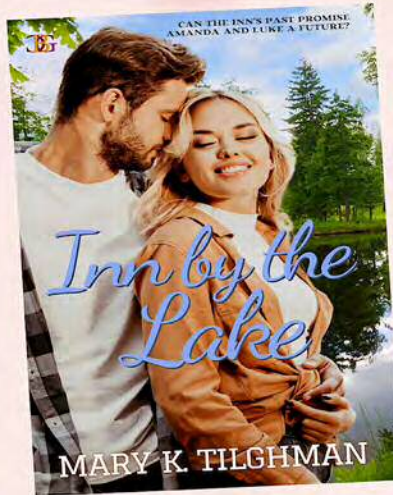
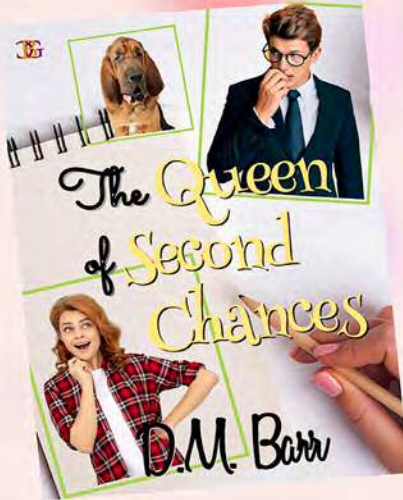


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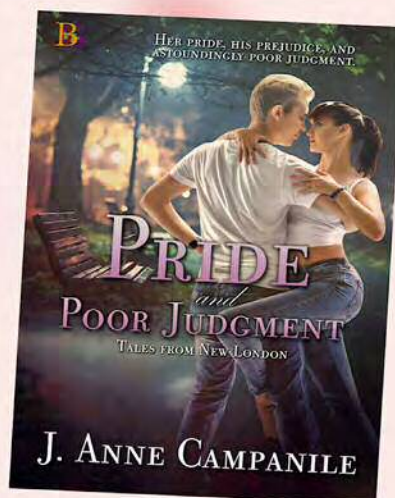
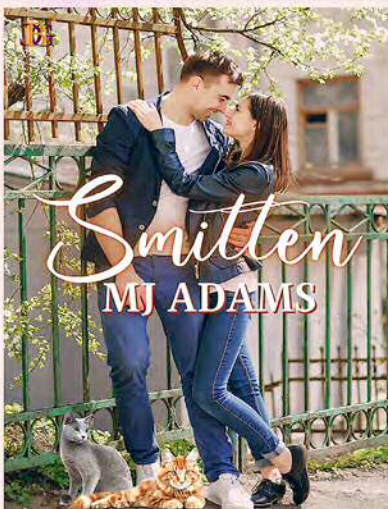
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March/April, 2022

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by Pamela Ackerson

"Then vs. Than"



Ester Lopez

shines in the spotlight. See her interview on page 12

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LUCY MONROE**



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**What on earth is Book Chat?
Author Carrie Nichols Knows**

March-April, 2022

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Lanelle Brent
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Dear QWERTY

by Pamela Ackerson

Than vs. Then

That Which May



Now you can understand it better **than** all the rest!

Let's move on to **then**.

Then is an adverb and has to do with time. Hopefully, you read last month's article about adverbs, and how important adverbs can be for us. Now **and then** is a common expression. In case you forgot, adverbs help explain the verb more clearly and answer the questions "how" and "when."

When I was in high school, we had to have a B average if we wanted to participate in sports. Once we proved our grade point average, **then** we could participate.

Back **then**, things were very different.

If you want to become a doctor, **then** you need to work hard to be accepted to the right colleges.

She found a great pair of boots, **then** bought two more pairs.

Now **then**, you'll be able to understand better **than** all the rest!

That Which May and Who

One of the most common mistakes authors make is determining whether to use that or which. The hard part is, at times, they can be used interchangeably. Depending on the sentence, it'll change the meaning.

One thing that many editors will say is 'can the sentence still be used without it'? If it's needed then keep it there. Unfortunately, that and which also can work both ways. One of the most common mistakes I see is using that when talking about a person. But this one is easy. If a person is being described, use "who."

She was worried about the man **who** lived next door.

Got any Dear QWERTY Questions? We're here to help. Email PamAckerson@adcmagazine with your questions. We'll try to answer them in the next issue!

Perhaps much of the confusion with *than vs then* is pronunciation. Many people tend to pronounce the words exactly the same. Whether caused by accent or just mispronunciation doesn't really matter. Doing so, they tend to spell it the way they've pronounced it.

Isn't that what most of us do when it comes to words? I mean, if we're not sure how to spell a word, phonetics come into play. If someone has read a word and never heard it spoken, they may not pronounce it properly.

Let's get to the bottom of *than vs then*.

Than is a preposition or conjunction.

The best way to figure out **than** is to think of it as a word used for comparing things—bigger than, better than, quicker than, or slower than a snail.

He did better **than** they expected.

She is crazier **than** a loony bird.



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Lanelle Brent, Editor in Chief

Lanelle Brent is an avid reader of all things written. She particularly loves fiction but hadn't read any "romance" novels until introduced to them by Louise. Now, they are her favorites! She states that her favorite genres are historical romance and erotica, and one of her favorite authors is Carolyn Faulkner. She actually likes all romance genres, but, besides historical and erotica, she's particularly partial to contemporary urban romance.

Lanelle grew up in the military. George "Spanky" Roberts, her father, was an original Tuskegee Airman. George was actually the first African-American accepted into the pilot program of the Tuskegee Experiment. When the pilots were sent overseas to participate in the Allied defense against Hitler, Edith started collecting newspaper articles from the Black press about her husband and the Tuskegee Airmen. When the national organization of Tuskegee Airmen and their chapters were formed, and after the death of her husband, Edith began to tell their story, sharing her collected memorabilia to provide accurate documentation of this historical experiment of allowing African-American to become pilots in World War II. Lanelle and her sisters would often accompany Edith around the country helping to tell the legacy. For those who don't know the fascinating/outstanding history of the TA's, an all African-American pilot group,

it will be worth your while to do a little research.

During Lanelle's lifetime she has held a wide variety of jobs, including (but not limited to) DJ with her husband in the 70's, medical insurance claims adjuster (before computers), paralegal, café owner, copy editor and personal assistant to the Assembly Majority Leader of the CA Legislature.

Lanelle was married to Richard Brent for over 42 years before his death. They were blessed with one son and six stepchildren, all of whom are very close.

With the passing of both Edith, her mother, and Colonel Roberts, her father, and being retired herself, Lanelle has undertaken her mother's passion and is an accomplished speaker doing historical presentations about the Tuskegee Airmen around the state in conjunction with her chapter, Tuskegee Airmen Heritage Chapter of Greater Sacramento, which she helped co-found with her two siblings and other Heritage (children and grandchildren of original Tuskegee Airmen) members. This chapter raises money and sponsors scholarships for graduating seniors and single parents who, under most circumstances, want to go into the Aerospace Industry, including becoming pilots, but would be unable to do so without the support of this chapter. If you are interested in supporting this endeavor, please consider becoming a chapter

Continued on page 15



THE SPOTLIGHT IS (ALWAYS) ON *LUCY MONROE*

With more than 8 million copies of her books in print worldwide, award winning and USA Today bestseller Lucy Monroe has published over 75 books and had her stories translated for sale all over the world. While she writes multiple subgenres of romance, all of her books are passionate, deeply emotional and adhere to the concept that love wins. A true devotee of romance, she adores sharing her love for the genre with her readers.



AdC: *How many different genres do you write?*

LM: I write several romance genres: contemporary romance, romantic suspense, paranormal romance, and historical romance.

AdC: *Tell us about the type of characters you love to write about.*

LM: When I'm reading, I am drawn to multidimensional characters and want to get to know them as more than just a name or placeholder in the book, so that is what I try to write. Getting to know my characters on a deeper level than will ever make it to the page is really important to me.

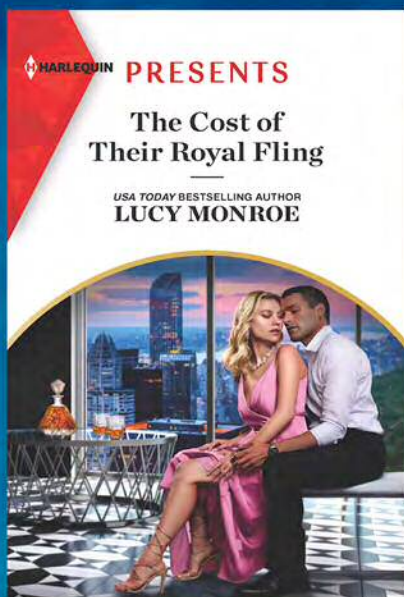
AdC: *Do you have a new book or series?*

LM: I have a bunch of new books out this year; two books in my "Children of the Moon" paranormal series and four contemporary romances, the latest being *The Cost of Their Royal Fling* from Harlequin Presents. Readers can keep up on my website or by signing up for my newsletter (on the website - link below).

AdC: *Favorite quote?*

LM: Right now it is, "Comparison is the act of violence against the

New Books from Two Great Authors in March



Look for **THE COST OF THEIR ROYAL FLING** by Lucy Monroe this month, final book in the Princess by Royal Decree miniseries.



Look for **THE HERO NEXT DOOR** by Carrie Nichols this month, Book 6 in the Small-Town Sweethearts Series.

self.” - Iyanla Vazant.

AdC: *What do you do when you just don't feel like writing?*

LM: I love to learn, so I watch a lot of documentaries and online courses. I read, of course, both fiction and nonfiction and have discovered a deep love for audio books. My family are an integral part of my life, so I'll often be found doing things with one or more of them.

AdC: *What do you like to read? Do you have a favorite genre?*

LM: I love romance and mystery, but I'll read almost any genre if the story intrigues me.

AdC: *Do you have any comfort characters or characters that must go into*

your stories?

LM: I've never been asked this, and it's really made me stop and think. Honestly? I don't think so. Most of my male protagonists have alpha characteristics, but then a lot of my female protagonists do, too. For me, character comes first and then the story, so I write the characters that are clamoring in my head to be written.

AdC: *What do you do to go beyond your comfort zone when it comes to writing and life?*

LM: For someone with agoraphobia and social phobia, most of life is beyond my comfort zone. Every trip to Target with my daughter, every time I interact on Social Media (and I try to do this daily) ...I spend a lot of time pushing myself beyond what I feel is comfortable, but I also know when to turtle in and regroup and have stopped

allowing guilt to plague me when I need to do so.

AdC: *Will you be attending any book signings or conventions?*

LM: Not this year. Talk to me again in 2023. lol

AdC: *What's something about you -- personality traits, habits, background, etc., that has been useful in your writing?*

LM: Writing is such an all-encompassing career. It uses every bit of me, every bit of my history, my knowledge, my penchant for the creative, my ability to imagine. I would say that my need to finish things has been one of the best things for my writing because it meant I finished book after book, rather than starting and abandoning story after sto-

continued on next page

Sneak Peek



An excerpt from

The Cost of Their Royal Fling by Lucy Monroe

Jenna's heart sped just a little with the usual fillip of excitement at the thought of seeing another certain member of the royal family. Prince Dimitri, Dima. The youngest and, in her opinion, sexiest of the three Merikov brothers, the six-and-a-half-foot tall triathlete had a gorgeous body. With brown hair and gorgeous grey eyes, he was her own personal brand of catnip, but the prince was five years younger than Jenna. He was also the brother-in-law of her best friend. Then there was that pesky prince thing.

