

May—June 2024

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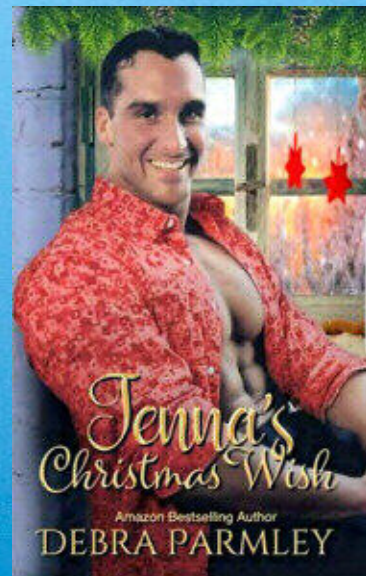
In the May 2024 Spotlight--

C.A. Szarek



Debra Parmley Brings Us Actor/Model

John Antorino



June 2024 Spotlights

Kat Elle

May/June 2024

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Dear QWERTY

The Importance of Marketing Plans in the Book Industry

by Pamela Ackerson



Pamela Ackerson

Dear Qwerty,

Why do I need a marketing plan? I queried an agent, and she wanted to know what my marketing plan was. Isn't that supposed to be her job?

It is part of their job. However, the agent wants to know how serious you are, if they want to put effort into your book, and whether or not you're not going to take it seriously. As in, being an author, whether you're self-published or traditionally published is still a business and should be treated as such.

So, why is a marketing plan so important? It sets up your strategy.

How are you going to get new readers? Where, besides their chosen markets, do you plan on placing your book for purchase? Where do you plan on advertising? How much do you have set aside for your advertising and marketing budget?

A plan is extremely important. You'll have clear objectives and opportunities to follow through on everything needed for success.

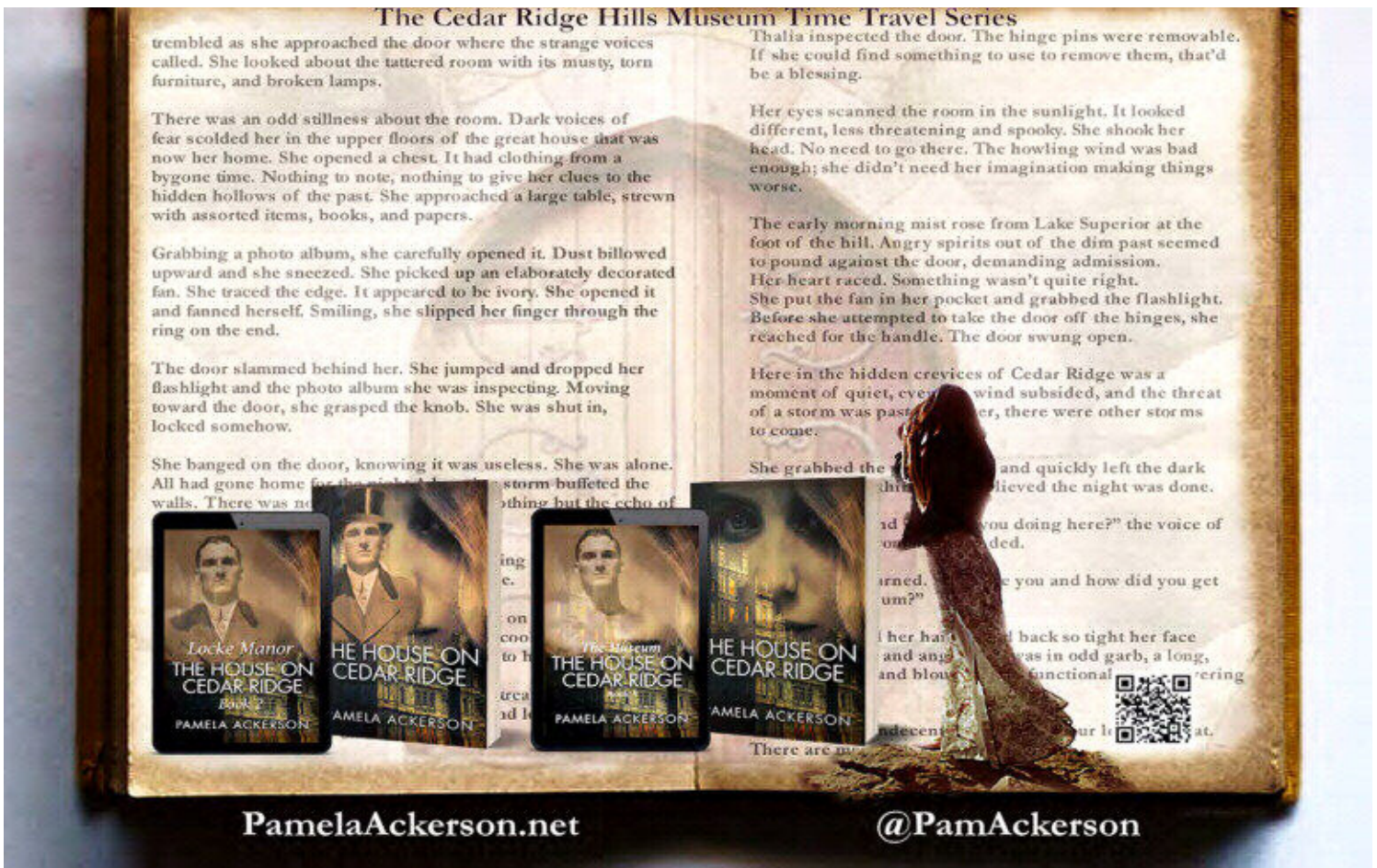
Your goal is to get more readers, get more sales, and when the next book comes out, have access to those readers and new ones. Therefore, increasing sales with each new book. To be able to do that a marketing plan is a necessity.

