

# *Affaire de Coeur*

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July/August, 2022

***AdC has the spotlight:  
Pamela Ackerson***

***Kat Martin***



## **Book Conferences are Alive and Well**

See AdC's coverage of two recent  
conferences:

The Flirty in Tampa Book Event  
and  
Capital City's Author Event

**Reviews  
Reviews  
Reviews**



# Time Travel Magic and Adventure

An old family heirloom, a medallion of uncounted age, promptly absconded by a magpie. The magpie flies from the window leaving a single feather. Jeremy, not happy with the theft, promptly chases after the magpie. The feather transports him and the magpie to the 1600's, the days of King James and his pursuit of witches.

A thrilling adventure you will never forget...



ASIN: B08NW6BM6Z  
ISBN-13: 978-1647501525



July/August, 2022

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*July/August, 2022*

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• Lani Roberts • Hannah Rowan • Veronica Westfield

# Dear QWERTY

by Pamela Ackerson

## Graphic Book Images, Ugh!

### Part One



own ad, and this is where we're going with this article. Hopefully, I'm going to help you stop saying, "Ugh".

First we'll start with digital ads. You may have to do some digging to figure out where your commands are on the program you're using, especially since you may not have the same program I use.

Dpi is dots per inch.

This is a 72 dpi image, jpg, at 3 x 2.

\



Hopefully, by the end of this article you'll have a better grip on understanding book graphics, images, and the difference for digital and print ads.

The language for photo programs are similar. You don't need to have the knowledge to create an ad. That's what graphic artists are for, that's why you pay them to create a beautiful cover, and/or ad. But, you should know what you're receiving and how it can be used.

There are multiple formats: jpg, jpeg, jfif, gif, bmp, png, tiff, and pdf to name a few. If you want to know what format your image is, you can hover over the image on your computer and it will tell you what the format is, or item type, and dimension (300 x 450). It may or may not tell you the bit size, for example, 1mg.

As an author, there are many times when you want to create your

Compacting the images helps save space on your computer but doesn't keep the picture at the quality needed. This image will look a little better in the digital issue. However, it doesn't do the image justice.

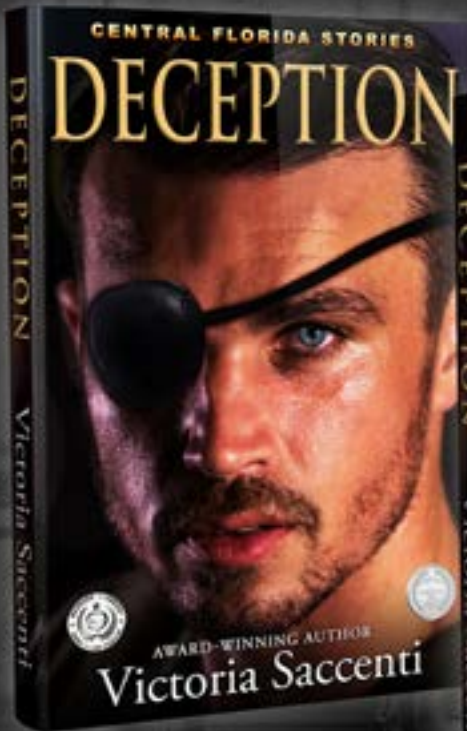
Below is the same image, 72 dpi, jpg, at 15 x 10. The size is manually adjusted for pdf to 3 x 2 without creating pixelation. When you resize manually, it compresses the picture avoiding pixilation.





# CENTRAL FLORIDA STORIES

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Victoria Saccenti.*

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Saccenti  
THE ESSENCE OF ROMANCE

[victoriasaccentiwrites.com](http://victoriasaccentiwrites.com)

When I say manually adjusted, I have highlighted the image and used the size-square with my cursor to shrink the picture. I didn't resize it in a photo program.

How can you make your images look sharp and professional? I prefer jpg or png when I create ads for myself and for the magazine, regardless of whether it is for digital or print.

Resizing incorrectly can effect color, pixilation, and distortion. For digital ads, I prefer using 150 to 225 dpi. Depending on the photo program you use depends on how you will resize your image. The main reason why I prefer the 150 to 225 is because text tends to pixelate more than a picture. If I raise the dpi from 72 or 96 to 150 or 225, it

avoids text pixelation.

I hope this helped you understand the use of different images for digital and print ads. I'm happy to answer any questions. Email me at [DearQwerty@adcmagazine.com](mailto:DearQwerty@adcmagazine.com)

with any questions you may have.

Is there an article you'd liked covered in Dear Qwerty,? Let us know. We're here to help!



# *The Spotlight Is Shining On ...*

New York Times bestselling author Kat Martin, a graduate of the University of California at Santa Barbara, currently resides in Missoula, Montana, with Western author husband, L. J. Martin.

More than seventeen million copies of Kat's books are in print, and she has been published in twenty foreign countries. Fifteen of her recent novels have taken top-ten spots on the New York Times Bestseller List, and her novel, BEYOND REASON, was recently optioned for a feature film. Kat's new novel, THE LAST GOODNIGHT, a Romantic Thriller, will be released in hard-cover on October 26<sup>th</sup> and is the start of her new "Blood Ties" series.

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

**KM:** I started writing historical, now I write contemporary romantic thrillers.

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

**K.M.:** I'm plot oriented, but all of my characters have a strong moral code. They are courageous, loyal, and smart. Of course they all have different backgrounds and personalities, which is what, hopefully, makes them interesting.

**AdC:** *What is your favorite quote?*

**K.M.:** "Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. 'Press on' has solved and always will solve the problems of the human race." Calvin Coolidge.

It's a much longer quote but that is the important part. It's posted above my desk.

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

**K.M.** When I don't feel like writing, I do promo work, get on social media and connect with readers. A real day off is rare unless we are traveling, which I love to do.



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

**K.M.:** I pretty much stay where I'm happy. In business, I have taken a lot of risks, some paid off, some didn't. It's part of life, something you have to do to succeed.

**AdC:** *Pass on some words of wisdom, please, to aspiring authors.*

**K.M.** Don't give up. No matter what anyone tells you, keep fighting for your dream. Work hard and learn the craft of writing, and just don't give up.

**AdC:** *Please provide your contact information so that fans can reach you.*

**K.M.** My contact information is as follows:

Personal web page: [www.katmartin.com](http://www.katmartin.com)

Twitter: @katmartinauthor

Facebook: KatMartin/Author



NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

## A BLOOD TIES NOVEL

There is no escape  
from the lure of  
treasure once it fastens  
upon your soul.  
Can Gage and Abby  
survive long enough  
to find it?



June 2022

## Meet *AdC* Reviewer, Author, and Jersey Girl, Hannah Rowen



**H**annah Rowen is a Jersey girl through and through. Former reporter, published author, mom and grandma, and most of all an avid reader since as far back as she can remember. Hannah is currently working in an assisted living facility and loving every minute. In her “spare time” (Ha!) she enjoys swimming and taking long walks with her husband. Hannah loves to travel to new places as often as possible. She is proud to have the

privilege of reviewing books for *Affaire de Coeur*.

My reading preferences are wide-ranging. Contemporary romance, mystery, suspense, women’s fiction.

My books were *Til Death and Beyond*, one of the original e-books. A paranormal romance.

*Man Wanted* (I didn’t choose the title), a contemporary romance from Kensington’s Romance Gems line.

And “Can’t Buy Me Love” in the *Last Chance Beach* anthology published by a group of former Gems authors.



## Sneak Peek

Excerpt

### Kat Martin's The Last Mile

Heart pounding, Abby raced for the nearest house and started furiously pounding on the door. It took a while for the lock to turn and the door to swing open. Elderly Mr. Godwin appeared in his bathrobe, his gray hair sticking straight up, his eyes groggy with sleep.

Abby darted into the house. "Close the door, Mr. Godwin! Hurry! And lock it!"

The old man swiftly closed the door, his watery blue eyes wide. "Abigail, what's happened? Are you okay? What's going on?"

Abby's hand went to the bruises forming around her throat. "A man broke...broke into my house. He tried...tried to kill me." She sucked in a deep breath of air. "I-I need to call the police."

"Please have a seat, Ms. Holland." Gage Logan was incredibly handsome, with dark brown hair long enough to brush his collar, and a solid jaw roughened by the faint shadow of an afternoon beard. His eyes, an amazing shade of blue against his darkly suntanned skin, carried a fierce gleam of intelligence.

"Thank you for seeing me," Abby said to the big man standing in front of her. She took a seat across from him as he returned to his desk.

Internationally famous explorer, Gage Logan, was thirty-five years old, born on a ranch west of Denver, but left for college when he was nineteen to travel the world.

He rested an elbow on the desk, his shirt sleeves rolled up over muscular forearms. "I understand you have a proposition for me."

Her mind went straight to the bedroom. The man had sex appeal and plenty of it. Add to that, she had been following his exploits ever since her grandfather had mentioned him several years back and had begun to imagine him as having almost super human abilities.

Abby smiled. "A proposition, yes. I want you to help me find a treasure. That's what you do, right? You find all sorts of missing things, historical artifacts, sunken



ships, missing airplanes."

"My partner and I tend to specialize, but basically, yes, that's what we do."

"I want you to help me find my grandfather's treasure."

Logan leaned back in his chair. "That was in the message you left on my phone. Interesting, but not very informative. What sort of treasure are you looking for?" Abby's smile widened. "Gold, Mr. Logan, at least two hundred million dollars' worth."

Logan's expression didn't change, the gigantic sum clearly not impressing him. "I assume you have some reason to believe you know where to find it, or at least have some clue as to where it's supposed to be located."