He was off limits to Jenna's libido on so many levels, it would take a skyscraper elevator to reach him.

A trip she was in no way willing to take.

Forcing her thoughts away from the delectable man, Jenna went back to work on the spread for the sustainable fashion article her magazine was featuring that month. The plus size model, who had opened her own wardrobe for the photo shoot, had a ginormous following that had only grown after she'd caught the notice of a pop icon.

The interview and photo spread had the potential to be one of their most popular to date, and that included the dating and wedding spreads she'd done on Nataliya.

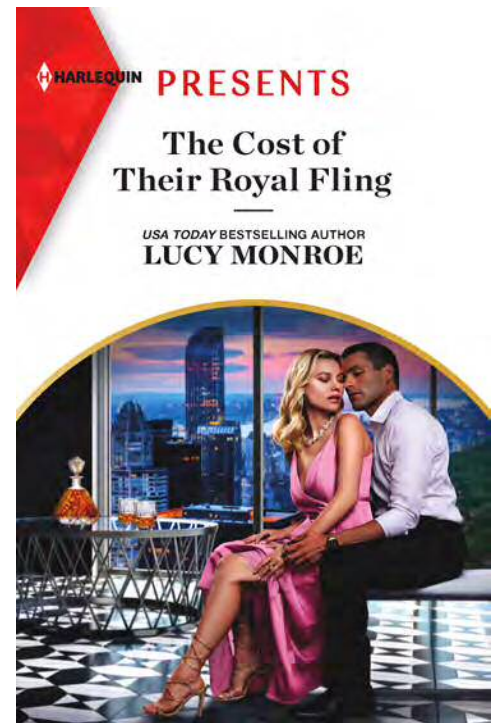
"Hey, Jenna, there's someone here to see you."

Jenna looked up about to ask who it was only to look into the grey eyes she saw way too often in her dreams.

Dreams that left her feeling hot and breathless.

"Dima!" she exclaimed in shock. "What are you doing here?"

It was as if her thoughts of him had conjured up the one guy she could not let herself go for.



Monroe interview cont.

ry. But that doesn't mean someone who follows the latter pattern won't get there in the end. We just take a different route and mine tends to be more linear.

Please give us the following contact information:

Personal web page: <https://lucymonroe.com>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/lucymonroe>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/LucyMonroe.Romance>

We know Lucy is prolific, but did you know she is the co-founder of Bookchat? What on earth is Bookchat?

Read on.

What is Book Chat?

An AdC chat with Carrie Nichols and Lucy Monroe



our comfort zone and took a lot of finessing. (More laughter.)

PJA: *How do you choose what books or who to read?*

CN & LM: Sometimes we pick a theme and we both get to suggest books for it. Sometimes, we find an author we really want to chat about.

PJA: *Do you have a schedule?*

CN: Yes, and no. We have a schedule, but we don't always stick to it.

LM: We've roped our writing group into doing a discussion on David Baldacci books in April.

CN & LM: We hope you'll join us sometime on YouTube to talk books! Look for info on our Social Media.

CN: It's just the two of us getting together and talking about books we've loved. (LM insert: We livestream it so readers can join in the chat as well.) We often invite other authors to join us, both just to chat and because we're maybe talking about their books.

LM: Who started this anyway?

CN: You did. You posted in your Book Nook and asked if anyone wanted to pick a book and chat about it. I posted right away and said I was interested and I don't think anyone else ever said anything, but that's how we got started.

LM: That's right. And then we decided to go live with our chat so we could share our thoughts with other readers.

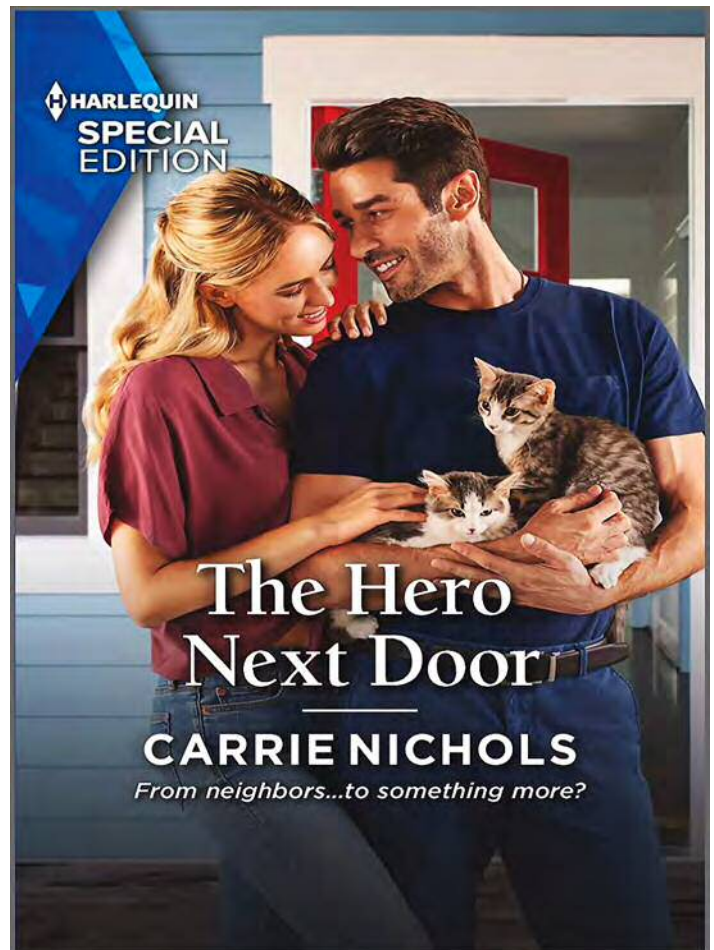
CN: (Laughter.) We started with FB and that technology was not our friend.

LM: Yes, moving to livestreaming on YouTube has been a lot better.

PJA: For many authors, this is a major "out of their comfort zone". How did you take a deep breath and dive in?

CN: I didn't think it was out of my comfort zone because I love talking about books.

LM: Me too! Talking about books I've enjoyed is one of my favorite parts of being a reader. Learning the technology to make it a live chat was definitely out of



The Spotlight is Shining on Ester Lopez



Ester is a writer and publisher and lives in the Smoky Mountains, where she has been writing sci-fi and paranormal/inspirational adventure romances for almost 30 years. Her first children's book, The Adventures of Charlie and Ellie was released in 2020. Her second children's book, Little Horses, was released in 2021.

AdC: How many different genres do you write?

E.L.: I write sci-fi adventure romance, paranormal adventure romance, and non-fiction children's books, written in a fictionalized style.

AdC: Tell us about the type of characters you love to write about.

E.L.: I love to write about characters who have secrets.

AdC: Do you have a new book or series?

E.L.: My new book is *Battle for*

Earth, a sci-fi adventure romance, but my current work in progress is a paranormal (in the "Angel Chronicles Series") about a lonely widow experiencing repeating dreams and she goes in search of her dream lover and finds a second chance at love with a man who is not quite human.

AdC: Favorite quote?

E.L.: My favorite quote is a scripture: Phillipians 4:13: "I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.

AdC: What do you do when you

just don't feel like writing?

E.L.: When I don't feel like writing, I may watch a movie, read a book, work in my flower gardens, photograph the flowers or scenics. I may can some vegetables, make wine, or clean the house, or do crafts or sewing.

AdC: What do you like to read? Do you have a favorite genre?

E.L.: I like to read a lot of different types of books from non-fiction, contemporary, historical, but my favorites are sci-fi, paranormal, and fantasy.



AdC: What do you do to go beyond your comfort zone when it comes to writing and life?

E.L.: Going beyond my comfort zone requires me to do research. I want to know as much as possible about a certain thing to feel comfortable writing about it. The same would hold true in life. I will look things up and see how it's done before trying it.

AdC: Will you be attending any book signings or conventions in 2022?

E.L.: I will be at Book Obsessed Babes Conference in Jacksonville in April, A Weekend With The Authors in May, Romance in the Carolinas

in July/August, and Indie Romance Convention in November.

AdC: What's something about you -- personality traits, habits, background, etc that has been useful in your writing?

E.L.: I'm short, so I tend to write more about short women (or from a shorter perspective), I've had a lot of different jobs over my lifetime, so I have real-life experiences to write from. I'm Hispanic, Irish, and Czech, so I use those nationalities sometimes, when I write.

AdC: Please provide your contact information for fans and new readers of your works:

E.L.: Certainly, my contact information is as follows:

www.esterlopez.com

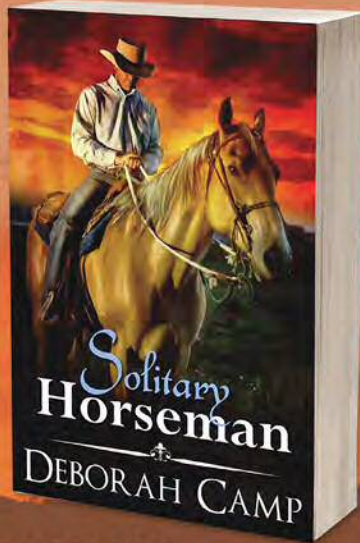
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Lonestar's Lady ~~ Lonestar. His name fit him perfectly. It fed every fantasy that Gussie Horton had conjured about Indians and forbidden love. His neighbors whispered that he was a murdering half-breed, which was true. But Gussie believed in second chances, and more importantly, her heart told her to believe in Max Lonestar.

Solitary Horseman ~~ The Civil War is over but the battles continue. Brought together by bad luck and cruel twists of fate, Callum and Banner forge a partnership they hope will keep them afloat even as neighboring Texas ranchers go under and their land is snapped up by opportunists.

Ropin' the Moon ~~ He had tumbleweed in his blood, moving from one town to the next. Traveling to where there was trouble, he was hired to tame wild places with a fast draw and an iron will. Lacy knew that Dalton wouldn't be around long and she shouldn't be tempted by him. But like the moon, his pull on her was a natural, powerful force that she was helpless to resist.

