and Thorne Book One is a sweeping epic fantasy about an ordinary farm girl's journey to save her family, and quite possibly the world at large. Led by a wise and cryptic fairy, Rose makes her way to the lair of the crafty elder black dragon, Gaspotine the Dark. The power of the dragon's blood will lead her down a path to ultimately save or destroy dragonkind, as a warrior goddess of Stonevar! But can a human ever truly place her trust in a Dragon? **In the Kingdom of Dragons** is a grand saga of high adventure, set in a vivid land of fables and magic, and featuring a stalwart (albeit inexperienced) heroine. Highly recommended.

The Climb
Michele Emerick
Tate Publishing & Enterprises
127 East Trade Center Terrace
Mustang, OK 73064
9781613464533, \$12.99, www.tatepublishing.com

We all can fall down so very far, that it can seem impossible to get back out. "**The Climb: My Journey Out of Darkness & Despair**" is a memoir from Michele Emerick as she shares her journey of coping with abuse in life and the fallout of such things, clawing out from the roughest periods of it all. "**The Climb**" is dedicated and insightful reading that seeks to help others with their hard pain of life, highly recommended.

Remembering God
Mary Katharine Deeley
Liguori Publications
9780764821691, \$12.99, www.liguori.org

Remembering God's presence can take our lives so very far. "**Remembering God: Resting In the Midst of Life**" is a spiritual meditation guide from Mary Katharine Deeley as she advises readers to piece together their own spiritual lives and take solace in God's place in their lives to resonate for themselves more clearly. "**Remembering God**" is a choice pick for faithful spirituality collections, highly recommended for those who seek his will to empower our lives further.

La Maga
Soror ZSD23
Kult of Kaos Publishing House
9780615687223, \$12.95, www.sorcerersandmagi.com

Sometimes it may seem like we need magic to find happiness. "**La Maga: A Story about Sorcerers and Magi**" is a sensual fantasy novel following lady mage Sofia la Maga as she returns home to help a troubled teen, who happens to be the son of a renowned sorcerer. A tale marked by sorcerers' exotic charisma as well as social unrest against injustice, and the repercussions of an unruly system of magic, "**La Maga**" is tempestuous soiree into mystic mysteries. A sequel, "**The Sex Lives of Sorcerers**", is forthcoming.

The Hidden Psychology of Pain
James Alexander
Balboa Press
c/o AuthorHouse
1663 Liberty Drive, Suite 200
Bloomington, IN 47403-5161
9781452506807, \$40.99, www.authorhouse.com

Pain happens because our body tells us so. "The Hidden Psychology of Pain: The Use of Understanding to Heal Chronic Pain" is a motivational guide from James Alexander as he advises readers on how to face down their pain and using their mind and overall general health to conquer it and achieve better and more complete health in their lives. With many anecdotes and much to consider for better health and wellness, "The Hidden Psychology of Pain" is a strong pick for health and wellness collections, not to be missed.

Standup Guys

John Debellis

Booklocker.com

c/o Stephanie Barko (publicity)

16100 Crystal Hills, Austin, TX 78737

9781621417644, \$16.95, www.amazon.com

To make it in comedy, there has to be a certain level of self-loathing. "Standup Guys: A Generation of Laughs" seeks to tell the stories of the comedy world of the 1970s and 80s and the chaotic standup scene that resonated through the period. With plenty of memoirs and stories from comedy legends and around them such as Larry David, Kevin Nealon, Joe Piscopo, Jerry Seinfeld, and many others, "Standup Guys" is a must for those who want insight onto the world of comedy as it was.

The Words Bysteps

David M. Gutknecht

Outskirts Press, Inc.

10940 South Parker Road, #515

Parker, CO 80134

9781478718345, \$15.95, www.outskirtspress.com

Finding faith is important for some to find their spiritual growth. "The Words By Steps: A Biblical Guide to Spiritual Growth and Purpose" is a Christian and spiritual read from David M. Gutknecht who encourages Christians to pick up the Bible, and read through it in order to piece together their own spiritual life and connect to God more effectively with themselves and those around them. "The Words By Steps" is well worth considering for Christian inspirational collections.

Michael J. Carson

Reviewer

Clark's Bookshelf

Leading the Learning Revolution

Jeff Cobb

Amacom Books

1601 Broadway, New York, NY 10019

www.amacombooks.org

9780814432259, \$29.95, www.amazon.com

Primers in "How to Books" many times fall short in presenting ideas on how to capitalize in the use of the Internet. Inside secrets never seem to fall into the hands of many because those in the know want to keep these proprietary work products as their own. Jeff Cobb is not one of those people. "Leading the Learning Revolution" discloses so much information that when you follow his cites to sites, it takes a lot of time to understand what he has disclosed.

This book follows a modern format of telling the reader what he needs to know by directing to specific information contained at the author's website. Partial quotations in the book to make a point are complete

on line. Cobb has done his homework by interviewing many outstanding experts in the field of education and getting them to share meaningful tips.

We hear so many times that our educational system is failing the needs of students and there is a need to concentrate on the basics. Adult learners are in a different category. These are shopkeepers, entrepreneurs, and just plain folks who are trying to get ahead with their lives by learning how to do their jobs better. Education in this framework according to Cobb can be meaningful, deliver what is needed, and be the basis of a new career in "capitalizing on the exploding lifelong education market."

Examples show that some who have led the way have built 100 million dollar businesses. This should get your attention! Even the most sophisticated internet users will find so many new sites that they will spend a lot of time browsing each to learn new methods of how to connect with a market. Jeff Cobb writes in a folksy style and conveys his message in plain terms, but do not let this mislead you. The content is cutting edge and combined with his website updated continually.

Jeff Cobb has written several other books, is an experienced educator, and is a successful founder of Tagoras, a research and consulting firm focused on continuing education. He has nearly two decades of experience in the world of learning technology and innovation. His previous books include "10 Ways to be a Better Learner" and "Shift Ed."

One feature of this book is thinking outside the box. All of this information regarding to how to reach a potential customer that sells them on the idea of learning, and then closing the sale by teaching is useful in establishing a new learning business on line. Cobb's informative material and techniques can sell widgets or any other product you might think of, with a modicum of expense when you use his ideas of testing what works.

This is a five star book, which can be your new job! You can operate from the comfort of your home using computers, video, and a dedicated effort to find success. "Leading The Learning Revolution," is highly recommended.

Road Trip
Mari Sloan
It's Me Ink Press
PO Box 4361, Thousand Oaks, CA 91359
97809798858314, \$16.95, www.itsmeink.com

Fantasy fiction is a genre, which we do not often review, but when an outstanding story comes along, we have to arise and pay attention. Mari Sloan is an excellent author who spins a yarn among the best storytellers. "Road Trip" is one of those stories that grabs your interest from the start and never wanes until the conclusion. Readers will love the meshing of the characters as the story unfolds.

Mari Sloan in writing this novel continues to display her talents of descriptive dialogue and scene setting. Her previous novel, "Beaufort Falls" was a dynamic first endeavor and this sequel hits the mark once again!

Some fantasy books go very far away from reality, "Road Trip," does not. Plausible scenarios that combine with an imaginative script are the rule rather than the exception. We start this journey in outer space and then mesh together with characters here on earth. There are combinations of conflict between good and evil that need to have resolution in order to save the earth and its people. Surprises unfold at every turn and the adventures of the characters will keep you enthralled as you travel with them.

"Road Trip" starts on the East coast and completes the journey on the West coast. Unique events show some very extensive research. Indian folklore, Chinese culture, and years of reading fortune cookies are only some of the glimpses making up this expedition into the unknown.

This is not a book for the youngsters as there is some very choice language and imagery, which is adult in nature. The use of language does not detract and is more for effect than shocking value. These two elements make this book seem realistic and many others will unfold as you read on.

One outstanding feature that transcends throughout is that the main character Molly is with her Dad, Charlie, and believes he is her Uncle. Charlie does his best to keep up this illusion because he fears that if she knew the truth his relationship with her would be lost. This theme permeates all facets of the saga as they travel along the highways and byways in a pick-up truck, an old Cadillac, and haul an antiquated pink trailer! Many of the events are great fun that makes this an enjoyable story, which you can visualize as a movie because of the vivid style of Mari Sloan.

I hope that "Road Trip" will propel Mari Sloan into the spotlight so that she will continue bringing more books just like this one that will stimulate the imagination.

Pick a nice quiet time to sit down and read this five star book. Wholeheartedly recommended as a fulfilling excursion, which culminates in a very satisfying conclusion wherein we arrive safely having survived calamities once again.

**Picking Cotton
Jennifer Thompson-Cannino
Ronald Cotton with Erin Torneo
St. Martin's Press
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010
www.stmartins.com
9780312376536, \$25.95, www.amazon.com**

"Picking Cotton" is about an identification of a rapist where all the information was wrong and an innocent man went to prison for a crime he did not commit. Ronald Cotton served 11 years in prison after a jury trial found him guilty. All that time, he maintained his innocence, but no one set him free.

The story is very compelling as the victim, Jennifer Thomson-Cannino remained positive in her identification of the rapist. She always felt he was the man and all during this time tried to keep in her memory his features, his actions, because someday she knew she would have to tell what happened to the police and the court system. Positive in her accusation, Jennifer never wavered. She was always convinced that Ronald Cotton was the man who should be in prison.

Eyewitness identification is very important in the solving of crimes. However, those who identify are not always right. In Cotton's case, a collaborating witness said he was the person who raped her, but that was only after Jennifer had made her ID.

When an attorney who represented Cotton in his appeals produced evidence freeing him, Jennifer Thompson-Cannino became terrified he would come after her for revenge. However, the rest of this book, which takes place after Cotton's release, is what makes this story unusual.

DNA testing became more sophisticated during the years of Cotton's imprisonment and subsequently changed the lives of many inmates. Testing 10 years before his incarceration was not reliable and yet the courts placed huge reliance on the results. Many paternity cases resulted in child support paid by presumed fathers based on weak evidence. Legislatures in their greater wisdom passed laws that compensated inmates for wrongful imprisonment in an effort to correct the injustices. However, in Cotton's case, he received less money for his years served, as it was not until later on that the amount was greater.

Ronald and Jennifer became friends after a meeting in which they both realized that mistakes changed

both of their lives. After several meetings both came to the same conclusion, they would take their story to the public and do the best they could in helping others who had been wrongfully charged. Since the publication of this book, Jennifer and Ronald make appearances enlightening audiences on the frailties of justice system. They both want to put an end to wrongful accusations and incarcerations.

This is a five star book is a necessary read for those who are in the justice system, those victims of a crime, or the alleged perpetrator wanting to be set free.

Clark Isaacs
Reviewer

Crocco's Bookshelf

ABC Animals - An Alphabetical Rhyming Picture Book

Mark Smith

Amazon Digital Services, Inc.

ASIN: B00B66UJW6, \$2.99

F is for Ferret whose cousin is the Skunk, is an example of Mark Smith's expertise into the minds of children.

Each animal has a page of its own and includes a speech bubble that displays clever text, such as, M is for Manatee who swims all day, and the manatee asks - Want to go for a swim?

The pictures are magnificent, perfect for the young reader to enjoy. In no time at all children will take over reading ABC Animals on their own. The rhyming pattern is written emphasizing a set of two letters, which encourages children to recognize and remember the last rhyming words of each sentence. For example, O is for Octopus who has eight creepy legs. P is for Parrot who sits on its eggs. The ultimate result is children reading the entire sentences without effort.

Educating children in a fun, subtle way, is what Mark Smith has mastered in ABC Animals - An Alphabetical Rhyming Picture Book.

The End page is a picture of a dog without a speech bubble. I would have liked a culmination end page of all the animals with a speech bubble.

Spark - A Bedtime Rhyming Picture Book

Mark Smith

Amazon Digital Services, Inc.

ASIN: B008SW6JHK, \$0.99

Night lights rule for every child who reads Spark. A requirement of childhood is having a night light to keep away monsters, creepers, snakes, and spiders - as Spark stays up all night doing.

The rhymes are kid friendly; the illustrations creative, which combined makes Spark a perfect story for the young reader.

If your child is night light deprived, he or she will be asking for Spark at the end of Spark - A Bedtime Rhyming Picture Book by Mark Smith.

Incredible Animal Moms: Fun, Facts & Incredible Photos
(Exploring Our Incredible World Series)

Mark Smith
Amazon Digital Services, Inc.
ASIN: B00AVBNFBE, \$2.99

A mini encyclopedia of twenty animal moms describes Incredible Animal Moms. Children are aware of how their mom takes care of them, and Mark Smith provides a non-fiction book bursting with information for children to learn how animal moms take care of their children.

Once again, Mark Smith does not disappoint his readers with superb writing and remarkable pictures. He offers his young readers just the right amount of interesting facts to build a knowledge base. For example, a Cichlid is such a good mom because she keeps her little fish fry in her mouth to protect them from creatures waiting to eat them up.

Incredible Animal Moms: Fun, Facts & Incredible Photos (Exploring Our Incredible World Series) is sure to spark a child's interest in the animal kingdom while expanding reading and listening skills.

Mark Smith does not include where the animals live, which encourages the parents and children to research further for information. Ideal motivation!

Proverbial Aesop: The Complete Aesopic Proverbs Translated with Commentary
Chandler Phillips
American Book Publishing
1589826922, \$19.95, www.amazon.com

Proverbial Aesop is a book of wisdom and information written to stimulate readers. Chandler Phillips style is entertaining as he includes commentary after the proverbs.

We recall Aesop's fables, however, in Proverbial Aesop; Phillips offers his English translation to Aesop's proverbs where he compares the proverbs to his fables, which compare to Greek, Latin, and Arabic wisdom.

If you want a thought provoking book, Proverbial Aesop: The Complete Aesopic Proverbs Translated with Commentary by Chandler Phillips is a perfect choice.

Unglued Devotional
Lysa Terkeurst
Zondervan Publishing House
5300 Patterson Avenue, S.E.
Grand Rapids, MI 49530
www.zondervan.com
0310320321, \$9.98, www.amazon.com

A spiritual self-help book filled with Scripture readings, devotions, thoughts for the day, and closing prayers. Lysa Terkeurst's main goal is to guide her readers through 60 days of learning how to turn emotions that unglue us into positive experiences.

Unglued Devotional is a short, easy read that may help those who struggle with everyday situations. It is 60 days of imperfect progress, with practical advice offered in a down to earth style.

Paintings & Poems
Evelyn and Lyndon Pugh
Drovers Press
0957431910, \$8.00, www.amazon.com

Paintings & Poems describes life, nature, and history through twenty-two beautiful works of art and twenty-one thought provoking poems that reflect the images.

Evelyn uses watercolors to paint nature, woodlands, flowers, water, and sunsets - just to name a few. Lyndon's poems are written to reflect the beautiful Welsh culture.

What is interesting about Paintings & Poems is the inclusion of history which is explained briefly. It offers just enough to entice the reader to want to research more on their own. For example, Evelyn's painting of Pentre Ifan in West Wales looks like England's Stonehenge. There's a mystery to explore and compare.

There seems to be a personal side to this lovely little book - about childhood and life's situations. As in life, not always pretty.

My favorite is 'Night Fears'. The watercolor is a black and purple open window with an ominous view, and the poem describes the title.

Whether or not one is a painter or a poet, Paintings & Poems can be enjoyed by everyone.

I Pledge Allegiance... Stories of Valor, Heroism and Patriotism

Wednesday Warrior Writers.

Houdini Publishing

9781936759132, \$14.95, www.amazon.com

A Las Vegas based writing group, the Wednesday Warriors, became inspired from a member's personal story of her grandson's death serving in Iraq. It made such an impact that they decided to compile a book of stories to celebrate American valor, heroism and patriotism.

The stories in I Pledge Allegiance are written by Merle Savage (the grandmother who inspired the book), Charles McKee, Jack Miller, Marshal Taylor, Rena Winters, Robert Fregeau, Robert Crawley, Keith Bettinger, Dennis Griffin, Rob Corbin and Michael MacQuarrie.

Each story is unique and thought provoking. Besides absorbing the stories shared, well known cliches are reinforced, such as:

True heroes are silent, and sadly the ones who don't return.

Don't judge a book by its cover.

People aren't always what they portray on the outside.

I learned the history of the "Dog Tags", some interesting facts about the GI Bill, Adolf Hitler, and torture, to name a few.

The stories included in I Pledge Allegiance are not only from war heroes, but from law enforcement, firefighters, and everyday citizens. The term heroes and patriotism are used often and reflection is imminent.

The proceeds from I Pledge Allegiance will go to the USO Las Vegas. The USO provides respite and services to U.S. service members that travel through McCarran Airport.

The Wednesday Warrior Writers are proud American patriots.

Mary Crocco, Reviewer

www.mrc-bookreviewer.blogspot.com

Daniel's Bookshelf

Sanctuary
Ted Dekker
Center Street
c/o Hachette Book Group
237 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10017
9781599953359, \$27.99, www.CenterStreet.com

This book is a thriller, which follows up from his earlier work entitled *The Priest's Graveyard*, as it contains the same two main characters of that book. I chose it, because I do like Ted Dekker, even though his writings have stories, that are very extremely adrenaline-rushed plots and confrontations between good and evil. He pulls little punches, which pushes the action into a real wringing out in the events of characters, plotting, and action. His books are memorable mainly due to the graphic telling of the subject matter.

Danny Hansen, who used to be a priest is just about to be transferred to Basal an Institute for Corrections and Rehabilitation. The epitaph above the door states its forbidding warning "AN EYE FOR AN EYE." Whatever somebody does in their life, this place is the justice set inside for retribution from the warden. Ironwood State Prison was Danny's first prison home where, he was sent there for fifty years for murder. He is getting from the warden, Marshall Pape his philosophy story, and he is explaining why Danny was selected to the facility. No email, no physical mail, no visitors and nobody finds out what happens there for any activities or punishments. He learns this right away and the warden is the God of this different type prison facility. Danny is filled with remorse now, and he is set to live out his day by a code of non-violence and maneuvers. He does this skillfully within a prison that promises to be nothing short of deadly.

On the outside lies the woman who loves him, and has been visiting him ever since he was incarcerated in prison. Her name is Renee Gilmore. She doesn't know he has been transferred, but then finds out. She wants to visit him, but a member of Basal staff notices her on the road to their corrections, and tells her she has to turn around. She finds out that no visitations are allowed until, they say he can have them. She locates the person who arrested Danny's main enemy Bruce Randall in Basal, and she teams up with him. He was no longer a law professional, and he was a sheriff's deputy. His name is Keith Hammond. She received a bloody finger, and a note from someone on the outside, saying both Danny and her will die. The two of them play the demands of the game from some unknown outsider, that eventually leads them to the prison. The game is one of life and death, with to whomever fails they will die. The body count is not only set to be at two maximum.

Ted Dekker is the author of over fifty novels, including eleven thrillers, six different book series, two non-fiction books, and eight graphic novels. One of his new series is *Eyes Wide Open*, and it is entirely released with four separate books making up the main title. He did offer the first copy *Identity* free to those who wanted to get a preview of the entire book's story-line. The books are available separately in the kindle versions or in one paperback book. *Blessed Child* (Caleb Series), *White*, (Circle Series), and *Sovereign* are slated for release this year.

Mad River
John Sandford
G. P. Putnam's Sons
c/o Penguin Group USA
375 Hudson Street, New York, NY 10014
9780339157707, \$27.95, www.gpputnamsons.com

I recently finished two John Sandford novels, one being a Lucas Davenport Prey Series entitled *Stolen Prey*, and the other a Virgil Flowers novel entitled *Shock Wave*. I couldn't pass the chance to catch up on his books as the other two were very good, and I had the opportunity to close the year a bit on his two running detective series. The story-line in the last Flowers novel *Shock Wave* was good, so I read the book flap jacket, and I spotted this copy on the library fun-raiser shelf. I take little chances with an author who has been so consistent, and he gave me another good read.

In a small town unbeknownst to it's residents, three people are up to some serious no good. Three young people who even failed any expectations, they will go the straight and narrow. Jimmy Sharp, Becky Welsh and Tom McCall are on a shopping spree and it begins, as soon as they find some new wheels. Nothing is free, and if it's available without any protests, In the same evening Jimmy shoots a black man named Emmett Williams, as he is heading for his car. The three young people hop in, and proceed to head for their next bad mission of something bad for the O'Leary's family. Robbery and death turn out to be the main motives. The killing spree continued with Jimmy hitting one of the older O'Leary girls across the head and then all three fast exited.

Not too long after the departure of the three young people, Virgil Flowers enters on the crime scene after a call from Lucas Davenport. The killing spree occurs in a town not far from Virgil's home town. He hooks up with the hard nosed local sheriff and starts to find out what has taken place on the blocked off house. The suspects are on the move again with a different vehicle. The manhunt is on, and Flowers must interview all the family members, so he holds a meeting to get a take on these three suspects. The police and Flowers learn as they check through the areas around the town. They discover find out another major crime has occurred, as the suspects kept moving away from the scene. The death of someone whom the police now really have a better reason to not bring in the suspects alive. This makes it even more imperative to stop them, before the killing spree continues. Virgil wants to end manhunt before, the body count mounts any higher. He wants them in alive to find out, if it was true that he suspects blood money. He wants something else to sweeten the pot for the death of the oldest O' Leary daughter Agatha Murphy.

John Sandford has twenty-four Prey novels with Lucas Davenport with some Virgil Flowers assisting in the background, and six Virgil Flowers with Lucas doing the same with him as the main character. I have had many good hours reading this detective genre' with this #1 New York Bestselling Author, and I guess I will have many more as long as he writes them. I look forward to his next effort covering one of the two main characters, I already had mentioned.

Daniel Allen
Reviewer

Gail's Bookshelf

Seeing Through the Fog: Hope When Your World Falls Apart

Ed Dobson

David C. Cook

c/o Cook Communicatons

4050 Lee Vance View

Colorado Springs, CO 80918

9780781405553, \$17.99, www.davidccook.com

Seeing Through the Fog, written by a former pastor diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's (ALS) disease fall of 2000, relates how he lives with and finds hope while he suffers from a terminal illness. It's an illness with no known cause or cure, a disease that gradually destroys all nerves and muscles, known to cause paralysis and death.

Ed uses the analogy of thick fog to describe what it feels like to live with Lou Gehrig's disease, where he no longer can control his body, instead, the disease, like a thick fog controls all of his movements.

Yet, the book isn't about disease, it's about hope. Hope that doesn't ignore, go around or dismiss the hopeless circumstances Ed lives with. That sense of hope fuels his strength to continue living in spite of the catastrophic challenges of Lou Gehrig's disease.

Readers learn how he found hope and learned to give thanks during the "darkest times" as his body slowly, inexorably continued to deteriorate. While, at the same time, he recognized everyone struggles with something, his struggle just happened to be terminal while others fought with finite things such as divorce, depression or loss.

However, it was in the struggle he learned there are no "easy answers...no Bible verse or prayer..." that would make it all go away. He also realized he didn't fear death, but he was "concerned about the process of getting there." (pg. 16)

Chapters on worry, fear, healing, forgiveness, relationships, deciding to be a "pastor no more," and others are written with forthright vulnerability. There is something for everyone within the pages of this small book with such a big message, especially anyone who suffers, lives with terminal illness or struggles with deep loss.

Joni Eareckson Tada wrote the Foreword to the book and said, "I need to see others...who put God to the test and find the grace of God is sufficient." She found Ed's book "powerful," his message profound, his story an illustration that "hope is rock-solid and real, unshakeable, immovable, and most of all eternal."

If you need hope, a new appreciation for life and circumstances, Seeing Through the Fog offers that and more. Ed demonstrates the power of personal perspective determined by choices we make each and every day. His life is a continual struggle yet he thanks God for each new day because his "life isn't over yet."

The Ultimate Conversation: Talking with God through Prayer

Dr. Charles F. Stanley

Howard Books

c/o Simon & Schuster

216 Centerview Drive, Ste. 303

Brentwood, TN 37027

9781451668605, \$24.99, www.simonandschuster.com

Dr. Stanley draws on a lifetime study of prayer to pen The Ultimate Conversation, a practical how-to guide on the often misunderstood topic of prayer. He teaches God "wants to talk with you" because He loves you, knows all about you and wants you to know Him too.