"I have a map, Mr. Logan. It was willed to me when my grandfather died. In the past few months, I've been making preparations to find it, but I need your help."

"It's just Gage, and you realize most treasure maps are fake, even the old ones."

"Not this one. My grandfather was an explorer, much like you. His name is King Farrell. I believe you may have heard of him."

Logan's intense blue eyes sharpened. "King Farrell was your grandfather?"

"That's right, my mother's father. His travels kept





# Duty, Friendship, or Love?

Sterling was honored to serve his country, but his contract is up, and he's ready to come home to her.

He is a damaged man. The scars of war will heal with Abby's help.

And then...there was Phil. The ex Abby can't, or won't let go. Things have changed.

Or have they?



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him away a lot, but whenever he was home, we spent as much time together as possible. King died three months ago.” Abby blocked a fresh surge of emotion. “He left the map to me in his will, along with the house he owned here in Denver.”

“Go on.”

“Receiving his bequest gave me a choice. I could keep the house and forget the treasure. Or sell the house and use the money to finance an expedition. I sold the house.”

One of his dark brown eyebrows inched up. “You’re that sure the map he left you is real?”

“I know what people say about him. That all those years of searching for the Devil’s Gold drove him over the edge. They said he never produced any real evidence the treasure existed. They called it King’s Folly. They said he was a fool. But my grandfather was no fool.”

Gage leaned back in his chair, steepling his fingers.

“So you’re completely certain it’s real.”

“I was fairly sure when I found out he’d left it to me in his will. After someone tried to kill me for it, I’m entirely certain.”

Gage Logan watched Abigail Holland walk out of his office. She was an interesting mix of naivety and de-

termination, pretty, with a high forehead beneath a fringe of bangs, and a figure with just the right amount of curves. The most glorious red-gold hair he had ever seen hung in a single loose braid down her back.

Gage felt a twinge of attraction he didn’t want to feel. He thought of King Farrell and didn’t like the idea that someone wanted the map she’d inherited badly enough to break into her home and attack her. She’d moved out, she told him, and was taking precautions.

Gage just hoped it would be enough.

*Next Issue:  
Romantic Traveling to Maui  
and  
Relive the Bridgerton Experience—  
We had one.*



# *AdC Loves Conferences*

## This time we attended the .....

### **Flirty in Tampa Book Event June 4, 2022**

Flirty in Tampa 2022, formerly known as Tampa Indie Author Book Convention, was held at Hyatt House Airport Westshore in Tampa, Florida. Hosted by Virginia Lee Johnson, Eden Rose, Jolene Huber, and Janneke Wolbers, the event was a blast for readers and authors alike!

Our day started at 9 A.M. and ended at 4 P.M. The book signing opened its doors at noon for the VIPs and for the public at 1 pm. Raffle baskets were donated from authors. Donations from the raffle went to r-u-safe.org

Flirty in Tampa Merchandise was available for authors and readers.

Next year's event will be June 3rd, 2023, in Tampa, Florida, and will be held at Hyatt House Tampa Airport / Westshore.

Want to get some special time with the authors? Saturday, June 3rd, 2023, will hold a VIP/Author Meet and Greet Event along with the book signing. VIP tickets are required to attend the Early Access Event!

For more information go to [AnytimeAuthorPromotions.com](http://AnytimeAuthorPromotions.com)



*Hostess, Eden Rose*



*Flirty Tampa Book Signing*



*Hostess Jolene Huber*



# The Cedar Ridge Hills Time Travel Series

Hope is the light that guides through the darkest of times.

**Skies of Blue** - Hired as a tour guide in a haunted museum, Janet had no idea she'd find the peace she'd been desperately seeking.

**The House on Cedar Ridge** - Thalia, the museum curator, traveled through a portal beyond the crack in space and time where vengeance, witchcraft, and barbaric practices were the norm.



*Hostess, Virginia Johnson*



*Author, Lynessa Layne*



# That's Not All

## We also attended the .....

### *Capital City Author Event*

There were two days of incredible fun in Montgomery, Alabama, hosted by Tammie Smith, Michelle Sewell, and Randy Sewell with party and games on Friday, and a book signing event on Saturday with over eighty authors. A special donation raffle with proceeds going to the Montgomery Humane Society was held during the games, prizes, and raffles galore!



*He may look laid-back,  
but Randy Sewell takes  
care of business*



*The Capitol City Authors What a good lookin' group!*



Capital City 2

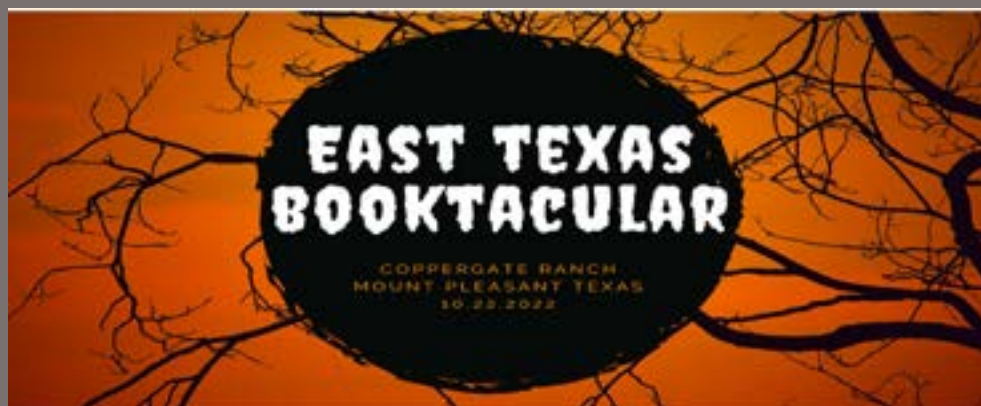


*Hostesses Mitchell Sewell (l) and  
Tammie Smith (r)*





*Hostess Tammie Smith with  
AdC's Pamela Ackerson*



## **East Texas Booktacular!**

**Coppergate Ranch in Mt Pleasant, TX  
October 22, 2022**

**Costumes are optional for fans & authors!  
VIP tickets -- \$10  
General admission -- \$5**

**[www.eventbrite.com/e/196281101057](http://www.eventbrite.com/e/196281101057)**

**[ETbooktacular.weebly.com](http://ETbooktacular.weebly.com)**



*Charity Parkerson*

**Let us know if you would like  
for us to come and cover your  
conference.  
We'll do our best to come.**



*Miranda Lynn*

## She's Always in the Spotlight

*We salute multi-talented Pamela Ackerson. Bestselling, award-winning author, Pamela Ackerson is a time travelling adventurer. She was born and raised in Newport, Rhode Island, where history is a way of life. She lives on the Space Coast of Florida, where everyone is encouraged to reach for the stars! When it's time to run away, she's a hop, skip, and jump from Disney World and fun-filled imagination and fantasy. She's a multi-genre author and writes time travel, westerns, Native American, historical fiction, nonfiction, WWII, inspirational, self-help marketing and advertising, personal and travel journals, and children's preschool/first reader books.*



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

**P.A.:** I love writing about strong characters that are imperfect, and have the same battles with life that every day people like us encounter.

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

**P.A.:** Yes, my latest series is the "Cedar Ridge Hills Museum" series. It started with a tour of the Ohio Reformatory, along with a few years of research and off I went! Thalia Jefferies is the new curator of a haunted museum. Exploring her new home, she's mysterious locked in an attic room and transported to another time when the museum was a sanatorium, hospital, and founding home.

**AdC:** *Favorite quote?*

**P.A.** "To multiply your happiness, divide it with others."

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

**P.A.** Gardening, playing the keyboard, Disney, St. Augustine, to name a few.

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

**P.A.** I love to read anything historical.

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

**P.A.** Attending book events. At first, I'm extremely uncomfortable and then, almost all the people who attend the events are so open and friendly, it ends up being the best!

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

**P.A.** I have two more events in 2022 and a couple planned for 2023:

Books at the Beach, Sept 9-11, 2022, St. Pete, FL  
East Texas Booktacular, October 21-22, 2022

Coppergate Ranch, Mount Pleasant, TX

In 2023: Book Obsessed Babes (Tentative—  
March 2023)

Flirty in Tampa – June 3<sup>rd</sup> 2023

Space Coast Book Lovers – Cape Canaveral in  
June 22 – 25<sup>th</sup> 2023.

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

**P.A.:** I'm a very positive person, self-motivated, and creative. Routine is my friend!

**AdC:** *Please give us the following contact information:*

**Personal web page** PamelaAckerson.net

Twitter @PamAckerson

Facebook.com/pam.ackerson.7



PAMELA ACKERSON

# SKIES OF BLUE







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## Across

6. The Oaks, Ascot, and the Epsom Derby are \_\_\_\_\_ races that began in the Regency era.
7. This part of the pig was considered a delicacy.
10. Not just a crisis of today, this drug was overindulged by the *ton*.
14. Napoleon's ultimate Battle of \_\_\_\_\_.
15. George IV was appointed this position—hence the name.
16. Her coronation ended the Regency period.
17. The “Ode” poet.
20. This author's book *Pride and Prejudice* was published in 1813.
21. A man in Regency era who was overly fastidious about his dress.
22. One of England's most famous authors was born during the Regency period.
23. Jeweler of the *ton* who had a spot in and upper class department store.
26. Leading poet of the Regency era and a peer of the realm.
27. Set the trends for men's fashion during the Regency period.
29. He was exiled to Elba.
30. Mary Shelly's book \_\_\_\_\_ was published in 1816.
32. \_\_\_\_\_ Gardens, a place to find ladies of the night.
33. Theatre where *A Christmas Carol* and other plays were performed.
34. The muffin man could be found on this lane.
35. This Duke held off the French in the Peninsular War.
39. Walter Scott's book \_\_\_\_\_ was published in 1819.
40. This river ran through it.