You don't have to be an expert. They don't expect you to be an expert and hand them a detailed spreadsheet. They just want to know your next steps. They want to know how you plan on coordinating your goals and what your objectives are for future sales. They want to make sure you know who your target audience is and how to find them.

A simple outline will be acceptable to most agents.

They will do the where. (Going wide)

But where do you plan to market yourself and your book? Goodreads? Amazon Author Page? Authors Den? Any or all of those will work. There are many, many websites where you can place your book as an author and have purchase links.



I'd recommend a one year marketing plan. What do you want to do, where do you want to be at the end of the year.

Here's a quick suggestion:

Book one comes out in November. You've chosen four websites to place you as an author. If you've got it as a pre-order, those first months are important advertising opportunities. You've chosen X amount of dollars for advertising the first three months. X amount of dollars for the rest of the year/time prior to your next release.

Book two comes out the following August. Continue advertising book one and then rinse and repeat for book two. In other words, if you've got book two as a pre-order, those first months are important advertising opportunities. You've chosen X amount of dollars for advertising the first three months. X amount of dollars for the rest of the year/time prior to your next release.

Having a marketing plan doesn't just help them, it helps you.

You'll be able to see what is and isn't working. Tweak whatever and wherever your advertising dollars are going and make adjustments.

Without a plan, you might as well throw a couple hundred dollars in the air and see where it falls. One site gets you sales, on site gets you recognition. Know which excels and helps you to stay in front of potential readers.

That said, not all advertising will get you sales but it will continue to get your name out there. Name recognition is the cat's meow! However, don't spend too much \$\$ on sites that don't give you a financial return.

- State your objective and where you plan on promoting your books to reach readers.
- Run promotions to reach more readers, do interviews, get their emails, run advertising in print and web magazines, websites, as

well as, social media sites.

- Set a budget. (Always double your budget during the holiday season) Books have consistently been the number one product sold on Amazon during the holiday season.
- Summarize and constantly tweak and adjust to what does and doesn't work. A sound business plan will keep you on target. It's essential for your success.

The Spotlight is Shining on Miss May

C.A. SZAREK



USA Today Bestselling, award-winning author of romantic suspense, epic and historical fantasy romance, C.A. loves to dabble in different genres. If it's a good story, she'll write it, no matter where it seems to fit! She's a hopeless romantic and always will be. Risking it all for Happily Ever After is what she lives by! C.A. is originally from Ohio but got to Texas as soon as she could. She's happily married and has a Bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice. She's always writing, and helps small business owners by writing their websites, and she loves it!