In addition to prayers for guidance, comfort and wisdom, Dr. Stanley writes, "The most important things to the Father are strengthening our bond with Him and enjoying profoundly satisfying and transformational fellowship." That kind of intimacy God is rooted in prayer and could be compared to what happens when friendship is cultivated.

When we want to make friends, we spend time with the person, talk with and do things with them. That's where we come to know who they are, what they like and what makes them happy or sad. That's how friendship with God develops, except the relationship is pursued in prayer. However, Dr. Stanley cautions, "...our first motivation...should be to know Him."

That's why he wrote The Ultimate Conversation, to teach God wants to communicate, be known and have personal relationship with His Creation. He considers communication and relationship foundational prayer principles while the third ingredient involves active "listening," perhaps the hardest to do - to "be

still." (Psalm 46:10) and wait on the Lord.

He believes God still speaks today, whether through the Bible, other people or at the internal prompting of the Holy Spirit and cites Nehemiah to illustrate a "...ongoing conversation with the Father" (pg. 55).

All chapters are filled with rich nuggets of wisdom, but some I thought exceptional were the chapters on how we perceive God, how to hear God's voice and God's use of silence.

Chapter two, "answers to questions about God's character" concerns issues of faith, perception and trust. If we don't believe God is real or that He cares, why would we want to "interact with Him?" Or if you do talk to god where is your focus - God or self - and perhaps the most important - the expectation of God's answer?

In the chapter on silence and unanswered prayer Dr. Stanley outlines six methods God uses to gain attention when He "wants to teach something significant." Such as to gain attention, prepare us to obey, reveal sin, grow trust, train us to hear His voice and sometimes teach faith and perseverance.

Chapters conclude with specific prayers Dr. Stanley prays regarding the reader. For example, that the Holy Spirit use his words to enrich the reader, power his prayer life, create hunger for God's Word and enable readers to draw close to the Lord.

The Ultimate Conversation is vintage Stanley, a book to savor and return to again and again. The writing is biblical and scripturally rich, as well as a practical prayer guide for those who want a more vibrant prayer life and greater intimacy with the Lord.

Joy Boosters: 120 Ways to Encourage Older Adults

Missy Buchanan

Upper Room Books

1908 Grand Avenue

Nashville, TN 37203-0004

9780835811927, \$12.00, www.upperroom.org

Missy Buchanan, well known author, speaker and advocate for seniors, inspires readers with "120 ways to encourage older adults," the subtitle of Joy Boosters set for release February 1st. Her book of creative ideas, similar to a pocket guide, is simple, easy-to-use and written to encourage joy in the lives of older adults and their loved ones.

With the greying of our nation, many are concerned with parents and grandparents who exhibit physical limitations and losses that compromise abilities once taken for granted. Such as the ability to walk without considering distance, stand without assistance or cook meals without help. When such capabilities are compromised decisions need to be made that result in difficult adjustments, sometimes loneliness and "barren and dry" lives.

Missy's creative ideas inspire joy and laughter while they equip "families, churches, and caregivers" to meet seniors needs, whether at home alone, in a nursing home or hospital bed. Ideas such as how to encourage smiles in a frail, wheelchair bound individual or someone who must move to an assisted living facility or how to encourage spouse's whose partners need to move into "memory care facilities."

Divided into twelve segments the book is chock-full of topics, ideas and conversation starters that teach how to "connect through questions and conversations...encourage from a distance...find laughter...celebrate holidays...blend families..." and so much more.

For example, she suggests open ended questions such as:

"What was your first paid job?"

"What is your proudest achievement?"

"For what are you most thankful?"

Some chapters include insets of "tips." For example if churches plan to visit, contact the facility and determine the best time so visits don't conflict with "medical appointments" or planned social events. If a family outing is planned, consider physical limitations and needs, such as where restrooms are located along the route and if handicap parking is available. Perhaps the best tip is simply to treat older adults with the dignity and respect their years have earned - never treat them like children.

The book is practical, simple and small enough to carry in pocket, purse or briefcase, the pages filled with basic common sense ideas that spark creativity, laughter and fun. It's like George Bernard Shaw wrote, "We don't stop playing because we grow old. We grow old because we stop playing."

Missy's book equips anyone who cares for an older adult to engage with sensitivity and keep "oldsters" young at heart with simple, creative ideas that encourage spirituality and growth.

Change Your Words, Change Your Life

Joyce Meyer

FaithWords Publishers

12 Cadillac Drive, Ste 480, Brentwood, TN 37027

9780446538572, \$22.99, www.hachettebookgroup.com

Joyce Meyer examines the power, energy and influences of words in her new release, 'Change Your Words, Change Your Life,' that complements her other books, *Power Thoughts* and *Living beyond Your Feelings*. She quotes Proverb 18:21, "...the power of life and death are in the tongue" to support her teachings.

To further illustrate the power of words, she gives two examples. The first, a new father who hears "Da-da" for the first time and begins to cry and, "When God said..." (Genesis 1:3) words God used to speak the world into being.

She likens "...our words to a movie screen that exposes..." a person's thoughts and attitudes to the world and reveals what that person "...thinks wants and feels." She also says readers learn a lot about themselves if they pay attention to the words they use. For example, consider whether your word choices reflect a positive, constructive attitude or a negative, destructive point-of-view.

The insightful chapter on how words become self-fulfilling prophecies in "seedtime and harvest" is worth the cost of the book. Just as farmer's sow seed they later harvest, Joyce says, the words we sow are powerful "spiritual seeds" harvested in the lives, souls and spirits of others as well as ourselves.

Emotionally battered children, who've only heard they're no good and will never amount to anything carry such words into adulthood where they turn into self-fulfilling prophecies. Other examples of negative thoughts begin with, "I can't...I'm a failure...I'm a loser...It's always my fault...they think I'm boring...I can't change...He/she doesn't like me...I hate..." When we repeat anything to ourselves or others often enough the words become truth.

Then there's the childhood rhyme, "'Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.'" With the advance of technology and the Internet that's no longer true, if it ever was since words today are used to communicate in ways never before imagined. Such as with cell phones, texting, instant messaging, blogs, FaceBook, Twitter and other facets of social media. Such devices and mediums have led to what Joyce calls a "word explosion" that makes words "cheap, quick, irrevocable and viral."

She wants readers to realize and understand the power of their words. When they do, they can transform their lives because, "where the mind goes, the mouth follows." One of the author's favorite "Joyce-isms,"

she's so well known for.

Besides the power of words, readers learn how to tame the tongue; "fast" their words, speak faith and not fear in addition to teachings on encouragement, complaining and how not to let Satan speak through you.

The entire book is worth reading and referencing, especially the Appendix: A Dictionary of God's Word that completes the book. This small topically arranged dictionary, excellent for quick reference, begins with "When you..." Whether the need is for help or strength to continue, themes include anger, confidence, discouragement, depression, fear, rejection, betrayal and more with targeted Scriptures.

Joyce's powerful book has the potential to change lives for anyone who understands and implements her practical and biblical advice.

Cassidy Jones and Vulcan's Gift

Elise Stokes

JACE Publishing LLC

15600 NE 8th St., Suite B1, 287

Bellevue, Washington 98008

9780988185104, \$9.99, www.jacepublishing.com

Cassidy Jones, Seattle's fascinating fourteen-year-old super-hero, returns in another delightful adventure for middle graders and beyond in book two, Cassidy Jones and Vulcan's Gift. Cassidy continues to adjust to heightened abilities of sight, smell, speed and athleticism since the accidental exposure to Professor Phillips secret, experimental 10X formula.

The adventure begins with Cassidy at the Seattle Center garbed "head-to-toe in black," wearing a black ski mask to disguise her youthful age and "mutant" identity. It's one in the morning as she runs her gaze up and down the "white-painted beam of the Space Needle's northern leg" gauging the gravity defying climb to the top.

Seconds later, Cassidy settled under the Christmas tree that adorns the 605 foot, saucer-like Space Needle and could feel the Needle's exhilarating sway as icy wind whipped her "dark-red hair into a frenzy" She knew Emery, the professor's brilliant fifteen-year-old son, would be upset she left home without calling his Droid and then dismissed the thought. Even though he was her secret bodyguard she had to work off this pent up energy. Besides she planned to climb back through her bedroom window before he checked for her GPS location.

She peeked over the saucer like edge when she overheard voices below and saw four surly teens circling "Ol' Joe," a homeless man she knew by scent, until he spoke to her for the first time tonight. When he saw her at the base of the Needle he had warned "...Ol Joe is watchin you Green Eyes...somebody is up to no good."

Now, loud, slurred words floated up through the icy air, taunting the old man with words that made hot blood pump through Cassidy's veins. "Prey drive" engaged and she hit the ground, her black Nike sending one punk flying, while another's head snapped to the side and the others ran away...

Thus begins Cassidy's newest escapade where danger, mystery and a touch of romance abound. Cassidy discovers additional super-hero capabilities, whether using scent to track an escaped Siberian tiger, chasing a screeching, smelly Sasquatch, or confronting a thrashing, thirteen-foot python intent on a fearsome "hug." This larger-than-life character keeps the pages turning long after lights should go out.

There are also large amounts of danger, treachery and suspense with a mysterious man in a silver suit, another mutant and formidable Lily White. Not to mention the ancient secret everyone searches for the Germans invented in WWII. From the well-written Prologue to the villain's maniacal laughter at book's

end that foreshadows book three, readers of all ages will be added to Cassidy's growing fan base.

Besides entertaining, the Cassidy Jones series contains no graphic violence, curse words or sexual innuendo, yet the pace is fast, the conflict authentic and the danger real. If you're looking for realistic characterizations, substantive plotting and vulnerable, lovable characters who deal with modern issues in wholesome ways, look no further, the Cassidy Jones series is for you.

Check out YouTube - Trailer for Cassidy Jones Adventures Book Series www.youtube.com/watch?v=r3yNIs4s44A

Breaking news - just learned book three - Cassidy Jones and the Seventh Attendant has a spring release, target date in May, with an intriguing storyline that reads:

Some secrets are better left buried...

When mysterious Gavin Phillips returns to Seattle after a prolonged and unexplained absence, he threatens to expose fifteen-year-old Cassidy Jones's incredible secret: she is a superhero. But his presence is far more sinister than she realizes, for it soon becomes apparent that his hidden agenda holds a dark and dangerous intent to unleash an unparalleled evil upon an unsuspecting world. Can Cassidy stop him before all is lost? Check with the author for ongoing news: www.cassidyjonesadventures.com

**The Gospel Story Bible: Discover Jesus in the Old and New Testaments
Marty Machowski
New Growth Press
1451 S. Elm Eugene Street, Suite 1102
Greensboro, NC 27406
9781936768127, \$29.99, www.newgrowthpress.com**

One of the best Bible storybooks I've ever reviewed

Family Life Pastor, Marty Machowski believes Jesus is the hero of every story in the Old and New Testaments and also believes "bedtime stories" can change lives. Those two views fueled his passion to produce 156 condensed stories, 78 from the Old Testament and 78 from the New Testament for this remarkable stand-alone Gospel Story Bible. The book is also a part of his Gospel Stories for Kids series used in Sunday school programs. He draws on the English Standard Version (ESV) Bible translation in addition to A.E. Macha's original and clever colorful illustrations to enhance and animate each story.

The stories are presented in imaginative two-page spreads complete with a brief commentary that connects Jesus, the larger story, "...to God's redemptive plan." I especially liked the idea that the Old Testament points forward to Jesus, while the New Testament points to the cross and God's plan of salvation. Narratives end with "Let's Talk about It," that includes three story questions to encourage family discussion.

The story book opens with "God Creates the World" from the book of Genesis with scripture references. The last story, "At the Throne Worshipping," is from the book of Revelation, a book not typically included in a children's book, yet I believe it should be.

Although Bible stories can "unfold over several chapters," such as the ten plagues of Egypt found in five chapters of Exodus, Marty selected the "best" story parts within the story without editing out relevant facts. Still, he also encourages parents to read the story as found in the Bible.

This remarkable resource could be used in many different ways. Not only is it an ideal storybook for preschoolers, it would make an excellent devotional for homeschooled, grade school and middle school students. It also would be useful as an introduction to the Bible for new believers or even a quick review or

overview for established believers.

Marty's versatile, enjoyable storybook is Bible based, God centered and gospel driven. Not only is it a biblical treasure trove for anyone, it would make an excellent basic primer for parents to teach youngsters about Jesus, the "hero of the Bible." On a scale of one to ten, The Gospel Story Bible is a twelve plus.

Long Story Short: Ten-Minute Devotions to Draw Your Family to God

Marty Machowski

New Growth Press

1451 S. Elm Eugene Street, Suite 1102

Greensboro, NC 27406

9781935273813, \$19.99 www.newgrowthpress.com

Marty Machowski, pastor, father, husband and writer penned Long Story Short, a gospel driven, field-tested family devotional that pairs well with The Gospel Story Bible. The easy-to-use devotional features seventy-eight lessons from the Old Testament designed for busy, time-challenged families of preschool, grade school, middle school, high school or homeschooled youngsters.

Readings and discussions take ten minutes a day, five days a week. Teachings feature biblical truth from the "cross-centered" Old Testament that point to Jesus Christ and salvation. Devotions begin with Genesis and end with Nehemiah and feature a single scripture theme that repeats for one week.

The simple format includes a brief reading, an explanation with three discussion questions and a short prayer. The first two days concern the central teaching, while the third day connects a New Testament scripture to the message and the fourth day completes the story. Readings from Psalms or a prophetic book tie the weeks teaching to the main scripture theme on Friday. Since this book is text without pictures, The Gospel Story Bible I reviewed Monday adds a nice touch for younger children. Review: www.examiner.com/list/the-gospel-story-bible-jesus-the-old-and-new-testaments-by-marty-machowski?cid=db_articles

We live in a busy world of schedules that conflict with work, home and school responsibilities. Parents and children are exhausted by days end with little time for family relationships or fellowship. Still, Christian parents want to teach children God's Word with a message that transforms their minds instead of adding information that only informs.

This devotional meets that need because it encourages Bible reading, devotions and prayer, equipping Christians to really know God and not just know about God. Such knowledge shapes beliefs anchored in God's truth that provide Christians a firm foundation to stand on. Otherwise we are like what Alexander Hamilton wrote, "Those who stand for nothing fall for anything."

Our children and families are our primary mission field. If children aren't taught about God at home, they won't learn about God in secular schools, media or among secular friends. On a scale of one to ten, Marty's devotional is a twelve plus.

YouTube - Long Story Short by Marty Machowski - New Growth Press www.youtube.com/watch?v=L2bWw1UVFoQ

Old Story New: Ten-Minute Devotions to Draw Your Family to God

Marty Machowski

New Growth Press

1451 S. Elm Eugene Street, Suite 1102, Greensboro, NC 27406

9781936768660, \$19.99 <http://gospelstoryforkids.com>

Marty Machowski's Old Story New is the second volume in his family life devotional series that

"continues the gospel story begun in the chronological Old Testament devotional Long Story Short."

Review:

www.examiner.com/list/long-story-short-ten-minute-devotionsdraw-families-to-god-by-marty-machowski?cid=db_articles

Old Story New uses the same effective format and structure as that in the Old Testament devotional except this one features New Testament teachings about Christ, the cross and the salvation message. The focus - Christ within the story!

The gospel centered narratives are designed for busy families and can be completed in ten minutes a day, five days a week. Their use plants life-transforming seeds of God's truth that build trust, faith and relationship with Christ. Devotions begin with the birth of Jesus in Luke and end with the book of Revelation, a book of the Bible not often included.

Seventy-eight versatile narratives equip families and youngsters, from preschool through high school, to understand God's truth, connect with it and apply it to their lives. Since the book is text without pictures, The Gospel Story Bible adds a nice touch for younger children. Review:

www.examiner.com/list/the-gospel-story-bible-jesus-the-old-and-new-testaments-by-marty-machowski?cid=db_articles

With the rise of liberalism and political correctness, it saddens me to see God dismissed from our schools, courts and even some churches, while reading and knowledge of the Bible continues on a downward spiral. That means families and children must learn about God, Christ and the Holy Spirit at home.

Marty's simple and inspirational devotional equips parents and children to learn about "the discipline and instruction of the Lord." I encourage every parent to consider any of his books.

Firebird

Brent McCorkle and Amy Parker

B&H Kids

c/o B&H Publishing Group

124 Ninth Avenue North, Nashville, TN 37234-0143

9781433679179, \$14.99, www.bhpublishinggroup.com

Writer, director and film composer, Brent McCorkle joins with author Amy Parker to produce Firebird, an inspirational picture book for children ages four and up. The well-written message draws a simple analogy between life's storms, common doubts and God's unchanging love. Beautiful colorful illustrations by Disney animators, Rob Corley and Chuck Vollmer enhance the story and invite youngsters to pick up the book.

The story begins with a baby oriole that his mother named Firebird because of his beautiful plumage and colorful array of orange feathers. Youngsters see the little bird's delight when he basks in the bright sunshine and fluffs his feathers amidst the tree tops, while his friends fly about twittering.

However, when the rains arrive Firebird asks his mother, "Why does God let the storm take the sun away?"

"You'll know, when you take a walk on the clouds," she replied. Firebird didn't understand and continued to complain when rain and storms rolled in until...

Thus begins a simple narrative that touches children's hearts and teaches them that storms in life come and they go. At those times we can either focus on the storm or fly above the clouds to find God's never changing strength and love. Children will be drawn to this attractive, beautifully illustrated hardback

book. The illustrations speak as loud as the words and youngsters who can't yet read will be encouraged to page through the pictures and tell themselves the story.

The book from B&H Kids' is unusual because it's a "flagship release" of a children's book that's tied to the simultaneous release of the film Unconditional. While the children's book, Firebird "...parallels the life of a storybook artist who has lost sight of God's love...", the film describes the artist's struggles to find God in the midst of personal loss while she works to illustrate the children's book - Firebird.

The unusual, unique and imaginative concept that ties a book to a movie release adds an appreciative, enthusiastic youthful audience to that of a more mature market. Very well done!

View Unconditional movie trailer: www.youtube.com/watch?v=uCa-aLAkU3c

Resolve Conflict God's Way

Dr. Bill Graybill

BT Johnson Publishing

P.O. Box 1247

Moses Lake, WA 98837

<http://btjohnsonpublishing.com>

9781938311024, \$16.95 / \$9.95 Kindle

Dr. Bill Graybill wrote Resolve Conflict God's Way to provide step-by-step guidance with practical worksheets, useful tips and online helps that teach Redemptive Management Conflict. It's a management style that doesn't destroy valuable relationships like "defensive conflict management" does. Instead, Bill's biblical approach leads to personal, emotional and spiritual healing and restored relationships.

His writes about a church he pastored where he planned to hire an associate pastor and spent a few months mentoring his selection and then decided to delay the hire. The man grew impatient, said Bill abused his leadership authority and retaliated with strife and division that split the church apart. The ensuing confrontation began what Bill describes as a "two-year nightmare of personal and church devastation" that led to this book.

The first chapter explores aspects of conflict and causes that includes personal, religious and even character assassination such as "judging others," bitterness, fear and mistrust. This chapter includes a simple acrostic - AIM that identifies classic conflict responses:

Attack

Ignore

Manage

Attacks set up a destructive win-lose scenario that can have "devastating long-term consequences" of abuse or legal action.

Ignore is the most common method that buries conflict and encourages denial and deception.

Manage with "redemptive conflict resolution," extends God's grace, meets with the offended person face-to-face or brings a mediator into the resolution process.

Chapters include scripture and end with self-examination worksheets and bonuses. The bonus in chapter one takes readers online to learn their conflict management style and where they fit in the AIM model: www.billgraybill.com/resolveconflictbonus Other chapters include topics such as prayer, faith, attitudes, anger, responsibility, forgiveness, self-control and more.

Although conflict is inevitable, broken relationships are not. Eugene Peterson endorsed Bills writing as a "must read for every Christian struggling with conflict." The book is also included on Rick Warren's leader's library list.

Dr. Graybill says "...hurt people hurt people...impose their pain on others...." Readers who follow these teachings learn "...restoring relationships is more important than being right... because "bridges of reconciliation" provide better solutions.

I recommend and encourage anyone who struggles with relational conflict to read *Resolve Conflict God's Way*. The benefits far outweigh the time and price! Bill is also available as a life coach: www.billgraybill.com

Dr. Fuddle and the Gold Baton
Warren L. Woodruff
Story Merchant
c/o Ken Atchity
9601 Wilshire Blvd. #1202
Beverly Hills CA 90210
9780615661803, \$14.99, www.storymerchant.com

Dr. Woodruff's irresistible fantasy, *Dr. Fuddle and the Gold Baton* escorts readers into a magical tale of danger, kidnapping, deception and adventure wrapped in legendary prophecy. There readers meet almost twelve-and-a-half-year-old Tyler, his mute sister Christina and friends, Antonio, Kathy and Leonard. A group chosen to save the enchanted land of Orpheia by re-capturing the stolen "Gold baton" and restoring Orpheia's once pristine beauty. The only requirements - they must learn to play the "sacred instruments" and re-capture the "Gold baton" stolen by the evil musician, Jedermann.

The delightful account begins with Tyler's return home, where instead of walking blocks out of his way to avoid passing the ghostly manor on "Willow Street Hill," he decides to confront his chilling fear. Even though his mother had warned him away from the mysterious residence before she died months ago.

"Just a few more steps" Tyler thought, "...I'm almost past it..." and he began to count the steps beyond the ghostly manors reach. Then he heard the special Beethoven piece "...his mother always played for...Christina." The rich, melodious piano chords stopped Tyler midstride.

The harmonious refrains reminded him of his mother's last words the night she died, "...you'll do something important...I'll send you a clear sign when it's time..." The connection between his mother and the music gave him the courage to approach the stained glass manor window and peer through the golden glass. He saw the translucent figure of a man seated at an "enormous grand piano." His supernatural fingers flew over the black and white keys to produce the lovely Beethoven melody as strangely dressed people appeared, then disappeared...while deep inside a brilliant golden door bid him enter...

Thus begins an enchanting fantasy of memorable musicians, a "Gold baton" and the mystical power of music to captivate for good or evil. The journey includes dark musician, Jedermann, magical Dr. Fuddle, Seiren's - monstrous catlike shape shifters, Erkenbald the gnome, Orphean children and more in a tantalizing tale that leaves readers wanting more.

The result is a literary musical masterpiece that enchants readers long before the last page is turned, similar to C.S. Lewis's classic Narnia series, one of my all-time favorites. The narrative is rich with classical music from "musical giants of the past" such as Beethoven, Bach, Liszt and Mozart. Musical terms like chords, chromatic scale, harmonies and rhythms are creatively woven throughout the story. Perhaps most important - classical music is portrayed as fascinating, high-tech and "cool" as the "messengers of music" fight to wrest the "Gold baton," from Jedermann's evil grasp.

Besides the connection between music that creates darkness and disharmony, I also understood why Hollywood contracted Dr. Woodruff's current and future work for books, movies and a Broadway production. Dr. Woodruff says he "...hopes to complete the second book of the series by year's end and one book a year thereafter. The film is currently in development."

YouTube video from Story Merchant: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qRpzgPSZplU>

Book trailer: www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=Hr-OY57p5F0

Creative! Unique! Wonderful! All adjectives apply to this author who writes with a touch of genius, a story that teaches as well as entertains with a story for all ages, not just children.

Holman Christian Standard Study Bible
Holman Bible Publishers
B&H Publishing Group
One Lifeway Plaza
Nashville, TN 37234-0143
www.bhpublishinggroup.com/books/bibles.asp
9781586405069, \$49.99, www.amazon.com

Easter and Bibles go together and Holman's new Bible translation is especially worthy of consideration this Easter. Holman Bible Publishers hit a home run when they published Holman Christian Standard Study Bible in 2010. "Evangelical Christian Publishers Association" (ECPA) thought so too when they awarded the bible ECPA's Bible of the year award in 2011. From the new translation, to the Hebrew and Greek word studies, footnotes, time lines, full color maps and more, there is lots to like in this inviting Bible.