## Down

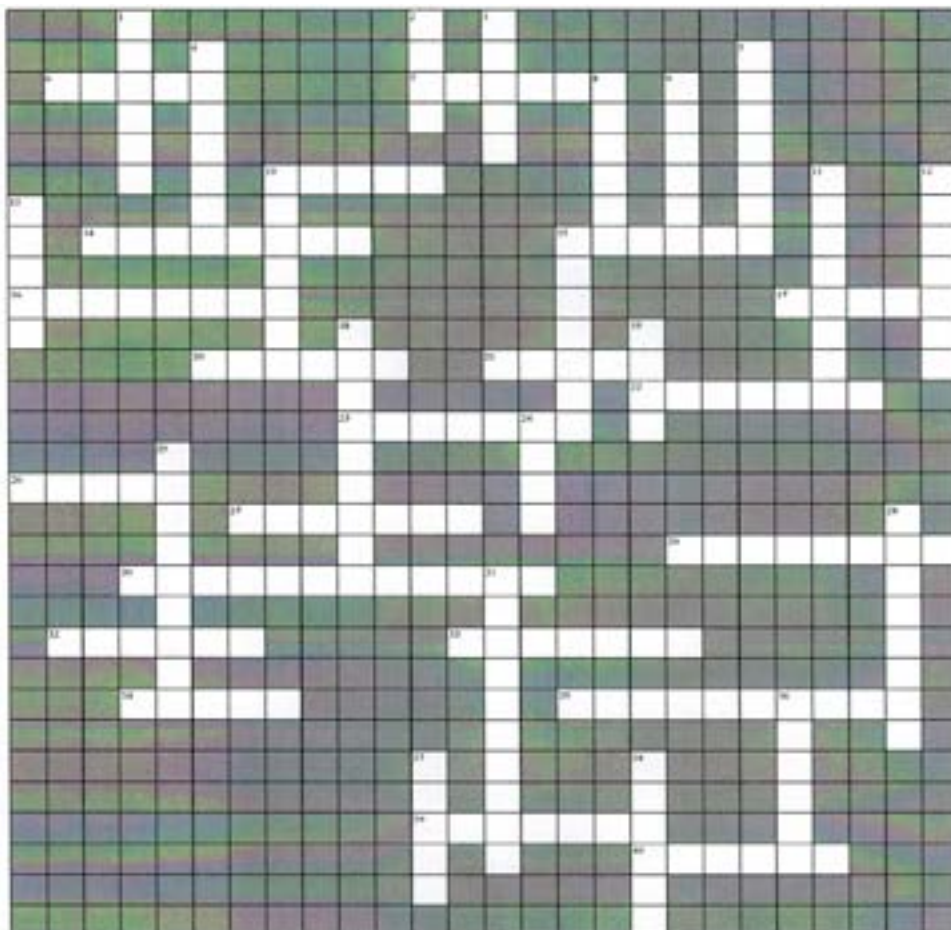
1. Classical Greek statues made of this medium and purchased by Lord Elgin, were brought to England.
2. A getaway for the wealthy also known as the “Spa” city.
3. The famous armless statue \_\_\_\_\_ de Milo was discovered in this era.

## The Regency Era

4. This famous London prison housed men, women, and children.
5. Gentlemen vs. players was a \_\_\_\_\_ match during Regency.
8. The waistline of a typical Regency dress.
9. Men were most likely to have their suits made on this street.
10. The Battle of New \_\_\_\_\_ took place in Louisiana.
11. This cheese on ice cream was the dish of the day.
12. A common accessory to carry when strolling through Kensington Park whether it rained or not.
13. This act prohibited the import and export of Africans for free labor. \_\_\_\_\_ Trade Act.
15. The social time period in England from 1810-1820.

18. The Alpine, the Hay, and the Poll are names of these clubs in England.
19. Members of the *ton* strolled through this, the largest park in London, for attention.
24. Leading architect of the Regency style.
25. Women dressing “commando” means without this garment.
28. In 1810 this official dress was described and designed for women and children who lost loved ones. Always black.
31. This revolution saw the transition from hand-made to machine made.
36. King \_\_\_\_\_ was too mad to rule during this time period.
37. British soldiers burned down this famous D.C. house in 1814.
38. This colorful place is famous for run-away weddings.

Answers on page 26





# 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 its 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](http://www.adcmagazine.com).

Authors,

We'd love to review your books! Are you brave enough for an honest review? If so, send it in at least three months before the pub date to [adcreviews@att.net](mailto:adcreviews@att.net)

**Bet on It**  
*Jodie Slaughter*  
**St. Martin's Griffin**  
Trade Paperback  
978-1250821829  
★★★★★

In Jodie Slaughter's *Bet on It*, Aja Owens and Walker Abbott make a bingosex pact, allowing them to satisfy their fierce sexual desire/thirst for each other. Though they agree to keep emotions out of it, Aja and Walker catch feelings because emotions won't be denied, especially when the connection/desire is this intense and powerful.

Aja first encounters the man of her dreams while having a panic attack in Piggly Wiggly's frozen foods section. To her surprise, her favorite bingo buddy introduces him as her estranged grandson. After one bingo game, she knows he will be a problem when she already has more than enough of those in her life. His grandmother and the diner's peach cobbler are all he cares for

in Greenbelt. After 10+ years, only his Gram could drag him back to the town holding bad memories of his childhood trauma and baggage. So he's counting down the days until her injuries heal and he can return to his real life. But that's before Aja, who changes everything in his life changes him.

From the opening scene, the characters and story draw you in. Slaughter's beautifully written exploration of Aja's and Walker's journey from strangers—living/struggling with anxiety/mental illness—to friends who make a bingosex pact to lovers who fall in love, despite themselves, grabs hold of the heart and mind. Her story is original, thoughtful, and full of emotion and heart, with fantastic pacing, excellent worldbuilding, vivid description, and colorful and lively dialogue and character interactions.

Slaughter wonderfully develops and evolves complex, likable, imperfect, and sympathetic characters through interactions infused with the full spectrum of emotions, shared experiences,



# Contemporary Romance

and pain that quicken and deepen the connection between them. Walker and Aja's sweet, funny, sexy, intimate, and emotional banter/interactions are among the novel's best moments. Additionally, their relationships, conversations, and interactions with friends and family are authentic, dynamic, and funny, offering insight into Aja and Walker.

Slaughter's portrayal of anxiety/mental illness and its impact on the characters' daily lives is nuanced and thought provoking. Her description of Walker and Aja's anxiety—panic, trauma, and PTSD—is vivid and visceral, making the reader feel like they are with Aja and Walker in those debilitating, emotional, frightening moments.

*Bet on It* is a sweet, unbelievably sexy, funny, steamy, emotional, compelling, and profoundly romantic novel.

Lacy Hill

## Honey and Spice

Bolu Babalola

William Morrow

Hardcover/E-Book

978-0063141483

★★★★★

Bolu Babalola's debut novel *Honey & Spice* is a fake dating romance with Black British college students.

Answering listeners' questions and offering advice on her popular radio show *Brown Sugar*, Kiki Banjo, a British-Nigerian student, overachiever, and relationship-evasion expert, keeps Whitewell University's African-Caribbean Society's women from falling into the mess of heartbreak and "situationships" with players. However, when filmmaker, player, and transfer student Malakai disrupts unity among campus women, Kiko vows to stop him before things get out of hand. But after personally denouncing him on *Brown Sugar*,

## The Bodyguard

Katherine Center

St. Martin's Press

Hardcover

978-1250219398

★★★★★



After devastating loss and personal betrayal, grounded executive protection agent (AKA bodyguard) Hannah Brooks is assigned to protect superstar movie actor Jack Stapleton in Katherine Center's *The Bodyguard*. While Hannah looks like a kindergarten teacher, she can kill with a ballpoint pen, dinner napkin, or a wine bottle opener. She desperately wants an assignment to Korea, anywhere outside the US, to escape her life! But instead, she's protecting Jack from a middle-aged, corgi breeding stalker.

Jack dropped from the public eye after a family tragedy. After his mom's illness, Jack must go home to be with her and his family at their Texas ranch. Hannah goes undercover, pretending she's Jack's girlfriend to hide the fact that he needs protection from a stalker. Hannah's used to protecting people and keeping her distance, but spending time with Jack/his family as his girlfriend is outside her comfort zone. The longer she's undercover, the more she learns about him and herself. Her heart's in danger because there's nowhere for her to run. Can she keep Jack safe without losing her heart? Can they safely protect their secrets without them blowing up in their faces?

Center's narrative and vibrant writing are richly detailed with emotion. She develops complex, imperfect, relatable characters whom you cannot help but love. Hannah excels as a bodyguard. However, she keeps aspects of herself tightly locked down. Jack's nothing like she expects. A down-to-earth, authentic sweetheart who's funny, charming, gentle, and sarcastic, Jack's haunted by trauma—a tragic accident and loss.

Though Hannah's determined to keep her usual distance from Jack, he breaks down her barriers. Their lives are different, but their closely held *personas*, hidden behind façades, are similar. They perfectly match, balancing each other, helping each other heal.

Exploring themes of family, self discovery, self esteem, hope, grief, loss, and trauma, *The Bodyguard* is a romantic, suspenseful, sweet, charming, and funny, well-plotted contemporary romance with surprising twists and turns and beautiful moments that sneaks up on your heart.

Lacy Hill

she kisses him publicly at a party. To redeem their reputations and protect their futures, Kiki and Malakai fake date each other while working together on a media studies project. After spending time with Malakai one-on-one, Kiki must rethink her prejudices about him. Can she risk opening her heart to Malakai?