Sneak Peek of



Ester Lopez's **Battle for Earth**

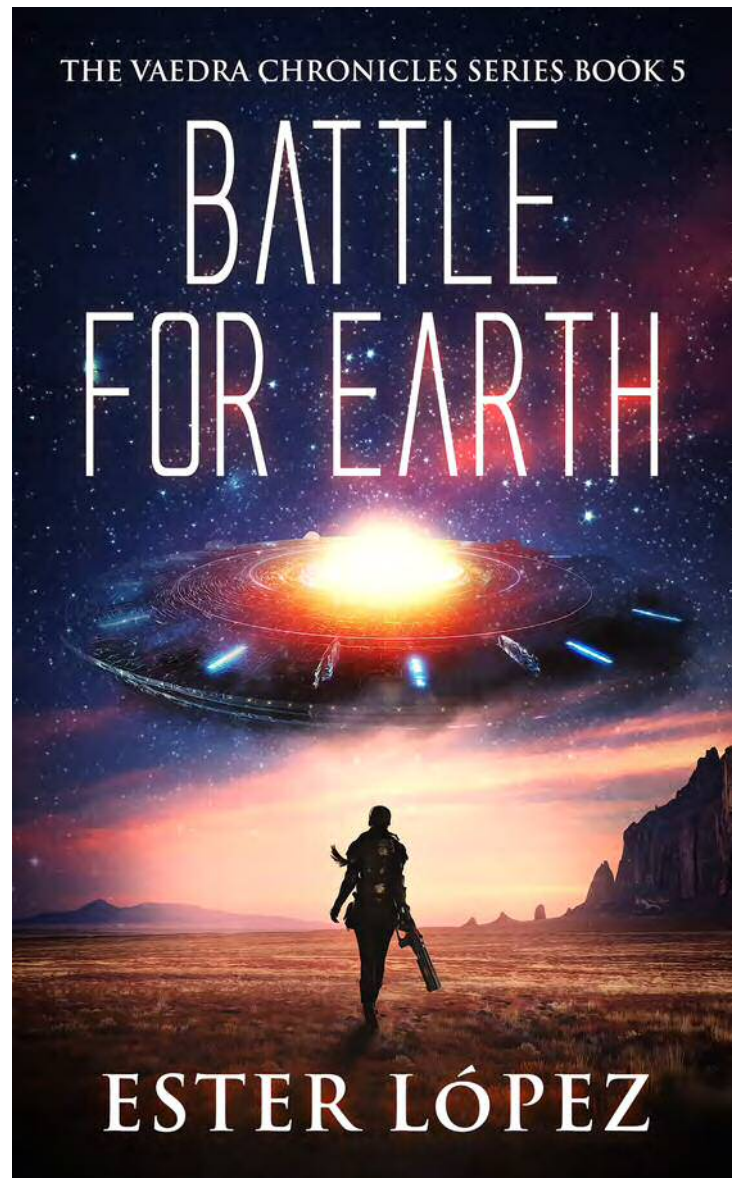
Setting the Scene

Willow Tree Moon's investigation of a child abduction snowballs into many abductions and missing children from the town of Mercy. The local mayor is becoming an interesting suspect. In an out-of-body experience, Willow Tree gets all the evidence she needs to put the mayor away... if she can make it out alive.

Eno ni Esrith, a lieutenant in the Vaedran Star Force takes down a grey's ship but suffers damage to his own ship. He helps a local police officer rescue two little girls and soon discovers a different kind of war going on planet-side and decides to help Willow Tree in her search for other missing children. Will he be able to rescue Willow Tree from the reptilians' revenge?

Excerpt

Slumped over the Nav-U-Comm was Eno. Oh God, let him be all right! She removed his harness and tried to pull him out. He was heavy. All those muscles add up, she thought. But her military training kicked in. She had to do this in the military, she could do it now. She bent down and draped his body over her shoulder, her weapon in the other hand. She grunted and straightened the best she could and carried him to the door, then jumped down. She could barely stand, he was so heavy. She moved away from the ship, closer to her home. Bear Hunter ran ahead of her and pulled a lounge



chair out and helped her lower Eno onto the seat.

Lanelle Brent, continued

member. They are a non-discriminatory, non-profit organization open to all. Lanelle is also an active member and officer of the national Tuskegee Airmen organization and treasurer of her local chapter, along with various other job duties.

Tuskegee Airmen swag is something you and your relatives and friends would be proud to wear or to give as gifts. Ranging from books that give the real history of these fantastic airmen to one-of-a-kind custom-designed t-shirts and caps, there is something there for everyone. Check out their catalog on their website at: www.taheritage.org.

Lanelle lives in the Sierra Foothills of California with her sister and multiple rescued animals.



You Know It's Spring When...

Across

3. Music award show.
5. A newborn cow.
7. These beans come in different colors and different flavors at Easter.
10. Ladybugs, mosquitos, and flies.
12. Symptoms that arise from pollens.
13. Newborn horses.
14. Time to sow the crops.
15. The first flower of the spring.
17. The process that occurs when birds and other animals gather material for their eggs.
19. These are dyed at Easter in pastel colors and hunted.
21. Too much rain causes these.
26. Frog _____ is a time when they transition from tadpoles.
29. Trees get buds on them; they _____.
30. Newborn hen or rooster.
32. Christian holiday celebrating the resurrection.
34. _____ Red Breast, one of the first birds of the spring.
35. They make honey and protect their queen.
36. Mallards, Drakes, and Bubbleheads, to name a few.
38. Bears, bats and hedgehogs wake up from their _____.
41. Stars in a cartoon, this bird is noisy.
42. Bring May _____ (see clue #15 Across).

Down

1. They return to the Platte River in Nebraska every spring.
2. These plants cover the forest floor with a colorful haze.
4. Whales, birds and many others go home like this.
6. This equinox marks the first day of spring.
8. Another name for #31 Down.
9. Fat Tuesday.
11. Red Bird of the spring.
16. Burpee's catalog comes out in the spring with their _____.
18. April _____ bring #42 Across.
20. These butterflies fly to Mexico

every spring.

22. Purplish flower that makes a very early appearance.

23. Animals give birth to these in the spring.

24. They first start gobbling in the spring.

25. "Dawn _____" is an orchestra of Blackbirds, Robins, Wrens, and other birds, usually from 4-5 A.M.

27. The blossoms on these trees are a major attraction in D.C. in the spring.

28. Most time zones make this switch during spring.

31. If this animal sees his shadow, it means no spring for six weeks.

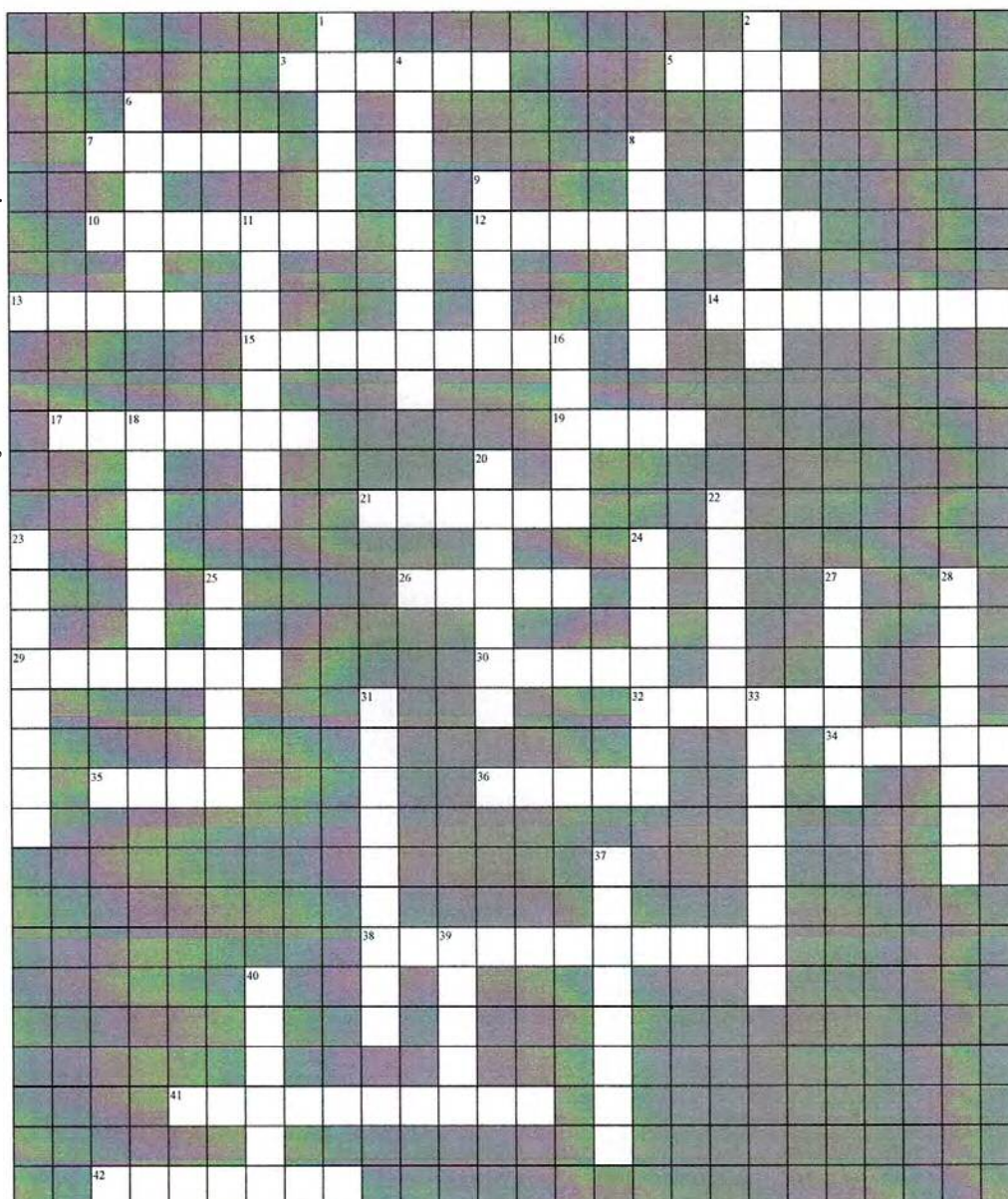
33. This sport's pre-season is called spring _____.

37. These birds go to Capistrano, CA on the same date every year.

39. During spring _____, college students take to the beach.

40. _____ Tax Day every spring.

Answer on page 25



Pam Binder

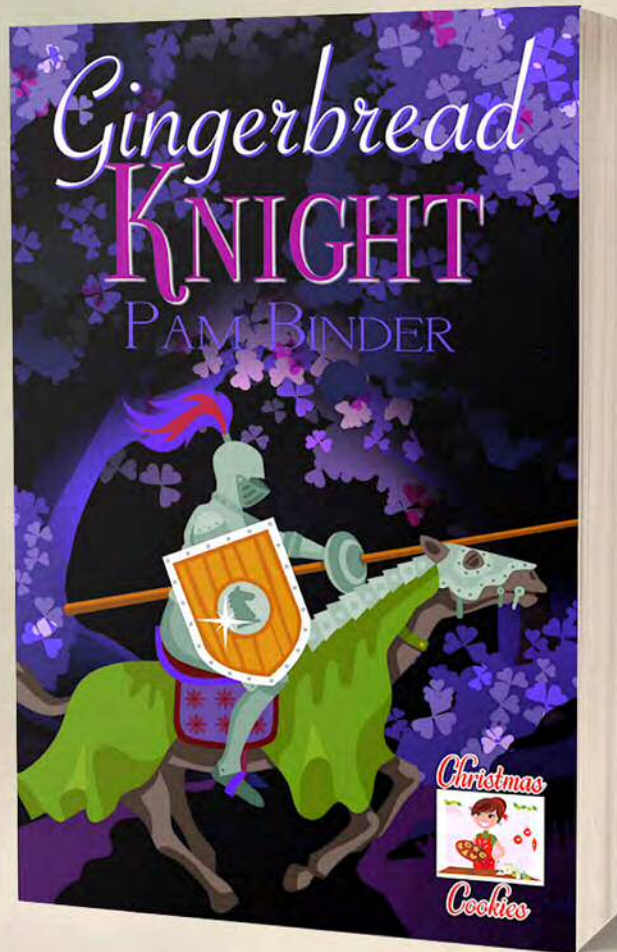
New York Times
USA Today
Bestselling Author



Gingerbread Knight

Together they devise
a dangerous plan,
knowing failure
means they will never
see each other again.