While most Bibles today are revisions of previous translations, "...the HCSB is a new translation for today's generation" that reflects the "information age" of Biblical research. Instead of interpreting original texts "word-for-word" or "thought-for-thought" like paraphrase translations, the HCSB uses both methods with footnotes if additional explanation is needed.

An entire page devoted to the Plan of Salvation features a FAITH acrostic with the sinner's prayer, what it means and how to say it.

F is for forgiveness - Ephesians 1:7a
A is for available - John 3:16, Matthew 7:21a
I is for impossible - James 2:13a, Romans 3:23
T is for turn - Luke 13:3b, Romans 10:9
H is for heaven - John 10:10b, John 14:3

In addition to the one or three year reading plans, I especially liked Old Testament quotes in the New Testament printed in bold black letters that sets them apart. Then there are the stunning full-color photographs, illustrations and maps for readers who haven't visited Israel that add rich visual depth and meaning. The center-page cross-references, inset text box word studies and sidebars make the HCSB a rich and valuable resource for in-depth study, yet is still simple enough for lay readers.

Gilt edged pages are laid out in standard format with Bible text on top and study notes on the bottom. Section headings along with chapter and verse numbers are in blue. Denser brown toned pages are used for multiple essays, section introductions and overviews that include timelines, author, surrounding circumstances, purpose and outline of events, plus a feature length article on how to read and study the bible.

I would have liked a larger Concordance, however with all the other features that would make it too large and hard to handle. The Bible's stunning binding, numerous features, and the way it lays flat for reading more than compensates for a small concordance. Without a doubt this Bible will raise the bar for study bibles and I'm sure others will think so too.

Although I personally use the NIV translation I was so impressed with this Bible I plan to buy one for myself since my husband claimed ownership after he read the review. I encourage everyone to consider the HCSB because, as my husband and I learned long ago, "A Bible that's falling apart usually belongs to someone who isn't." -Charles H. Spurgeon

For more information about the HCSB study Bible: www.hcsbstudybible.com and

<http://www.mystudybible.com>

Gail Welborn, Reviewer

www.examiner.com/christian-book-review-in-seattle/gail-welborn

Gary's Bookshelf

The Iron Breed

Andre Norton

Baen

P.O. Box 1403, Riverdale, NY 10471

www.baen.com

9781451638585, \$12.00, www.amazon.com

These are two separate novels under one cover for the first time by the Agatha Christie of the science fiction genre Andre Norton. It is nice to see that many of her works are staying in print and will continue to please new audiences of fans. Known for her catlike characters she once again in "Iron Cage": and "Breed to Come" masterfully makes readers believe that anything is possible. The writing is easy to follow and is character driven in two wonderful books that are a delight to see back in print. "The Iron Breed" is another shining example why Norton is still one of the best authors of science fiction

Going Interstellar

Edited by Les Johnson & Jack McDevitt

Baen

P.O. Box 1403, Riverdale, NY 10471

www.baen.com

9781451637785, \$7.99, [www, amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

Collections of short stories are a lot of fun to read and "Going Interstellar" is a prime example of why. Authors Mike Resnick, Ben Bova, and Jack McDevitt are surrounded by other talented writers who tell wonderful imaginative views of such things as space travel in the future to alien contacts. There are also some nonfiction pieces by experts who foretell where we are going as a culture. "Going Interstellar" is a smorgasbord of great storytelling and fabulous writing in one place.

The Hiding Place

David Bell

New American Library

375 Hudson Street, New York, NY 10014

www.penguin.com

9780425246061, \$9.99, [www, amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

David Bell's last novel "Cemetery Girl" was a very dark tale that was very strange. Now with "The Hiding Place" Bell again has written a strange and wonderful gloomy and sinister page turner thriller that begins and never lets the reader down. Janet Manning has been haunted by guilt that she caused her brothers death when she lost track of him at the park. Now twenty five years later the accused and convicted person is about to get out of prison and new information emerges that reveal a lot of strange things that have never been answered in the murder of Janet's brother. "The Hiding Place is a nail biting tale of suspense that has a lot of twists and turns in a fast paced thriller that is guaranteed to rivet readers and will cause them to lose sleep.

Flashy Fiction And Other Insane Tales

Sean Hayden & Jen Wylie

Untold Press LLC

114 NE Estia Lane

Port St. Lucie, FL 34983

www.untoldpress.com

9780615631431, \$7.99 www.amazon.com

"Flashy Fiction And Other Insane Tales" is a collection of 15 stories by two talented authors of horror. These short short stories are very tough to do for some authors but these two make it look easy. There are lots of dark and sinister things the authors cover from zombies to vampires that are lots of fun to read. One of the most interesting ones is how the author of the particular tale shows why it is so important to always wear clean underwear. Flashy Fiction And Other Insane Tales is a gem of storytelling by two rising authors in the horror field. I would love to see other volumes by these two authors.

The Spooky Chronicles 2 The Terminal People

Kevin Ranson

Lulu Edition

c/o Lulu Publishing

3101 Hillsborough Street

Raleigh, NC 27607-5436

www.spookychornicle.com

9781105936852, \$10.00, www.amazon.com

Zombie "Spooky" learns more about who he is in the second installment of this ongoing series of novels about the strange character "Spooky" Film critic Ranson takes the reader into a world that is not real and makes the reader believe it is. His characters come alive in a fast paced weird tale that is only the second of many planned stories. I look forward to reading the next portion of the "Spooky Chronicles".

Hyde and Shriek A Monsterrific Tale

David Lubar

Starscape

c/o Tor/Forge Books

175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010

www.tor-forge.com

9780765330819, 14.99, www.amazon.com

The Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde story is given new life in David Lubar's newest YA novel "Hyde and Shriek A Monsterrific Tale" Miss Clevis is a very popular teacher at the Washington Irving Elementary School. While having a breakfast drink she adds some ingredients that will change her life with her students forever. The story races along with fun filled characters and situations to the final page. At times I was reminded of the Jerry Lewis movie "The Nutty Professor" another version of the Jekyll and Hyde novel that, like this novel was very well done. "Hyde and Shriek A Monsterrific Tale" is a delightful story with lots of great twists and turns that are sure to please readers of all ages.

Princesses on the Run**Smiljana Cob****Running Press Kids****c/o Running Press****2300 Chestnut Street****Philadelphia, PA 19103-4371****www.runningpress.com****9780762446124, \$15.95, www.amazon.com**

What if one day all of the princesses we know in kid's fairy tales got bored and ran away from their homes? That is exactly what happens in "Princesses on the Run." Young Princess Antonia who has everything is bored so she decides to run away for the day. Along the way she encounters Sleeping Beauty, Rapunzel and many others. Together they hang out for the day and find that when its time to go back home their lives are not as bad as they all had thought. "Princess on the Run" is a fun little kid's book that many adults could take a lesson from on how to better enjoy their lives.

The Art of Planning Allergen-Free Events**Stephanie Couttney****Outskirts Press Inc****10940 South Parker Road, #515****Parker, CO 80134****www.outskirtspress.com****9781478718314, \$12.95, www.amazon.com**

I thought "The Art of Planning Allergen-Free Events" was a book about planning for social events or work related dinner parties. In a way I was correct and in another I was very wrong. The author delves into food allergies, food intolerance, and many other problems people experience every single day. Courtney also gives ways to eat healthier by knowing about ingredients, being more cautious in restaurants and social occasions and learning where to find more information to help deal with these problems "To date, the statistics reflect 25% of Americans are affected by one of the top eight allergens....a large part of the population suffers from some form of gastrointestinal distress which may indicate a food intolerance. One in 133 people has been diagnosed with celiac disease and many have not been tested yet:" "The Art of Planning Allergen-Free Events" is an eye opening overview of the constant day to day life or death struggle people with these afflictions with foods live with.

Wide Open Privacy Strategies for the Digital Life**J. R. Smith and Siobhan MacDermott****330 East Maple Road #406****Birmingham, MI 48009****www.it-harvest.com****9780985460730, \$14.95, www.amazon.com**

"Wide Open Privacy Strategies for the Digital Life" is a very scary book that lets people know we really have very little privacy with our techno advanced society. The authors who are experts in their fields, tell about different viruses and other nasty things that can inhabit your computer, or that information about you can be found in the most unlikely places. But they also delve into ways that we can all protect ourselves from Internet pirates. "Wide Open Privacy" is a wakeup call to anyone who has an iPad, cell phone, laptop or home computer to take precautions to protect themselves against all kinds of criminals who prey on people.

Pieces of Me**Nan Rigotti****Legacy Book Publishing**

**1883 Lee Road
Winter Park FL 32789
www.legacybookpublishing.com
9781934449394, \$16.95, www.amazon.com**

"Pieces of Me" is a wonderful collection of poetry that celebrates life, nature, family and lots more in a slew of different types of writings that are easy to read and enjoy. There are plenty of them that seem simple but have symbolism that will appeal to many different interests.

**Gary Roen
Reviewer**

Gloria's Bookshelf

**Dead Scared
S. J. Bolton
Corgi
61-63 Uxbridge Rd., London W5 5SA
9780552159838, 6.99 BPS**

The brief prologue sets the scene for the reader: Near midnight; one of the tallest towers in Cambridge, England; D.I. Mark Joesbury, racing up the stairs to its roof; and a young woman perched near the ledge at the top. And then the reader is brought back eleven days in time to see how they got there, with a 1st person p.o.v. of D.C. Lacey Flint, which alternates with third-person perspectives. Flint has been "loaned out" from the Southwark Police to the Special Crimes Directorate of the Metropolitan Police which deals with covert ops, typically being sent on "difficult and dangerous situations." As we are introduced to them, the slightly flirtatious banter underlying their meetings hints at the least of a possible romantic entanglement between them at some point in the relatively recent past.

Lacey goes undercover as a student at Cambridge University after the latest in a number of suicides, with a suspicion that there is more going on than meets the eye. The death was only the latest of three suicides during the current academic year. The only one outside of her police colleagues who knows the truth is Dr. Evi Oliver, head of student counseling. The belief is that there is "something decidedly sinister" happening. Lacey's remit is to "keep a lookout for any unhealthy subculture that might be unduly influencing young people."

Initially Lacey feels out of her element: "I knew I'd never get used to it," in a place where "Wordsworth and Wilberforce weren't characters from history but alumni." But she is there to do a job, and it becomes increasingly urgent. Within several days, one more death occurs. And further investigation indicates that there have been a total of nineteen suicides over the past five years, far more than the general statistics on suicide would bear out. And the manner of death chosen is not what might be expected, including self-immolation by one girl and another who'd decapitated herself. As the days go on, whatever is going on threatens to ensnare Lacey herself.

This is a book at once not an easy read and yet difficult to put down, much more so on both counts as the book progresses. The fifth novel from Ms. Bolton, this is the first I have read, but it will certainly not be the last. It is a nail-biter, beautifully written, and highly recommended.

**All Mortal Flesh
Julia Spencer-Fleming
Minotaur
c/o St. Martin's Press**

175 Fifth Ave., NY, NY 10010
9781250018557, \$14.99, www.stmartins.com

"All Mortal Flesh," the fifth in the Clare Ferguson/Russ Van Alstyne series, finds Clare, the parish priest in the small Adirondack, upstate NY town of Millers Kill, and Russ, the local police chief and married man she loves, having just wrenchingly ended their relationship. The following day, an even more devastating event occurs: Russ is told that his wife, from whom he had recently separated when he told her of his love for Clare, has been brutally murdered. Loving Clare, yet still loving his wife, matters are only compounded when both Clare and Russ are considered prime suspects, not only by the police but by the local gossip-loving town residents.

With her usual adroit skill, Ms. Spencer-Fleming has written another wonderful tale of these very human protagonists in this book, available for the very first time in a trade paperback edition. The sense of place is vivid, and the wintry weather graphically evoked. There is a slam-bang ending with a final unexpected and stunning turn as this suspense-filled tale concludes. An excellent and fast-paced read, and one that is highly recommended.

No Mark Upon Her
Deborah Crombie
William Morrow
c/o HarperCollins
10 E. 53rd St., NY, NY 10022
9780061990625, \$13.99, www.harpercollins.com

In the opening pages of Deborah Crombie's 14th novel, DCI Rebecca ["Becca"] Meredith, an Olympic contender and a senior officer in West London's Major Crimes unit, is found dead in the waters of the Thames near her home in the town of Henley, 35 miles from London. The events that follow take place, amazingly, over a period of about a week. I say 'amazingly' because so much happens, in a terrifically plotted novel. The case falls to Detective Superintendent Duncan Kincaid, of Scotland Yard's Murder Investigation Team, with some aspects of it falling to his bride, Gemma James, DI with the Notting Hill Police.

The book is filled with wonderfully drawn characters, including not only both the protagonists but also Kincaid's partner, Sgt. Doug Cullen, about to become a first-time homeowner and nervous at the prospect; Gemma's colleague, Melody Talbot; Becca's ex-husband, Freddy; Kiernan Connolly and Tavia Larssen, members of the SAR [Search and Rescue], or K-9, team as well as its four-legged members, Finn, a Labrador retriever and Tosh, a German shepherd, every bit a part of the plot as are their human partners.

The common thread among several of the characters is a love of - in fact, a passion for - rowing or, to be more specific, sculling, a very specific skill employing the use of sleek racing shells, apparently a world of its own. Just how much so is made very clear through the author's use of quotes, preceding the start of most chapters, from various publications on the subject, as well as Ms. Crombie's own prose in the early pages, describing the victim shortly before she is killed: "she sat backwards on a sliver of carbon fiber narrower than her body, inches above the water, and that only her skill and determination kept her fragile craft from the river's dark grasp."

The James/Kincaid family dynamic of 'his' [Kit], 'hers' [Toby - - their respective 14-year-old sons], and 'theirs' [Charlotte, the mixed-race 3-year-old foster child they are planning to formally adopt], is a constantly active one that makes the protags' personal lives every bit as engaging as their professional ones.

The author comments "Things were always so much more complicated than they appeared on the surface," and employs mini-cliffhangers throughout, maximizing the suspense, as well as some shocking

revelations, producing several OMG moments. But I'll leave those discoveries to the readers of this highly-recommended novel.

Chance of a Ghost

E.J. Copperman

Berkley Prime Crime

375 Hudson St., NY, NY 10014

9780425251683, \$7.99, www.penguin.com

Alison Kerby returns in the fourth *Haunted Guesthouse Mystery* series by E.J. Copperman. Alison, a single mother in her late thirties, runs a guesthouse in her childhood hometown of Harbor Haven, on the Jersey Shore, inhabited by her and her precocious ten-year-old daughter, as well as Maxie Malone, Alison's resident Internet expert, and Paul, an English/Canadian professor turned detective, both of whom have lived there since before their deaths. It would seem that Alison and her daughter, as well as her mother, are the only ones who can see the ghosts.

At Paul's urging, Alison had obtained a private-investigator's license, and her services as such are sought by her mother's own ghostly friend, who wants Alison to find out who killed him. While his death six months previously was deemed to have been of natural causes, he is convinced he was murdered. The investigation morphs into a search for the ghost of Alison's father, who died five years ago, but whose ghost has been strangely absent of late. She is aided in her efforts by her mother, her daughter, her best friend Jeannie, and her present [living] houseguest, who is a retired cop and delighted at the opportunity to do what he did best, and misses a lot, as well as by Paul and Maxie [who Alison refers to as her two "non-breathing squatters"].

As with every book in the series, this newest entry contains the same unbeatable combination: a terrific plot and great if quirky humor [if you like that sort of thing - and I do!!]. I particularly loved the line about the heating system in Alison's ancient Volvo, which was "roughly as efficient as the United States Congress, which is to say it made a lot of noise but got very little done." The protagonist's slightly bemused attitude toward the apparent fact that ghosts actually exist, and that some people could see/hear them, seems perfectly reasonable. This book, as were the earlier entries in the series, is thoroughly delightful, and highly recommended.

Edge of Dark Water

Joe R. Lansdale

Mulholland Books

c/o Hachette Book Group

237 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10017-0010

9780316188425, \$14.99, www.mulhollandbooks.com

The reader is introduced to sixteen-year-old Sue Ellen and her family on the no-nonsense first page, when Daddy is 'fishing' - a chore that combines 'telephoning,' i.e., "cranking that telephone to hot up the wire that went into the water to 'lectrocute the fish,' dynamiting them, and poisoning them with green walnuts. I might add, as does the author, that the dynamiting doesn't always work too well, as he attempted it one time when he was so drunk that some of his fingers got blown off.

By page eight, Sue Ellen, Daddy and her Uncle Gene, finishing up the fishing project, discover the body of her friend, May Lynn Baxter, at the bottom of the lake, long dead, her hands and feet tied behind her and with a sewing machine weighing the body down. She describes her as "the kind of girl that made men turn their heads and take a deep breath . . . [who] moved like she was hearing music we couldn't," a girl with no living family who had dreamed of going to Hollywood and becoming a movie star. Sue Ellen and another good friend, an African-American girl named Jinx [described as having "a sweet face, but her eyes seemed older, like she was someone's ancient grandma stuffed inside a kid"], and Terry, the fourth member of the group and a boy who was rumored to be homosexual, determine to "burn her up" and take

her ashes to California from East Texas, described as a place where "jobs, especially for women, had become as rare as baptized rattlesnakes." That trip, when it finally begins, fittingly enough in a leaky boat, is like nothing the friends, or the reader, could possibly have anticipated, or even imagined.

This author's writing has been compared to that of Mark Twain, and deservedly so. That said, I should add that I found the writing to be very original, as is the book as a whole, which is [loosely] placed in time by the frequent casual references to the segregation that was then the norm, as were drunken, abusive husbands/fathers, and convincingly captures the vernacular of small-town, little-educated and poverty-stricken Southerners of the period. There is some graphic material [not sexual, I should point out] that seems of a piece with that. "Edge of Dark Water" has been described a "hillbilly noir," and that captures it as well as anything.

Recommended.

Perfect Hatred
Leighton Gage
Soho Crime
853 Broadway, NY, NY 10003
9781616951764, \$25.00, www.sohopress.com

This is the sixth novel in the series referred to as the Chief Inspector Mario Silva Investigations, and a very welcome return it is. The book opens, shockingly, with a man cutting the throat of a young woman and kidnapping her infant child. Shortly followed by a suicide bombing outside the US consulate in Sao Paulo, Brazil, which is in turn followed by another suicide bombing in Buenos Aires, outside of the oldest Jewish synagogue in Argentina. All with the attendant high numbers of innocent victims including, in Buenos Aires, the Israeli ambassador to Argentina, his wife and two children.

A grisly beginning, to be sure. We quickly learn of additional targeted killings planned, in a book replete with murderous plots from start to finish, typical, one must believe, of the true climate of politics in parts of this country filled with great beauty, and even greater intrigue. Heading up the investigation is the brilliant and incorruptible Mario Silva and his team, once again including once again one of my favorites, charming Haraldo "Babyface" Goncalves [so called because although he is 34 he looks 22. The reader is quickly reminded of the corruption that pervades every possible level of many South American countries, from the cop on the street to the highest elected officials. As the investigation proceeds, everything the investigators thought they knew is called into question. It soon becomes apparent that there will be no lack of suspects, including killers with principles, and politicians with none.

As Inspector Silva says, "I've been in the service of a corrupt legal system for all of my working life. Another cop says "In case you guys never noticed, politics and favoritism is what Brasilia is all about." And from another character, "In his world, the rich didn't go to jail. Not in Brazil. Not even if they killed an unnamed, penniless priest, in the presence of a federal cop, as he had done." As well, the author paints a chilling portrait of the overwhelming number of criminal activities rampant throughout the neighboring country of Paraguay.

As awful as is this portrait of these events, and the people who plan and carry them out, don't think the book is a dark one. Almost surprisingly, I would not describe it as such. It is fascinating, well-written, fast-paced, and thoroughly enjoyable.

Highly recommended.

A Fistful of Collars
Spencer Quinn
Atria Books
c/o Simon & Schuster

1230 Sixth Ave., NY, NY 10020
9781451665161, \$25.00, www.simonsays.com

In the fifth book in the Chet and Bernie Mystery series, our favorite four-legged private investigator, Chet the Dog, and Bernie Little, his partner in the Little Detective Agency, are back on the job - - albeit not the usual missing persons case, or even the less-desired divorce work. He has been hired, on very generous financial terms, at the recommendation of the mayor's office to make sure the young star in a new movie being filmed in their town stays out of trouble during the film shoot. The Valley, a town in the southwest desert, is hopeful of becoming a mecca for movie-making if all goes smoothly. [A big "if," in this instance, and definitely easier said than done.]

Things are currently not going that smoothly in Bernie's personal life, with his ex-wife continuing to be an annoyance [on good days] and his girlfriend, reporter Suzie Sanchez, having been offered a job with the Washington Post.

This delightful series brings the reader a mystery, a dead body or two [or three], and somehow makes Chet [who narrates the tale] a completely believable sidekick. He is the devoted companion to Bernie, an ex-cop and wounded war vet, but brings his own special talents to the job, and is completely irresistible. Well-plotted, this charming novel is the perfect thing when one wants to hunker down on a cold winter's night - or any other night, for that matter.

Recommended.

Dead Anyway
Chris Knopf
Permanent Press
4170 Noyac Rd., Sag Harbor, NY 11963
9781579622831, \$28.00, www.thepermanentpress.com

Chris Knopf has written nine previous mysteries, including two different series [both set in the Hamptons] and one standalone. His newest novel is the first in a new series, featuring 42-year-old Arthur Cathcart [although he seldom uses that name after the events the kick off the book]. And "kick" is an appropriate word here, inasmuch as the first chapter describes a scene wherein Arthur [self-described as a "math geek and social misfit"] and his "breathtakingly beautiful and successful" wife, Florencia, are held at gunpoint in their home in Stamford, Connecticut, by a man they have never seen before, who shortly shoots them both in the head. Florencia is killed instantly; Arthur is grievously wounded and left for dead. After falling in and out of a coma for months, he is almost literally brought back from the dead, and makes a decision not to let the world in on that fact, convincing his physician sister, who has been caring for him, to fake his death.

Using the skills of his profession - - he holds a Masters in Applied Mathematics, doing freelance market research - - he is determined to find out who brutally murdered his adored wife and left him for dead, and why: "I'm dead anyway, so who's better suited to the job?" He goes completely off the grid, difficult to do in this day and age. Using the skills perfected by identity thieves, which he "hoped to successfully emulate," he begins to feel that "the concept of identity has become an abstraction," to the extent that at times he barely remembers who he really is.

The writing is wonderful throughout. On the first page, as he and his wife rise from bed shortly after their morning love-making, Arthur thinks of the day ahead with "that part of my mind that wasn't lingering with recollections of the morning, the smells and feel of skin-on-skin, the transcendent lightness of unrestrained adoration." At one point he says that "the most important thing I'd learned from years of research was that almost nothing you thought in advance turns out to be the case . . . It means that most people who aren't researchers go through life thinking things that aren't true, and never discovering their folly."

The plotting is ingenious, the book captivating. At the end, the author gives a hint of the direction in which he will go in the next book in this series, and I for one can't wait. Highly recommended.

The Cocktail Waitress

James M. Cain

A Hard Case Crime Book

c/o Winterfall LLC

333 Central Park West, NY, NY 10025

c/o Titan Books

144 Southwark St., London, England SE1 OUP

9781781160329, \$27.99 (16.99 BPS), www.amazon.com

This was the last book written, at age 83, by James M. Cain, who died in 1977, the man who penned such classic, unforgettable novels as *Mildred Pierce* and *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, and one never before published. And kudos to Hard Case Crime for doing so now, nearly four decades later, for it is a fitting conclusion to the man's oeuvre. Along with Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler, he helped create the noir genre, with this a typical example.

The first-person narrator, Joan Medford, twenty-one years old, is burying her husband on page one of the book. The abusive drunk had crashed into a culvert headwall one night at 70 miles an hour, leaving her with a small boy to raise, alone and penniless. [In those days, there were few resources for a teenage girl who found herself pregnant, and many 'shotgun weddings' were the result, of which this had been one.] His family had never liked her, and her husband's sister, herself unable to have children, covets Tad, Joan's adorable three-year-old boy, and readily agrees to care for him while Joan attempts to get a job to keep a roof over their heads, and immediately gets one working as a cocktail waitress in a nearby restaurant/tavern/"ginmill" in Hyattsville, Maryland [a better scenario than mowing lawns, her next choice.]