This gorgeous novel will have readers laughing, crying, and feeling all the emotions! *Honey & Spice* draws

readers in from the first scene. Babalola deftly develops and evolves fascinating, fallible, relatable, likable, and larger-than-life characters.

Like Babalola's multilayered story, the interactions and connections among her characters are equally complex. Babalola seamlessly weaves current events and pop culture into their lives, the story, and the plot. She develops Malakai and Kiki's relationship through intellectually challenging

# Contemporary Romance

banter. Their attraction is intense and profound from the first meeting because it's sexual and intellectual.

A new adult fake dating, rivals-to-lovers romance, *Honey & Spice* is a funny, sweet, sexy, angsty, emotionally intense, steamy, romantic, and thoroughly captivating novel filled with wonderfully written Black love and friendship. Babalola brilliantly explores several themes and topics, including college life, student politics for Black students, romance and dating, self-discovery, Nigerian culture, racism, sexism, overcoming familial expectation and pressure to follow your own dreams, taking risks to open yourself up to love and relationships, and making peace with the past.

*Lacy Hill*

## Paradise Girls

*Sandy Gingras*

**St. Martin's Griffin**

Trade Paperback

978-1250816719

★★★★ 1/2

Mary Valley has been semi-engaged to her boss, Ron, for four years. And yet there's always some reason why the wedding must be postponed. This time it's actually going to happen. It has to—Mary has sold her condo. If Mary doesn't move in with Ron, she'll be homeless. Then Ron's ex shows up, and he decides to spend Christmas with her instead of with Mary. Mary finally realizes that Ron is never going to marry her. It's time to move on.

Mary books a vacation with her estranged daughter, CC, and her beloved granddaughter, Larkin. At the last minute, CC cancels. She and her boyfriend need some alone time. They are going on a cruise. Mary can babysit Larkin if she wants. Mary is thrilled! She hasn't seen the five year old in months.

Daniel Dayes's son was killed

## Undeniable

*Victoria Saccenti*

**Essence Publishing**

E-book

978-1736358986

★★★★



Arely Bernal's dreams had come true in the form of an invitation to the man of her dreams, Kurt Allendorf's, graduation party. He was her older brother's best friend, and she had been in love with him FOREVER! Kurt had always been a gentleman to her, patient when following them around, giving her an encouraging wink every now and then. Little did she know that Kurt had been captivated by her also, for a very long time. But she was his best friend's little sister.

Fast forward 16 years. Kurt has returned home from Afghanistan with a lot of baggage—walking with a cane and suffering nightmares from survivor's guilt. He is also the co-owner of Club Nexus, the exclusive BDSM club in his hometown of Spring Lake, Florida.

Arely has returned from her native Puerto Rico. She now has her dream job teaching second grade in Nashville, Tennessee. Suddenly, as she was leaving school for the weekend, Arely was snatched out of her car by a man wearing a black balaclava who said, "You scream. You're dead." When she wakes up in a cell occupied by other women, she thinks she's been kidnapped as part of a human trafficking ring. Only after overhearing her captors speaking in Spanish, does she learn that she is not part of the trafficking ring, but a "special order" from a member of her own family! After the women are rescued, everyone is sent home. Except Arely. She has no idea whom she can trust in Puerto Rico and has no family left in the United States. But she does have friends and contacts her childhood girlfriend in Spring Lake who immediately takes her in. Determined to get over her ordeal and get her life back on track, Arely starts looking for a job. Her friend Gabby suggests she apply for a job as a bartender at a special club she and her husband belong to. The club specializes in high-end security and vetting everyone who comes through their doors. She would be safe.

Kurt had not done much of anything since returning from deployment. He quit going to physical therapy and is doing nothing to help heal his leg because his survivor's guilt and depression told him he deserved to walk with a limp. Running out of reasons to sit home and do nothing, Kurt finally returns to his duties at the club including sitting in on interviews of applicants for jobs. Imagine his surprise to hear Arely's voice as he entered the room! Just like that, all his teenage fantasies about Nando's little sister came rushing back full force.

*Undeniable* is not a hard book to read and shouldn't scare off anyone who has no knowledge of BDSM or is curious. Arely's in trouble, through no fault of her own, and finds her only safe place is in the employ and arms of her old crush who just happens to be a Dom (Dominant), but not presently practicing the lifestyle. Ms. Saccenti takes the reader on an emotional, non-scary glimpse into the BDSM world without whips, chains, spankings or anything else that the imaginative mind can come up. It's a chance to see how the real BDSM world works—consensually—and not the way other books and movies portray the lifestyle. An excellent read, especially for the curious of this alternate lifestyle.

*Lani Roberts*



# Contemporary Romance

in Afghanistan last year. He is drowning in grief and just wants to be left alone. But a man's gotta eat. Daniel takes tourists on fishing charters. The trip with Mary and Larkin does not go well, to say the least. But there is something about Mary that eases Daniel's pain just a little. Can these two wounded people find a love that will heal them?

In addition to being a romance, this story delves into loneliness and brokenness. It's a really good book.

*Sheila Griffin*

## Royally Indecent

*Kelly Jamieson*

**Kelly Jamieson, Inc.**

E-book or Trade Paperback

978-1988600727

☆☆☆☆

Kelly Jamieson's *Royally Indecent* explores the polyamorous relationship between Chelsea Alderich, Ford Sullivan, and Prince Griffin Marlow of Eria.

Chelsea, a voting rights advocate, and Ford, a U.S. Attorney, meet when he rescues her from a bad first date. Chelsea feels an immediate spark, but he's out on a date with his boyfriend. From that night on, they quickly become best friends, then roommates. Even though it's pointless, Chelsea's attraction to him doesn't fade—it intensifies.

She starts dating and meets reluctant Prince Griffin at a charity gala. They spend all their time together, falling for each other. Unfortunately, Griffin's only in the U.S. temporarily. Because he must return to Eria to become King, a future between them is impossible. But he can't stop thinking about Chelsea.

Meanwhile, Ford's feelings for Chelsea unexpectedly deepen over time. But he starts suspecting she's dating someone, becoming jealous. When he comes home to their apartment and

meets her new boyfriend—Prince Griffin—he's no longer just jealous. He's infuriated.

Jamieson's narrative flows quickly with vivid description, authentic-sounding dialogue, an intriguing story, and likable characters. Griffin's backstory is not as tragic, but his life is all planned out for him, controlled, limited, keeping him from being the force for change and good in the world he wants to be. Jamieson wonderfully lays the foundation for their relationship, carefully developing separate relationships between Chelsea and Ford, Chelsea and Griffin, and Griffin and Ford. They have clarity about their feelings before choosing with whom they want to be in a relationship and what form the relationship would take. Griffin's, Ford's, and Chelsea's lives are already profoundly emotionally entwined. Their love scenes are emotionally intense, steamy, intimate, and sexy. Griffin and Ford's emotional connection in these scenes seemed more intense.

*Royally Indecent* is an angsty, steamy, intriguing, and sexy romance about grief, healing, overcoming past trauma and adversity, following your dreams, and taking risks for love and being with your soulmate(s).

*Lacy Hill*

## Skies of Blue

*Pamela Ackerson*

**Self-published**

Trade Paperback

979-8840014097

☆☆☆☆

*"Tomorrow was a promise of hope and second chances"*

Janet Nelson has fled an abusive marriage but still has to put up with the verbal abuse of her ex due to the shared custody of their son. Working hard to manage being a single mom on the days she has her son, Janet moves to Cedar Ridge Hills and begins working for the local museum. While creating

a new life for them, she never dreamed of having another shot at finding love—until she meets Teri. Janet has finally found her bluebird of happiness, but will the past she so desperately ran from keep her from her skies of blue?

*Skies of Blue* is an enjoyable second-chance-at-love romance. Would recommend this sweet short story to fans of this genre!

*Sharing what I love,*

*Veronica*

## The Spirit of Second Chances (Heart & Soul)

*Synithia Williams*

**Harlequin**

Mass Market

978-1335724168

☆☆☆☆

Synithia Williams' *The Spirit of Second Chances* focuses on the second chance romance between paranormal investigation show co-host and architect Wesley Livingston and Cierra Greene, single mom and realtor.

Cierra strives to build a successful real estate business to support herself and her young daughter after a failed marriage and messy divorce. Unfortunately, a lucrative property she has for sale may be haunted. So, she hesitantly contacts her high school crush and chemistry lab partner, Wesley Livingston, for help.

The Livingston Brothers are living their dreams, but Wesley struggles to adapt to the sudden fame and separation from his brothers, which leaves Wesley back home taking care of things by himself.

Cierra and Wesley work together to solve the mystery behind the haunting while trying to ignore their broken friendship and unfinished business. Old unresolved feelings resurface as they uncover dangerous, long-hidden secrets, complicating their uneasy alliance.

Williams draws readers in with

# Contemporary Romance

a creative story, vivid description, natural and lively dialogue, and detailed worldbuilding. Her well-developed characters are fascinating, likable, relatable, and fallible. Cierra is an honorable, kindhearted, honest, and nurturing person. A peacemaker and problem solver, Wesley is intelligent, reliable, responsible, diligent, empathetic, and trustworthy. Williams develops Wesley and Cierra's intense chemistry/attraction through funny, sweet, sexy, emotional, steamy, fiery, and tense interactions and banter.

Williams explores U.S. Southern history with nuance and creativity, taking the Livingston Brothers' paranormal investigations and Book 2's plot to the next level. *The Spirit of Second Chances* is a sexy, sweet, steamy second-chance romance with a compelling mystery and paranormal twist.