PamBinder.com



Christmas Knight

To find her mystery man,
she must travel through time.

Christmas Deadline

Will Holly and Noel manage to
write a happily-ever-after for their
fictional couple—and themselves
by their Christmas deadline?



REVIEWS

- ★★★★★ Amazing/Excellent
- ★★★★ Good
- ★★★ Average
- ★★ Something's missing
- ★ More than one element missing

Sometimes a book does not quite fit into the description above. That is when the reviewer will use 1/2 to indicate it is better than it's description but not quite at the next level.

Books are evaluated on (1) Characterization (2) Plot (3) Pacing, (4) Writing and (5) Originality.



Contemporary Romance



Do you think you can write a fair and honest review of a book you've recently read? Here's your chance. We accept guest reviews. If you would like to submit one, pick a book that has just come out, whether you liked it or disliked it, and write a review of it. It's not as easy as you think. Send it to our website at www.adcmagazine.com.

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Bounty Flight

Violet Howe

Self Pub

Kindle Edition
B09T3J3961

★★★★

"To the world you may be imperfect, but you're perfect for me..."

Small town librarian Lauryn Vargas is returning from a book convention when she spots the man of her dreams across from her at the airport. With a pounding heart and a shaking of her head, she wishes she could figure out a way to chat with the mystery man. Fate has a funny way of granting her wish when she boards the plane and notices he's also a passenger...but their chance meeting is quickly followed by tragedy when the plane goes down in a fiery inferno in the mountains. Lauryn never dreamed she would end up living out one of the scenarios in her beloved romance novels, but here she is...stranded with a handsome stranger...as well as someone else who will do whatever it takes to survive.

I will most likely show my age here, but *Bounty Flight* so reminded me of an old 80's film I love, *Romancing the Stone*—a writer of romance finding herself way over her head in the wilds of the jungle and ending up with the most unlikely of heroes. If you enjoy snarky banter, page turning adventure and, of course, an ending with...well, I'll not spoil the mystery...you'll just have to snag your own copy!

I highly recommend *Bounty Flight*, and, as always, look forward to reading more from this author and her stories from the small town of Cedar Creek.

Sharing what I love,
Veronica

By Any Other Name

Lauren Kate

Penguin

Trade Paperback
978-0735212541

★★★1/2

In Lauren Kate's *By Any Other Name*, an author romanticized by an assistant editor is someone completely different than she expects.

Contemporary Romance

Lanie lacks real-life experience with love. In her mind and heart, she's held onto her mother's dying request for her to promise to find someone she really loves. After reading a romance novel in college, she's inspired to compose a list of attributes she wants in a man, locking onto it as a guide for life and her search for love.

She's excited to edit for romance author Noa Callaway, her biggest inspiration in life and love. If she cures Noa's writer's block, she gets her dream promotion. Once Lanie discovers Noa's true identity, she questions everything she thought she knew about love and her life plan. Can it inspire her to live free from her checklist of requirements/expectations, finally discovering the love her mom wished for her?

Kate's vivid description and lively dialogue pull you into *By Any Other Name*. She wonderfully develops and evolves Lanie's character. While you can see why Lanie may have fallen for the hero, the narrative and the hero's character development don't allow readers time to fall for him too. After Lanie spends one-on-one time with him, helps Noa with her writer's block, and reflects on what she wants/needs, the narrative's pacing and flow improve.

Most diehard romance readers have a novel they hold dear to their hearts because it speaks to a rough patch in their life. That's what happens to Lanie. As much as Lanie thinks about Noa, feels a connection, and uses Noa's work as a life blueprint, she never gives much thought to who Noa, the person, is. If you don't know the truth, you can put your own ideas, wants/needs onto her. Kate brilliantly captures the emotions expressing how deeply Lanie feels personally betrayed when she discovers Noa's identity. Fair, based on their seven-year online friendship formed while Lanie assisted with editing Noa's books. *By Any Other Name* is a cute, funny, slightly angsty novel about a young woman's journey of self-discovery and finding her own path to love.

Lacy Hill

A Brush with Love

Mazey Eddings

St. Martin's Griffin

Trade Paperback

978-1250805980

★★★★★



Tension and stress radiated from Harper as she rushed through the rain to get to her first dental class of the day. As a senior, Harper was laser-focused on becoming an oral surgeon specializing in facial reconstructions and corrective jaw surgeries. She had spent four years hyper-focused on flawless grades, incredible hand skills, and publishable research. The only thing she could do now was wait for the powers-to-be to decide her fate...and worry. Luckily for Harper, she had three close friends who managed to keep her from spiraling into a full-blown panic attack most of the time, but they had yet to convince her to have a life outside of dental school. As Harper started down the stairs to get to her class, she slipped on a puddle on the floor, fell down the entire flight and body slammed into a drop-dead gorgeous face and torso that ended up sprawled across her body with a broken plaster mold of teeth smashed beside them.

Dan had no idea how he ended up on top of one of the cutest girls he'd seen in a long time. One minute he was dreading going into the lab to finish up his labor-intensive dental impression, the next his impression was a broken mess on the floor and his head was on the chest of Harper. Dan didn't want to be in dental school, his heart wasn't in it, and he wasn't very good at it. He had been a successful financier in New York when his famous, innovative dentist father suddenly passed, and his mother was left to handle their joint practice. She begged him to help her out by becoming a dentist and joining the practice. Out of a profound sense of guilt, he agreed, and now he was stuck. His anxiety level wasn't nearly as great as Harper's, but he did understand hers, to a degree, and was more than willing to go by her rules and just be friends.

A Brush with Love is a well-written, slow-simmering romance that will tug at your heartstrings. Ms. Eddings takes the reader into the world of high anxiety, hyper-stress and panic attacks with the compassion and understanding of the person who experiences these debilitating attacks and how they cope (or don't) with them. Dan is the perfect love interest for Harper with his low-key manner and infinite patience and understanding of her disability. When he rescues her from a full-blown panic attack, it will make your heart melt and bring tears to your eyes. He is truly a knight in shining armor! A fabulous read!

Lani Roberts

The Damaged (Insiders- 2)

Tijan

Griffin

Trade Paperback

978-1250210791

★★★★★

Computer genius Bailey Hayes appears to have everything she's ever

wanted. The man of her dreams returns her love, and she's finally beginning grad school at the college of her dreams. But Bailey's new classmates don't know her background. They assume she's a talentless spoiled brat riding on Daddy's coattails. They couldn't be more wrong.

Until two months ago, Bailey didn't know who her father was let alone that he is an extremely wealthy

Contemporary Romance

tech legend. Bailey was raised by a single mom who worked two jobs just to get by. Three weeks ago, Bailey was the victim of a kidnapping attempt that came very close to succeeding.

Kash Colello, Bailey's boyfriend, is the grandson of Calhoun Bastian. Calhoun murdered Kash's parents. To protect him from his evil grandfather, Kash was hidden away. When he inherited his mother's fortune, Kash emerged from the shadows with one goal; destroy Calhoun before he destroys everything important to Kash. Will he be able to foil Calhoun's plot and save Bailey?

This is the second in a series but can be read alone. However, reading the previous story would have explained how the huge cast of characters is connected. This would have made the book considerably less confusing. Despite this flaw, it's a really good book. But be warned, there is a cliffhanger ending.

Sheila Griffin

Fake It 'Til You Bake It

Jamie Wesley

St. Martin's Griffin

E-Book

B09CNGDY76

Mass Market

978-1250801852

★★★★

Jada Townsend-Matthews has come home to San Diego to hide out after refusing to marry the bachelor who proposed on a reality TV show. She didn't know where else to turn when social media spewed hatred because of her decision, the latest in a long list of impulsive acts that disappointed her family.

Star football player Donovan Dell indulges his dream by opening a cupcake bakery along with his two best friends and teammates. A football career doesn't last forever, and the ever-practical Donovan is getting a head start on the future when he can no longer play. After an antagonistic first encounter, circumstances force free-spirited Jada and pragmatic, uber-

Gouda Friends (Ponto Beach Reunion #2)

Cathy Yardley

Montlake

Trade Paperback

978-1542030021

★★★★★



Cathy Yardley's *Gouda Friends, Ponto Beach Reunion #2*, is a friends-to-lovers, nerdy, foodie rom-com. Tam Doan breaks up with her boyfriend for cheating on her and throwing away her gourmet cheese. She calls her BFF Josh O'Malley, using their emergency code word—goldfish. After five years, she's back in her hometown, staying with Josh, and jobless. Tam helped Josh believe in himself and find his way when he was lost. A successful multimillion-dollar ghost kitchen owner, he wants to help her now. From middle school, Tam's and Josh's close friendship helped each survive tumultuous homes and neglectful families, becoming a lifeline. However, being in close quarters leads to heightened awareness and feelings, complicating their friendship.

Yardley beautifully explores how important friendship is to our lives in adulthood and how it can transition into an affirming, fulfilling romantic relationship. Tam and Joshua are sentence finishing, lifesaving, once-in-a-lifetime, ride-or-die friends you call 24/7 SOULMATES. Yardley's fantastic storytelling, vibrant description, and deft character development, interactions, and evolution highlight this. Romance and sex are all that's missing in their relationship. They support each other, not just with words, but in action with unconditional love and willingness to do anything for each other. Yardley marvelously develops their romantic/sexual relationship. Sexual awareness/attraction has always been there, but things get interesting once Tam and Josh cannot deny the depth of their mutual interest. Yardley knocks these moments of realization out of the park. Their pining, thirst, and longing are hilarious and sweet. Their playful, lighthearted, intimate, sexy, intensely emotional, and steamy love scenes further the evolution of their characters, relationship, and story. Yardley nicely delves into our childhoods' effects on our future aspirations, relationships, and career approaches.

Sweet, hilarious, steamy, and sexy with emotional punch, *Gouda Friends* is a fun romance about discovering what makes you happy and taking risks to follow dreams.

Lacy Hill

organized Donovan together. Each time it seems things can't get any worse, they do, as the two struggle to deal with one another's idiosyncrasies.

Fake It 'Til You Bake It is a satisfying romance with just enough unexpected twists to keep the pages turning. Will the differences between these two headstrong characters force them apart, or will they learn to complement each other? It's a great deal of fun to discover the answer.

Hannah Rowen

Hook, Line, and Sinker (Bellinger Sisters #2)

Tessa Bailey

Avon Books

Mass Market

978-0063045699

★★★★

Tessa Bailey's *Hook, Line, and Sinker* is a friends-to-lovers romance about how the friendship between production assistant Hannah Bellinger and king crab fisherman Fox Thornton is tested by sharing close quarters while Hannah's working in town.

Contemporary Romance

Hannah dreams of creating film soundtracks. She suggests her sister's hometown for a filming location and stays in Fox's spare bedroom. The more time they spend together, the less she can deny she wants Fox, but not for a fling.

Fox, a sexy, carefree flirt with a reputation as a notorious ladies' man, longs to escape people's expectations and assumptions about him based on his handsome appearance—he's only entertainment, good for sex. Hannah is the first person to see him for more than that, to like him for who he is, his personality, his heart. He was instantly attracted to Hannah when he first met her. But he must keep things platonic because she's his best friend's future sister-in-law, and she's his best friend and too good for him. Being roommates makes it difficult to remember those reasons because Hannah breaks through all his defenses and barriers. Before he can be the man for Hannah, he must fight his issues/inner demons. If he proves he wants to be with Hannah for the long run, will she choose him?