One is quickly orientated to the time frame when a tonic on the rocks ordered by her first customer costs 85 cents. And initially the writing seems dated as well, but once the reader gets into rhythm of the book, its pleasure derives from much more than nostalgia.

That new customer, Earl K. White III, is just one of two men Joan meets her first day on the job. He is an older man, a wealthy widower, kind and generous though nearly repulsive to her. The second is a hunky young man who has dreams but no resources. They are both immediately enamored of her, and the descriptions of her seductive appearance in her "uniform" which arouses such reactions are made dramatically, and graphically, clear in the wonderful, and wonderfully evocative, cover art. She is confronted by a choice between love/lust or a chance at a comfortable, respectable life for her and her adored son. There is a hint of sinister events to come, with a cop who is not satisfied with a verdict of accidental death and harbors suspicions of murderous intent. The novel has an ending straight out of the arsenal of this author of *Double Indemnity*, which the reader won't see coming. The book is hard to put down, and is recommended.

Parishioner

Walter Mosley

Vintage Books

c/o The Random House Publishing Group

1745 Broadway, 17th floor, New York, NY 10019

B009MYCOYK, \$9.99, www.blacklizardcrime.com (digital)

Xavier "Ecks" Rule is the 46-year-old eponymous protagonist in this standalone from Walter Mosley, the author of several novels, most notably the *Easy Rawlins* series, holds the title of Deacon in a nameless church in Southern California, led by a self-ordained minister. It should be said that the church has no

denomination, and the 96 members of the congregation, deacons all, have backgrounds as thieves, murders, rapists and one state-certified anarchist. But they have either been drawn to the "church" or been recruited by Father Frank, its leader, who then at some point gives each "missions" in which the skills acquired in their violent pasts are put to good use, all as part of the redemption they seek: "The church was like a prison that worked on the honor system. You were free to repent, but always as an inmate serving a life sentence, with Father Frank as both warden and confessor. . . The one rule of their church was to refrain from passing judgment on one another."

At its heart, this is a tale of human trafficking and three lost boys, and tracking them, at the behest of another Parishioner, is the mission assigned to Ecks, a former Harlem gangster now making his living delivering newspapers, as well as taking a correspondence course studying religion and literature. The book is replete with unrelenting violence, sex and brutality, seemingly as natural as breathing to the continually growing cast of characters, this last making the book frequently difficult to navigate and at times to distinguish one from another. Needless to say, there are numerous murders and much other violence throughout the book.

The often poetic writing is typical of this author's work. I particularly liked the descriptions of many of the characters, e.g., "he was so thin and wan that he blended into the washed-out fabric like a chameleon might subtly come to resemble branch and leaf." A dark world is portrayed here, one that I suspect is foreign to many, if not most, readers, but that said, there is much to enjoy here, and with that caveat, it is recommended.

Birthdays for the Dead

Stuart MacBride

HarperCollins 360

10 E. 53rd St., NY, NY 10022

9780007344208, \$14.99, www.harpercollins.com

Stuart MacBride's writing has been called "gritty," and "brilliant." Understatements both.

In his new standalone mystery/thriller, the author introduces DC Ash Henderson of the Oldcastle Police, formerly DI Ash Henderson - he was busted down to Constable following a particularly horrific phase of an investigation into murders committed by a killer dubbed by the tabloids the "Birthday Boy," an investigation now eight years old. The victims have all been young girls, abducted within a few days of their thirteenth birthday, their parents tormented with photos mailed to them every year on the ensuing birthdays, each one increasingly grotesque in its images of torture, mutilation and, finally, death. What no one else knows - not the detectives with whom he works, not even his wife - is that Henderson's daughter, Rebecca, who went missing five years before, is another of those victims. The rest of the world believes that she has simply gone missing; Ash has hidden the truth so that he can continue to hunt for the killer, in the quite-correct belief that he would otherwise be pulled off the case, placed on compassionate leave and given grief counseling.

Henderson is a fascinating protagonist, 45 years old, with an ex-wife and twelve-year-old daughter and now living in a dilapidated council estate, he is not one to shy away from exacting revenge, or justice, when called for. But the most fascinating of the characters created by Mr. MacBride for this novel is Dr. Alice McDonald, brilliant forensic psychologist, somewhat mentally unstable, self-described as "delightfully quirky" - a more objective viewpoint might include OCD and perhaps agoraphobia.

The book takes place over a period of ten excruciating days, as the victim list mounts, and bodies are suddenly found, and the hunt for the Birthday Boy has suddenly become more intense, if possible. With canny plotting, and a stunning ending, this is a book which will stay with you long after the cover is closed. I made the mistake of coming within 100 pages of finishing it late one night, something I definitely do NOT recommend - unlike the novel itself, which I most definitely do.

Wild Thing
Josh Bazell
Reagan Arthur/Back Bay Books
c/o Hachette Book Group
237 Park Ave., NY, NY 10017
9780316032209, \$14.99, www.HachetteBookGroup.com

Dr. Peter Brown, nee Pietro Brnwa [pronounced "Brown"], has become a doctor thanks to the Witness Protection Program in which he was placed several years before the story opens. [His nickname, "Bearclaw," has its own backstory, at which one could never even begin to guess.] Pietro bears rather unusual tattoos, at least in combination: a snake staff on one shoulder, a Star of David on the other. I hasten to add that these are the words with which I opened my review of "Beat the Reaper," the first, wonderful novel by Josh Bazell which introduced this most unique protagonist; there is little reference to his background in this, the second entry in the series, other than the fact that he was a hired killer who had murdered an impressive number of victims before and is still trying by any means to elude the attempts of his former employers to kill him. As the book opens, his present means of accomplishing this finds him working as a doctor on a cruise ship [not nearly as impressive or desirable a job as it might at first seem].

When he is offered a substantial sum of money by a 'reclusive billionaire' to accompany, and safeguard, a gorgeous paleontologist on a trip into the Minnesota woods [and waters] to prove, or disprove, an urban legend, he quickly accepts. Whether or not the whole thing is a hoax - - well, there are several theories put forth, that being only one of them. Basically signing on for a twelve-day canoe trip, the various invited members of the group are seeking to find out if there is actually, as rumored, a Minnesota version of the Loch Ness monster, paying very handsomely for the privilege. This is a whacky, and very funny, tale and, be warned, if profanity disturbs you, this is not the book for you.

Nominally the plot is about the protagonist's attempt to somehow buy his way out of a mafia vendetta. The book is replete with footnotes, informative and often hilarious. The author concludes with a section titled "Sources," about forty pages long, which perhaps gives a hint of what has preceded it, and is alone worth the price of the book, material referencing, e.g., critical events from the Reagan years, as well as those of the current President of the US; discussions of contemporaneous medical/health care issues, including meds prescribed for PTSD and other mental health disorders; corruption among politicians in all levels of government; decisions from the recent past by the US Supreme Court; environmental issues; many of these possibly polarizing but brilliantly set forth, which also describes the book as a whole. One thing is for certain: Very funny and profane as it might be, this is a book that is difficult to describe, but one that will make you laugh, and make you think, and it is recommended.

Potboiler
Jesse Kellerman
Jove
c/o Penguin Group USA
375 Hudson St., NY, NY 10014
9780515153026, \$9.99, www.us.penguingroup.com

The reader has an inkling of what's in store from the cover of Jesse Kellerman's new book, which appears to show a typewriter keyboard of sorts, the various keys or buttons displaying words such as "assassinate," "coup d'etat," and "war."

The first page of the book is filled with what appear to be blurbs by no less eminent writers than Stephen King, Lee Child, Robert Crais and various highly respected reviewers, which on closer inspection are very funny and relate to books written by one William deVallee, "noted author of more than thirty internationally best-selling thrillers" whose protagonist is one Dick Stapp. The protagonist of "Potboiler" is Art Pfefferkorn, who had known deVallee longer than anyone, including his wife [with whom, it should

be said, Pfefferkorn had been in love]. The two men, best friends, had thirty years ago both been aspiring writers. While Bill had achieved great fame, Pfefferkorn had only had one book published.

The book takes off in a completely different direction at about one-third of the way through, part satire, part fantasy. Devious, unsettling and frightening things begin to happen. There are several memorable lines regarding writing, e.g., "good novels enlarged on reality while bad novels leaned on it" and "If one could not express something in an original way, one ought not to express it at all," and points out the "similarities between spying and writing: Both called for stepping into an imagined world and residing there with conviction, nearly to the point of self-delusion. Both were jobs that outsiders thought of as exotic but that were in practice quite tedious."

A highly original and delightful read, "Potboiler" is recommended.

Brooklyn Bones

Triss Stein

Poisoned Pen Press

6962 E. 1st Ave., Scottsdale, AZ 85251

9781464201202, \$24.95, www.poisonedpenpress.com

Erica Donato has a difficult personal life: Her mother has passed away, she is estranged from her father after he moved away to Arizona with the new woman in his life, her husband died in a tragic accident at age 26, leaving a 24-year-old widow and three-year-old daughter, now fifteen, and she is trying to raise a teenage daughter on her own. Erica is a historian, in grad school, and working in a museum on a part-time internship, receiving a small paycheck and getting academic credit for the work.

During the course of extensive renovation work in her century-old house in one of the less-upscale parts of Park Slope, Brooklyn, a skeleton is found, hidden behind a wall, apparently that of a young girl, and it appears to have been there since late in 1972. Both Erica and her daughter, Chris, become determined to try to ascertain who the girl was and why she died. Her daughter says "I feel like I found her so I owe her something. I feel like she wants me to find out about her." Erica agrees, thinking about "this refuge that no longer felt so safe, where a girl my daughter's age had seemingly disappeared a long time ago. I didn't want to think about who must have been looking for her way back then, or the terrible sadness if there was no one to look."

As the two start to investigate the history of the house, bad things start to happen to people in their lives, both of long standing, and new ones, and Erica is repeatedly warned to stop asking questions, to her and her daughter's peril should she fail to do so.

The tale is an intriguing one. The book seemed to sag a bit in the middle, but quickly picks up again, and I found this a very interesting novel, one that makes me want to read more from this author.

Recommended.

[Brooklyn Bones is also available in a trade paperback edition, ISBN 9781464201226, \$14.95]

Gloria Feit

Reviewer

Gorden's Bookshelf

Darwin's Ghosts: The Secret History of Evolution

Rebecca Stott

Spiegel & Grau
c/o Random House
1540 Broadway, New York, NY 10036
9780679604136, \$13.99, www.amazon.com

Darwin's Ghosts is a fun story about the many scientists that helped develop evolution. These scientists range from the ancient (Aristotle and before) to contemporaries of Darwin. Stott does more than just give the details of these other scientists work. She builds into the story the personal details of how the scientists lived and how they had to, in many cases hide, publish their work to the general public. The fun parts of the story are the social issues that these various scientists were forced to do their work under. The public and scientists of today can easily understand their problems because they exist today with evolution even after hundreds of years of validation.

The two forces that affected the scientists the most were religion and the government. Most religions want to dominate the social life of the populous. To do this they produce an approved set of ideas that the population has to follow. It doesn't matter what these ideas are -- just that they must be approved by the religion. Evolution and even biological facts frequently contradicted the accepted religious dogma. Religion has always had enormous power that frequently goes beyond just disagreements and range from prison to even death. Scientists have to always walk a fine line between facts and dogma to protect their lives and their families.

The second part, government, produces its own dogma. During most of history, the mating of religion and government has made the dogma of these two forces similar but there are notable exceptions. Politics uses religion or other groups with power to create accepted dogma. The popular culture can put these forces into play. Powerful individuals and organizations can easily produce political dogma that doesn't depend on scientific facts but on sustaining the power of those individuals and organizations. Historically the organizations have been dominated by those with the majority of the money and power. In only a few instances have religion and government actively promoted pure science. Ancient Greece was one period when science was a force strong enough to exist on near equal footing with religion -- possibly because there were many religions. Another exception was a very short period of time during the middle ages with a Moslem government. But even in this last period religion had to be acknowledge for the scientist to survive.

The sheer amount of work required to build up the data needed to produce evolutionary theory is more daunting than the average reader can easily understand. It literally took thousands of years to compile enough data within the constraints for the needed data to become detailed enough for Darwin to produce the idea of evolution. The critical point created the opportunity for evolutionary theory to become obvious enough that when evolutionary theory exploded it shortly became an obvious next step in biology for those many individuals who were familiar with the accumulated information.

An interesting side note is how Darwin was forced to publically publish his work when he did. Another scientist, Alfred Wallace, had stumbled upon evolution. Darwin had been developing his evolutionary theory for decades but with Wallace nearing his own publishing of evolution Darwin had to rush his work into publication. This rush cut short on his referencing of the work of other scientists that he used to produce his own evolutionary theory. Darwin worked for a number of years to adequately reference these scientists but, even over the many years following his first publication, the thousands of years of data was more than he could reasonably reference.

Darwin's Ghosts is an easy recommendation to anyone who is interested in science and the constraints scientists have worked under. It reads less like a textbook and more like an adventure story. It is a must addition to the library of any person with an interest in science and history.

Frozen Heat
Richard Castle

Hyperion Books
77 West 66th Street
New York, NY 10023-6298
www.hyperionbooks.com
9781401324445, \$26.99, www.amazon.com

The TV show *Castle* has a fictional mystery writer following a NYC detective around during her work solving murders and writing genre mystery based on his time with her. The first three *Heat* books -- the books written by the *Castle* in the TV show -- are solid mysteries with multiple fun links between the TV show and the mystery. *Frozen Heat* takes this series of books a step farther. Whoever is writing under the pseudonym *Castle* has produced a mystery story that would be very good without having the TV show tie-in. The biggest problem with the book is that you find out on the last page that it is really book 1 in a two part story.

A body is found in the back of a refrigerated grocery truck frozen in a suitcase. NYC police detective *Nikki Heat* is called to investigate. When she looks at the suitcase, she finds her initials carved in the bottom. The suitcase had been used to carry away items from her home after her mother was murdered. *Heat* soon finds more links between the frozen woman and her mother's death. The more she looks into the past history of her mother the more dangerous the case becomes. She barely escapes dying in a shotgun blast in just the first attempt on her life.

Frozen Heat is a good action detective mystery. It is in the same class as *Connelly* and *Sandford*. If you watch the TV show, it is a must read. The mystery reader will not be disappointed picking this book up. The only reason to delay reading the book is if you want to wait for the sequel to be released first.

S.A. Gorden, Reviewer
www.paulbunyan.net/users/gsirvio/content.html

Harwood's Bookshelf

The Outsider Test for Faith: How to Know Which Religion Is True
John W. Loftus
Prometheus Books
59 John Glenn Drive
Amherst NY 14228-2119
9781616147372, \$18.00, www.amazon.com

"The only way to rationally test one's culturally adopted religious faith is from the perspective of an outsider with the same level of reasonable skepticism believers already use to examine other religious faiths they reject. This expresses the Outsider Test for Faith (OTF)." That says it all. The rest of *John Loftus's* book is a detailed manual for showing curable believers how and why they should do that. He is aware that a large proportion of believers will not be persuaded, because, "we overwhelmingly adopt what our respective cultures teach us.... people, all of us, have a strong tendency to believe what we prefer to believe and to justify what we believe. Once our minds are made up it is very hard to change them."

There are roughly 45,000 religions on earth. For any one of them to be true, all others must be false. "What religionists believe depends on where they were born and raised.... What kind of truth depends on one's location?" The probability that an accident of geography caused a believer to be born into the "one true religion" is therefore one in 45,000. That statistic alone should be sufficient reason for a believer to apply the OTF to his own belief system. Will significant numbers do so? Loftus is an optimist, but he is not unrealistic: "Wait just a minute!? What about the odds? Ahhh, just ignore them."

In advocating skepticism, Loftus draws attention to the difference between faith-based skepticism and science-based skepticism. "A faith-based skepticism is one that causes believers to doubt other religious faiths simply because they believe that theirs is the true one.... It also causes Mormons to doubt the DNA evidence showing that Native Americans are not descendants from Semitic people." Scientific skepticism, in contrast, "demands sufficient evidence before accepting some claim as true."

Unfortunately, right at the beginning of Chapter Two he fails to practise what he preaches, and instead parrots religious propaganda as fact. He lists statistics claiming that there are 2.1 billion Christians, 1.5 billion Islamists, 1.1 billion nontheists, and 500 thousand Scientologists. In fact the most accurate figures that can be deduced are: 1.5 billion Christians (including 0.8 billion Catholics), 1.0 billion Islamists, 2.2 billion nontheists, and less than 50,000 Scientologists. Under "Atheist Diversity," he lists figures promoted by the religious for the distribution of nontheism in thirty countries, including 31-44% in Britain (actually over 50%), less than 20% in USA (actually 36%), 19-30% in Canada (actually slightly higher than USA), and 24-25% in Australia (almost if not quite 50%). I am defining "nontheist" as any person who does not have at least a tentative belief that the biblical "God" exists, and suggest that any other definition is bound to produce inaccurate statistics.

While focusing on the failure of believers to subject their own religion to the same skeptical scrutiny they apply to others, Loftus does not ignore the reality that a god who has the omnipotence to abolish evil and the benevolence to wish to do so, that instead sits on its hands, is an oxymoron: a morally retarded higher life form. (There have been philosophers who argued for such a god, but no official spokesman for a religion has ever done so.) As Loftus explains, "With God's help scientists today could've created a vaccine for the worldwide Spanish influenza outbreak in 1918 which killed an estimated 50 million people.... The ONLY explanation that fits the data is that God does not exist."

Loftus offers an explanation of why theists believe in miracles. "When it comes to the miracle of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead all that Christians have is ancient testimony.... All it requires is one liar for Jesus, and I think that liar is the author of Mark, the first gospel. He invented the empty tomb sequence. That's it.... The evidence of a biblical miracle cannot reasonably convince someone that such a God exists unless said person already believed such a God exists who did those miracles.... When faith is the basis then anything can be believed."

When I received an advance copy of Outsider Test of Faith, I suggested to Loftus that he should have included my book on the origin and evolution of religion in his bibliography. Since he does not in fact discuss religious origins, I withdraw that objection-while continuing to wonder why he included a theoretician whose presentation of a minority interpretation of Christian origins revealed an arrogant contempt for the majority who disagree.

God and the Atom-From Democritus to the Higgs Boson: The Story of a Triumphant Idea
Victor J. Stenger
Prometheus Books
59 John Glenn Drive
Amherst NY 14228-2119
9781616147532, \$25.00, www.amazon.com

Does the discovery that humans and all other lifeforms are descended from common ancestors, a direct contradiction of the opening chapters of Genesis, prove the nonexistence of God? Millions of religious fundamentalists are terrified that it does, since nothing else could explain their inflexible determination to believe that evolution did not happen.

A more meaningful question would be: How can persons who argue that evolution does not prove the nonexistence of God, then turn around and claim that the discovery of the Higgs boson does so? As Stenger explains, the Higgs boson "gives mass to the other elementary particles.. If elementary particles did not have mass, they would all be moving at the speed of light and never stick together to form stuff like

stars, cats, and you and me." The discovery that a subatomic particle that causes smaller particles to unite has the godlike quality of omnipresence throughout the universe inspired a humorist to call it "the god particle," but its mere existence does not prove that God did not design it. Since God is defined as the creator of everything, he could just as easily have decreed, "Let there be evolution," or created only atoms and their component parts and ordered them, "Combine into everything," as create everything in a single step.

The most valid argument for the nonexistence of God, defined as a god with the specific qualities, including omniscience, attributed to the protagonist of the Tanakh, Bible and Koran, is that God's supposedly inerrant Word is incompatible with a universe billions of years old or a human race that evolved from nonhumans. Another definitive argument is the simultaneous existence of such non-manmade evils as disease, famine, natural disasters, and death from old age, and a god with the omnipotence to abolish such evils and the benevolence to wish to do so. Since the evils observably exist, a god that could have and would have abolished them clearly does not. The author who has made that point most successfully in his previous books is Victor Stenger. So why is he now reverting to arguments that merely prove God unnecessary rather than falsifiable? Is he hoping to reach believers to whom their bible's fourteen endorsements of a flat earth are insufficient to prove that the source of all claims of a god revealing its existence is fiction? Good luck with that.

Stenger concludes with a reiteration of Richard Dawkins' observation that the observable universe is consistent with there being no design, no designer, and no conscious purpose. He writes that, "The total absence of empirical facts and theoretical arguments to support the existence of any component of reality other than atoms and the void can be taken as proof beyond a reasonable doubt that such a component is nowhere to be found.. The world can be understood without calling on any forces from outside the world- no wood sprites, no fairies, no angels, no devils, no gods or spirits of any sort."

Stenger acknowledges that he named his book *God and the Atom* because the inclusion of "God" in a title tends to increase sales. In fact he said everything he had to say about God in *God: The Failed Hypothesis*. This new book combines a history of the evolution of belief in atoms, including comments by Christian physicists on whether God and atoms can exist simultaneously, with recent advances in theoretical physics that a historian who has never taken a physics course finds as incomprehensible as if it were written in Etruscan. It says nothing to readers seeking further evidence for the nonexistence of God. On that subject, he should have quit while he was ahead.

The Turbulent Universe

Paul Kurtz

Prometheus Books

59 John Glenn, Drive

Amherst NY 14228-2119

9781616147358, \$20.00, www.amazon.com

The achievements of Isaac Newton are in no way diminished by the fact that he swallowed the god hoax hook, line and sinker. Similarly, the achievements of Paul Kurtz are not diminished by the fact that he swallowed E. O. Wilson's sociobiology hoax hook, line and sinker.

Among the imbecilities of sociobiology, or "evolutionary psychology" as it was renamed in an attempt to dissociate it from the denunciations heaped on it by practitioners of the legitimate sciences with which it is incompatible, is an interpretation of natural selection that Darwin specifically repudiated, and the belief that animals other than *Homo sapiens* are aware of the biological relationship between sire and cub. Humans only discovered the relationship 5,500 years ago, and no other species has any such awareness. Kurtz's crediting nonhuman females with "choosing the best male, healthy and handsome, as the father of their progeny," strongly suggests that he bought into Wilson's incompetent pseudoscience.

The Turbulent Universe is very much an autobiography, although not in the usual sense of a chronological

account of the author's actions, decisions and motivations, detailing personal, career-related, and intimate encounters with relevant acquaintances. Rather, it is a history of human progress during his lifetime, in terms of how he perceived worldly events as they were happening and how he reacted to them. In asking, "How did our solar system emerge?" he was not writing an astronomy text but responding to a thought that crossed his mind at a particular time. He writes that, "Cosmological theories are like the reading of inkblots in a Rorschach test: How we interpret a blot says more about us than about the blot." (Actually it says more about the psychoquack who resorts to such a charade to disguise the reality that he thinks he can read minds.)

In refuting god-centered interpretations of observable reality, Dr. Kurtz explains that, "life evolves through the working of natural laws, i.e., natural selection, but contingency and chance also have a role." By citing the co-dependency of natural laws and random chance, he effectively preempts god addicts who would attack either explanation by itself as if it were offered as a revealed truth. He makes clear that, "Minds would not exist without brains or bodies; they are functions of them. There is insufficient evidence that minds survive after the death of bodies." By writing "insufficient evidence" rather than "no evidence" he again pulls the rug out from under apologists who would claim that there is such evidence. But he is unambiguous when he asserts that what you see is what you get:

"There is no North Pole populated by little elves who manufacture presents and a giant set of reindeer and Santas to go down chimneys loaded with gifts for countless generations of children. Myths may exist in culture and be perpetuated, but they are not true of the world. Fairy tales are only tales; and these include the Jesus, Moses, and Muhammad myths, promising salvation in paradise to believers and torture in hell to miscreants and backsliders." Kurtz was clearly aware that there is no such thing as a free lunch.