Lacy Hill

## Thank You for Listening

Julia Whelan

Avon Books

E-book, Trade Paperback

978-0063095564

☆☆☆☆

In Julia Whelan's *Thank You for Listening*, former actress Sewanee Chester is a successful audiobook narrator embarking on a journey of self-discovery, love, and acceptance while narrating her final romance novel. After a tragic accident, Sewanee lost sight of her dreams. While she misses her stardom days working on film sets, narrating audio books became a successful and satisfying career that helps her care for her beloved, ailing grandmother. After taking her friend's place at a book convention, Sewanee spends a whirlwind night with a charming stranger. Then a beloved romance novelist wants Sewanee to perform her last published book with Brock McNight, who is the industry's most secretive and hottest voice. After her own dreams were cata-

strophically cut short, Sewanee stopped believing in what romance novels sell. So, she stopped narrating romances. However, swayed by being able to get more help for her grandmother's care and her admiration of the late author, she accepts the job.

While recording with Brock, Sewanee develops a genuine connection with him—shielded by anonymity. But, once Sewanee starts dreaming again and believing in possibilities, secrets bring life's harsh realities to the fore, threatening to destroy the new life she's worked hard to build. Can she be brave, risking it all for the dreams she's buried so long to discover the acceptance, intimacy, and love she's never believed she'd have?

Whelan gives readers a first-hand POV of the romance audiobook narration world/process. It's interesting how both Brock and Sewanee have strong negative feelings about the romance genre influenced by personal, real-life baggage. Whelan's exploration of this world is enlightening and entertaining for obsessed romance audiobook listeners. She also offers a glimpse at the not-so-glamorous side of acting/Hollywood.

Diverse and fascinating characters help develop the plot. Adaku Obi, Sewanee's best friend, is an extraordinarily intriguing character who leaves readers curious about her. She's a wonderful friend to Sewanee. Whelan's beautifully written exploration of Sewanee's relationship with her ailing grandmother is, touching, and developed/written with nuance and care.

The banter between Brock and Sewanee's relationship is sexy, funny, sweet, intimate, and emotionally raw. However, for whatever reason, it felt like something was missing from their romance. Still heartfelt, funny, thoughtful, and entertaining, *Thank You for Listening* is about the relationships that make us who we are, challenge us, and help us grow and heal.

Lacy Hill

*Affaire de Coeur*



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# Paranormal Romance Reviews

Fantasy

Vampires

Shape Shifters

Time Travel

Werewolves...

## Storm Echo

Nalini Singh

Berkley

E-book

978-0593440674

★★★★★

Ivan Mercant is a Psy, a member of a powerful psychic family known for their espionage abilities. He possesses abilities that are unique and deadly, as a result of events that occurred in his childhood, and he knows that eventually he won't be able to control them anymore. Ivan is the ultimate predator, eliminating those who prey on the helpless. When he meets Soleil Bijoux Garcia, he is not able to keep his emotions under control, drawn to her, even though he knows that he cannot promise her forever. But Soleil is not willing to let her Psy true mate give up on their love or himself.

Nalini Singh's long-running "Psy/Changeling" series gets an exciting new entry, with a hero who believes he's the villain, and a heroine who knows he's her mate and will fight to keep him. The romance is utterly appealing, both characters are dynamic and endearing. Ivan has an ice-cold demeanor, but to readers, it's clear he's a



perfect example of still waters run deep. Soleil, called Lei, is a healer, with a hopeful, open demeanor despite the way she's suffered in her life. Together, they make a wonderful couple. Singh has created a complex, fascinating world in the near future where Psy are people who have enhanced mental abilities that give the series a great science fiction feel. The Changelings are people who can become animals and live with a sort of animal twin spirit. The contrast between the different species adds a lot of dramatic tension to the narrative. The ongoing storyline in which Psy are threatened by the collapse of their neuropsychic connective net makes for a huge amount of suspense. Readers who are new to the series can still enjoy this novel, but there are references that are tied to previous books in the series, so they'll likely want to read previous novels to catch up. Quick moving, emotionally resonant, and compelling, *Storm Echo* is a great read.

Danielle Hill

## A Strange and Stubborn Endurance

Foz Meadows

Tor Books

Hardcover and E-book

978-1250829139

★★★★

Foz Meadows' *A Strange and Stubborn Endurance* explores the impact of gender and sexual identity on the alliance of two kingdoms. The unexpected, arranged marriage between third son Velasin vin Aaro and warrior/soldier Caethari Aeduria shocked everyone. Velasin never intended to marry, especially a woman. He's, therefore, quite surprised when his father informs him of his arranged betrothal/marriage to a neighboring Tithena young woman. After he's assaulted, revealing his preference for men, Vel fears he's ruined the diplomatic union and let his family and kingdom down. His father plans to disown him, but the Tithenai envoy suggests that Vel marry the brother of his intended bride instead. While Caethari knew any marriage of his would be political, he's shocked when he's suddenly betrothed to a man from Ralia, where relationships like theirs are forbidden.

An unknown faction proves their willingness to kill or hurt anyone to end Vel and Cae's new alliance,

## Paranormal Romance

leaving them no choice but to trust one another. Cae and Vel begin their marriage as uneasy allies, but as they work together to discover who is plotting to sabotage their alliance/marriage, they grow closer. They learn more about each other and how to live as partners within their new reality, ultimately discovering love is the biggest risk of all—even greater than survival.

Meadows' vivid description, detailed world building, fascinating characters, and intriguing and suspenseful plot make this novel a fast-paced, enjoyable read. While Vel and Cae are complete opposites, they match each other nicely. Meadows deftly develops their relationship with intellectual banter plus great chemistry. Vel and Cae learn that first impressions rarely show the whole of who people are or what situations appear to be at first glance. Cae helps Vel to heal the wounds from his past, and Vel helps Cae to broaden his worldview. Vel discovers that he has so much more to offer the world than he had always believed. The characters are complex and deftly developed.

Within the bounds of a well-constructed narrative that has several unexpected twists, Meadows explores issues of sexual gender and identity, discrimination, prejudice, and sexism. *A Strange and Stubborn Endurance* is a thrilling, emotional, suspenseful, entertaining LGBTQ romance with a great blend of royal/political intrigue, light fantasy, magic, humor, and adventure.

Lacy Hill

### A Taste of Gold and Iron

Alexandra Rowland

Tor

978-1250800381 Hardcover

978-1250800404 E-Book

★★★★

Kadou is the prince of Arasht, a kingdom of unknown location during

an undetermined time period in this fantasy romance. Brother of the sultan, his sister Keliha, Kadou has the uncommon ability to "touchtaste" metal to determine its composition down to the smallest detail. This skill will come in handy when he is given the task of finding a counterfeiter whose dealings put the very livelihood of the kingdom in jeopardy.

Kadou would prefer not to be prince at all, but honor is very important to the people of Arasht; so Kadou must carry out his mission in spite of his panic attacks and his lapses of judgment in certain situations. He must prove himself worthy again in his sister's eyes.

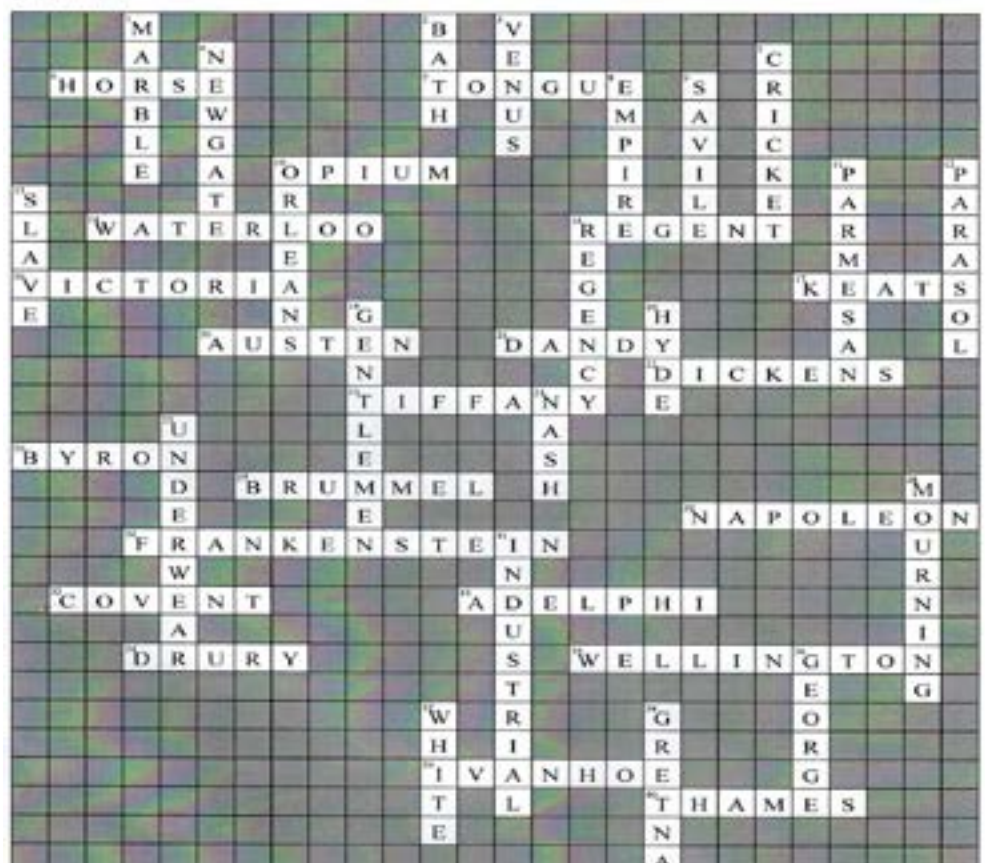
Honor also comes in to play when the stoic Everner is assigned as Kadou's new bodyguard. Everner dutifully serves the prince with utter formality that does little to disguise his contempt for Kadou. But as they face danger together, will that contempt con-

tinue? Could there be a spark between the young prince and his inflexible servant?