AdC: *Tell us about the genre(s) you write, and the type of characters you love to write about.*

C.A.: I write whatever comes to me. It's a blessing and a curse. I have series out that are romantic suspense, epic fantasy romance, and historical fantasy (Scottish Highlander Time Travels). I also have some ideas for paranormal romance, and even YA. I can't pick a lane, LOL. From me you'll always get sassy heroines, and strong guys with a side of bad boy.

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

C.A.: I am currently working on book four of my epic fantasy series, the "King's Riders", but my newest release

is in my Scottish series.

AdC: *Which tasks/projects do you find you tend to procrastinate on and why?*

C.A.: What tends to happen to me is I get stuck (because I don't plot at all, LOL), so I usually end up working on something else. So, then I work on more than one thing at a time, until one project takes over, or I make myself go back to the book I'm supposed to be writing. LOL.

AdC: *If you had to pick any character in one of your books, who is most similar to you, who would you choose? Why?*

C.A.: Well, all my girls have me in them, in some way. Even if I don't mean to do it. I think it's subconscious.

But I think Andi, from *Collision Force* ("Crossing Forces" Book One) and Cera, from *Sword's Call* ("King's Riders" Book One) are both cooler versions of me. They are both very much how I think.

AdC: *If you were transported to the setting of the book you're currently reading or writing, where would you be?*

C.A.: I would be in Greenwald, or on the road in the Provinces. In my fantasy world.

AdC: *If you saw a doorway/portal in the middle of the forest, would you enter it?*

C.A.: Hecks, yes. LOL. Without thought or delay. Hoping/praying I go to the Fae Realm in my books, or at least to meet my Scottish characters in the 17th Century. (Although I would want



bags full of soap and antibiotics.)

AdC: *What do you wish you were better at?*

C.A.: Writing with more consistency, or faster.

AdC: *What is something you say a lot?*

C.A.: “Cool beans” and “No Worries.” With a side of “Cool, cool, cool” and “awesome”.

AdC: *What do you do when no one is around?*

C.A.: Watch way too much TV.

AdC: *When running away for fun, where can you most likely be found?*

C.A.: At an Airbnb with my closest writer friends, tapping away at a key-

board. Writing books.

AdC: *Where is one place you don't like to be?*

C.A.: Work. LOL. My full-time gig. I do like my job; I write websites for small businesses, but I wish I could just write my books, and edit for other authors.

AdC: *You get in trouble, who are you most likely with?*

C.A.: LOL, there are too many to count, but they are all authors!

AdC: *What are one of your quirks?*

C.A.: I have to have coffee every day, nonnegotiable.

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

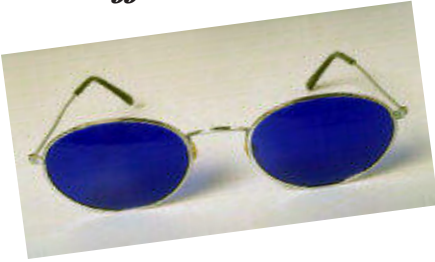
C.A.: Unlike most years, I won't be traveling far this year, unfortunately. I do have one event in New Braunfels, TX, The Lone Star Writers Round Up, August 30-September 1st, 2024. It's a two-day event, from 10am to 4pm, both days. Here is their FB page: <https://www.facebook.com/Lonestarwritersroundup/>

Please give us the following contact information:

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Sneak Peek

Highland Skies

Faery Stones. He couldn't chance bringing his beloved roan stallion, Treun, because leaving his horse while he was gone would pretty much shout that he'd done something all his family—Clan MacLeod—deemed foolish and childish.

He'd also left his favorite claymore in his rooms. Because of its size, he'd opted for his dirk, which was sheathed in his boot. The Fae-forged blade had been a gift from his father when he'd turned eight and ten and could still inflict any needed damage. He was equally skilled with it, as he was with his sword.

A part of Liam protested leaving his main weapon, but he didn't plan to be gone long, and his long dagger would have to do.