Colorful description, lively dialogue, and excellent characters bring the emotions simmering deep inside/between Fox and Hannah brilliantly to life. The interactions are electric and filled with chemistry, emotion, and intimacy. Bailey's love scenes are seriously steamy and sexy, contributing to developing her story and characters. Her descriptions imbue them with intimacy and all the emotion Hannah and Fox feel for one another but fear expressing. Hannah's connection/relationship with music makes it another character foundational for their bond.

Steamy, sweet, angsty, and poignant, *Hook, Line, and Sink* is intensely emotional, sexy, and compelling. But it doesn't read as a rom-com. Bailey takes readers, Fox, and Hannah on a perilous, exhilarating, and passionate journey of self-discovery, following your dreams and falling in scary, heart-wrenching, once-in-a-lifetime, ever after love.

Lacy Hill

Lucifer's Sin (Walker Security: Lucifer's Trilogy #1)

Lisa Renee Jones

Julie Patra Publishing

Trade Paperback

979-8421575535

★★★★

Lisa Renee Jones' *Lucifer's Sin*, Book 1 of her Walker Security: Lucifer's Trilogy standalone series, barely scratches the surface of the mysterious and dangerous Lucifer, the woman who betrayed him, and the mystery behind the night that tore them apart. One of Walker Security's newest members, Lucifer's still a mystery to his team. A man with a dangerous past, he loves fast cars and lives his life on the edge, flirting with death. Walker Security saved him from the hell he'd allowed his life to become, pulling him back from the edge and his death wish—mostly. He's haunted by demons and secrets, the most personal of whom owns his heart, owns him, still, even after her betrayal made him the man he is today. When she reappears in his life, everything they believed/thought they knew about that night is questionable, and nothing is as appears. The past comes back to haunt them.

Luke is all twisted up about Ana, bitter and angry over her betrayal. Though it drives everything he's doing, he's all about keeping her safe. Ana's no pushover. She's perfect for Luke because she has demons and secrets she's yet to make peace with. Intensely drawn to each other, they're forced into close quarters on the run, relying on each other to survive in dangerous situations.

Jones' active, descriptive writing style draws readers straight into the action, the pages quickly flying by. Ana's and Luke's relationship is complex, rife with anger, bitterness, frustration, and beneath all that longing, desire, and love. Despite their time apart, the emotional and sexual connections and attraction they share are deep and powerful, just like their

personalities. Readers can expect richer development and evolution in books 2–3. The relationships and interactions between the Walker Security men also are nicely developed and amusing.

Lucifer's Sin is a sexy, angsty, action-packed, slow build, thrilling, romantic suspense, and second-chance romance ending on a cliffhanger.

Lacy Hill

The Suite Spot (Beck Sisters #2)

Trish Doller

St. Martin's Griffin

Trade Paperback

978-1250809479

★★★★

Single mom Rachel Beck's life is standing still in Trish Doller's *The Suite Spot*. Still living with her mom, she's in an unsatisfying off-and-on again relationship with her daughter Maisie's unreliable, aimless father. Maisie's the best part of her life. When Rachael is fired unfairly from being night reservations manager at a Miami Beach luxury hotel, the weight of everything in her life that's off-track becomes overwhelming. At a crossroads, Rachel impulsively accepts a position at a brewery hotel on Kelleys Island and packs up her daughter, moving cross-country.

Mason has dealt with failures, grief, and sadness by withdrawing from town, isolating himself. While he knows everything about brewing beer, he knows nothing about building or running a hotel. He offers Rachel the chance to live her dream—*carte blanche* to design, build, and manage a hotel. A planner, not a risk-taker like her sister, Rachel initially regrets her impulsivity when the job is different than she expects. But she can't turn down the chance to get her life together and follow her dream.

Doller's vibrant description, deft creation and evolution of intriguing characters with depth, and emotional and chemistry-filled narrative and

Contemporary Romance

interactions between her likable characters draw you into the novel. Scenes with Rachel and Maisie driving to Kelleys Island are touchingly sweet. Maisie's adorable, and her interactions with Mason and her mom are cute. Rachel's surprisingly attracted to the handsome, moody, and grumpy Mason despite his gruffness. However, she believes the attraction could never be mutual. Their interactions are intimate, sexy, funny, sweet, intensely emotional, enhancing their characters' development and growth. Mason calms Rachel and makes Maisie and her feel safe and valued. They thrust him from his self-protective shell back to the land of the living. They help each other heal.

The Suite Spot is a sweet, sexy, poignant, uplifting, funny, small-town romance about healing and taking a chance to follow your dreams, make a new life, find love, and create a home with that person.

Lacy Hill

Summer Nights with a Cowboy (Kittredge Ranch #3)

Caitlin Crews

St. Martin's Griffith

Mass Market

978-1250750020

☆☆☆

Caitlin Crews' *Summer Nights with a Cowboy, Kittredge Ranch #3*, explores the forbidden passion simmering between traveling nurse Janie Atwood and next-door neighbor Sheriff Zack Kittredge.

Trying to discover/uncover secrets about her family, Janie comes to Cold River, taking a job as Zack's elderly neighbor's nursing aide/assistant. Believing Janie threatens his town with a nefarious scheme, Zack keeps a close eye on her. Zack's an intense gorgeous loner, and control freak. Janie is cheerful, courageous, and tenacious. The sweet, friendly, quintessential good girl, Janie's always been just the cute friend, one of the guys, invisible until Zack

noticed her—even if for ridiculous reasons. He makes her want to be dangerous, and bad. Janie believes love is too special to be wasted while Zack doesn't believe in love at all. They're complete opposites who help each other make peace with their families and pasts, becoming who they're meant to be.

Crews' opening scene gets the novel off to an intriguing start. She quickly sets up the tension and vibe between the sunshine heroine and grumpy hero. Zack comes off as a jerk, stalking Janie glowering and scowling at her with suspicion and disapproval for no good reason, treating her antagonistically. The barely leashed sexual awareness flowing between them makes him uncomfortable. Crews develops Zack, Janie, and their relationship with vibrant description, lively dialogue, and humorous, snarky, and fiery banter and

emotional interactions.

Lacy Hill

Unfortunately, the pacing is slow, and the story drags at some parts. It's also difficult connecting with Zack for most of the novel. However, later we discover things revealing who he is and why he became the man he is that soften his character.

Exploring themes of discovering family secrets, searching for a home, reconciling the past, and opening your heart to love, *Summer Nights with a Cowboy* is a sweet, humorous, angsty, charming small-town romance.

Lacy Hill

Sunday at the Sunflower Inn

Jodi Thomas

Zebra Books

E-Book

978-1420151398

★★★★☆



Jodi Thomas takes the reader back to small-town life and love in Honey Creek, Texas. McCoy Mason's life falls apart just before he's about to start a new job, when he wrecks his car, breaks his leg, and his fiancée abandons him. He just needs a place to heal, and the only option is the grandfather he's never met. Sixty-seven-year-old Charles Winston is ready to embark on his first adventure with true love. The lady of his choice is the sweet Lilly Lambert, who is more than happy to be his fiancée. Jessica Ann Mackenzie, Jam to everyone, has her thriving restaurant and dreams to establish an inn in her ancestral home. But she doesn't have a man of her own. When Sergeant Tuscon Smith comes to town, he brings all kinds of opportunities, if she's willing to take a chance. Melody might be young, but she knows her soldier Michael is her one and only. She's determined to meet him in Honey Creek, despite her overprotective parents. Honey Creek offers the hope of new beginnings for them all.

Jodi Thomas' gift for storytelling shines through in this latest book in the "Honey Creek" series. The reader feels like a part of the action as humor, pathos, and slices of life build a textured narrative. With so many characters, it can be difficult to give them all equal time. Yet their stories unfold and tie together beautifully. This book shows that love comes in different forms, and there is always hope to find a way to a sense of belonging and being loved. Jodi Thomas's books are not to be missed for readers who love character based, heart-warming stories.

Danielle Hill



Historical Romance Reviews

Rules for Engaging the Earl (The Widow Rules #2)

Janna MacGregor

St. Martin's Press

Mass Market

E-Book

125076162X

☆☆☆☆

"A friend is someone who knows all about you and still loves you."—Elbert Hubbard

Constance is shocked to find her now deceased husband has left her not only pregnant and penniless, but also not considered his widow in

the eyes of society. Apparently, he was already married to not only her, but two other women. Desperate to not let her child be considered illegitimate, she reaches out to her longtime friend Jonathan, the Earl of Sykeston. Knowing he has recently returned from serving in the war, it is her hope he will agree to a marriage of convenience.

When Sykeston agrees, Constance could never have imagined what began as a series of unfortunate events, would develop into a healing balm soothing two broken souls...and proving once again, love conquers all.

Oh, how I'm a sucker for not only friends-to-lovers tropes but broken heroes as well, and Janna MacGregor

delivered both in her second installment to her "The Widow Rules" series. The journey between these two long time friends going from a marriage of convenience to realizing they're soulmates is full of drama, passion and suspense! Thoroughly enjoyed reading Constance's and Jonathan's love story and would recommend to fans of this genre!

Sharing what I love,
Veronica

Paranormal Romance Reviews

Fantasy

Vampires

Shape Shifters

Time Travel

Werewolves...

Ancient Retribution (Ancients Rising #5)

Katie Reus

KR Press LLC

E-book

978-1635561906

★★★★

In Katie Reus' *Ancient Retribution*, *Ancients Rising* #5, a lost dragon princess finds her mate and birth clan while tracking missing humans and battling an unknown, treacherous enemy. Raised by wolves, Juniper is a dragon shifter who doesn't know her birth clan. Since rogue dragons destroyed half the planet in the Fall, she leads her crew on black ops missions hunting supernaturals and dangerous criminals. On a mission, she meets dragon shifter warrior Zephyr.

Until meeting Juniper—his destined mate—Zephyr doesn't feel like he fits in anywhere, especially in this new world. Zephyr is set on winning Juniper's heart, which she doesn't trust anyone with. She also doesn't want to get mated. Nevertheless, Zephyr cannot lose this battle and won't ever stop fighting to win her. Even up against Juniper's stubbornness, a long-lost clan determined to bring their lost dragon princess home, and an enemy with



endless resources.

Reus' development of Zephyr's and Juniper's relationship is first-rate. Juniper's a fantastic fighter and leader and Zephyr's a fantastic character and love interest. An alpha male, he's all about Juniper, but not bothered by her being in charge. He respects Juniper completely, and never undermines her leadership, becoming her partner, offering her support, caring for her, and meeting her needs—first. They have fiery chemistry, and their interactions and relationship are intense, sexy, and steamy, but also sweet, even though Juniper tries to resist Zephyr and their connection because of trust issues and fear.

Reus's descriptive and thrilling action scenes, intriguing suspense plot, deft world-building and character development make this an exciting read. But how she takes themes—found families, estranged families, kidnapping, organ theft, human trafficking—brilliantly giving them a supernatural spin, makes it fascinating, giving it added depth. The villains, unfortunately, lacked sufficient development, matching their threat level and inflicted harm. Likewise, while Reus nicely plants seeds connected with Juniper's separation from her clan, the resolution of this central plot point was achieved too easily and needed more development. Action-packed, suspenseful, and steamy, *Ancient Retribution* is an entertaining and captivating paranor-

mal romance.