Intrigue and betrayals abound as Kadou not only carries out his mission in an effort to save the kingdom, but also journeys within himself to discover a purpose and courage. *A Taste of Gold and Iron* is set in an atmosphere where gender fluidity is not only accepted, but is an unremarkable part of everyday life. It is both a gripping mystery and an exploration of human nature as the chara

ige.

Hannah R







## **Bend Toward the Sun**

*Jen Devon (Author)*

*Narrated by Chris Brinkley, Erin Mallon*

**Macmillan Audio**

Audiobook

978-1250855183

★★★★★

Rowan McKinnon believes her life is complete with her botany Ph.D. and best friends who love her despite her quirkiness. Engaging in occasional no-strings sex, she doesn't believe love is real. She has only ever known her Grandmother Edie's love, who taught her to care for all things that grow. Unfortunately, an emotionally negligent mother and a fiancé, who lied and used her, left her with hidden wounds. A chance encounter with a stranger leaves her out-of-sorts, but she agrees to manage the restoration of the Brady family's abandoned vineyard, immersing herself in nurturing the grapes back to their former glory. She tries not to think about Harrison Brady—no longer a stranger—who makes her want unexpected, new, and dangerous things.

After obstetrician Harry loses a patient, he experiences PTSD/panic at-

tacks and a crisis of faith, spiraling into doubts about his ability to keep his patients safe. Harry leaves L.A. for Pennsylvania to emotionally recover at his parents' new vineyard. From their first meeting, Harry is drawn to Rowan—her sunlight breaks through the darkness smothering his soul. He cannot resist exploring the undeniable pull between them. But after a lifetime of protecting herself from feeling anything—for anyone—Rowan pushes to keep things casual after fighting and failing to deny their explosive connection.

Brinkley and Mallon's emotional and lively narration complements Devon's storytelling and writing style, bringing her novel brilliantly to life. Narrating in dual POV, Brinkley and Mallon provide distinct voices that perfectly capture Rowan and Harry and the secondary characters. Their performances are emotionally intense, moving, and spot-on.

Devon's writing is lush and vibrant and draws the reader into her novel, making them feel like you are with the characters from the first scene to the last. Devon develops fascinating, imperfect, relatable, genuine characters through humorous, snarky, emotional, intimate, flirty and sexy banter, dialogue, and interactions

*Bend Toward the Sun's* a beautifully written and profoundly romantic novel.

*Lacy Hill*

## **Smooth as Silk (Good Southern Women #2)**

*Alicia Hunter Pace*

*Narrated by Courtney Patterson*

**Dreamscape Media**

Audiobook

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 defense man Robbie McTavish, wanders into her shop—and her 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 are 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. With her affinity for accents Patterson has the perfect voice for Pace's characters—especially Robbie and Hyacinth. Patterson marvelously narrates Robbie's Scottish brogue, accent, and personality so flawlessly you forget she's the sole narrator without a male counterpart for Robbie's and Hyacinth's dual narration. Robbie's feelings for Hyacinth soften his narration. Patterson's narration for Hyacinth is emotionally intense and powerful, capturing her high strung, prickly, driv-

# Audiobooks

## You're My IT (Nerds of Happy Valley #1)

C.N. Holmberg

Narrated by Kelsey Navarro and Tim Paige

Tantor Audio

Audiobook

978-1666196023

★★★★★



Roller derby blocker Blaine's track record for confessing her feelings is nightmarish. From being dismissed to losing friends to becoming a viral sensation, Blaine has given up on romance until falling for Lysander—an IT tech with whom she becomes friends at her new job. She still has doubts; so Blaine spends the next two years pining for Lysander, working up the courage to tell him how she feels.

Aloof, funny, and shy, Lysander suffers from low self esteem, struggling to discover his place in this world. After his father's health scare, Lysander decides to improve his own, losing 50 pounds. Now, the world treats him differently, particularly women, while Lysander still feels like the same invisible person who doesn't fit in anywhere. When he returns from his California transfer apparently attached, Blaine fears she's waited too long to tell him how she feels.

Holmberg's story is refreshingly original and thoroughly entertaining, resonating with authenticity and emotion. Her characters are complex, quirky, nerdy, likable, and down-to-earth. Holmberg's vibrant description and lively, colorful dialogue, and narrative style give the novel fast pacing and a lighthearted tone. She thoughtfully explores issues of self-esteem, self acceptance, self love, and changes in weight/appearance with nuance and sensitivity. With humor and sarcasm, she also examines the soul crushing awfulness existing in office culture.

A poignant, sweet, funny, angsty, charming, romantic love story, *You're My IT* is highly recommended for audio listening if you like nerdy heroines/heroes, friends-to-lovers, pining, crushes, office romances, and roller derby.

Lacy Hill

en, uptight personality and the tough façade, protecting her fragile heart. When she goes into an hysterical worry spiral, Patterson's voice is frantic with a flurry of emotion. Moments that Hyacinth views Robbie with scorn, judging him and comparing him to her parents, Patterson's tone turns snooty to voice Hyacinth's thoughts and words. Then tightening when things aren't under her control. Her narrations make an excellent match for Pace's narrative style, which sparkles with humor, small town Southern charm, sweet and sexy banter, and angsty romance.

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

Lacy Hill

## Up All Night with a Good Duke

Amy Rose Bennett

Narrated by Sasha Higgins

Dreamscape Media, LLC

Audiobook

978-1666583540

★★★★

Sasha Higgins delightfully narrates Amy Rose Bennett's *Up All Night with a Good Duke*. Burdened by painful pasts, finishing school teacher and author Artemis Jones, and the widowed Duke of Dartmoor, Dominic Winters feigns an engagement so she to gain freedom from her controlling aunt. Neither expects their attraction to deepen into feelings that could complicate the

arrangement and their lives. A finishing school teacher by day and Gothic romance writer by night, Artemis dreams of opening her own academic ladies' college. A close friend, and fellow Byronic Book Club member, requires Artemis' support navigating her first London Season, so Artemis returns home hoping to court the interest of a wealthy patron to support her school. But she'll have to avoid her highhanded aunt's schemes to marry her off.

Labeled "The Dastardly Duke" because of rumors about him murdering his wife limits Dominic's choices for a suitable bride. When he meets Artemis, who at first is nothing like the type of woman he would ever choose as a bride, he can't stop thinking about her.

Sasha Higgins' narration brings Bennett's novel and characters to life while giving them distinct voices using cadence and pitch. Her British accent and voice are lovely and just right for Artemis. Her narration/voices for Dominic and the other characters are also nicely done.

Bennett develops her characters through witty, humorous banter and interactions. Artemis and Dominic's interactions include sexy, flirtatious banter. I love how deeply drawn to Artemis the duke is from their initial encounters and how completely he falls for her despite trying to convince himself she wouldn't make an appropriate bride. His wife's death haunts him still. Passionate, stubborn, and creative, Artemis' perfectly happy being a spinster. Artemis gives in to her attraction for Dominic while fighting her deepening feelings for him. I enjoyed Artemis' relationship with the duke's daughter, Celeste. Celeste is isolated, leading a solitary existence only made better by reading. I think Artemis sees herself in Celeste.

*Up All Night with a Good Duke* is a steamy, funny, slightly angsty, entertaining historical romance.

Lacy Hill





## **The Bone Flower**

*Charles Lambert*

**Gallic Books**

Trade Paperback

978-1913547271

★★★★

Edward Monteith, a young Victorian gentleman, falls in love with a beautiful gypsy. He convinces Settie to run away with him. It is an idyllic time with fun-filled days and passion-filled nights. Then Settie tells him that she's pregnant. Edward declares he doesn't care what society thinks. He loves Settie and will marry her.

Edward mentions the pregnancy to his friend Dr. Bell. The doctor says that Edward's estranged father will never accept a half-gypsy conceived out of wedlock. If the pregnancy should be terminated, Settie could be educated to comport herself as a lady. Then there would be a possibility that Edward's father might accept her. Bell tells him that there are ways to get rid of unwanted babies. Edward reluctantly agrees but insists that the procedure must not harm Settie. Bell gives him a potion to knock

her out. When Settie comes to the baby will be gone. Edward will convince her that she had a miscarriage and they can marry. But something goes horribly wrong and Settie dies.

A few years later, Edward is married to Marisol. They have a beautiful son. It quickly becomes apparent that something is wrong with the boy. Settie's gypsy family must have cursed the child. Edward must somehow remove the curse.

This is a creepy but interesting book.

*Sheila Griffin*

## **Funnel Theory**

*Jonathan Kendall*

**Fables and Facts**

E-book

979-8985994612

★★★★

This book helps the business person understand the concept of Funnel theory and how to apply it effectively for a successful business. The Funnel theory is a marketing concept whereby the marketer shows their advertisements

to a diverse group of their ideal potential customers, and then nurtures those leads slowly over time through the funnel, reducing the number of potential customers at each stage of the funnel, until eventually those leads that arrive at the bottom of the funnel become customers. There are many steps to this theory, and the author begins with the explanation of what Funnel theory is, moves to the explanation of promoting product, utilizing the proper marketing for a sales system, and the tools needed to continue with a successful marketing and business plan.

Funnel theory has been around for almost one hundred years. In the last few years, its practicality has been applied to sales on the internet. The author doesn't assume that the reader knows or understands everything about marketing. He explains things in a nice, neat way that isn't patronizing and helps the business owner to better understand the concept of change and expanding their business.