Deconstructing Mormonism: An Analysis and Assessment of the Mormon Faith

Thomas Riskas

American Atheist Press

PO Box 158

Cranford NJ 07016-3214

9781578840076, \$29.95, www.amazon.com

I already know that religion is a contrary-to-fact belief system, and the person most qualified to prove its falseness is a former believer. Even so, I would be hesitant to take seriously an alleged falsification of religion written by a tea leaf reader. If he has the rationality to recognize illogical double talk for what it is, why has he not recognized the fraudulence of tea leaf reading?

Thomas Riskas is a former high-ranking Mormon, and as such should be excellently-placed to recognize the illogic of his former belief system. He is also a practicing psychoanalyst. If his analysis of Mormonism is sufficiently logical to justify accepting his conclusions about the cult, then how come he is unable to recognize Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis hoax as a combination of cold reading and sympathetic listening that is no more therapeutic when a psychiatrist does it than when a bartender, a taxi driver or a courtesan does the same thing?

The first four sections of Deconstructing Mormonism constitute Riskas's apologia for writing the book. He states that, "This Foundational Preface creates an essential context for this analysis of the Mormon Faith.. As such, this preface-along with the preceding Introduction and Chapters 1 and 2 which follow-is essential prerequisite reading." "Essential prerequisite reading" is one way to put it. A more accurate description is "unmitigated drivél."

Every time Riskas makes a point, instead of doing so in a single paragraph he instead writes three pages of obfuscating psychobabble that would make a professor of education proud, raising the question: Was he paid by the word? Even though the evidence falsifying Mormonism is sufficiently definitive to stand on its merits even if the falsifier was a phrenologist, a numerologist, a parapsychologist, or a Scientologist, Riskas makes even a logical argument sound like theology. For example:

"According to this naturalistic explanation, under special circumstances this parent image (or idealized mental image) is (or can be) projected and encountered as the omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent Parent or Parent-like presence we all once experienced as infants. Such a transferential encounter-which can be facilitated by cognitively formed assumptions and beliefs that act as hooks for the projection, and triggered by certain hypnotic cues (e.g. words, statements, symbols, music, appearances, etc.) used and encountered in the environment-is motivated unconsciously by a primary need and desire for affective re-union or symbiosis with the internalized Parent or Primary Caregiver. The state of primal fusion or attachment accompanying such a projective transference (or 'faith-state' in 'converted' theistic believers) recapitulates our 'basic biological situation' as infants, and naturalistically explains, from a psychodynamic perspective, the emotional appeal and attachment to the believer's personal idea of 'God.'" I could be polite and describe such contentless doubletalk as "bullshit." But "theology" says it better.

Not until Appendix B does Riskas get around to mentioning the self-contradictions in Mormon doctrine that should have been the basis for his whole book. And even there he makes no mention of the DNA comparison that has shown that native Americans are not descended from residents of the middle East, as the Book of Mormon states. The rest of Riskas's book is indefensible. With nontheists like Riskas, who needs the godphuqt?

Deconstructing Mormonism is over 500 pages of theobabble. The likelihood of any Mormon who picks it up reading more than five pages is vanishingly small. Did Riskas not recognize that? Or was he less interested in curing Mormons of their delusions than in demonstrating his skill at dispensing a minimum amount of information in the maximum number of words? This book is not so much dis-informative as non-informative.

William Harwood
Reviewer

Janet's Bookshelf

The Llama Of Death: A Gunn Zoo Mystery
Betty Webb
Poisoned Pen Press
6962 E.First Avenue, Suite 103
Scottsdale, AZ 85251
www.amazon.com
9781464200663, \$24.95 hc / \$14.95 pb / \$6.99 Kindle

Anthropomorphic is what I am and I always will be. Investing every animal I come across with human qualities is natural for me and I'm pretty sure it's the same for author, Betty Webb, the creator of the Gunn Zoo mystery series. The Llama Of Death, the latest in the series, features Zookeeper, Theodora 'Teddy' Bentley ably assisted by llama, Alejandro, a resident of the Gunn Zoo located in California's Monterey Bay coast.

Teddy and Alejandro have been drafted by the Gunn Zoo owner to work at a Renaissance Faire to publicize the zoo and raise money for a local animal shelter. Alejandro, a sensitive sort of guy, delights in giving rides to children but adults are a different matter. Rescued by zoo staff after being badly treated by his owner; his happy yips turn to barks when confronted by people who invade his comfort zone.

Llamas act as guard animals in South American countries; wild dogs and wolves leave livestock alone if there's a llama around - they don't want to get trampled. Teddy and Alejandro, good buddies, she is

always around to make sure pushy people don't turn the pitter patter of Alejandro's hooves into a dangerous stampede.

All the staff at the fair have time travelled to Henry VIII's Merry Olde England: Teddy is dressed as a fair young maiden, the minister from the local wedding chapel, Victor Emerson, perhaps because he doesn't need padding under his costume, playing King Henry. Minstrels, jesters, you name it - there's even a leper roaming the fairground for the amusement of visiting families.

Bedding down at the fair, Teddy is awakened in the middle of the night by Alejandro's screams. Dressing in a rush, she sprints to the rides enclosure. Alejandro has every right to be upset - he's sharing his bedroom with a dead body. Victor Emerson is lying face down in the dirt. Terrified Emerson might have wandered into the enclosure by mistake and spooked her llama buddy, causing him to attack with his killer hooves, Teddy reluctantly calls the police.

Acting Police Chief, Elvin Dade, for whom the phrase 'dumb and dumber' was created, tramples the crime scene and after pulling a cross bow dart out of Emerson's chest declares Alejandro off the hook when it's pointed out to him llamas are not great at archery. Teddy's sigh of relief is short lived as next morning Dade arrests her mother, Caro. Extremely annoyed at Emerson passing her over for the part of Anne Boleyn, Caro was overheard saying that killing him was on her to-do list.

Everything above her waist that can be nipped, tucked or enhanced done, Caro, despite not being in the bloom of youth, is a trim, taut, really attractive woman. Between husbands, she takes the opportunity to check out the attorney Teddy hires to defend her, with a view to matrimony.

Caro, released from jail with a new beau, Teddy can get back to doing what she loves; being a zookeeper. But wait a minute... there's another murder and Teddy discovers that workers at the fair all have pasts, pasts they would rather keep hidden. Police

Chief Dade, unable to solve one murder, let alone two it's up to Teddy and Alejandro to stop the fairground killer.

The Llama Of Death, fast paced and funny, Betty Webb has created a cast of weird and wonderful characters who parade their virtues and vices in an exciting entertaining plotline. My favourite character was, of course, Alejandro - like to hug him big-time.

The Concrete Kiss

David Grace

Wildside Press

9710 Traville Gateway Dr. #234

Rockville, MD. 20850

www.wildsidepress.com

9781434441133, \$7.99 pbk. / \$4.95 Kindle

Forget genre, good plain writing never goes out of style. David Grace's latest thriller, The Concrete Kiss, is good plain writing and coupled with an exciting plot, it's a great read.

Homicide Detective Ned Danes is appalled when he finds Deputy D.A. Worthington has deliberately withheld video evidence from a defence lawyer in order to get a conviction and further his own career. Danes has one of two options: let an innocent man go to prison or become a whistleblower and see his prospects of promotion sink lower than ground zero.

Detective Danes, one of the good guys, doesn't even think twice - he passes the video to the defendant's attorney and when he's subpoenaed to appear for the defence his testimony ensures D.A. Worthington's case is thrown out by the judge.

Furious, Worthington threatens Danes with dismissal, loss of pension and anything else the sleazy prosecutor can think of to bad-mouth a guy who, although it may sound a cliché, is just doing his duty; upholding the truth to protect the innocent. The court scene dialogue, hard edged and believable, I particularly liked Detective Danes reaction to Worthington's abuse and I quote:

... Ned Danes had graduated from Marine Corps boot camp, had been shot at twice on the job, had carried a gun into back alleys and crack-dens on more occasions than he cared to remember, and this putz lawyer thought he could frighten him? Really? Danes did the only thing he could under the circumstances. He laughed and walked away...

In a few straightforward sentences author, David Grace gives the reader a definitive description of Danes' background and character - nice economical writing and unlike some other thriller writers he doesn't interrupt the pace and flow of the story by padding it with unnecessary details of character's encounters and pastimes which do nothing to flesh out the characters or advance the plot.

Danes contacts a previous work colleague, F.B.I. Agent Phillip Abbot, to try and salvage his career. Abbott tries to help but Danes is relegated to the Cold Case Squad; his prospects of advancement as dead as the victims in the cases he investigates. Abbott, fast tracked to retirement, has only 60 days left to catch a serial killer whose modus operandi is to murder entire families. He has adopted a young autistic girl, Jessica, whose family was slain by the killer. Time running out, Abbot asks for Danes help to put a stop to the serial killer's ongoing murderous rampage.

The story spans five years and during the course of Danes and Abbot's investigation the plot moves in many different directions - two stories are interleaved: Danes tracking of a killer who tortures and murders young girls and Abbot's desperate search for the murderer of Jessica's family. Adrenalin, at heart pumping level the surprises keep right on coming - the bad guys are especially bad but there's no chance the good guys, Danes and Abbot, will ever give up in this fast paced, hugely exciting thriller.

The Concrete Kiss is a diverting entertaining read and I will be looking for David Grace's other titles - he's a good writer.

Janet Walker, Reviewer
www.janetwalker.biz

Karyn's Bookshelf

The Center of Everything
Linda Urban, author
Houghton Mifflin Books for Children
215 Park Avenue South
New York, NY 10003
9780547763484, \$15.99, www.amazon.com

Just-right humor and poignancy combine in this story of Ruby Pepperdine, a sixth-grader coping with the death of her grandmother. Absurdity - Ruby's small town has built its identity around the donut, including an annual festival honoring a sea captain who was purportedly the first to poke a hole in a blob of fried dough - meshes with tween drama as Ruby takes to heart local lore that says tossing a quarter through the donut hole in a statue of Captain Cornelius Bunning grants you a wish. That her wish, however, has to do with righting things that occurred just before her grandmother's death assures that it will be a tough one to find fruition. A strong cast of supporting characters, including Ruby's extended family, a new friend and a longtime friend whose neediness proves challenging as Ruby grapples with her

loss, lends great depth. The author of 2007's "A Crooked Kind of Perfect," demonstrates again her mastery of middle-grade writing, hitting readers squarely in the heart and the funny bone.

Rain

Linda Ashman, author

Christian Robinson, illustrator

Houghton Mifflin Books for Children

215 Park Avenue South

New York, NY 10003

9780547733951, \$16.99, www.amazon.com

Youthful joy, vintage art reminiscent of 1960s classics like Ezra Jack Keats' "The Snowy Day," and a gentle lesson about viewing life as a glass as half full, delightfully combine in this sparsely worded picture book. As he and his mother head out into a rainy day, a little boy happily dons a bright green raincoat and a matching frog rain hat. Meanwhile, an elderly man grumbles as he tugs on galoshes, is rude to a doorman and generally trudges, bad-tempered, through his morning. When the two accidentally collide at a coffee shop, inciting the man, the boy has two choices - take offense or share his spirit. An inspiring conclusion caps this ode to looking on the bright side, and to sharing that upbeat view with those who need it most.

Karyn L. Saemann, Reviewer

www.inkspotsinc.com

Katherine's Bookshelf

104 Ways to Starve Your Anger and Feed Your Soul

Robyn Wheeler

Born Mad, LLC

PO Box 1783, Mabank, TX 75147-1783

9780615694504, \$15.99, www.amazon.com

Robyn Wheeler, author of Born Mad, has written an exceptional book about controlling your anger. It is a list of suggestions about how to do just that. It can be read through and the suggestions that you feel are the best for your situation can be utilized - or - take one at a time (by the week) for 104 weeks, and explore them that way. Ms. Wheeler does not preach or lecture the reader, but just states the suggestion and lets you internalize it. How you use them is up to you. An example from the list is:

"Happiness is not an inanimate object that can be purchased from a store. Happiness is located within you. Only you have the power to make yourself happy. Happiness is a state, not a destination."

Robyn Wheeler was diagnosed with a form of depression called dysthymic disorder, which she related in her book, Born Mad. She struggled for years with anger, until she was diagnosed. She now takes medication to help regulate the imbalance in her brain and most of the indicators of her disorder are gone or have improved.

She is the owner of Born Mad, LLC, a company dedicated to creating awareness for this disorder and helping others. She is now a newspaper reporter, author and inspirational speaker. She is a member of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, National Association of Professional Women, World Wide Who's Who and the National Association of the Self-Employed. She is a certified Family to Family Education Instructor for NAMI, Kaufman Chapter and was named the 2012 Professional of the Year in Writing and Editing from Worldwide Who's Who.

Black Eagle Force: Return of the Starfighter
Buck Stienke and Ken Farmer
Timber Creek Press
312 N Commerce St.
Gainesville, TX 76240
9780984882038, \$16.95, www.amazon.com

In *Return of the Starfighter*, authored by Buck Stienke and Ken Farmer, The Black Eagle Force is called in to another action thriller mission. This time they are called on to save the country from the invasion of a group of rogue Chinese.

"So, you are saying, Admiral, that while we have been busy trying to stamp out brush fires around the world, China has been preparing a non-nuclear first strike capability that could overwhelm us? Is one ultra-super carrier group that significant? Is it possible that you are exaggerating somewhat?"

To accomplish this, the "Old Iron" (retired, but usable aircraft) is retooled and brought out of mothballs. Led by General Jack Stewart, a force of older and retired men from all the services are called in to fly in this new/old squadron. Then, the BEF is called in Since we know that the BEF is invincible, there is no reason to go into any details, just suffice it to say that the action is exciting and not predictable, as is the wont of Mr. Farmer and Mr. Steinke. This is another great read for everyone.

In this, the third of the BEF novels by Ken Farmer and Buck Steinke, we again meet with old friends of the BEF, Dare, Blaze, Mickey, Jill and Gunter Hermann who is now married to the President of the United States as well as other familiar air warriors. Do they all survive the turmoil in which they find themselves? No spoilers here, folks.

Often, by the time an author gets to the third (or even the second) in a series, they have run out of new scenarios to make a believable storyline for us to become enthralled with. Not so with these two bon vivants of military novels. They continue to entertain us and make us believe that a clandestine group such as the BEF is possible. Maybe it is? Who knows - its top secret.

Buck Stienke is a retired captain and fighter pilot for the United States Air Force and a graduate from the Air Force Academy. He was a pilot for Delta Airlines for over 25 years and also executive producer of the award winning film *Rockabilly Baby*.

Ken Farmer served in the Marine Corps and graduated from Stephen F. Austin State University. Ken has been a professional actor, writer and director with memorable roles in *Silverado*, *Friday Night Lights* and *Uncommon Valor*. He continues to write and direct award-winning films, including *Rockabilly Baby*.

Lady Justice and the Book Club Murders
Robert Thornhill
CreateSpace
100 Enterprise Way Ste A200
Scotts Valley, CA 95066
9781479150885, \$12.99, www.amazon.com

In this, the 10th book of his Lady Justice series, Robert Thornhill crafts another comedy/mystery. It will keep you on the edge of your seat in anticipation of the mystery and laughing your head off at old and new humor at the antics of his "crew" and co-workers. This time Walt enters the world of literature as he and Ox pursue a serial killer, labeled by the media as "The Librarian". Will Walt and Company solve another one with aplomb and finesse - or by accident? We get a close look into the killer's mind as Walt and the Kansas City police try to put together the few clues left by the suspect, Oscar Roach.

"No way for the old man to identify me and even if he sees the car, it will turn out to be stolen. Any DNA

evidence will be at the bottom of the muddy Missouri River and we'll get away clean --- the perfect crime!"

Oscar smiled as he watched their faces.

They were hooked!"

Robert Thornhill began his writing career at the age of sixty-six, after a successful career in real estate. He and his wife Peg, who does the covers to his books, have expanded their horizons by going into the literature business. Four of his novels in the Lady Justice series have won the Pinnacle Achievement Award from the National Association of Book Entrepreneurs as best of mystery novels. He has also written seven volumes in the Rainbow Road series (chapter books for children), a cookbook and a mini-biography. He holds a master's degree in psychology and spent thirty years as a real estate broker. He and his wife, Peg, live in Independence, Missouri.

**Katherine Boyer
Reviewer**

Logan's Bookshelf

**The Secret Gospel of Ireland
James Behan & Leo Behan
Skywest Publishing
9780985458300, \$13.99, www.secretgospelofireland.com**

Ireland is an ancient land that has seen no shortage of turmoil over the past few hundred years. "The Secret Gospel of Ireland: The Untold Story of How Science and Democracy Descended From a Remarkable Form of Christianity That Developed in Ancient Ireland" delves into a deep history theory that much of the roots of modern thought can be traced back to a clash of cultures in Ireland as the Christian faith collided with the faith of the land those hundreds of years ago. Enticing and fascination evaluations of history, the authors bring much to ponder about Ireland's development in the role of the west. "The Secret Gospel of Ireland" is a strong addition to international history collections with a focus on Christianity and the west.

**Everything But Snakes
Matthew Phillips
iUniverse, Inc.
c/o AuthorHouse
1663 Liberty Dr. Suite #300
Bloomington, IN 47403
9781475919943, \$28.95, www.iuniverse.com**

The world of business is quite daunting for someone to dive into. "Everything But Snakes" is a memoir of New York high society as author Matthew Phillips tells his sort of coming age story as he matures fast in the New York city night life, dragged to learn about this world kicking and screaming, and quickly learning to enjoy it almost every step of the way. With plenty of humor and much to ponder about life's pleasures and how much of it to indulge, "Everything but Snakes" is an enthusiastically recommended addition to any personal memoir collection.

**Wall Street Journeyman
Silvio Santini
Outskirts Press, Inc.**

**10940 South Parker Road, #515
Parker, CO 80134
9781478719199, \$14.95, www.outskirtspress.com**

Wall Street and Corruption may as well be synonyms. "Wall Street Journeyman" is a novel from Silvio Santini as he presents his own insights into the financial world through the novel, as he tells of a driven young man facing the cruelty and harshness of the environment. "Wall Street Journeyman" takes much from Santini's own experiences, well worth considering for those who want insight into what goes on Wall Street.

**Crossfire Diamonds
George Snyder
BooksForABuck.com
9781602152007, \$15.99, www.booksforabuck.com**

With some crimes, the scariest thing isn't the police, but the other crooks you're competing against. "Crossfire Diamonds" is a novel following Colt Fallon, big time crook with eyes on millions in diamonds in a vulnerable vault. Racing against international organized crime, the cost the millions could quickly escalate and turn out to be his life. "Crossfire Diamonds" is worth considering for those who love crime thrillers, recommended.

**The Slickrock Paradox
Stephen Legault
Touchwood Editions
9781927129395, \$18.95, www.touchwoodeditions.com**

Into the vast wastelands of the American southwest, the answers we search for and find are never clear. "The Slickrock Paradox: The Red Rock Canyon Mysteries" follows Silas Pearson, a man who wants to find his wife who has disappeared into the canyons of the southwest, and he follows her trying to find the truth behind the matter, even when the truth may be she left him behind. With psychological elements, "The Slickrock Paradox" is an exciting addition to mystery and thriller collections, highly recommended.

**Sanctuary in Steel
Bryan Cassiday
CreateSpace
100 Enterprise Way, Suite A200
Scotts Valley, CA 95066
wwwcreatespace.com
9781479106172, \$17.99, www.amazon.com**

As the world is swarmed with the ravages of the dead, survival grows all the more difficult. "Sanctuary in Steel" is a novel of the zombie apocalypse from Bryan Cassiday, telling of several survivors as they flee the ravaged California, thinking the isolated and abandoned prison of Alcatraz will protect them better. When they arrive, they see troubles will only grow more complicated. "Sanctuary in Steel" is a riveting read that will be hard to put down, highly recommended.

**The Essene Diet
John Hagan, M.D.
Rauson Group, LLC
2313 L-S #138
San Antonio, TX 78230
9780982082829 \$9.98**

The Essene Diet is a diet and lifestyle guide recommending a morning-fast model in the same style as the

ancient Jewish sect of the Essenes (perhaps best known because of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which are popularly attributed to them, though this is not conclusively proven). Repudiating the oft-repeated claim that breakfast is vital to maintaining a healthy weight, The Essene Diet recommends fasting for fourteen hours each day, typically starting at 9 p.m. before going to bed, and ending at 11 a.m. after waking up and engaging in a few hours of activity, though this can be adjusted for people who work on different schedules. A small study among a group of volunteers yielded positive results, and the Essenes themselves practiced this way of life for hundreds of years. The Essene Diet discusses exercise metabolics, hunger set-points, pitfalls of common commercial diet programs, and much more in its persuasive attempt to counter what it calls "the myth of breakfast". "The Essenes were known as the healthiest men of their time with many living past the century mark. They ate simple foods and were not vegetarians. Significantly, their first meal of the day was taken after a morning of work."

Carl Logan
Reviewer

Lois' Bookshelf

Jacob's Cellar
Richard Sharp
CreateSpace
100 Empire Way, Suite A200
Scotts Valley, CA 95066
9781478350323, \$12.95, www.amazon.com

Novelists proceed at their peril when they opt to defy the conventional wisdom of storytelling, those tired old rules taught in every Creative Writing class: Write what you know, and show, don't tell.

Richard Sharp cannot be faulted with breaking the first rule. He knows his material so well that one feels he could have gone on twice as long had he chosen to do so; he could have written a War and Peace. It's the second cardinal rule that he so courageously defies. This book is written almost entirely in narrative, with one character after another taking over, picking up the threads of story-line. As an author who often longs to break the rules, I pursued the experiment with interest.

The history of a family from the time they left their home somewhere in Germany to settle in a German-speaking colony in North Carolina, to the time they moved on to pioneer in Missouri, the tale is told by family members, from blind Grandpa Fentress to soldier-father Jake. Eleven-year-old William is chief listener. The sessions occur in the spooky and semi-haunted cellar where the family gathers, with the cellar itself often the focus and setting.

On arrival in Missouri, where everyone else was building a log cabin, the original Jacob dug a huge hole in the ground to serve as safe living quarters where neither tornadoes nor Indians nor fire could find the family, and in time to become the cellar of the house. In fact, it became a downright legendary cellar when Jacob managed to kill himself there by falling on a pitchfork. It gained a reputation of being haunted and of possibly having spirits or mummies hidden behind its retaining wall. Its mystique dominates the story and fear of it by locals saves the family from the troubled times before and during the Civil War.

In a sense, the story of the cellar reflects the story of the family. The cellar serves as protagonist in much the same way as the house is the protagonist in *The House of Seven Gables*. Hawthorne tells the tale of the Pyncheon family through history of the house, from the accursed founder, Colonel Pyncheon, to Hepzibah and Clifford Pyncheon who flee on a rainy night to escape its walls. In *Jacob's Cellar*, the cellar serves a similar function, a focus for the passing generations of the family. Jacob's death seems to guarantee a haunted quality about the place, and subsequent urban legends add to that.

In short, this unusual technique bypasses the familiar detailed war-tales of battles with Mexico and later battles of the Civil War. It provides a different reading experience, that of having actually sat with family members in that cellar and listened as history unfolded. It's an oblique but unforgettable way of showing us what went on in the states along the Mason-Dixon line, where neighbors disagreed on issues of slavery and secession, where both wandering Rebs and Union officials were likely to attack at any moment.

I would not recommend this technique to other authors but in this case it works. The unique nature of this material seems to call for it, and allows it to highlight various different and unusual aspects of history. For instance, this family dislikes slavery and opposes secession, yet Jake goes off to join the Confederate army out of loyalty to his unit and its commander with whom he fought in Mexico. His letter home describes the war as largely boredom, a case of traveling perpetually in search of the enemy, with brief battles when the latter is finally encountered, most of them soon ended as one side or another declares a tactical victory and retreats. Those of us used to seeing the Civil War in black and white terms have probably given little thought to the realities of individual soldiers' motivations, so indifferent to the main issues yet so important in the long run.

The author loses something but also gains something by his unusual choice of technique. This is not a fast read but it's a meaningful read. The book is highly recommended as a bit of rich Americana.