Lacy Hill

Shadow Fallen Sherrilyn Kenyon Tor

E-book

978-1250144515

★★★★ ½

Ariel is an arel, a winged immortal warrior for the light. When she is cursed by a woman bent on vengeance, she is trapped in a mortal body and damned to watch the person she loves die. She falls under the protection of feared warrior and half-brother to William the Conqueror, Valteri. He has been shunned and hated by others for his "demonic deformity" and lives only to fight. However, he has a kind and gentle heart.

Valteri is drawn to the angelic beauty who sees only good in him, but he knows they can never stay together. His powerful secret heritage and her true nature put them in the crosshairs of demonic forces bent on destroying the world.

Shadow Fallen is part of Kenyon's long-running paranormal series "Dream Hunters." Yet it has a very different feel. Along with a stirring and emotional love story, the meditations on the cruelty of humans towards those who are different, and what constitutes

Paranormal Romance

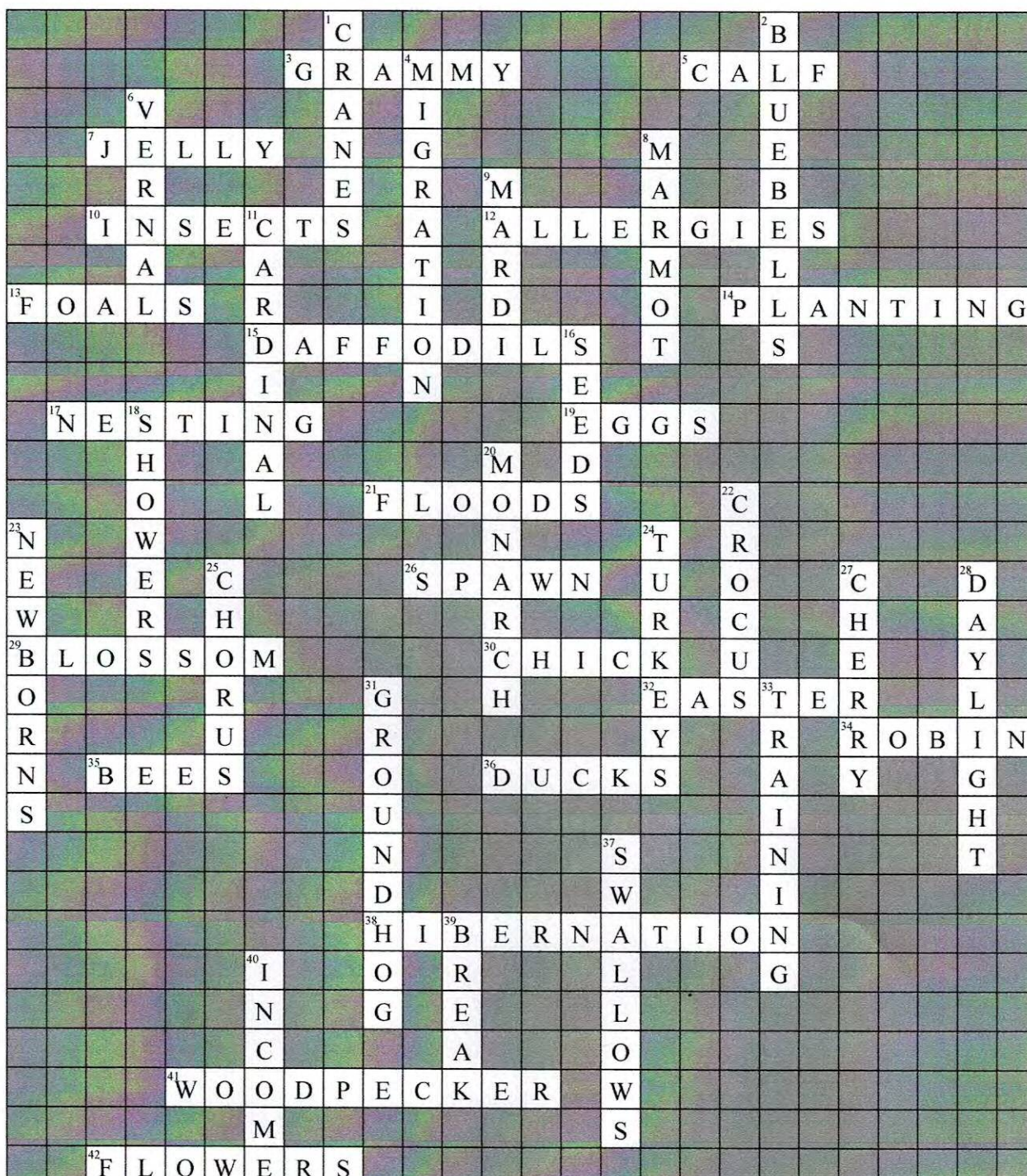
true faith, spirituality, and goodness are timely and impactful. Valteri will not fail to have an impact on readers who love tragic, tortured heroes. And Ariel's dual nature, kind and loving, but fierce and protective, makes her the perfect heroine for Valteri. The setting of Norman Conquest Era Medieval

England will also appeal to historical romance fans who like a little paranormal thrown in. Well-developed secondary characters add color and texture to an enjoyable, fast moving romance. *Shadow Fallen* is recommended to long-time fans of Kenyon and readers who enjoy historical paranormal ro-

mance.
Danielle Hill

It's Springtime!

Louise B. Snead



Fear Thy Neighbor

Fern Michaels

Kensington

Kindle

ASB098KNSQWM

☆☆☆

"The place where you made your stand never mattered. Only that you were there... and still on your feet."

—Stephen King, *The Stand*

Alison Marshall is a survivor. After escaping from an aberrant foster home, Alison drifts from town to town...job to job...never trusting anyone and keeping to herself. Her only goal is to hopefully find a forever home where she can put down roots and actually find peace in her life.

While traveling to the Florida Keys, Alison thinks she's finally found her own slice of paradise on the beaches of Palmetto Island. A small beach-front cottage is for sale, and she throws caution to the wind and decides fate is finally giving her a sign. However, all good things seem to come with a price, and after purchasing the cottage, Alison starts noticing this tight-knit community is hiding something...but what? Has she made the wrong choice? Will Palmetto Island become her nightmare rather than her dream come true?

Fern Michaels is an author I've enjoyed reading in the past, and while *Fear Thy Neighbor* is an easily read mystery, it just didn't keep my attention, and I really wish the ending wasn't quite so rushed. I'll say no more for fear of spoilers. Keep in mind not all stories appeal to everyone, so if you are a fan of Fern Michaels or this genre, give it a try! While not my fav, it could be yours!

Sharing what I love,
Veronica



Historical and Contemporary Whodunnits?

The House on Cedar Ridge

Pamela Ackerson

Self-Pub

Kindle Edition

B09TRXK532

☆☆☆☆

"The ghosts of yesterday cautioned her to leave...but there was no turning back."

In another time, the Cedar Ridge Hills museum was known as Locke Manor, a sanatorium and home for foundling children. Looking for answers about her family, Thalia Jefferies becomes curator of Cedar Ridge, and while looking through old items stored in one of the rooms, finds herself swept back in time...literally.

Waking up almost 100 years in the past, Thalia goes from being a curator to a teacher. She has also become the target for something sinister she'd hadn't expected. Will Thalia's past and present collide? And will she find the answers to the questions she so desperately seeks...

If you are a fan of gothic mystery stories, you will enjoy entering into the dark and mysterious Locke Manor and uncovering the secrets it holds. Will the residents of Locke Bay welcome you...or will you find yourself at their mercy? *The House on Cedar*

Ridge is an enjoyable paranormal tale I'd recommend to fans of this genre.

Sharing what I love,
Veronica

Sea Storm (Underwater Investigation Unit #3)

Andrew Mayne

Thomas Mercer

Kindle Edition

B08SQMNDQY

☆☆☆☆ 1/2

"We all have a dark side...some of us are just better at keeping it at a distance."

If you are new to the "Underwater Investigation Unit" series, allow me to introduce you to Sloan McPherson. Sloan is the daughter of a pirate, and not the Captain Jack Sparrow kind. Everyone whispers about the McPherson family, who are either known for their talents of diving in the deep blue sea for lost artifacts and buried treasure or being drug smugglers.

Determined to make a name for herself not tainted, Sloan becomes a law enforcement official and detective for the Florida Underwater Investigation Unit (UIU). But even the best of divers can find themselves in way over their

head.

Called to a scene of a luxury cruise ship that has apparently become a target of an eco-terrorist, Sloan and her motley crew quickly sense this is something more than just an irate “tree hugger.” Someone is covering up something major, and once again, Sloan can’t stop the nagging voice telling her the clues are pointing them in the wrong direction. But will Sloan’s “leap before you look” mentality cost her everything she’s worked so hard to achieve...could this be the case that takes it all away... including her life?

Andrew Mayne and this series are quickly becoming one of my favs! Please note that while this is book 3, it is written to be standalone. The cast of characters in the UIU play so well against each other, and Sloan’s snarky inner monologue is fun-tastic! If Netflix is looking for a new series/movie to pick up, I hope someone puts these books in their hands! Loved and highly recommend!

*Sharing what I love,
Veronica*

A Treacherous Trade (The Fiona Mahoney Mysteries #2)

Kerrigan Byrne

Oliver-Heber Books

Kindle Edition

08YNBYRKY

☆☆☆☆

“Grief had driven me to the brink of madness...I was convinced of that now...And blood had brought me back...”

Fiona Mahoney thought nothing could hurt her more than having her best friend become a victim of the infamous Jack the Ripper. But she was wrong...so very wrong. While seeking vengeance against the dastardly villain, she sets a mark on herself, and in the process discovers a secret about her

dearest love so dark that she fears she will never be able to feel alive again. Falling into a state of depression, Fiona welcomes the opportunity to try to embrace her inner detective skills and once again seek out her nemesis.

Cloaking herself in the costume of a prostitute in one of the brothels, Fiona begins hunting for answers on who is poisoning the working girls in the establishment. But will her disguise draw unwanted attention? Will the Devil himself come knocking on her door? Is she prepared to play his game till the very end?

Picking up from the ending of the first installment of the “Fiona Mahoney” series, Kerrigan Byrne once again weaves a thrilling whodunit with an interesting cast of characters. Fiona not only finds herself the possible next victim, but is drawn into a twisted love triangle between three of the most unlikely men. While I detest cliffhangers, this book does conclude the mystery, but will leave you wanting more. No spoilers! Would recommend and look forward to the next installment!