He needed to draw on any knowledge of stealth—magic and skill alike—he was ever capable of. His cousin by blood—and aunt by marriage—Alana, had a strong tie to the Faery Stones and would sense when they opened. She was a former Fae princess, and his father had been her bodyguard. They'd been exiled from the Fae Realm before he'd been born.

Of course, he wouldn't have to deal with *those* consequences until he returned.

Liam didn't have much time, and he could only hope the spell he'd used the few times he'd successfully sneaked over to the other realm unseen would work to keep him hidden and safe.

His favorite cousin, Lexi, had helped with her magic in times past, but he couldn't rely on her now. She'd been living in the far future, blissfully happy with her husband in the twenty-first century for almost five years now. At least, that amount of time had passed for them, in the seventeenth century.

He'd just turned five and twenty, and his actions tonight would be far from appreciated if he got caught.

Liam could hear his father,

Xander's voice now, "*You're not a laddie anymore, Liam. You're a man. You need to stop making foolish choices that put our whole family at risk.*"

He sighed.

His family was always smothering him, but he loved them—even his trouble-prone raucous cousins, two of which—Lachlan and Rory—were close to him in age. Iain was the bairn, at seven and ten, but they were all as close as brothers, even Angus, who was more than ten years older.

None of them would ever understand. None of them knew what it was like to fly.

Only his father could, but the man often refused to talk about the past.

When Liam had sneaked to the Fae Realm and his wings took him into the purple and gold skies, so he could soar—that was the only time in his life he recalled true freedom.

Aye, it was dangerous.

The tales he'd heard from his father and aunt had always resonated, but a part of his mind denied it could be wholly true.

After all, he'd survived several trips without a scratch.

He and Lexi had never successfully gone to the Fae Realm together, but he had on his own several times, using stealth magic he'd gleaned from his former Fae Warrior da, as well as an invisibility spell he'd learned as a laddie to compete with his cousin Rory's famous pranks.

Liam admitted he'd been lucky to get into the realm and away from the Fae Warriors who guarded the Faery Stones, usually with a small magical distraction of some sort.

Like him and his father, they were winged and fierce. Skilled and highly trained soldiers.

The Fae army.

His father had once been one of their elite numbers.

They wore green armor and kept their hair fashioned in long thick plaits. It was said, the longer and thicker the braid, the more power and magic the Warrior possessed.

He was also told the Fae could smell—or sense—human blood and would kill anyone who suffered such an affliction on sight.

People like him were considered an abomination.

Liam waited until Dunvegan was quiet, like he always did when he wanted to sneak over to the Fae Realm. It was just before midnight, which was the latest he'd ever had to wait, but his father, a former Fae Warrior had been especially...nosy...all evening.

He'd had to reinforce his magical shields with a spellword multiple times, because his father could read minds. It was his gift—or his curse, as the man always declared—and Liam tended to agree, considering he didn't want his da anywhere near his thoughts. Especially when he was planning something against the rules.

Dangerous. Life threatening. Forbidden.

Liam had heard it all his life. It didn't matter.

In the Realm of the Fae, he had wings.

He needed to fly.

Liam quickly made it down the beach and to the cave that held the

How I Discovered My Mother—and More

by Caroline Crocker, Ph.D

Remembering Meta Has Created a Tribute to All Moms

I've known the heroine of *Brave Face: The Inspiring WWII Memoir of a Dutch/German Child* for over 65 years, but helping put together a book about her childhood was still an educational experience. You see, like many who live through a war, Meta (known to me as Mom) didn't talk about her early days—at least, not the painful parts.

I'd often observed that, before she leaves the house, Meta checks the stove and dryer not once, not twice, but three times. She also ensures the toaster and iron are unplugged. It doesn't take a genius to figure out she's terrified of fire. But now I know why. Nine-year-old Meta was one of the few eye-witnesses of the horrific bombing of the Kleykamp building in The Hague; she's still haunted by the screams of people burning alive.