Time is the Oven
Richard Sharp
CreateSpace
100 Empire Way, Suite A200
Scotts Valley, CA 95066
9781480036406, \$12.95, www.amazon.com

Continuing the story of the Ebhart family in post-Civil War days, *Time is the Oven* takes us to Leavenworth where young William, now grown, has gone in hopes of joining the army. In a search for an epiphany and for meaning in life, he moves on to many adventures including involvement with the legendary James brothers, Frank and Jesse, otherwise known as Buck and Dings.

In this second book, William, the former child-listener to family tales, serves as the main protagonist and POV character. On leaving home, he has sought out a Sergeant Riley, who plies him with liquor and war stories of his father's old regiment. At some time during their drinking bout, William meets a woman, part prostitute, part actress, named Lenore or Nora Lee depending on which role she is playing. Seeing her as young and vulnerable, he is much drawn to her; indeed, he ends by taking her home, where he comes up against the harsh reality of her profession on finding himself short of funds to pay her fee. Yet he longs to take care of her; he fails to understand her feisty determination to earn her own money and control her own life. Lacking a place to sleep, she stays with him for some time, yet she talks of plans to go off with a man named Sam Fletcher who has offered to buy a theater and make her a principal actress. William fears that as a mere boy, unsophisticated at that, he can't compete with the man-of-the-world Fletcher, owner of a traveling circus where William has landed a job.

The story becomes a tale of love gained and love lost. The charming Lenore remains enigmatic. William can capture no hint of desire on her part to hook up with him permanently. They come together for lengthy periods only to separate again as the restless Lenore seemingly hungers for fame as an actress. Finally, on hearing news of her demise, he abandons hope of her and embarks on years of adventure including the above mentioned involvement with the James brothers which brings him an unwarranted reputation as an outlaw, and to Panama, where he has been offered a good-paying job as overseer on the canal dig. Having once had yellow fever, he is now immune in a land where everyone else is dying of it, and so is a valuable asset in the equatorial region.

In Panama, William hooks up with a woman who proves to be a great partner though an unexciting

bedmate. But, still dreaming of the lost Lenore, he wants little to do with his new attachment physically.

By the time William returns to the States, ten years have passed in Panama, twenty years since his first encounter with Lenore, yet she lives on in his dreams. With Jesse James dead and Frank James morphed into a model citizen under a false name, there is little left of the old, adventurous days. But adventures are not over; there is still one great surprise in store for William and for the reader.

The author likens this book to Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale*, and indeed it echoes that story in its focus on the search for redemption and inner experience. Yet I found myself reminded of Joseph Conrad. The protagonist goes into the Heart of Darkness in Panama much as Conrad's heroes go into Africa, and encounters a similar miasma of evil. Men die by the hundreds of disease, or buried in landslides, and management's indifference to their suffering echoes that of Conrad's Kurtz, the killer. Also, the reality of the canal-digging, tangible and gruesome, is not in William's power to change. He feels helpless as does Marlowe in Conrad, and must seek his epiphany within himself and his own life.

The search for Lenore is the thread of plot on which many wild adventures hang, with adventure the true meat of the tale. Experiences with the James brothers and with the crew in Panama are vividly brought to life. Fascinating material keeps the reader riveted right to the end. This book is highly recommended for history buffs - and even those who are not history buffs may well emerge from it with a new interest in the field. History, after all, is most interesting when it focuses, not on battles and war strategy, but on individuals and their experience of war and post-war disruption.

Lois Wells Santalo
Reviewer

Margaret's Bookshelf

Judas the Apostle
Jan R. Mayhall Jr.
iUniverse, Inc.
c/o Author House
1663 Liberty Dr. Suite #300
Bloomington, IN 47403
9781475931556, \$18.95, www.iuniverse.com

The character of Judas in history is filled with mystery, as a traitor and a carrier of God's will. "Judas the Apostle" is a thriller following ancient language expert Dr. Clotile Lejeune as she tries to find the truth behind her father's murder and an ancient jar said to carry the ashes of the infamous Judas Iscariot. With much learned about ancient history and forces seeking to stop her, "Judas the Apostle" is a riveting thriller circling the truth of the past, very much recommended reading.

Jimmy Stu Lives!
Kent McDaniel
Penumbra Publishing
9781935563839, \$9.99, www.amazon.com

The words of faith are easy to skew to corruption. "Jimmy Stu Lives!" is a novel following a twentieth century preacher who awakens in the twenty second century to find his church has gone far beyond what he ever expected, himself now a major figure. Shocked at what he seeks, author Kent McDaniel presents an humorous twist of faith and life, and its future. "Jimmy Stu Lives!" is not to be overlooked, highly recommended.

Secrets to a Creative Mind**David Judd Nutting****Outskirts Press, Inc.****10940 South Parker Road, #515****Parker, CO 80134****9781478719236, \$19.95, www.outskirtspress.com**

Creativity is in all of us if we are willing to let it flourish. "Secrets to a Creative Mind: Become the Master of Your Mind" is a spiritual and inspirational read from long time designer David Judd Nutting who presents his own insights onto untapping our creativity and unleashing it for whatever we seek out of life. "Secrets of a Creative Mind" is worth considering for spiritual and motivational collections.

The Timing of the Incarnation**Robert G. Saba****CreateSpace****100 Enterprise Way, Suite A200****Scotts Valley, CA 95066****wwwcreatespace.com****9781470045951, \$12.50, www.amazon.com**

We struggle to try to understand God's grand plan, even when it doesn't make much sense. "The Timing of the Incarnation: God's True Plan Revealed" is a Christian pondering of faith and living from Robert G. Saba as he ponders faith and religion, drawing from the doctrines of faith and looking at them through history, to present his own thoughts on God's views and purpose in the world. "The Timing of the Incarnation" is a must for Christian spirituality collections, recommended.

Jesus Phenomenon Return: End of the World**Fritz Michel****Outskirts Press, Inc.****10940 South Parker Road, #515****Parker, CO 80134****9781432781293 \$16.95 www.outskirtspress.com**

Jesus Phenomenon Return: End of the World offers the prophecies on author Fritz Michel. Challenging readers to judge the truth of his prophecies by the fruits they bear, Michel claims that before Christ can return, the world must be prepared. Jesus Phenomenon Return speaks of the failings of the modern church, the forthcoming struggle of the End Times, and a glimpse of the world's upcoming radical transformation. "I think that anyone who calls out for salvation should receive it. It is never too late to receive salvation, and never too late to give it. Since Satan made his grave mistake, corrupting Adam and Eve, God has been waiting for Satan's repentance, so that He can forgive him. Repentance makes no discrimination, and salvation makes no discrimination." A bold, forceful assertion of the dark days to come and humanity's path to holy grace, Jesus Phenomenon Return is the unforgettable words of a prophet whose flame of devout faith burns strong and true.

Trade Secrets**Holly Rozner****Privately Published****9780986016301, \$14.95, www.hollyrozner.com**

Staying afloat when you've finally hit it big is harder than you'd think. "Trade Secrets" is a novel from Holly Rozner as she tells the story of high finance as Zach Silverman faces his financial empire falling apart, his wife Sarna quickly learns how the business works and the two seek to stay afloat, even as the forces against them grow bigger and bigger. "Trade Secrets" is an exciting financial adventure set amongst the tumultuous 80s, recommended.

Sudden Sex
Alison Tyler, editor
Cleis Press
2246 Sixth Street
Berkeley, CA 94710-2219
9781573449007, \$15.95, www.cleispress.com

A long romantic engagement sometimes isn't in the cards, but there's still a strong need for passion. "Sudden Sex: 69 Sultry Short Stories" is a collection of short erotica compiled by Alison Tyler who presents an array of stories of people faced with a flash of passion in many situations in their lives, facing the train, split second decisions of giving into lust, tempting fate where people might disturb your sinful actions at any moment. "Sudden Sex" is a strong addition to short erotic fiction collections, and for any who dream about those moments where instant lust may strike them.

Margaret Lane
Reviewer

Marjorie's Bookshelf

Fabric of the Cosmos, the DVD
Hosted by Brian Greene
NOVA series distributed by PBS
WGBH Education Foundation
B0056031LE, \$29.99

What I liked about the DVD of Fabric of the Cosmos is that it takes difficult physics concept and makes them visual. I have read sections of Greene's book by the same name and think he is good at writing for the layperson. The DVD takes it a step further by putting the concepts into a visual medium that make theoretical physics a tiny bit easier to understand. This is a NOVA series in four parts so there are two discs with two parts apiece.

The first segment is What is Space? As Greene said in the book: "Space is not what we once thought it was." Space is everywhere, and it is not empty.

The second segment is The Illusion of Time. The amazing thing about this segment is that physicists cannot figure out why time only flows in one direction. Mathematically it flows in both directions. Interesting in this segment also is why time is necessary and they give the example of when trains came into regular usage in Europe, every town had a different time. Now there is the atomic clock so everyone is on the same time. But that still doesn't solve the problem of why when you break a glass, time doesn't reverse and the glass can come back together. Or can it? The flow of time may be an illusion, or it may be more like a frozen river.

The third segment is called The Quantum Leap. This covers quantum mechanics which is a world we cannot see but is part of us, where electrons can be in two places at once. Where particles are so small we cannot see or experience them, and they jiggle! Quantum mechanics is based on probability and so not everything is certain in the quantum world compared to the one we live in and can sense which appears to be certain. But maybe it's not.

The fourth segment is Universe or Multiverse? Now it is generally accepted that there is more than one universe. Green covers this well in his book Hidden Reality which I've reviewed before. There make be universes that are so small we can never hope to see or experience them. They make be in the same space

we are but in a different dimension. That there is more than one universe can be proven mathematically. Trying to prove it experientially is beyond our present capabilities.

I suggest watching the DVD or the NOVA series which is repeated on a regular basis, then reading the book. It will make a far out, difficult subject easier to understand.

The Spiral Staircase, My Climb out of Darkness

Karen Armstrong

Alfred A. Knopf

c/o The Random House Publishing Group

1745 Broadway, 17th floor

New York, NY 10019

www.randomhouse.com

0375413189, \$14.95, www.amazon.com

This book by Karen Armstrong, one of many she has written, is about her transition from life in a convent to the outside world. She entered the convent in 1962 as a teenager and left seven years later. She struggled tremendously to make the decision to leave a life she no longer felt relevant. She questioned the very existence of God. She writes,

"He had been so consistently absent that he might just as well not exist." (p 61)

While in the convent she started an undergraduate degree at Cambridge. When she left she continued her studies and had to adjust to secular life at university in the 1970s. Her questions about God's existence continued as well. She writes,

"Did I really believe that there was a Being up there somehow responsible for everything that happens on earth? No, I did not. Not only did it seem highly unlikely that there was an overseeing deity, supervising earthly events, apportioning trials and rewards according to some inscrutable program of his own, but the idea was also grotesque." (p 111)

She describes her crisis of faith, her movement away from God and the church in subsequent events in her life. What is fascinating is her return which came as she studied and wrote about other religions. She was commissioned by Channel 4 in England to do a series on Christianity and started with the "pugnacious apostle" St. Paul, who she considered had "perverted the simple, loving message of Jesus". But in her research for the series she "stumbled unawares into the minefield of New Testament scholarship, whose findings astounded me". (p 231) And she "made some startling discoveries. A disturbing number of eminent scholars agreed that Jesus had no intention of founding a new religion." There were more discoveries and she writes that "once I had been introduced to these ideas, I read the gospels and epistles with new eyes.... These ideas gravely undermined many of the theological assumptions of my Catholic years." (p 232)

It was the study of the Crusades that changed her, "making me determined always to try to listen to the other side... Studying the Crusades had confirmed me in my conviction that stridently parochial certainty could be lethal, especially in religious matters." (p 259)

There are too many great revelations in the book to include in a short interview. I include just one more. Toward the end she writes,

"In the course of my studies, I have discovered that the religious quest is not about discovering 'the truth' or 'the meaning of life' but about living as intensely as possible here and now. The idea is not to latch on to some superhuman personality or to 'get to heaven' but to discover how to be fully human..." (p 271)

In the end Armstrong comes full circle. Her journey is a fascinating one. She an excellent writer and

ponders many of the tough questions we all face. I would recommend reading any of her books or watching one of her talks on TED. This book is so thought provoking, I think I'll read it again.

Marjorie Thelen, Reviewer
www.marjoriethelen.com

Paul's Bookshelf

Navy Fun: When Ronald Reagan Was In Charge and Being in the Navy Was a Blast
Vince Stead
E-Book Time, LLC
9781598245141, \$12.95, www.e-booktime.com

This is one person's chronicle of life in the US Navy.

The author grew up in a small town in Michigan. Part of a large family, his father's attitude was that when each child reached 16 years old, they moved out of the house. A friend was joining the Navy, so the author followed him.

Boot camp, held in Florida, consisted of a lot of yelling, for no good reason. When it was time to choose the area of training the sailor would learn, the author, having no better ideas, went to yeoman school. There he learned to type memos the Navy Way, and otherwise entered the world of military paperwork.

His first duty station was aboard a submarine tender. It followed several submarines, and acted as their supply ship. He worked directly with the ship's Commanding officer and Executive Officer, most of whom were decent, reasonable people. He compared himself to Radar O'Reilly, from the TV show MASH, taking care of the paperwork. It was not the most strenuous job in the Navy. Later in his career, he found himself doing similar work on a destroyer and an aircraft carrier.

When it is time to board a ship for your tour of duty, the ship does not come to you; you go to the ship, wherever in the world it might be. The author talks about some of the places he visited in his travels. Places like Manila and Seoul very much cater to American military personnel. There are many, many bars and nightclubs, each with many beautiful young women available for one-night stands. Even the most plain-looking guy, who can't get a date back home, could have a different woman each night, if he was interested. He noticed that things are very different in places like Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. He also visited Hawaii, Guam, Hong Kong, the Maldive Islands and Diego Garcia (which is little more than a giant military base).

Navy Fun: When Ronald Reagan Was In Charge and Being in the Navy Was a Blast is an interesting book that's worth reading. It's short, and is written in a very informal style.

The Monsterjunkies: An American Family Odyssey
Erik Daniel Shein & L.M. Reker
Arkwatch Holdings LLC
4766 East Eden Drive
Cave Creek AZ 85331
9780615250205, \$9.95, www.arkwatch.com

This is the story of a very unique American family.

The Monsterjunkies live in a walled compound on the coast of Maine. Talon, the father, is a crypto-zoologist who specializes in rescuing animal species thought to be extinct, with the intention of returning

them to the wild. Pandora is his wife, and their children, daughter Indigo and son Crow are students at the local high school. Because they are "different," both children have been noticed by Rutherford, the school bully. Crow wants the bullying to end, and Indigo wants the family to start being a little more trusting of outsiders. No one is allowed on the property, and the family doesn't talk about it, which leads to the expected rumors of monsters on the property.

Indigo invites Winter, a friend from school and a budding artist, for an overnight sleepover, and shows her what is really going on behind the walls. Crow becomes friends with a trio of boys from school who attempt to sneak onto the property to see for themselves. They are stopped by an actual sasquatch, who, they learn later, is intelligent and is named Beauregard. The visitors are also introduced to a pygmy elephant named Thunder who loves marshmallows, and an actual sea serpent named Sybil who can't eat enough squash.

At school one day, the group publicly humiliates Rutherford, in front of a bunch of girls. Naturally, he is not going to go away that easily. Does the Monsterjunkie family get "outed" prematurely? Does the bullying stop, once and for all?

This is an excellent YA novel. It has a very strong environmental and anti-bullying message. It is a well-done piece of writing that is recommended for all young people (and adults, too).

Paul Lappen, Reviewer
www.deadtreesreview.com

Peggy's Bookshelf

Anni's Attic
Anne Loader McGee
Vendera Publishing
PO Box 116, Franklin Furnace, OH 45629
9781936307241, \$12.99, www.amazon.com

The last thing 11-year old Jennine Nicòle Parkington wanted to do was live on an old cotton plantation in Georgia, and share a bedroom with Annise Loreal Bouvoir, la cousine terrible. But that was exactly what happened. After her mother died, Jenn was perfectly happy living with Grandmere and Grandpere in their New Orleans mansion while her father Phillip Parkington, a businessman from England, went about his international affairs. But the Civil War had changed everything. Southerners were choosing sides and Mr. Parkington had chosen to fight in President Lincoln's Army. He told Jenn, "Believe me, living with someone your own age will be the best thing for you, especially now I'm going - "

Be that as it may, the two cousins had nothing in common. Jenn spoke French and took pride in her impeccable manners. Anni made friends with the Negro slaves and didn't know the meaning of the word "etiquette." In spite of their animosity, friendship sprouted and bloomed through four brutal years of the Civil War. Together Jenn and Anni shared secrets and adventures like all young girls. Then, as the war dragged on and closed in around them, the secrets and adventures became much more terrifying and dangerous.

Through the friendship of Jenn and Anni, the intertwining of the Parkington and Bouvoir families, and the politics of war, Anne McGee skillfully weaves Confederate and Yankee sympathies into this epic tale. McGee's intricate details of Southern life during the Civil War Era transport the reader to another time and place. "Anni's Attic" is the American version of "Downton Abbey." Fans of the series will absolutely love this book.

Pukka's Promise: The Quest for Longer-Lived Dogs**Ted Kerasote****Houghton Mifflin Harcourt****215 Park Avenue South****New York, NY 10003****9780547236261, \$28.00, www.amazon.com**

Ted Kerasote's beloved first dog Merle ("Merle's Door") was a stray he picked up in Arizona. After Merle's death at age 14, Kerasote not only sets out on a quest to find a new dog but to answer the question on the lips of every dog lover: How can we help our dogs live longer, healthier lives?

Genetics, breeding, and purebreds vs. shelter dogs all come into play in what, for some readers, might seem like an obsessive, 3-year search for the perfect dog. But there is a method to his madness. In "Pukka's Promise," Kerasote intertwines the joys and challenges of raising a pup from seven weeks old with the latest research on canine nutrition and optimum health. From his diet to his toys and dog bed, Pukka gets the best of everything. As Kerasote sifts through the vast market of dog food and pet supplies, readers learn how to make better choices for their dogs.

Kerasote challenges time worn veterinary practices of vaccination schedules, spaying and neutering. With the aid of interviews with several veterinarians, he offers alternatives to basic health care issues. From there he delves deeper into common diseases in dogs such as cancer, diabetes, allergies, and adrenal disease to find out the causes. In essence he shows us that as we strive to lead healthier, happier lives, if we apply the same principles to our dogs' lives, they too will benefit.

Kerasote's treatise on animal shelters in the United States is both controversial and groundbreaking. His notions about fundamentally changing our attitudes toward pet overpopulation and shelter care could go a long way toward raising the standard of living for all dogs in this country. He presents ideas that deserve a closer look and a much broader discussion.

Engaging, thought-provoking, and meticulously researched, "Pukka's Promise" is a guidebook for raising a dog in the 21st century.

Chomp! Chomp! Chomp!**Kevin J. Doyle, author****Oliver Chipping, illustrator****Knowonder****198 N. 600 E, Hyrum, UT 84319****9781479103577, \$7.95, www.amazon.com**

A young boy befriends a gigantic green crocodragonosaur named Oliver. There's only one problem. Oliver eats everything - and I do mean everything. First he eats his way through the boy's toys and even his lunch. The boy follows the hungry monster on an eating binge through the neighborhood. He even tries to get Oliver to stop eating and go back to his cave but it doesn't work. Oliver must be stopped before he destroys the whole town. Chipping's animated artwork puts a friendly face on an otherwise scary monster. Kids who love dinosaurs will get a real kick out Oliver, the lovable crocodragonosaur.

Peggy Tibbetts, Reviewer**www.peggytibbetts.net**

Riva's Bookshelf

Bluff

Lenore Skomal
Lemore Skomal Press
9781478192473, \$14.95
ASIN B0095YE65M, \$2.99 Kindle

Bluff by Lenore Skomal is not light reading. It is a deep, meaty, sink your teeth into and get you thinking kind of book - and it just might change some of your perspectives; It changed some of mine.

Jude Black is a gay woman who is pregnant. She takes a life-threatening fall off the bluff near her house. Was it an accident, a suicide or foul play? And how did Jude, who is far from thrilled at the thought of being pregnant get that way? Who is the baby's father? And when does, or should, life end? These are all questions addressed by Bluff, and Skomal does a wonderful job of telling Jude's story, as well as that of many of her characters.

I don't think I have read a book as complex as this one or one that challenged what I thought to be true as much as this one did. From the moment I began the book I had to keep on reading. At times the tension was unbearable and the story is heartbreaking on so many different levels.

Skomal is a master of voice and characterization. Her story is peppered with real people you care about, not cardboard cut outs and they are so rich and so well-developed. Each character is rich and multi-faceted. Their stories are complex. Their challenges are real ones and Skomal's talent in bringing this story together in such a realistic way is amazing.

Bluff tears at your heart and mind on some many levels. It is both an extremely intellectually story as well as an emotional story that deals with multiple societal and ethical issues that are woven effortlessly together in a seamless whole that will captivate you from the first pages. It is a stellar work of fiction and I highly recommend it.

Sudden Breakaway
Jessica E. Subject
Decadent Publishing Company, LLC
ASIN B0096FO09C, \$2.99

Sudden Breakaway by Jessica E. Subject is another of the great new erotic releases coming out of Decadent Publishing. This is the story of Paige Brown, a member of the Space Service and bound to them for life. Paige and her husband divorced when they were on opposite sides of a broken intergalactic gate. Paige remained faithful waiting for reunification, but her husband moved on to a woman from another galaxy leaving Paige crushed.

Paige's character is well developed and you really feel for her, even though she works for a super-secret intergalactic agency. You understand how lonely she is and how much she just wants a normal life. You feel her frustration when she is sent to contact after contact that turns down the request to serve the Space Service, and you feel her frustration when she meets the man who may just be her Mr. Right at exactly the wrong time and place. He is one of the recruits who refuses her offer of a place in the Space Service, but something about him - maybe the sight of him answering his door with nothing but a towel around his waist - haunts Paige's dreams and fantasies for ages.

Finally fed up and frustrated Paige seeks out Madame Evangeline and the One Night Stand dating service. Needless to say, you can imagine her shock when no one other than the man of her fantasies, Jared, walks in. Turns out she has been playing a starring role in Jared's fantasies too. When the night is over Jared wants to get to know her better, even wonders if his niece and nephew, orphans who he is raising, might someday need the influence of a woman exactly like her. He tries to encourage her to see him again, but Paige makes it clear that her contract with the Space Service simply doesn't allow for outside commitments. Both Paige and Jared are sorry to see their night end, but what can they do?

Can Madame Eve deliver on her promise of finding the perfect mate for the people who use the dating service, or has she finally met a circumstance in which she'll fail?

Subject does a great job of developing the characters and tension in the story and the love scenes are hot, sweet and sexy. Maybe sweet isn't the correct word, maybe loving would be better, because there is definitely a lot of naughty mixed in with the nice in Subject's story. I would recommend it. It's a sexy, romantic read.

Love, Amalia

Alma Flor Ada and Gabriel M. Zubizarreta

Atheneum

c/o Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing

1230 Avenue of the Americas, 4th floor

New York, NY 10020

www.simonandschuster.com

9781442424029, \$15.99, www.amazon.com

ASIN B0061OFKYK, \$8.89 Kindle

Love, Amalia by Alma Flor Ada and Gabriel M. Zubizarreta is the story of a young girl learning to deal with loss, first when her best friend moves away, and then shortly thereafter when her beloved abuelita passes away. Through it all Amalia comes to better understand the importance of family and friendships and to learn that even when someone is gone they are still with you in so many ways.

In Love, Amalia, Amalia comes to understand her history and her culture much better through the stories of her abuelita who tells her of her uncles and aunt. She shares stories, cards, letters and traditions with Amalia, who feels a justifiable pride in her heritage.

Alma Flor Ada and Gabriel Zubizarreta do a wonderful job at make Amalia and this story come alive for readers. Amalia is identifiable to any girl in any country. Her best friend moves away, her grandmother helps her deal with it, but then her grandmother passes away and Amalia is left feeling all alone and can't understand the strange mix of extreme sadness mixed with joy that comes from the adults who are gathered together for the first time in years. Amalia feels like her world has ended, how will she cope and what will she decide to do about her best friend who now lives far away?