*Sharing what I love,
Veronica*

***Capital City
Author Event
Hosted by
Michelle Sewell
Randy Sewell
Tammie Smith***

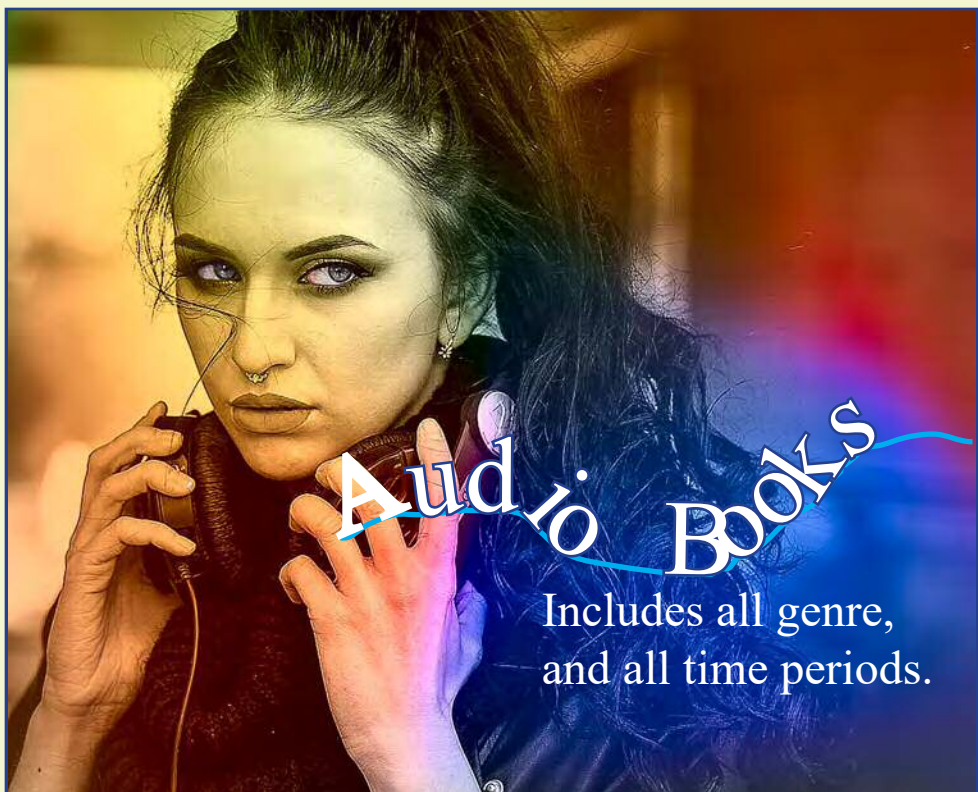
***May 20-21, 2022
Montgomery, AL***

Meet multi-genre author
Pamela Ackerson



***Facebook.com
CapitalCityAuthorEvent***





The Fastest Way To Fall

Denise Williams

Narrated by N'Jameh Camara
and Teddy Hamilton

Penguin Audio 11
hrs. and 22 min.
B08WDZ8J5W

★★★★★



Britta Colby aspires to write for her company's lifestyle website. She's assigned to write about her experiences with a new body-positive fitness app, offering personal coaching. Initially focused on writing, she enjoys her exercise routines and how they make her feel.

FitMe app CEO Wes Lawson has achieved the financial security he's longed for since childhood. But, overwhelmed by family issues and a breakup, he feels out of sorts, isolated, and unfulfilled. So he starts coaching again and instantly clicks with Britta on FitMe. His daily messages with her become a daily bright spot. Britta comes to rely on Wes. Their friendship—harmless flirtation—moves offline to texting. It's tricky for them to resist the shared connection and fiery chemistry and remain professional when working out and running. The more time they

spend together, the deeper their connection, and the faster they fall for each other. But how can any relationship last when forbidden and unshared secrets exist?

Camara's and Hamilton's flawless narration excellently tell Britta's and Wes's story with distinct voices for each character, capturing personalities and moods. Perfectly matched narration and prose will have readers laughing, crying, and swooning. The narrators delightfully relate Britta's and Wes' sweet and funny interactions as they become friends, steamy and passionately as lovers, and expressively emotional while supporting one another through intense, challenging moments—adding to both character and story development. Their vibrant, emotional narration style brings Williams' larger-than-life characters and beautiful novel to life with narration that draws readers so quickly and deeply into the novel that it's over before they're ready to part with the characters.

William's vivid description and writing style and relatable and likable characters invest readers in the characters and their journey. Wes is drawn to the whole of Britta, loving, accepting her mind, body—as is. The best thing about *The Fastest Way to Fall* is how much he adores and wants to be with

Affaire de Coeur

Britta and how they balance, support, and help each other heal and support each other's dreams. *The Fastest Way To Fall* is a sweet, steamy, funny, insightful, poignant, and sexy romance, exploring themes of body positivity, self-esteem/self-love, finding your soulmate, chasing your dreams, forgiveness, and family.

Lacy Hill

Smooth as Silk (Good Southern Women #2)

Alicia Hunter Pace

Narrated by Courtney Patterson
Dreamscape Media

9 hrs. and 25 min.

B09R2VM1L6

★★★★

A driven perfectionist, Hyacinth Dawson dreams of her bridal shop on the reality TV show *All Dressed in White*. Hyacinth is unprepared when impulsive Scottish defenseman Robbie McTavish, wanders into her shop—and life—like a whirlwind, upon seeing a bride wearing the wrong dress. Hyacinth's dream comes true after a video of Robbie's antics goes viral. The show's producers will film at her shop only if Robbie is involved. Robbie brings chaos, reminders of her unstable childhood, and confusing emotions into Hyacinth's well-ordered life. Robbie is a straightforward, funny, down-to-earth guy. His tendency to rush in and act without thinking makes Hyacinth crazy. A list-making, contingency-forming planner, she needs to be in control. They're total opposites drawn together by a strong attraction.

Pace's colorful description and outstanding development of her characters make them and their lives relatable. Patterson's vibrant narration exudes Southern charm, vividly bringing Pace's novel to life. Patterson's voice is a perfect fit for Pace's characters—especially Robbie and Hyacinth—with her affinity for accents. Patterson marvelously narrates Robbie's Scottish brogue, accent, and personality so flawlessly listeners forget she's the sole narrator without a male counterpart for Robbie's

Audiobooks

Icebreaker

A.L. Graziadei

Narrator Tom Picasso)

RB Media

Audiobook

B08W41KXT1

★★★★★



Tom Picasso wonderfully narrates A.L. Graziadei's riveting debut *Icebreaker*.

Expected to be the first NHL draft pick, Mickey "Terzo" James III, comes from a hockey legacy. Terzo's nemesis/teammate Jaysen "Cauler" Caulfield is attractive, annoying, and his direct competition for number one. An introvert, Terzo avoids the spotlight, didn't choose hockey for himself, and is overwhelmed by the pressure. On the other hand, Cauler, a Black player without Terzo's advantages who chose to learn to play hockey and started late, is extroverted, loves the spotlight, and thrives on competition/pressure. However, the most significant difference is that Terzo struggles with self-doubt, anxiety, and depression, affecting his gameplay, love of hockey, schoolwork, and quality of life. Being teammates with Cauler may be the worst—or best—thing to happen to Terzo's hockey and life.

Picasso perfectly captures Terzo's personality, headspace, isolation, confusion, and weariness that Cauler breaks through with relentless teasing and skill—his very presence. His narration for Cauler softens when alone with Terzo. Despite tonal shifts between hilarious, melancholy, sexy, and angry, Picasso's narration using Terzo's melancholy monotone stays consistent. He deftly varies his narration, giving other characters distinct voices. His skill with accents is spot-on.

Lacy Hill

and Hyacinth's dual narration. Patterson's narration for Hyacinth is emotionally intense and powerful, capturing her high-strung, prickly, driven, uptight personality and the tough façade, protecting her fragile heart. When she goes into a hysteric worry spiral, Patterson's voice is frantic with a flurry of emotion.

Emotional, sweet, and hilarious, *Smooth as Silk* is a thoroughly entertaining, fast-paced listen.

Lacy Hill

White Boyfriend

LeeSha McCoy

Narrated by Jordan Frazer

Bookouture

8 hrs. and 50 min.

978-1803140452

★★★★★

Nikki is focused on pleasing her parents and winning their approval, missing out on living her own life. When her "perfect boyfriend" dumps her, she feels like a failure. Her best friends encourage her to date and open herself to new experiences. Embarking on a journey of self-discovery, she goes with the flow, meeting Mike, the first white man to whom she's been attracted. Can Nikki find the perfect man if she doesn't know herself first?

A workaholic planner, Nikki's a strong, independent, Black woman with a positive outlook on life. Unfortunately, she's a people pleaser who rarely does fun things that make her happy. Mike is a free spirit who lives only for today and not caring what people think. He's a calming presence who balances and supports Nikki, encouraging her to take risks.

Frazier's lively, emotional narration perfectly complements McCoy's humorous, sexy, and emotional narrative exploring self-discovery and interracial dating. She brilliantly brings Nikki's story to life with distinct voices for each character, capturing their personalities, moods, and emotions. Frazier's narration for Nikki and her friends is excellent and also good for the men. Her accents are superb.

McCoy's colorful description, relatable and nicely developed characters, and wonderfully written scenes draw you in quickly. Nikki's relationships and conversations with her friends feel authentic, and how her friends support her resonates. Nikki's and Mike's banter and interactions are sweet, funny, intimate, and sexy. McCoy's characters confront interracial dating issues and stereotypes head-on. The ending may disappoint some readers but suits Nikki's evolution.

White Boyfriend is a funny, sweet, insightful, and engaging novel about a woman's journey of discovering who she is and what she wants out of her life, free from others' expectations and control.

Lacy Hill



Abandoned in Death (In Death series Book 54)

J.D. Robb

St. Martin's Press

Hardcover

978-1250278210

★★★★★

A corpse is found on a park bench. There's a note on the body. Written in crayon in childish handwriting, it reads, "Bad Mommy!" Lieutenant Eve Dallas and Detective Peabody are called to the scene.

A missing person report was filed for Lauren, the dead woman, ten days ago. Several other women who resemble Lauren are also missing. Eve and her team get to work.

One minute Mary Kate was walking home from her ex's bar. The next she's waking up in a windowless basement chained to a cot. An old man comes in. In a child's voice, he says that this time she will be a good mommy and take care of him. If she doesn't, he'll leave and never come back just like she left him. A few days later Mary Kate hears a woman scream. She

begins yelling for help. The door to her prison crashes open, and the old man bursts in holding a bloody knife. Mary Kate realizes that she must play along with the man's delusions until she can escape. Mary Kate begins acting like she's the man's mommy.

Will Eve be able to find the missing women before the killer decides that they're bad mommies too?

This is the latest in an awesome series that can be read alone. It's a fantastic book!

Sheila Griffin

Aspects

John M. Ford

Tor Books

Hardcover

978-1250269034

★★

Lord Varic is a member of parliament. Lady Longlight has a request to make of them. Varic tries to guide her on how to present

her request and give it the best chance of success. Longlight doesn't listen and her request is denied. She misses her train home and Varic comes to her rescue. They wind up sleeping together.

Varic invites Longlight to a house party at his good friend's country home. They spend the next few days falling in love. One of Varic's closest friends falls into a coma. Varic must leave immediately to go to the man's side. He doesn't even stop to say goodbye to Longlight. Even if Varic hadn't departed in such a boorish manner, how could a relationship between him and Longlight ever work? The lands they own are on opposite sides of the country. So marriage would not combine their properties. Neither of them is willing to give up their ancestral homes and roles. Longlight has only known Varic for a few days. Why is she so heartbroken?

Aspects is the unfinished final work of John M. Ford, a man whom many considered to be one of the greatest SF and fantasy authors of his time. There is beautiful prose and masterful worldbuilding—two things that this reviewer doesn't care about at all. Sadly, there is very little plot, leaving this

reader disappointed. Only rabid fans of this author should expect to enjoy this book.