*Lauren Calder*

# Booty

## Hanna

*Magali Jeger*

**Koehler Books**

Trade Paperback

978-1646637577

☆☆☆☆ 1/2

The last few years had been tough on their family. Living in Amsterdam in 1941 wasn't exactly an opportune time to be carrying a child. Yet, Hanna had wanted a baby, and she was pregnant. Her father and brother wanted her to wait, worried that a Jewish woman having a baby under German occupation would be a cruel fate. Hanna was determined to keep the child.

The child represented love, hope, and a better future. As time passed, Hanna found it more difficult to keep a positive attitude. Nazi occupied Amsterdam was quickly deteriorating with each coming day. Fear started creeping in and warning them when friends started mysteriously disappearing. Then, they received the letter for voluntary immigration.

Based on a true story, this tale hits the heart. It's been over 75 years since WWII, ended and the haunting horrors are still vivid in many people's minds. This is a story that needs to be continued to be told until everyone starts listening to the atrocities and not candy-coat reality.

A must read and highly recommended for anyone who loves history.

*Lauren Calder*

## Wake of War

*Zac Topping*

**Forge**

Trade Paperback

978-1250814975

☆☆☆☆

New recruit Specialist James Trent thought that enlisting in the U.S. Army would be a good way to pay for his college and be a hero to his girl back

home. But, after arriving in Salt Lake City surrounded by the Revolutionist Front, he knew he was going to war with the possibility of getting killed, college be damned.

Sam, Samantha, Cross had been a child when the government swept onto her parents' farm, conscripted her brother Jimmy into the army and killed her parents when they objected. Sam had run into the woods, terrified. Now she was an expert teenage sniper, thanks to her father's and brother's training, and part of the Revolutionist Front. The Front, headed up by a backwater preacher named Joseph Graham, was the rebel force fighting against the oppressive government of the United States, drunk with power, and determined to stay in power even if they had to kill the very citizens that made up that government. The RF was just as determined to make sure that the government did not succeed in oppressing its citizens and was ready to kill whoever opposed them. Which side was right?

*Wake of War* is a chilling first-person account of a war gone terribly wrong on both sides. It follows the path of new Army recruit James Trent, who has never fired a gun, Sam Cross, a teenage girl filled with hate and revenge, and the civilian security force hired by the corporation to protect from both sides the gold mine that they owned that sat in the middle of the conflict.

Even for those, like this reviewer, who know nothing about the various types of guns or military armament, Mr. Topping makes following the troop movements, the types of guns they're using, etc., easy to follow. Reading this was hard and cringe-worthy considering the political atmosphere in this day and age, but it is very well-written and makes the point that, depending on your point of view, your side is correct. But is all the death, destruction, and hatred that fuels it really worth it?

*Lani Roberts*

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## Accomplished: A Georgie Darcy Novel

Amanda Quain

Wednesday Books

Hardcover or E-book

978-1250817815

☆☆☆☆

Amanda Quain's *Accomplished* is a modern retelling of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* from Georgiana Darcy's POV. It explores Georgie and Wickham Foster's relationship and its fallout if transported to the present day. Quain also examines Georgie and Fitzwilliam's relationship.

Georgie's Pemberley Academy classmates believe she should have been expelled after "The Incident" with Wickham last year instead of him. But, while the family name helped her escape expulsion, she cannot escape her big brother Fitz's disappointment or her classmate's scorn. And, she cannot seem to let go of Wickham.

Georgie starts her junior year wanting to prove she's not an embarrassment to the Darcy family name by becoming the "Perfect Darcy":

1. Rebuild her reputation with the marching band.
2. Forget about Wickham and his lies.
3. Distract Fitz by matchmaking him with Lizzie Bennet.

Georgie draws fellow bandmate and friend Avery into her plans. But she must make peace with who she is, finding her way when the weight of living up to the Darcy name and striving for perfection overwhelms her before she loses everything.

Surprisingly more angsty and intense than expected, *Accomplished* is balanced with sweet, lighthearted, and humorous moments. Vivid description, and deft worldbuilding, draw the reader into the characters' lives and the story. Quain skillfully develops fallible, relatable, and likable characters. Georgie Darcy's not okay. Betrayed by her first "boyfriend," she's grieving losing her parents and adjusting to changes in her relationship with her brother. It's frustrating watching her tear herself/her life apart over Wickham. It's crazy how she runs back to her feelings for him and that relationship for comfort. But she's unable to believe how much Fitz loves her and that he could never hate her.

Georgiana's a hot mess. Georgie can't change it until she gets to the root of why/how it got that way, lets go of the guilt and shame, and forgives herself.

Quain brilliantly uses Georgiana and Wickham to explore the dynamics of an abusive relationship. Avery's nothing like Wickham. He's sweet, encouraging, forgiving, and not a user. Quain's Lizzie and Fitz are likable and amusing. Georgiana's most likable in her scenes with Avery and Lizzie because she relaxes, letting herself be and live.

*Accomplished's* an entertaining exploration of Georgiana Darcy's journey of self-discovery and belonging after the devastation inflicted by an abusive relationship with Wickham.

Lacy Hill

## The Charmed List

Julie Abe

Wednesday Books

Hardcover

978-1250830098

☆☆☆☆

In Julie Abe's *The Charmed*

# Young Adult

List two neighbors/former childhood best friends who have drifted apart, Ellie Kobata and Jack Yasuda, are forced to take a road trip together down the coast of California to a magical convention. A quiet, shy, artist and planner, Ellie's ready for a life-changing summer where she finally takes risks. Her Anti-Wallflower List includes 13 goals for her to check off—i.e., riding rollercoasters, sharing her art on Instagram, and taking an epic road trip with her best friend, Lia. Unfortunately, #4 (getting revenge on Jack) takes a disastrous turn, throwing her summer plans off course. Will #13 (fall in love) take Ellie by surprise on a road trip filled with cupcakes, magic tea, a charmed to-do list, and villages beneath the stars, hopefully finding their way back to each other?

Abe's creative mythology, deft worldbuilding, and vivid description draw readers into the novel. While she creates a story about magic, people who can wield magic, and magical places, the characters are still bound by natural laws and experience the ups and downs of human existence. Consequently, the novel's more angsty and emotional than expected, but Abe nicely balances this with sweet, lighthearted, and humorous moments.

The characters evolve with Abe's fascinating story. Ellie longs to be seen and break out of her shell—free to be herself—but sharing her magic could get her kicked out of the magic world.

Abe beautifully examines the difficulty of losing a friend who's been by your side for most of your life—like losing part of yourself. She presents an irresistible mystery. Jack seems to still care deeply about Ellie, but it's hard to reconcile that with his abandonment of her and their friendship and his cold, aloof treatment. Jack's reasons are complicated and heartbreaking, and the pain he caused is palpable. Angsty, funny, introspective, and sweet, *The Charmed List* is an enchanting, entertaining,

fanciful YA, former friends-to-lovers road trip romance about taking chances, self-discovery, rejecting labels, forgiveness, and changing your life to make yourself happy.

Lacy Hill

## My Mechanical Romance

Alexene Farol Follmuth

Holiday House

Hardcover

978-0823450107

★★★★

Alexene Farol Follmuth's *My Mechanical Romance* explores competitive high school teen robotics. High school seniors Isabel Maier and Mateo Luna discover love and unexpected truths about themselves while designing/building battle robots. Because she fears the future, Bel avoids thinking about planning for it. One of her teachers sees her talent for engineering and forces her to join the robotics club. Unfortunately, the team's boys ignore her, and Neelam, the team's only other girl, doesn't like her. Bel and Teo's start is antagonistic because of differences in personality, ideas, and style conflicts. However, they grow closer while building/designing robots, transitioning into friends, and verging on more.

Follmuth's vibrant descriptions and relatable, authentic characters capture the readers' imaginations. She creates a world of characters rich in individuality and diversity of interests, cultures, and ethnicities, taking time to explore the characters' lives and cultures with a down-to-earth, natural, warm tone. Lively, humorous, candid dialogue and character interactions, excellent worldbuilding, exciting robotics competitions, and the empowering and sincere relationships Bel shares with her BFFs are novel highlights. With nuance, Follmuth candidly depicts the sexism, misogyny, racism, and unfairness young girls/women of color experience in STEM education and careers.

Bel's many and varied talents

and characteristics make her fascinating. Her innate ability to make things work efficiently without having scientific/mathematical foundations is remarkable and admirable. Many readers, especially teens, can relate to Bel's insecurity and inability to view her talent through the lens of science and math and her uncertainty about the future.

The development/transition of Bel's relationship with Teo from antagonistic to friends to romantic is believable, sweet, and entertaining. It's life changing for Bel and Teo because it pushes them outside their comfort zones, challenging them. Having Teo believe she can do amazing things encourages Bel to take risks. But ultimately, Bel must believe in her own capabilities and realize she doesn't need Mateo to be strong, capable, confident, and successful. However, it's only one step on her road to success in STEM. Bel helps Teo grow as a person. Teo's a superior, egomaniac, who's dismissive, controlling, and unkind to people he views as beneath him—unworthy of his time—particularly Neelam and, at times, Bel. His relationship with Bel makes him question himself.

*My Mechanical Romance* is a sweet, engaging, enlightening, creative, funny, rivals-to-lovers/enemies-to-lovers YA romance.

Lacy Hill





# Late!

Didn't quite make in the last issue



Includes all genre and all time periods

## Heroic Hearts Anthology

*Jim Butcher, Anne Bishop, Kelley Armstrong, Annie Bellet, Hearne, Viridi, Neill, Hughes, Harris, Holder, Brozek, Briggs and Edited by Jim Butcher and Kerrie L. Hughes*

**Penguin Random House**

E-book  
978-05930099193

☆☆☆☆

*Heroic Hearts* is a collection of short stories about heroism that comes in different forms. Its heroes are far from stereotypical, but instead they are the ones who are in the right place at the right time.