I really enjoyed Love Amalia. I loved the way it presented Amalia's Hispanic culture, I loved the family orientation of it and I loved the storytelling of it. Alma Floe Ada and Gabriel Zubizarreta are to be commended on an excellent story that should appeal to readers of all ages - even those too young to read for themselves who may be dealing with a loss. It would be a great book for mom or dad to read to them to show that even when someone is gone, in so many ways they are always with us.

Cephrael's Hand: A Pattern of Shadow & Light Book One

Melissa McPhail

Outskirts Press

10940 South Parker Road, #515

Parker, CO 80134

www.outskirtspress.com www.amazon.com

9781432759698, \$28.95 hc

9781432759674, \$19.95 pb

ASIN B0046A9VLO \$3.99 Kindle

I actually bought this book in May of last year, but hadn't gotten around to reading it. I wish I would have known what I was missing! I definitely would have read it sooner!

I absolutely loved Cephrael's Hand by Melissa McPhail. The characters are rich and multi-faceted. They are infused with life and each has flaws as well as good points. There are characters like Alyneri, the Healer, who wants to travel and see the world, but at the same time both wants and fears love because she is afraid it will tie her down. There is Trell of Tides, adopted son of an Emir who has no recollection of his life prior to five years ago. There is Dagmar, the Second Vestal, who talks to people through their dreams; Raine the most powerful Truthreader in the Kingdoms and the Fourth Vestal, who will manipulate anyone in a desire to get what he wants most - revenge on his former oath-brother, the Fifth Vestal Bjorn van Gelderan, branded as a traitor by the remaining Vestals; The Crown Prince of Dannym, barely an adult, full of promise, but also flaws, who has known so much loss in his life; as well as Sundragons, zanthys, and various other magical creatures; and finally the terrible and destructive Malorin'athgul who wait eagerly for the end of the world of Alorin, doing all they can do hurry its demise. It truly is a rich canvas of beings, all of whom have magic to some extent and who also inhabit and protect a world full of mortals, who have only their gods and the hope of the Returning to hold to.

Speaking of the gods, McPhail did a wonderful job there. There are various desert gods, including Jai'Gar, the prime god; Azerjaiman, the wind god; his three sons and one daughter who are gods of the various wind directions; and Naiadithine, the goddess of water, as well as the two gods the northerners recognize in this vast tapestry. Of course, as in any world there are those who believe in no gods.

The multiple plots running through the story are all bound together seamlessly and McPhail always makes setting and speaker clear though a perfect use of voice.

I have one complaint about this book and that is the fact it has some typos, omitted words, and one instance where a major character's name is misspelled. Even so, the storyline is so amazing, that I absolutely have to read the next book in series. Even with its flaws Cephrael's Hand was a book I could not put down, that haunted my dreams at night, before I finished it and continues to take up an inordinate amount of my thoughts as I look forward to the next book in the series.

**Torn Together
Emlyn Chand
Evolved Publishing
ASIN B008XPKNWY, \$2.99 Kindle**

I am not sure exactly what I was expecting when I started reading Emlyn Chand's Torn Together but it certainly wasn't the multifaceted storyline and page turning, edge of your seat tension. It made me run the gamut of emotions from anger and indifference, to joy and sorrow while Chand played me like a virtuoso on a violin, knowing exactly which string to hit and when. It was fantastic.

Torn Together is the story of Daly, a twenty-year-old art student whose mother thinks she should become a nurse or something "useful." If Daly will do this then her mother will pay her tuition for college, but if she won't then Daly is on her own.

Determined to prove her mom wrong Daly decides to apply for an art scholarship - There's only one problem, her inspiration seems to have dried up. Enter Meghann, a young, unwed mother, only a freshman in high school who shows Daly how to embrace the joy in life and Kashi, who might just teach Daly to love again after her recent break-up with her boyfriend of two years.

Still, Daly is estranged from her mother. Even though they live in the same house, Daly rents a room in the basement, they are like two strangers living together until tragedy strikes. Will either of them get through it?

I highly recommend Torn Together. It is absolutely awesome.

The Look of Love: The Sullivan's Book 1

Bella Andre
9780778315568, \$5.99
ASIN B0055UZO9M, \$4.99 Kindle

Bella Andre sizzles with The Look of Love: The Sullivan's Book 1. This is the story of the uber hot photographer Chase and Chloe whom he picks along the roadside after she runs her car off the road. Chloe has been burned by love, and burned badly, if the bruise on her cheek means anything, but Chase wants to hold her, and comfort her and oh yeah, keep her around forever. Only problem with this whole idea is Chloe only wants a fling, just for the few days she'll be around. Then she and Chase will go their separate ways. Desperate, Chase agrees to Chloe's terms hoping he can convince her that he is different and what they have is worth sticking around for.

This story is hot. It is definitely a romance and not erotica, but it skims awfully close to the border, if such a border exists when speaking of the best of both categories. The scenes are steamy, the sex is passionate and Chase is the perfect man, for Chloe or anyone. He is the hero you can close your eyes at night and dream about. Chloe is the girl next door who has been through a hard time, but who slowly emerges from her shell working with Chase and his crew on a photography shoot. With them she learns to relax, smile, laugh and be herself again and it is great watching her come to life across the pages, both during the day with the crew and at night in the haven of Chase's arms.

I loved this romance because it was very sweet and very steamy at the same time. It teaches women that their sexuality is okay, even desirable, which is a message that can get lost in romance novels. It also teaches it is not okay to manipulate a woman, bend her to your will, or force yourself upon her in any way. Throughout its pages all the messages are positive and loving about how to build a healthy relationship, even when you may not be consciously aware of the fact that it what you're doing. I have got the entire Sullivan series except for Book 8, which isn't out yet, and I can't wait to see what Bella Andre cooks up for the rest of the Sullivan clan. I have to say Bella Andre has gained a fan for life with her wonderful storyline and writing style.

JESUS: The Jew No One Knows
D.C. Smith
The Jesus Journals
9780615516332, \$18.00

JESUS: The Jew No One Knows by D.C. Smith was an interesting read in many ways, but it was also shocking at a few points. Truthfully, most of the shocking chapters, at least for me, dealt with the subject of Mary's character. For example, I knew of the mistranslation of the Hebrew word almah, which means young girl, into virgin, so that was no surprise, but what was surprising was that there was more than one possible male candidate as the father of the man known as Jesus. Also shocking was the fact that the most likely candidate was a Roman soldier, probably a local conscript from Syria, and that Mary quite possibly had more than one husband.

The information in JESUS: The Jew No One Knows dealt with the Jewish identity of Yehoshua, better known as Jesus. It deals with the alleged fact the message of Yehoshua was to the Jews and the Jews alone. It deals with his followers and the facts of his religion - that he was a Torah observant Jew, who brought a Messianic message that the deliverance of God was near. This message was not unusual; there had been Jews who were Messianic both before and after Yehoshua. The Jews were undergoing great persecution and encouraging their continued, or renewed, faithfulness in God's promise was a keystone of the message of all of these Messianic hopefuls. According to Smith, Yehoshua would have been appalled by the very idea that he was God's equal or that a new religion was brought forth supposedly in his name. He would have been shocked to find his name Hellenized and his appearance made more aesthetically pleasing to coming generations of gentiles.

My only complaint with JESUS: The Jew No One Knows is that all the references are given at the end and

are not referenced at the point in the document where they occur so one can easily go, "Oh, this fact here, came from such and such a work between pages 417 and 425." This lack of footnote, endnote or parenthetical reference is troublesome. It makes it difficult to cross-reference the facts easily or to check what others have to say about the source of previously mentioned facts, because you don't know which facts came from what work.

Overall, I found D.C. Smith's work to be highly illuminating. I have always accepted the man better known as Jesus as a Jewish prophet, but not God, so for me there was little for me to get hung up on or stumble over, but for a Christian, or a potential Christian seeking to know who this man known as Jesus really was and what he was really like, the information could have been better presented.

Overall, I would still recommend JESUS: The Jew No One Knows but not nearly as highly as I would have recommended it had it been better annotated.

Moonlight on the Nantahala

Michael Rivers

CreateSpace

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Scotts Valley, CA 95066

wwwcreatespace.com

9781466345980, \$11.95

ASIN B005MLXUP4, \$2.99 Kindle

Michael Rivers does an extraordinary job with his modern fiction *Moonlight on the Nantahala*. It is evocative and it captures so thoroughly the spirit of this part of the Appalachians that I found it easy to picture the setting the around me. I may have an advantage some readers don't have; I am from outside of Asheville and so the areas Rivers speaks of are in my proverbial expanded back yard. In fact, this is part of what drew me to the book, but it was the storyline that made me stay.

Edward is elderly man, still very independent and living on his own with the help of a live-in housekeeper. He lives in a bungalow in town, but walks every day to the house he once shared with his wife Celia on the banks of the Nantahala. One day there is a young woman along the banks. For a time, three years in fact, she and Edward share the space along the bank, each in their own little area, until one day she finds out the property belongs to Edward, and belatedly asks his permission to be on his land.

Over time Lena, Edward and Edwards's housekeeper, and friend, Betty Curtis all begin a wonderful friendship, which includes in a strange fourth, Celia, Edward's long departed wife who he mourns every day and who occupies a place of honor in his daily conversation. The love Edward felt, and still feels for his beloved wife comes across clearly on the page as does his respect and affection for his housekeeper Betty. Also, the relationship between Edward and Lena grows and he sees her like the daughter he and Celia never had.

Lena is married to a philandering no-good man who could care less about her. He is more interested in the power she brings him through her family and the way she looks on his arm. To him it is all about control, control of Lena, control of the family business and unquestioning loyalty, even in the face of dire circumstances from those around him. Needless to say, his actions hurt Lena and that hurts Edward who has a desire to shelter and protect her from the cruelty of the world, especially when that cruelty comes in the form of her husband.

I loved everything about this story. The characters are interesting and are typical of small. They may seem stereotypical to some, but most of the people, especially of the older generation and the generation behind them all know each other, and who is sick, who needs help, and how to reach out to their neighbors in love and friendship. It is a dying tradition, but it is still alive here and there in small communities throughout the area, and it made me want to go searching for the real town Rivers based his fictional town on, even

though I live in a relatively small town myself.

Edward is not what most of us picture when thinking of an elderly person, walking four miles a day, round trip to go to his old house and sit on the bank of the Nantahala River. He longs for a glimpse of Celia, whose ghost others have seen, but it is not to be for Edward. Instead of a view of his deceased wife's ghost, he finds a warm friendship that adds to the lives of all who are part of it. I highly recommend this work of modern literature. It is well worth the time it takes to read it and it is not overly long. It can be read in three or four short sittings, or two long ones. Trust me, once you start putting it down will be one of the harder things you will have to do.

Arab Summer

David Lender

Thomas & Mercer

c/o Amazon Digital Publishing

9781611097832, \$14.95

ASIN: B0091TMAEU, \$4.99 Kindle

Arab Summer is the sequel to David Lender's blockbuster Trojan Horse. Sasha Del Mira is back working with the CIA to prevent events in Saudi Arabia from coming to a disastrous conclusion. It is the story of a woman on the outside who wants to come in from the cold and help take out an old friend and lover turned enemy and madman.

The tension in the first part of this story is very well written, but in the second half of the novel it feels a bit rushed. Part of this is the inevitability of events racing toward their conclusion, but a part of me wanted the tension to be a little sharper and more well-defined. The main characters with the except of Sayd were familiar to me, but I wonder if maybe some of the major secondary characters could have been flushed out a bit more beyond their stereotypical roles.

I really enjoyed this book and I definitely am a Sasha Del Mira fan so I hope for more books in this series. There is plenty of potential for more stories about a younger Sasha from the time she left Prince Yassar until the time of the events in Trojan Horse. Also, Sasha is still relatively young and remains active and attractive enough to remain in the spy business for some time to come. I really hope Lender will keep writing in this series because young women need strong women they can look up to and while Sasha's late teens might have been turbulent the woman she has become is strong, capable and deadly, which makes for good reading and writing.

I slightly preferred Trojan Horse to this tale because the espionage element was a little stronger in it than it was in this tale. Still, overall I found it to be a satisfying read that kept me coming back for more. David, if you're listening give us more of Sasha Del Mira.

Broken Pieces

Rachel Thompson

Privately Published

ASIN B00AR0T74S, \$5.77 Kindle

It is rare when a writer puts so much of him or herself on the paper that you can see them bleed, but Rachel Thompson boldly steps out of the shadows and puts herself in the light that shows her wounds, her flaws, her heart and you can't help but be moved.

This book was extremely hard for me to read, even though it is written in short, succinct bits. There is poetry mixed in with short stories that reveals for the entire world to really see just who Rachel Thompson is and all that she has battled, overcome, or made peace with to become the vibrant, confident, successful woman she is today.

Rachel is willing to put herself out there so we can see that even the worst kinds of pain can be overcome. That the human spirit really is indomitable, that while we can be hurt we are tough enough to disable the things that seek to destroy us and use them instead to recreate the person we will be in the future.

Broken Pieces left me in tears. It left me raw - the wounds still chafe, but it left me astounded at the courage Rachel Thompson had shown in writing this book, in breaking taboos, in speaking out and in refusing to use her pain and hurt as excuses to hide behind for the rest of her life.

This is a book about rising above; about becoming more than you can possibly believe you ever will be at those terribly low points of your life. It is about surviving, thriving and living and I recommend it more than any other book I have read.

Spring into Summer

Eden Baylee

lowercase publishing

9781478257677, \$12.99

ASIN B008IJ4BNM, \$4.99 Kindle

Refreshing is the word that comes to mind when describing Eden Baylee's erotica collection Spring into Summer. It made me believe in hot, sexy love all over again. I found Eden reached deep within herself while writing her short stories and touched her feminine heart and just poured it out on the page. I felt the intoxication of the characters, laughed with them, cried with them, heard the poetry of the Romantics whispered in my waiting ear and felt a yearning that went beyond the merely physical and touched a soul that was filled with more than just lust.

While Baylee's writing is absolutely everything that erotica should be hot, intense, passionate, it is so much more. Her depictions of her characters are so well done you can picture the shiver of anticipation that races through a woman's core, hear the deep tones of impassioned speech, picture the sweat on the entwined bodies, feel the struggle to believe in love. To hope that what you see, hear and feel is real and to discover you have a power you never dreamed you possess.

Baylee's male characters are all strong leading characters in their own right, but it is in the depiction of her female characters that she excels. They are not wimpy, needy, clinging women, but strong, passionate and possessed with a sense of their own power. They are feminine, with all of the wonderful traits that term truly engenders, and she paints accurately, the full spectrum of behavior from women who know what they want and who don't feel threatened in going after it.

I enjoy good erotica, but Baylee's tales are so much more than simply good erotica. They are stunning slices of humanity laid bare at their most vulnerable moments and shared with her readers. I cannot recommend Spring into Summer, or Baylee's talent highly enough.

Tracy M. Riva

Reviewer

Sandra's Bookshelf

Asleep Without Dreaming

Barbara Forte Abate

Halcyon Moon Books

978061568549, \$12.99 pbk.

BOO98SZUEG \$3.99 eBook

Where authors get their ideas for writing a book has always amazed me. Do they come from the author's soul? Or just kind of floats around until the author begins to put thoughts to paper? Ms. Abate is one of the best in character development and story line. I wonder at times if there is an older spirit that is trying to cleanse itself of old hurts and feelings in a young woman's mind.

Willa is a young teenager who has parents who are terrible self-centered people. They don't care about her. Willa calls them Martin and Stella. One day Martin hits it big at the race tracks and Stella was overjoyed. But that night he runs off and leaves them with only a thousand dollars. Not long after that Stella wakes Willa and tells her they are leaving so get packed but do not turn on the lights. They put their bags in their car and then roll the car until no one could hear the engine started. Willa asked Stella where they are going and Stella said to California. That there were all types of chances to make their life better there.

The broken down car takes them only so far and then it just dies. A man in a truck stops and gives them a lift to Omega Pearl Bodie who owns, "The Moonglow", and rents out cottages she has. The man said he would have someone take a look at her car, and let her know the condition. When Stella got the news that the car could not be fixed she stayed in their cottage and was always planning a way to leave. She did get a job cleaning rooms, but it was mainly Willa who did the majority of the work at Moonglow.

Omega was the town's gossip. She told them they had an escape prisoner who ran around setting fires to things and they should be careful until he is caught. One day Willa saw a teenage boy working at the moonglow also. His name was Jesse Truman and he did odd jobs for Omega. As time goes on Jesse and Willa begin to talk. Eventually they fall in love. It is the first time anyone has loved Willa and she loves Jesse. It is also the last time Willa will ever love anyone.

This book shows the darker side of life. It will not make you smile or feel like laughing. You will read things that could happen in real life. We don't live in the perfect world. Everyone who reads this book will come to their own conclusion as to why this book ended the way it did. To me the ending is sad, but it is the only way this story could end. Rated PG

In A Van by the River and Other Adventures of a Born Again Aspie

Dana Longpre

PCG Legacy

9781936417698, \$14.95, www.thepushinghub.com

Dana Longpre grew up knowing she was "different", but could not figure out what it was. Her home life was terrible and Dana and her sister were taken away from her mom and dad. Then it was a life from one foster home to another. She had been moved eleven different times in three and a half years that included two hospitals and a group home.

Then she heard about Jesus and His saving Grace. She learned it was so much better to live the way He wanted. To give Him all the love that she had, knowing He loved her deeper in ways we can't even begin to imagine. God gave her courage to keep going.

Dana married a special man named Joe. Joe helped her with her unknown problems. He could help her to calm down when something threw her day off. She had a list that involved times for everything. If things on the list were not met she would begin to have a melt-down.

Then they had a beautiful baby boy they named him Nathan. It is because of Nathan that they learned why Dana was different, and discover Nathan had the same thing. It is called Asperger's Syndrome.

This book is special to me as I have a grandson who is nine-teen and also has Asperger's. I believe that God sends us special angels who can help so many people. To me, Dana is one of those sent from above. If she had not gone through so much we might of never known about it. You are my angel Dana.

Sandra Heptinstall
Reviewer

Suzie's Bookshelf

The Wife He's Been Waiting For

Dianne Drake

Harlequin

P.O. Box 5190, Buffalo, NY 14240-5190

9780373066773, \$3.25 Kindle, www.harlequin.com

Dr. Michael Sloan was once a brilliant surgeon. His career ended when he stepped on a landmine. His fiancée ended their relationship when she couldn't come to terms with his disability. Not knowing which direction his life should take, he makes the decision to work on a cruise ship as a doctor.

After the death of her husband and a failed engagement, Dr. Sarah Collins walked away from her medical career to travel the world. She finds herself on a cruise ship, but minutes from the ship embarking she experiences an anxiety attack. All that she can think of is that she must get off of the ship. She rushes out of her cabin and into an elevator. The close confines of the elevator get the best of her and she faints in the strong arms of the ship's doctor, Dr. Michael Sloan.

Upon first meeting Sarah, Michael is attracted to her beauty. He recognizes the hurt in Sarah's eyes. He knows that she is running away from something in her past. Can two doctors provide the healing balm needed to restore their faith in themselves and each other? Will they be able to leave the haunting memories of their past behind to discover a love worth fighting for?

THE WIFE HE'S BEEN WAITING FOR is a wonderfully constructed emotional rollercoaster ride. Both Michael and Sarah has experienced the worst life has to offer. They are trying to rebuild their lives and in their journey they find one another. Love doesn't come easy for these two wounded souls; they must both come to terms with their past before they are allowed to see what the future holds. Having been on several cruises, I found myself imagining that such a man exists like Dr. Sloan. To say that he made an impact on this reader is an understatement.

Accidental Romance: The Challenge Series

Jessica E. Subject

Decadent Publishing Company, LLC

PO Box 407, Klawock, AK 99925

9781613334607, \$3.99 Kindle www.decadentpublishing.com

Leanne Declan had recently graduated from college. At twenty-two she dreams to take over the management of her father's farm. Jake is one of her father's farm hands. Together they work the farm on a daily basis.

Jake lives to aggravate Leanne, he is always teasing her unmercifully. When Leanne is involved in a farm accident, she finds out later when she awakes in a hospital that it was Jake who saved her life. She feels that losing her hand has ended her dream of having a happy life. She feels that not many could love a woman with only one hand nor will she be able to work on the farm.

Jake refuses to allow Leanne to wallow in her own self-pity. He pushes her to go back to work with him on the farm. Leanne is slow at the tasks she once did without thought but getting back to the work that she loves allows her to see that her life does have purpose.

Leanne starts to notice that Jake has sex appeal she never knew existed. Jake has always harbored feels for Leanne. He hopes that his love will be strong enough to make her want to start living again. Could a tragedy result in a happily ever after ending?

ACCIDENTAL ROMANCE: THE CHALLENGE SERIES is one outstanding novel. Jake and Leanne are characters that you can easily fall in love with. Jake strong determination to save Leanne from her own dark thoughts makes for a memorable scene. I am so excited to see that Decadent Publishing has embarked upon a series that feature disabled characters. For years I have hoped that a publisher would realize there is a fan base of readers who enjoy reading books with disabled characters. I eagerly await to dive into the next book in this wonderful series.

Suzie Housley
Reviewer

Teri's Bookshelf

The Geneva Decision
Pia Sabel # 1
Seeley James
Amazon Digital Services
9780988699601, \$0.99 Kindle, www.amazon.com

What happens to world-class athletes when they stop competing? For world class women's soccer star, Pia Sabel, she is fortunate in that her father owns his own business, Sabel Security.

Pia plans to step into his shoes taking over the leadership in this firm. However, many of the employees do not like nepotism. These people are concerned that Pia although athletic, does not have what it takes. As she takes over the reigns, more employees resign.

Pia immediately decides to prove her competence by taking a field assignment protecting a Swiss banker at a party. When the banker is killed in front of her, she quickly learns the value of teamwork, trust, and the military training. As her team is training her on the job attempting to prevent other bankers from being assassination, they are catapulted into a plot that is more complex and involved than they could ever had imagined. Added to that, the assassin seems to be following Pia possibly targeting her. Does Pia possess the necessary skills to keep herself alive without killing her team?

The Geneva Decision is superb with constant detailed action. The non-stop intensity catapults the action from the first page to the last, never relaxing. The strength of The Geneva Decision is definitely the constant action described in precise detail. Seldom is any action adventure better explained. The weakness is in the character development. The characters at times seem to have been thrown into the story randomly without any connections or backgrounds previously. Some personal aspects about Pia's past were revealed as the story progressed but more is needed for the reader to care about these characters.

The Geneva Decision is the story from Pia's viewpoint as she transitions from being an athlete to an executive. Her developed athletic skills allow her superb stamina and conditioning that even members of the military do not possess and unquestionably, admire. Will she be able to transfer her athleticism into skills useful in a security system?

Her father wants her to be the leader of the company but Pia realizes that she will never have the respect of the employees unless they view her as a competent field agent. Seeley James has worked in advertising and marketing. When he was nineteen years old, he chose to adopt a small child and raised her by himself.

Now he is married and has two additional children while living in Arizona. Although he has published short stories, Seeley James is definitely an author to watch in the future as he writes more story featuring the undaunted Pia Sabel.

**The Night Circus
Erin Morgenstern
Anchor Books
c/o The Random House Publishing Group
1745 Broadway, 17th floor
New York, NY 10019
www.randomhouse.com
9780307744432, \$ 15.00, www.amazon.com**

"Anything either of us does has an effect on everyone here, on every person who walks through those gates. Hundreds if not thousands of people. All flies in a spiderweb that was spun when I was six years old and now I can barely move for fear of losing someone else."

How much of our life is truly the choices that we make? Do each of us have a predetermined fate and we are only pawns in this game of life? Are all of us so interwoven together that the choice one person causes effects on everyone else?

The quote above is about the circus and those paying their admission fee as they enter this unusual circus. The tale of The Night Circus is a tightly interwoven story based on the theme that each of our life choices has an effect on the others in our lives.

This story encircles two children, Celia and Marco who are both to be trained as magicians. However these two are destined to compete with true magic at some time in their future, possibly to their death. Who is better trained? What phenomenal magic will win the competition? What if they fall in love?