Sheila Griffin

The Bone Orchard

Sara A. Mueller

Tor Books

Hardcover

978-1250776945

★★★★1/2

The Emperor conquered Mistress Charm's country many years ago. He brought her to the capital and placed a mindlock in Charm's brain. Mindlocks ensure complete obedience from the people whose brains they have been implanted in. Any deviation from the restrictions programmed into the mindlocks causes excruciating pain. If the behavior continues it will eventually kill the mindlocked person.

Then the Emperor installed Charm as the madam of his brothel, The Orchard House. The Orchard House has a very unusual method of obtaining prostitutes. First, bones are harvested from the bone trees in the brothel's orchard. These bones are then placed in growth tanks. In time, a fully formed woman is born.

Over the years the Emperor has come to trust Charm. One evening she's suddenly called to the palace. He's dying. The Emperor removes all the restrictions Charm's mindlock has imposed. In their place, he leaves just one command, discover which of the Emperor's sons are behind his murder. The future of the empire rests in Charm's hands. If she is successful, her mindlock will disengage and Charm will be free.

The Bone Orchard is a very interesting book. It's also a confusing one. It is the author's debut novel but it reads as if it were a continuation of a series. Nonetheless, it is an outstanding book.

Sheila Griffin

Comeuppance Served Cold

Marion Deeds

Tor/Macmillan Publishing

E-Book 978-1250811081

Paperback 978-1250811073

★★★★

In this historical fantasy, set in 1929 Seattle, magic, fairies, and shape-shifters are a common part of everyday life. Yet, a sadder side of human nature, there are those who want to eliminate anyone "different," and those who want to use the skills of the magic folk for their own enrichment or power.

Dolly White is, for all appearances, an herbalist with no magic of her own but an extensive knowledge of herbs and various magical devices. She insinuates herself into a prestigious family in the guise of a companion for a rebellious daughter. But there is more to Dolly than meets the eye as the con artist works to take advantage of this influential family. Is Dolly out for her own gain, or something more?

Dolly faces life-threatening situations as she becomes more involved in the lives of the people who help her, which is outside her normal method of operation. But Dolly also tries to make sure unsavory people get the comeuppance they deserve.

The story is unique and interesting with an uncertain outcome that will keep the reader guessing.

Hannah Rowan

The Echo Man

Sam Holland

Crooked Lane Books

Kindle Edition

B098PW2NRL

★★★★

"Don't imagine psychopaths to be monsters with horns. They're not...they're well camouflaged most of the time...that's why they fool you so easily."—Michael Faust, *Crapitalism*

Detectives Cora Elliott and Noah Deakin begin their grisly search for the serial killer given the moniker "The Echo Man," named so for having echoing the m.o. of past infamous killers such as Manson, Kemper and Dahmer. Will Elliott and Deakin discover who is behind the murders, or will the body count continue to rise as *The Echo Man* pays tribute killer by killer?

WOOOOWZA! If fast-paced, gruesome kills and high body counts are your m.o. for thrillers, you'll not be disappointed in Sam Holland's debut novel! The Echo Man is not for the faint of heart and will most likely keep you looking over your shoulder and sleeping with the lights on after reading! Would recommend to fans of this genre!

Sharing what I love,

Veronica

Kundo Wakes Up (Part of: The Gurkha and the Lord of Tuesday)

Saad Z. Hossain

Tor

Trade Paperback

978-1250823922

★★1/2

Nearly two years ago, Kundo's wife left him a note saying that she was leaving. Then she disappeared without a trace. He hired a hacker named Hassem to find her. Several months pass and there's been no word from Hassem, Kundo goes to Hassem's apartment to get an update.

The building Hassem lives in is full of people with no money. Government handouts are the only thing between them and starvation. One of these people is Hassem's next-door neighbor, Fara. She tells Kundo that the hacker moved out months ago. Hassem asked her to give Kundo a letter if he showed up looking for answers. The letter said that Hassem had figured out

Booty

what happened to Kundo's wife, but Hassem decided not to tell him where she is. Hassem also told Kundo not to try to find her.

As Kundo digs into Hassem's files, it becomes apparent that his wife's disappearance has something to do with the virtual reality game she played. He isn't enough of a gamer to be able to figure it out, but Fara is. Kundo bribes her to help him. Fara's findings reveal an unbelievable option for both of them.

Kundo Wakes Up is set in the same world as one of the author's previous books, but it is not a sequel. It

can be read alone. Maybe reading that book would have made this story more enjoyable. The book was confusing and not interesting.

Sheila Griffin

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J.D. Robb

St. Martin's Press

Hardcover

978-1250278210

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like she left him.

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Will Eve be able to find the missing women before the killer decides that they're bad mommies too?

This is the latest in an awesome series. It can be read alone. It's a fantastic book!

Sheila Griffin

The Best Kept Secret (Smokejumper #3)

Tawna Fenske

Entangled Publishing LLC

Mass Market

978-1649370303

★★★★★

Sweet and nurturing, Nyla

Franklin is a natural-born nurse who is driven to help others. She discovered that keeping secrets is more trouble than it's worth. Since then, she's been unable to keep secrets. Valiant, thoughtful, and kind smokejumper pilot Leo Sayre always does what's right and has spent his adult life putting everyone in his life first, sacrificing his desires, dreams, and needs. The person with whom he feels most comfortable letting down his guard and sharing his true thoughts and feelings about his life, dreams, and future plans is Nyla, his best friend. She's reliable, intelligent, and funny, but the last person with whom he would share his biggest secret. Unfortunately, a drug sensitivity/reaction to pain meds postsurgery causes him to reveal a secret to Nyla when she comes to check on him. Sharing this massive secret changes everything between Nyla and Leo. Growing even closer, new feelings of attraction and emotions are suddenly unleashed, and a sexual and romantic relationship between them feels inevitable given their closeness, shared interests, etc.

Fenske's intriguing characters and lively storytelling draw readers in, investing them in the characters and story. Nyla's and Leo's relationship and how the secret's revelation sparks an evolution in how they see and interact with each other is wonderfully written. Fenske excellently develops her characters' relationships. Nyla's and Leo's is emotionally and sexually intense, rich with intimacy, well-balanced, and healing for both. However, when the wall keeping their attraction at bay comes down, things get hot, heavy, and seriously steamy. Fenske's narrative and description are vibrant.

On the surface, *The Best Kept Secret* by Tawna Fenske explores the impact an accidentally revealed secret has on two best friends' relationship. Digging deeper, Fenske explores the motivations for keeping secrets, how secrets never stay that way forever, and the devastation keeping secrets can cause. It's a quick and entertaining read featuring a nice mix of humor, steam, angst, and sweet and sexy banter.

Lacy Hill

Late!

The Good Girl's Guide to Rakes (Last Chance Scoundrels #1)

Eva Leigh

Avon

Mass Market

978-0063086272

★★★★★



Eva Leigh's *The Good Girl's Guide to Rakes*' Kieran Ransome must find a respectable wife or be disinherited following a scandal. How can he when he's unaccepted in respectable society? Carrying the weight of her family's social status as *nouveau riche*, society darling Celeste Kilburn feels trapped in a gilded cage, longing to escape and experience adventure and excitement. She's desperate to experience more of life before a forced engagement to satisfy her father's social-climbing, approval-seeking desires. So, when Kieran requests her help, Celeste agrees to introduce him to the proper social circles if he shows her London's scandalous side. Kieran escorts Celeste to wild fêtes, rowdy gaming hells, and sensual art salons while she affords him access to proper teas, musical recitals, and garden parties. Spending time together frees the sparks of their attraction to blossom from desire into deeper emotions. Unfortunately, someone discovers their midnight adventures, jeopardizing Celeste's freedom and reputation.

Leigh's enchanting language, vivid description, spellbinding storytelling, meticulous worldbuilding, and strong-willed and relatable characters she skillfully develops and organically evolves draw readers into her novel. Scenes with Celeste and Kieran sharing their worlds have complexity and emotion as they reveal themselves to each other, discovering truths of who they are or could be. Fearless, intelligent, adventurous Celeste seeks freedom to make her own choices. Kieran fights his attraction to Celeste, believing he's wrong for her. Celeste has crushed on him for years. To the world, Kieran's an inveterate scoundrel rogue. But Celeste sees all he hides from the world. A man of depth who's perceptive, generous, wise.

With compelling characters, an absorbing story, angst, sweet and sexy banter, and steamy and sizzling hot love scenes, *The Good Girls Guides to Rakes* is a mesmerizing and profound romance. Leigh insightfully explores how families don't see children for who they are and put them into boxes, trapping them in roles that don't fit. She also explores young women's lack of agency and independence and its impact on their identity and happiness.

Lacy Hill

Rosebud

Paul Cornell

Tor

Trade Paperback

978-1250765390

★ 1/2

Five sentient digital beings have been aboard the spaceship, *Rosebud*, for more than three hundred years. One day they spot a black spherical object that doesn't reflect light. There are

no surface details visible. As the ship approaches the sphere, its communication systems abruptly shut down. With no directive from their bosses, the crew decides to retreat.

That's when the craziness begins. Quin, one of *Rosebud*'s crew, routinely backs their memories up to a hard drive that isn't connected to the ship's log. They know for a fact that the ship has just encountered the sphere. They distinctly remember approaching

the sphere. The rest of the crew is just as adamant that the sphere has been following *Rosebud* for days. The crew remembers spending those days discussing whether or not they should approach the sphere. The ship's logs agree with the majority. Quin's memories continue to be different than those of the others on board.

How can the *Rosebud* crew proceed when someone or something is changing not only the group's memories but the ship's log as well.

This reads as if it is part of a larger story. But it's not. It's just a confusing and seemingly pointless novella.

Sheila Griffin

The Rake Gets Ravished (The Duke Hunt #2)

Sophie Jordan

Avon

Mass Market

978-0063035676

★★★★★



Mercy Kittinger sneaks into Silas Masters' private rooms at his gaming hell to steal the debt voucher for her family home that her brother lost gambling at cards. When Silas catches her, she surprises and seduces him—thoroughly taking and ravishing him—then sneaks from Silas' bed at dawn. She then haunts his dreams. But, he cannot allow her theft to go without payback. However, once Silas finds her at her farm and sees her life and all the burdens she assumes, he views her differently. Working side-by-side with her on the farm gives them time to know each other beyond their passionate night. Desire inevitably deepens into more intense feelings.

A spinster and wallflower caring for her sister, managing, and working on the family farm, Mercy's resilient, courageous, and selfless. She's willing to do whatever it takes to protect her family. But for one night,

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she'd been free to be someone else—a sultry, seductress taking pleasure just for herself. Intelligent, wealthy, and powerful, Silas is an irresistible rogue with a traumatic childhood that haunts him and makes him who he is. Mercy's an admirable underdog. But the road ahead isn't easy, saddled with a selfish, mercenary, man-child brother holding all the power and a younger sister eager to test her boundaries. Likewise, Silas' backstory and honorable character make him sympathetic and likable, especially his respect and support for Mercy.

Jordan deftly develops Mercy and Silas, who evolve naturally within the novel's progression, even using their love scenes for character and story development. Mercy's and Silas's chemistry, interactions, and love scenes

are beautifully written and sensual—rich with emotion and vivid with descriptive details. Jordan also explores the harmful impact traditional wealth transfers to male heirs have on female relatives and its implicit unfairness.

Featuring a captivating mix of family drama, angst, suspense, and sexy, emotional, off-the-charts sizzling hot, steamy romance, *The Rake Gets Ravished* is an entertaining historical romance that lives up to its title.

Lacy Hill

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