In Jim Butcher's "Little Things," brave pixies in the service of wizard Harry Dresden protect his stronghold from evil, formidable goblins.

"The Dark Ship" by Anne Bishop is a dark fantasy with a scarred young woman who makes a selfless choice that garners her a favor from the

leader of inhuman pirates.

In "Comfort Zone" by Kelley Armstrong, a young psychic and her werewolf boyfriend are recruited by a ghost to protect a loved one from human predators.

Annie Bellet's "Train to Last Hope" is the story of two estranged spouses who unite to find their long-lost child, using their magical skills in an Old West set adventure.

Kevin Hearne's "Fire Hazard" is from the point of view of druid Atticus O'Sullivan's devoted Irish Wolfhound Oberon, as they work to stop unnatural fires in the Australian wilderness.

"Grave Gambles" by R.R. Viridi features a man whose unique ability to reanimate the body of a recent murder victim to solve the crime, on a case to find missing children.

"Silverspell" by Chloe Neill's latest story in the "Heirs of the Chicago-land Vampire" series involves a vampire sentinel and her werewolf boyfriend solving a series of ritual sacrifices of urban-dwelling supernaturals.

In "Troll Life" by Kerrie L. Hughes, Harzl is a troll who works an unglamorous job in an underground train system who intervenes to protect a gargoyle child from slavers.

Charlaine Harris' "The Return of the Mage" intertwines low fantasy and science fiction between warriors and mages who form an uneasy alliance to rescue the lost members of their battalion.

With "The Vampires Karamazov", Nancy Holder asks the reader to ponder how the famous Tolstoy novel would look if the family were all vampires.

In "The Necessity of Pragmatic Magic" by Jennifer Brozek, Maureen is a 71-year-old docent who may look mild-mannered, but she has some hidden skills to help protect her coworkers at the Stewart Historic Museum from a dangerous magical artifact.

Longtime fans of Asil the Old Wolf from Patricia Briggs' werewolf series have the privilege to accompany with him on a special kind of date that involves his unique set of skills in "Dating Terrors."

*Heroic Hearts* features the who's who of fantasy and sci-fi and has a little something for everyone in this wide variety of stories. It may involve some knowledge of the series to fully appreciate all the nuances, but even for new to the series readers, there are plenty of enjoyable moments. While a few of the stories were unimpactful, most showcase their writers' enviable skills at telling a short, satisfying, engrossing story. Overall, this is a recommended read for fantasy lovers.

*Danielle Hill*

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

*Tessa Bailey*

**Avon**

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

# Late!

king crab fisherman Fox Thornton is tested by sharing close quarters while Hannah's working in town.

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 is a sexy, carefree flirt with a reputation as a notorious ladies' man. He longs to escape people's expectations and assumptions about him based on his handsome appearance. Hannah's 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?

With colorful description, lively dialogue, and excellent character exploration, development, Bailey's writing brings the emotions simmering deep inside/between Fox and Hannah brilliantly to life. Their interactions are electric and filled with chemistry. Bailey's love scenes are seriously steamy and sexy, contributing to developing her story and characters. Hannah's connection 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 romcom. 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

## A Proposal They Can't Refuse

Natalie Caña

MIRA

Trade Paperback  
978-0778386094

☆☆☆☆

In Natalie Caña's *A Proposal They Can't Refuse*, the grandfathers of two former best friends—who've drifted apart becoming enemies, foes—black-mails them into agreeing to marry. So, Puerto Rican chef Kamilah Vega and Irish American whiskey distiller Liam Kane pretend to be engaged. Kamilah loves her family's Puerto Rican restaurant and believes the only way to save it in the wake of the gentrification of their Chicago neighborhood is to enter the Fall Foodie Tour. But first, she must convince her parents and family to go for her ideas, requiring them to change things at the restaurant. Unfortunately, her Abuelo won't let her change anything in his restaurant unless she marries the one man she can't stand: his best friend's grandson—her former best friend. After working to turn his family's distillery into a contender, Liam and his grandfather are close to winning a national competition with a prize-winning brew. Then, Liam's Grandpa reveals he has cancer, and his heart's set on Liam getting married to Kamilah ASAP. Their grandfathers threaten to sell the building housing the family businesses if they refuse to marry. So, Kamilah and Liam fake an engagement not expecting how complicated their entwined lives become.

Caña's use of language, colorful dialogue, vivid description, and cultural details sprinkled throughout her narrative make it a page turner. She smoothly blends Spanish into the dialogue with English. Caña wonderfully develops Kamilah and Liam's relationship, their sunshine heroine/grumpy hero dynamic, and the crackling and fiery tension sparked by their lifelong friendship

turned *faux* enemies. Liam and Kamilah's funny, snarky, sweet, intensely emotional, passionate, and chemistry-filled banter, interactions, and love scenes barely mask their underlying attraction/connection. Complete opposites, they complement and encourage each other to be their best. An incorrigible dreamer and optimistic force of nature, Kamilah is a bold, fearless, stubborn, and demanding social butterfly. Liam, on the other hand, is an antisocial loner and hermit burdened by past trauma and loss. Yet, he's also sensitive, sweet, caring, generous, supportive, loyal, and dependable.

Close familial bonds drive them to continue their family legacies. But Liam and Kamilah are burdened by family pressure and keeping secrets, preventing them from following their dreams and finding happiness and peace—also distancing themselves from loved ones. They have deep emotional ties still drawing them together despite their denial. Spending time with each other, living together, and pretending to be engaged while planning a wedding brings all those feelings to the surface.

*A Proposal They Can't Refuse* is a sweet, funny, steamy, angsty, entertaining family-centered, ex-friends-to-lovers, fake dating, and second chance romance about two friends finding their way back to each other, themselves, and their dreams.

Lacy Hill

## Unforgiven (Deep Ops #5)

Rebecca Zanetti

Kensington Books

Trade Paperback  
978-1516111251

☆☆☆☆

In Rebecca Zanetti's *Unforgiven* British Deep Ops agent Jethro Hanson falls for enigmatic single mother Gemma Falls. Gemma uses her game theory expertise to evade a deadly and



# Late!

relentless stalker for years and to outrun a killer. Now that Gemma's teaching game theory as a professor at D.C. University, she's hopeful that D.C. can be a safe harbor for her young daughter Trudy and herself after years on the run. If only Gemma could avoid the sexy and distracting philosophy professor Jethro, with whom she keeps crossing paths.

Jethro has blood on his hands from his time as a British Agent and a Deep Ops agent that he can never wash away, even though he now works in academia. He longs for redemption, nevertheless—something he believed beyond his reach until meeting Gemma and her daughter. Fortunately, the lethal skills he's honed doing things he can't leave behind will help keep Gemma and Trudy safe from whatever threats are stalking them.

Zanetti deftly develops complex, intriguing characters the reader roots for and admires. Gemma is sharp, intelligent, resilient, resourceful, and guarded. She sacrifices to protect her little girl, ensuring to always satisfy all her needs and keep her safe. Burdened by secrets and a tragic past, Gemma's wary of trusting and letting others into her life. Intelligent, handsome, charming, and sexy, Jethro presents a harmless, calm façade to the world. Gemma never expected to be swept away by passion again, but the chemistry between her and Jethro is fiery and intense—surprising both. Ultimately, protecting Gemma from a threat pursuing her requires Jethro to unleash the trained killer he's been trying to escape locked deep inside.

Zanetti dives directly into the story, weaving a suspenseful, eerie tale. *Unforgiven's* scenes are vivid, lively, and detailed, especially the exhilarating action scenes and engaging character interactions, which are integral to the characters' development and Zanetti's complex, emotional, intense, and riveting story. Zanetti wonderfully develops the relationships between all her characters. Gemma and Jethro's instant attrac-

tion quickly grows into a deep connection through intense, emotional, funny, sexy, intimate, and steamy interactions. The sweetness of Trudy's interactions with Jethro and the Deep Ops team members is so adorable.

*Unforgiven* is a gripping, emotional, steamy, suspenseful angsty, breathtaking romantic suspense read.  
*Lacy Hill*

## **Worlds of Exile and Illusion: Three Complete Novels of the Hainish Series in One Volume**

*Ursula K. Le Guin*

**Tor**

Trade Paperback

978-1250781260

☆☆☆ 1/2

### **"Rocannon's World"**

Rocannon is a different type of Starlord. He wants to catalog planets not subjugate them. But when Rocannon's ship and crew mates are destroyed, he finds his inner warrior.

### **"Planet of Exile"**

From time beyond memory when the winter years come, all of the Tevaran tribes build underground cities. They remain in them until the winter years have passed. As the Tevaran retreat, the Gaal swarm down from the mountains. Like locusts, they consume everything in their path. When the winter years end, the Gaal return to the mountains and the Tevarans return to the surface.

But this time something is different. Instead of bypassing the cities, the Gaal are killing the cities' defenders. The Gaal are leaving some of their people in these cities, ready for occupation when the summer years return. Can the tribes unite to defend their homes, or is this the end of the Tevarans?

### **"City of Illusions"**

A man is found naked in the woods with no memory of his identity.

He looks like the people who found him except for his eerie eyes. They are yellow and catlike. The tribe names him Falk and nurses him back to health. Eventually, it is decided that Falk must leave the village and seek out others like himself.

This is a reissue of a compilation of the first three Hainish novels. It's not a trilogy. However, there are links between the three stories. The writing style is a little confusing, but the stories are interesting.

*Sheila Griffin*



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