The setting is in the late 1800s and early 1900s at The Night Circus which mysteriously appears and disappears throughout the world without any prior advertising. This circus has a mysterious enticement with their own followers who recognize the unusual gifts and talents of these performers.

I have mixed feelings about The Night Circus. The story is character driven and a predictable romance, however, several aspects of this story especially the visualization is outstanding. The descriptive passages which support the characters are truly magical and inspirational. These sections were outstanding in this debut novel by Erin Morgenstern. Unfortunately these aspects favor female readers regarding the dresses and the romance.

The Night Circus is a different style in reading with very short chapters centering on only the characters. The strength is definitely how each event and character is so dependent on each other focusing on how everybody's actions change everyone's effects. Definitely unusual, Erin Morgenstern has utilized her skills as multimedia artist to paint in words visual characters in this debut novel, The Night Circus.

**Chasing Normal
T. L. Hoch
iUniverse, Inc.
c/o Author House
1663 Liberty Dr. Suite #300
Bloomington, IN 47403
www.iuniverse.com
9781469751498, \$27.95, www.amazon.com**

Who wouldn't want to be considered the star high school athlete? To be admired by everyone is a high

school student's dream, but is there a down side? Have you ever known coaches who believe that winning is everything and the only thing? Is there more to a sport than winning?

Annie Smith has not had an easy life. Her father died in an airplane accident just as she was becoming a teenager. She quickly discovered her fascination for basketball and softball. This interest developed her skills as an outstanding athlete who strongly values her team rather than being a star. Throughout her short competitive experience, she strongly worked with her team in developing their strengths and the value of teamwork. This success caused the media in her small community in Arkansas to become obsessed with her life. Now Annie and her mother have an opportunity for change by moving to Texas.

Annie dreams of being "normal" rather than a superstar and begins her new life by calling herself B.A. B.A. joins the basketball team but is not enjoying playing guard on this team. She chooses to stay quiet with an inexperienced coach who believes that your tallest players should always be the forwards. With considerable attitude, the taller players are threatened by this newer, shorter girl who only wants to play the game and to do her best for her team and herself. Between the coach and the players being threatened and challenged, how does the new kid make friends?

Through her one new friend, Chip, B.A. begins to learn about friendship and trust. CHASING NORMAL excels with lessons of sportsmanship and the personal responsibility of doing the right thing in helping others. The teenager issues of friendship in a relationship with a boyfriend who is a friend, is refreshing.

CHASING NORMAL is definitely a change in the traditional young adult novel. There are no inappropriate violent or sexual scenes or language. The the main characters do not approve of these. By creating this wonderful character of B.A. with a boyfriend and learning basketball strategies, many teens would be delighted to see a female as a role model and heroine even though fictional.

The story is well-written and logically organized with a developed plot and climax that is perfect for young adults to view as a story map with all the elements of literature woven into an refreshing story.

A few minor elements cause concern such as the minimal mention of B.A.'s mother and their time together. After everything that both of them had been through and moving to a new town, the mother seems too distant. Also, there is no mention of her grades except that she does not excel in math. When does she complete her homework? With her love of playing bass, she seldoms practices or plays. At B.A. is almost too good to be true, even in fiction even though B .A.'s poise and maturity is unusual in anyone, especially a teen.

**Chasing Normal
T. L. Hoch
iUniverse, Inc.
c/o Author House
1663 Liberty Dr., Suite #300
Bloomington, IN 47403
www.iuniverse.com
9781469751481, \$17.95, www.amazon.com**

Who wouldn't want to be considered the star high school athlete? To be admired by everyone is a high school student's dream, but is there a down side? Have you ever known coaches who believe that winning is everything and the only thing? Is there more to a sport than winning?

Annie Smith has not had an easy life. Her father died in an airplane accident just as she was becoming a teenager. She quickly discovered her fascination for basketball and softball. This interest developed her skills as an outstanding athlete who strongly values her team rather than being a star. Throughout her short competitive experience, she strongly worked with her team in developing their strengths and the value of teamwork. This success caused the media in her small community in Arkansas to become

obsessed with her life. Now Annie and her mother have an opportunity for change by moving to Texas.

Annie dreams of being "normal" rather than a superstar and begins her new life by calling herself B.A. B.A. joins the basketball team but is not enjoying playing guard on this team. She chooses to stay quiet with an inexperienced coach who believes that your tallest players should always be the forwards. With considerable attitude, the taller players are threatened by this newer, shorter girl who only wants to play the game and to do her best for her team and herself. Between the coach and the players being threatened and challenged, how does the new kid make friends?

Through her one new friend, Chip, B.A. begins to learn about friendship and trust. CHASING NORMAL excels with lessons of sportsmanship and the personal responsibility of doing the right thing in helping others. The teenager issues of friendship in a relationship with a boyfriend who is a friend, is refreshing.

CHASING NORMAL is definitely a change in the traditional young adult novel. There are no inappropriate violent or sexual scenes or language. This is unusual in any book and even the main characters do not approve of using bad language or having inappropriate relationships. The choices the characters make in the book are ethical and moral and excellent examples of role models.

The story is well-written and logically organized with a developed plot and climax that is perfect for young adults to view as a story map with all the elements of literature woven into an refreshing story.

A few minor elements cause concern such as the minimal mention of B.A.'s mother and their time together. After everything that both of them had been through and moving to a new town, the mother seems too distant. Also, there is no mention of her grades except that she does not excel in math. When does she complete her homework? With her love of playing the bass guitar, she seldom plays or practices. Sometimes it seems that B.A. is too good to be true, even in fiction with her poise and maturity that definitely outshines most adults.

T. L. Hoch is a retired high school social science teacher and golf coach in northwest Illinois.

I look forward to the next book in this series and also a possible spin-off following the mother in raising such a classy daughter as B. A. Smith.

The Bracelet
Roberta Gately
Gallery Books
c/o Simon and Schuster
1230 Avenue of the Americas, 14th fl.
New York, NY 10020
www.simonandschuster.com
9781451669121, \$15.00, www.amazon.com

What do you do if you witnessed a murder in a foreign country? Most of us would cautiously inform the authorities as Abby Monroe did while in Switzerland. What happens though when the police can't find the body and you are so flustered that you are no longer certain of the location and you are questioning your own sanity?

How many people have made occupational choices based on their love life? Abby has just been dumped by her doctor-to-be via e-mail, her job in New Orleans is no longer available due to Hurricane Katrina, so she decides to accept work from the United Nations in Pakistan.

While waiting for her final flight, she is in Switzerland where she decides to take a morning run. She hears arguing and sees a woman in eastern style dress arguing with a man. The woman grabs his glasses and is pushed over a balcony falling onto cement. Abby quickly approaches and checks for a pulse noticing an

exquisite bracelet with gems on her arm. The man on the balcony glares at Abby. Frightened she hides in the bushes while the man descends and finally enters the area.

When she is certain that she can escape, she races back to the hotel and explains the situation to the doorman who calls the authorities. However, she can't find the exact location or a body. The police seem to be that she hallucinated the entire event.

As she begins her duties in Pakistan working with a clinic that vaccinates children, she is still haunted by the incident in Switzerland. As she meets a Pulitzer Prize journalist who pretends to interview you, both of them are catapulted into the illegal human trafficking trade.

The Bracelet is a page turner bringing a realistic aspect to life in Pakistan, especially the women. The story hooks you on the first page and doesn't release. The realistic characters and believable events only allow a small snapshot into the lives of these people, but unquestionably moving. My only complaint was the predictable ending through the roller coaster situations. Abby's emotions are the reader's through each page.

Roberta Gately also wrote Lipstick in Afghanistan and obviously modeled the character of Abby somewhat after herself with her similar experiences of being a nurse and working with humanitarian causes in the Middle East and Africa.

The Bracelet is recommended for a female audience due to the romance tendencies in the novel. Overlooking the romance is a strong realistic story about human trafficking in this part of the world.

The Casual Vacancy

J. K. Rowling

Little, Brown & Company

c/o Hachette Book Group

237 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10017

www.hachettebookgroup.com

97803160228534, \$35.00, www.amazon.com

"A casual vacancy is deemed to have occurred:

- (a) when a local councillor fails to make his declaration of acceptance of office within the proper time; or
- (b) when his notice of resignation is received: or
- (c) on the day of his death..."

Barry Fairbrother was content in his life. He seemed to have everything, a beautiful and devoted wife, twin daughters, a successful career as a lawyer, and volunteering as a girls' rowing coach and developing the disadvantaged members of this team. He also serves on the small town of Pagford's board which decides how the financial resources of the town are spent.

For the past few days, Barry has had a headache that at times almost incapacitates him. Being that today is his anniversary, he plans to take his wife out to eat at the golf club. He would prefer to be at home in bed, but decides to just work through the headache is easier than explaining the problem to his wife.

When he drops dead in the parking lot as the result an aneurism, this small town becomes an infestation of gossip, rumors, and self-serving candidates to fill this "casual vacancy".

The Casual Vacancy is about the fictional town of Pagford. From all appearances, Pagford seems to be the perfect small town. However with Barry's death, it becomes evident that there are many hidden grievances from all the residents. Who will actually fill his council seat without having all their dirty secrets unveiled? The people who reside in this small community are normal, flawed humans with many

secrets that they would prefer their neighbors not to know. However, when the council's website starts to reveal secrets of those who either are on the council or applying for the casual vacancy, life changes and not every change is for the best.

J. K. Rowling is the author of the seven Harry Potter novels with *The Casual Vacancy* being her first adult novel. The characters of *The Casual Vacancy* are not as loveable as those in the Harry Potter series. The adult gossip and secrets are not as much fun as a game of Quidditch. Also, there seems to be a lack of purpose in the novel, except who wins the seat. By the time the new councilor is revealed, you feel that the entire council should be abolished. Following the Harry Potter series, *The Casual Vacancy* has no enchantment in any area.

Teri Davis
Reviewer

Theodore's Bookshelf

Murder at the Lanterne Rouge
Cara Black
Soho Crime
853 Broadway, NY, NY 10003
9781616952143, \$14.95, www.sohopress.com

The latest Aimee LeDuc mystery has one plot intertwined with two themes. To begin with, we are introduced to a young Chinese woman, Meizi, with whom Aimee's business partner, Rene, is deeply infatuated. She turns out to be an illegal immigrant, and Aimee determines to find out more about the woman to protect Rene before it might be too late. At the same time, a young Frenchman is found murdered just outside the restaurant where Aimee, Rene and Meizi and her parents were dining.

During the dinner Meizi receives a phone call and abruptly leaves, disappearing, immediately becoming a suspect in the murder. The victim it develops has made a unique discovery, and Aimee, together with Rene and their part-time geek, Saj, have to somehow find out what it was, while Aimee attempts to protect Meizi from an impending sweep of Chinatown by the police and find the killer.

Once again the author provides a sweeping panorama of the City of Lights, and perhaps a lot of Aimee's fashion acquisitions (but after all, isn't that what Paris, to some degree, is all about?). Smoothly written and tightly plotted, the novel once again raises the question of whether Aimee will ever meet her mother, who is a wanted woman. Good reading, and recommended.

Line of Fire
Stephen White
Dutton
c/o Penguin Group USA
375 Hudson St., NY, NY 10014
9780525952527, \$26.95, www.penguin.com

In a note the author informs the reader that this is the next-to-the-last novel in the long-running series featuring psychotherapist Alan Gregory. He intends to complete the series on his own terms because of the changing nature of the book industry with number 20. Not many authors reach such a conclusion. Even Ian Rankin had to bring back his popular Rebus protagonist.

And this book definitely sets the stage for that scenario. The novel introduces a new patient, giving Alan some insights not only into that patient, but himself. She also complicates his life in unexpected ways,

especially as to Diane, his friend and partner. And as usual, Boulder, CO, plays an important part in the story with brush fires raging and destroying homes. Lastly, his friend, Detective Sam Purdy and he are exposed to unwanted risk as an old secret surfaces.

The novel slowly builds up as the various characters are brought into focus. It is an insightful look at Alan Gregory and provides plenty of factors to consider looking forward to how the series will end. I can't wait to find out. (Just an aside: the author says this is the right time to conclude the Gregory story. Some readers may disagree. But, after all, it's his decision alone.)

Recommended.

A Dying Fall
Elly Griffiths
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt
222 Berkeley St., Boston, MA 02166
9780547798165, \$26.00, www.hmhpublish.com

When, after learning that a university friend has burned to death, a letter arrives from him, written just days before he died, asking for her help, forensic archeologist Ruth Galloway could hardly refuse to leave her home and go up north to investigate what she believes her friend discovered: a momentous find. It appears the friend, Dan Golding, believed that he had uncovered the bones of the legendary King Arthur. The letter indicated Dan was scared but wanted Ruth to look at the bones and, hopefully, confirm his suspicions.

So Ruth travels to Lancashire, along with her almost-two-year-old daughter and her druid friend, Cathbad. Unbeknownst to Ruth, Kate's father, DCI Harry Nelson, has chosen the same time frame to vacation in his nearby hometown, thus setting up the situation for the pair to solve yet another mystery together. Golding's death has already raised police suspicions, and no sooner than Ruth decides to go she begins to receive threatening messages warning her not to. When she arrives, she learns of neo-fascist activity at the college where Golding was a lecturer and a particularly dangerous group called the White Hand. Examining what purports to be Golding's discovery, Ruth learns a shocking fact about "King Arthur," but further analysis is not possible because the real bones have disappeared, setting up the further mystery of who would steal the bones and why.

This is the fifth novel about a plump 42-year-old protagonist, a single mother and an academic, who apparently has a penchant for using her skills to solve various types of mysteries with a detective inspector with whom she apparently is in love (but who is unavailable). Who would think that such elements have the making of an interesting and rewarding series? Perhaps the excellence of the writing, and the creative nature of the plots, have something to do with the novels' well-deserved popularity.

Recommended.

Leaving Everything Most Loved
Jacqueline Winspear
Harper
c/o HarperCollins
10 E. 53rd St., NY, NY 10022
9780062049605, \$26.99, www.harpercollins.com

One would think that Maisie Dobbs, at this point, had it made: She has inherited a substantial estate and fortune from her mentor, Dr. Maurice Blanche; she has a loving father; wonderful friends; a successful business; loyal employees, and a handsome, wealthy suitor who very much wants to marry her. And yet, she feels at loose ends, reflecting she is unfulfilled and wanting to follow in Blanche's footsteps, traveling, perhaps to India and learn more about the world.

But before she can decide, she has to solve the murder of an Indian woman who has traveled to England and worked as a governess for a family, before leaving its employ and living in a home for similar immigrants who had lost their jobs, resorting to menial work as cleaning women and the like. Since this is a Maisie Dobbs mystery, there are overlapping plots and themes which must be tied together before we move on to the next chapter in Maisie's life.

In each of the ten novels in the series, we have witnessed the development of Maisie's experiences and character growth, as well as world developments as the 1930's unfold toward what is likely to be World War II. But this entry takes place in 1933, so there is plenty of time for several more Maisie Dobbs stories. And that is something worth waiting for.

Recommended.

Robert B. Parker's Fool Me Twice
Michael Brandman
Putnam
c/o Penguin Group USA
375 Hudson St., NY, NY 10014
9780399159497, \$25.95, www.penguin.com

In the second Jesse Stone novel not written by the series creator, the same characteristics of the originals are on view: a major plot line with a couple of minor subplots, Jesse's quips and sardonic humor, short sentences and the like. Not that it should be compared to Robert B. Parker's efforts. As with the first novel by the author to continue the series at the publisher's request, "Fool Me Twice" should be judged on its own merits and, suffice it to say, it does keep the reader turning pages.

To begin with, Paradise, MA, where, of course, Jesse is Chief of Police, is selected as the site for the filming of a motion picture, creating all the complication that an influx of Hollywood personnel and equipment demands. However, the two minor themes present us with a new insight into Jesse's character. One is ecology, and the world's problems with water shortages; the other is his attitude toward juvenile behavior, taking it upon himself to educate and allow a teenage girl to learn more about herself and her apparent poor attitudes toward society.

One can question whether the Grand Master would have raised the questions brought forward by the subplots, much less the conclusion of the novel, which ties all the loose ends together. However, that should be of no concern in judging a novel on its own worth. Is it a good read? Is it well-written? Plotted well? And this book is substantially all of that, and is recommended.

Death's Door
James R. Benn
Soho Crime
853 Broadway, NY, NY 10003
9781616951856, \$25.00, www.sohopress.com

There are a couple of mysteries which this novel seems to solve. Primarily, of course, Billy Boyle, a Boston detective on the staff of "Uncle" Ike (Dwight D. Eisenhower, that is) during World War II, is sent to occupied Rome to find the murderer of an American Monsignor at the Vatican. However, his arrival at the Holy See sets the stage for the author to provide substantial background on the role of various clergy and the Pope on the question of Nazi brutality and the holocaust. Pope Pius XII was much criticized for his silence on the matter during and after the conflict, but the author shows that the reason was to maintain "strict neutrality," giving the German occupiers no reason to invade the Vatican and take the Pope to Germany "for protection." The novel provides numerous examples of refugees and escaped POWs being shielded in the Vatican and safe houses throughout Rome.

A subplot involves Billy's attempt to save his girlfriend, Diana, from a German prison, despite orders to solve the murder and not get involved in any way in her rescue. More detail in the book is, however, spent on retrieving Diana from her cell than in identifying the killer. Although an occasional reference is made to Billy's investigation, until the last few pages name the murderer, almost as an afterthought.

Be that as it may, "Death's Door" is a welcome addition to the fine Billy Boyle World War II Mystery series, and can be read two ways: as a crime novel, or as a detailed historical picture of a controversial sidelight of the war period. The author does an excellent job of describing the effect of the war and German occupation on Italians, Rome, the Vatican and the clergy, and provides a touching portrait of the various characters. With Rome about to be retaken by the Allies as they break through the Anzio bottleneck, we can, and do, look forward to the next chapter.

Recommended.

Buffalo Bill's Dead Now

Margaret Coel

Berkley Prime Crime

375 Hudson St., NY, NY 10014

9780425252710, \$25.95, www.penguin.com

This novel, the newest in the widely acclaimed Wind River Mystery series, is a little different from its predecessors. While still featuring Vicki and Father John, the thrust of the book is well in the past: the late 19th century, to be exact, when Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show toured Europe featuring various Indian groups, including Arapahos like Chief Black Heart.

It appears that the regalia worn by the Chief went missing when the tour came to an end, only to be discovered when the building in which it was hidden was being demolished. The items were purchased by a local rancher and donated to the museum at the St. Francis mission. However, en route from Germany the shipment is hijacked, and Vicki and Father John, as usual, have to come to the rescue. The mystery includes the murder of the donor, who might have known more about the stolen goods. Complicating the investigation is a feud between two Arapaho families with lineage back to the principal players way back when.

Intertwined in the tale are descriptions of what it is like living on a reservation, now and in the distant past, and the effect on the lives of Native Americans. The plot is well-presented, with the requisite suspense to keep the reader wondering what comes next. The real question, always present, is the relationship between Vicki and Father John and what, if anything, will ever develop.

Recommended.

Defending Jacob

William Landay

Dell Books

c/o The Random House Publishing Group

1540 Broadway, New York, NY 10036

9780440246138, \$7.99, www.bantamdell.com

Is this novel a courtroom drama, a psychological study of a family, an introspective study of a man, or is it about truth and justice? Or all of the above? It's hard to tell in this rambling book which attempts to keep the reader in suspense and leaves much to the imagination.

Andy Barber, the First Assistant DA in Newton, MA, is the man who faces the questions posed by the story and really doesn't come to grips with the essential problems raised. His 14-year-old son is accused of

murdering a fellow student and goes to trial for Murder One. Did he or didn't he? Andy, who initially ran the original investigation, does not believe his son is capable of doing the deed. The effect of the pressures of the trial on Andy and his wife are weakly described. The courtroom drama is, to some extent, extremely well done, but, for the most part, drawn out to a great degree. And the snideness of the comments about Andy's replacement when he's taken off the case and during the trial are too often petty.

On the whole, the novel is an interesting presentation, but could have been edited severely, especially the front end which drags on slowly until the book picks up steam toward the middle. It is no spoiler to note that there is more than one surprise waiting for the reader at the end, some attention-grabbing, others a little far-fetched. That said, it is an off-beat novel that is recommended.

Crashed

Timothy Hallinan

Soho Crime

853 Broadway, NY, NY 10003

9781616952747, \$25.00, www.sohopress.com

There is a wide variety of protagonists in the mystery genre, but Timothy Hallinan has come up with an unexpected and different one: a professional burglar. Junior Bender has been a thief, breaking into homes for 17 years, since he was 14, often on a contract someone pays him to obtain a desired object. Moreover, he is an intelligent, well-read character, always thinking.

Junior is hired, indirectly, by Trey Annunziato, the female head of a crime family, to steal a Klee from the home of another gangster. He is then blackmailed into helping her produce a porno film starring Thistle Downing, once the darling child star of a popular TV sitcom, now a down-and-out doped-up has-been. It appears someone is attempting to sabotage the movie, and Trey wants Junior to find out who and to help make the film possible. So much for the plot. It's what follows that keeps the reader turning pages with its out-of-the-blue developments and amusing dialogue and situations.

Originally published as an e-book, the novel is the first of a three-book deal with the publisher (with the third one due out in June), and the TV rights have been sold to Lionsgate. Quite a send-off for a new series. No wonder the author turned from the just as popular Poke Rafferty series to concentrate on Junior Bender. Both series have in common very original protagonists, lots of humor, stirring stories and extraordinary twists. And now, for this reader, the second novel in the series, "Little Elvises."

Recommended.

The Essay

Robin Yocum

Arcade Publishing

307 W. 36th St., 11th fl., NY, NY 10018

9781611457667, \$24.95, www.arcadepub.com

Writing a second novel as good as an initial effort can be a problematic thing. And "The Essay" follows in the path set by the author's excellent maiden effort. It is a poignant portrayal of how an impoverished Appalachian boy growing up in a family looked down at even by the low standards of the southern Ohio coal country in which he lives can pull himself up by the bootstraps and escape from ignorance and poverty.

This is the story of Jimmy Lee Hickam who, by good fortune and talent, makes something of himself with the help of a good teacher and a football coach. He first attracts the interest of the coach, who gives him the opportunity to shine as a player. As a result he gains some stature in his high school despite his background as beneath recognition as a person. Then his English teacher gives him a second chance when he is about to fail. He rewards her by working hard, winning an essay contest and proving he has brains as

well as brawn.

The story is not only a compassionate look at the boy's development, but a moving look at life in a depressed area of the country. The story is a heart-rending tale of real life characters, with deep insights into their makeup. The writing is plain and unadorned, and completely in tune with the people and place. Highly recommended.

Little Elvies
Timothy Hallinan
Soho Crime
853 Broadway, NY, NY 10003
9781616952785, \$25.00, www.sohopress.com

A pattern seems to be developing in the Junior Bender series. In the debut novel, "Crashed," Junior, a professional burglar, was blackmailed, indirectly, by Trey Annunziato, the female head of a crime family, to steal a Klee. In this, the second book in the series, he is blackmailed by a detective to try to protect his uncle, Vincent Di Gaudio, from a murder rap. I guess we'll have to wait for the third installment, expected in June, "The Fame Thief," to find out whether the trend continues.

Be that as it may be, there are two stories in the present novel. First is the murder of a gossip reporter, for which a prime suspect is Vincent DiGaudio, known for finding and promoting various boys known as the "Little Elvies" during the 1950's. Then the owner of the motel in which Junior is living asks him to find her daughter, from whom she has not heard for some time. Apparently she was living with a man suspected of murdering several women. Just to add an additional touch of complexity and humor to the novel, Junior becomes involved with the journalist's widow, while his ex-wife and 13-year-old daughter each have new boyfriends, complicating his life further.

A hallmark of a Timothy Hallinan mystery novel are unusual situations and characterizations, and a whole lot of humor. "Little Elvies" is no exception. Junior continues to evolve in this book, and we find him becoming softer and more human, despite the bizarre confrontations he gets into. It's a worthy follow-up, and we look forward to the next chapter in his life.

Recommended.

Theodore Feit
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