Meta's children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren know that her TWO refrigerators are always full. Moreover, she has a special drawer filled to the brim with all kinds of chocolate. Perhaps she's just greedy? Actually, no. Through our book-related discussions, I learned that Meta starved during the Dutch Hunger Winter. If her family got food at all, it was tulip bulbs, which are poisonous; grated sugar beets, which are used for animal feed; and a few brown beans swept off the floor of the post office where her father worked. It took her four years to recover physically. Psychologically, I doubt she ever will.

Those who are slightly acquainted with Meta assume she is brimming with the confidence her outgoing, intelligent, and joyful nature warrant. Those who know her more intimately discern the opposite. Oh, she puts on a brave face, makes sure that her clothes are ironed, and is careful that her shoes shine. But challenge her, and she will immediately back away. Meta is riddled with anxiety.

As her eldest child, I've long been conscious of Meta's lack of self-esteem, but its cause baffled me. The research I conducted for *Brave Face* revealed the answer. After the Allies liberated the southern part of the Netherlands, they continued to Germany. The Hague, where Meta lived, was outside the line of main advance and deemed "not of strategic importance." The people who lived in the northern and western parts suffered for over seven more months. This experience solidified an erroneous belief deep inside Meta's psyche: she's not important. It was therefore very gratifying to see her blossom in the attention that came her way after the publication of *Brave Face!*

"Living" *Brave Face* changed me, too. Because I'm now aware that puzzling behaviors may have hidden and painful reasons, I've become a gentler, more tolerant person. The writing of *Brave Face* has also transformed me into a less tolerant person. Since childhood hunger and deprivation have lasting effects on generations to come, my political views have shifted to favor those who prioritize the needs of children. I have also become a more observant person, watching and listening closely, looking below the surface, specifically so I can encourage those

who struggle with confidence. Finally, it has made me even more proud to be the daughter of the brave woman who raised me: Meta.

I. Caroline Crocker, PhD



Meta



Literary Love Savannah

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freebies, karaoke, a Ball,
Inflatable slides and
SO MUCH MORE!

70+ authors

Saturday Book Signing

Savannah Marriott
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Literary Love Savannah

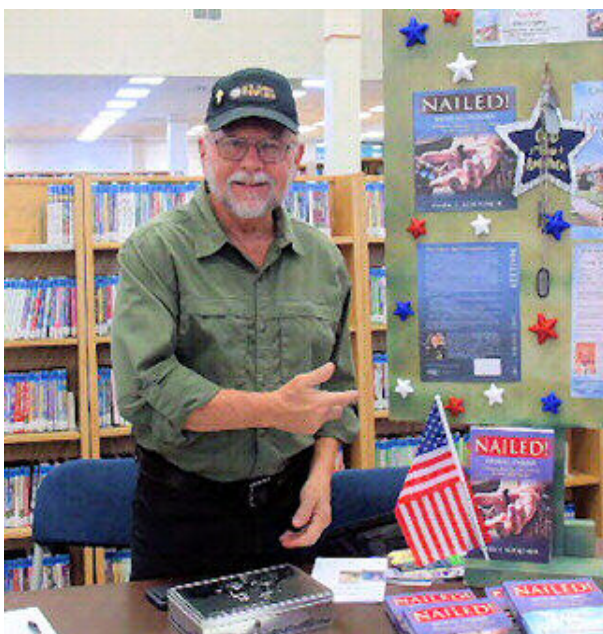
AdC Loves Conferences

The Flagler County Book Fest

The Flagler County Book Fest held on April 6, 2024, had over thirty local authors in attendance. All genres were represented in this wonderful event at the Flagler County Library in Palm Coast, Florida. The Book Fest was a celebration of literature, creativity, and the power of storytelling.



Hostess Gemma Rose



Author Mark Schreiber

Best Selling Author

Deborah Camp

Start The Year Off
Right With A Great
Romance!

deborah-camp.com Available on Amazon



Author Rhonda Lowe



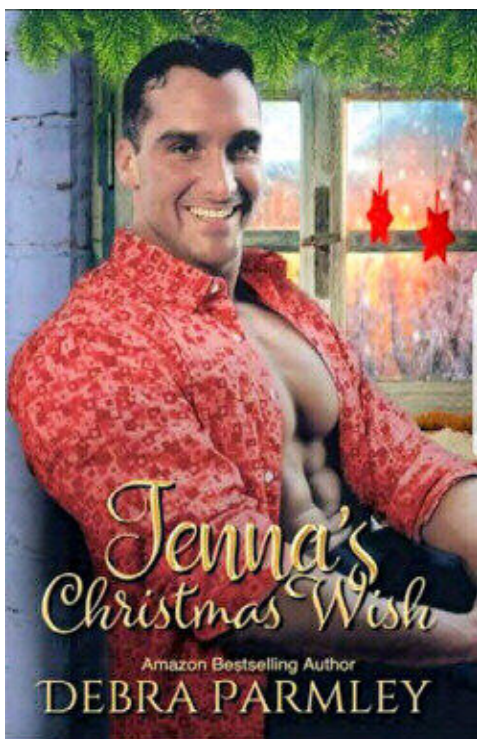
Flagler County Book Fest

An Interview with Cover Model

Actor and Cover Model

John Antorino

Brought to You by Debra Parmley



Debra: Hi John! It's been a while since we did an interview and I'm looking forward to catching up with you. For readers who are new to you, tell us what was the first cover you appeared on and how did this come about?

John: Hi Debra! And hello to all readers, friends, and fans here! It has been a minute, yes. My first romance novel cover was "*Dreams of a Raven Moon*" by Veronica Towers. It was a great novel and great cover. If I may say so myself (smirk and smile). How did it come about? Well, I was already deep in the modeling industry and doing different ads and magazine spreads all over the

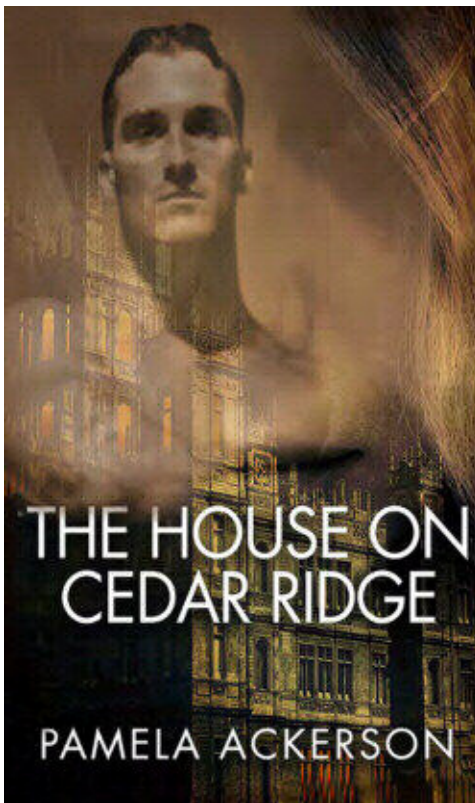
country and world. And at the time Myspace was the social media and popular. I believe that's where it started for the romance novel covers. I think the publishing company and Pam Stanton Seres contacted me there and the rest is history as far as the romance novels go.

Debra: Myspace was a fun site and what a fun place to start! Now let's catch up

with your career! What is your most recent cover?

John: Most recent cover is *The House on Cedar Ridge* by awesome Pamela Ackerson.

Debra: Beyond romance novel cover



shots, you are also an actor. How did you get your start?

John: Yes! It was just the natural progression I feel. And it was always on my radar as far back as I can remember. I was a natural and always comfortable in front of the camera and transforming into any role.

I had done basically everything possible in the modeling industry. I did runway all over Europe at the start of my career. Did all kinds of different ads, magazine spreads, represented clothing companies and various companies. So, I believe it was time for the next step and challenge.

Debra: You've done so many exciting things. What projects are you working on now?

John: Currently in pre-production on a great project. Feature film *American Paradise*. IMDb for the movie is: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1477856/?ref=nm_filmg_t_1_act

Debra: Oh, that looks good!

John: More new covers are coming soon too!

Debra: We can't wait to see them.

John: It's been a tough time in the entertainment industry. We had Covid and all that madness and craziness. Then as if that wasn't enough and a big enough set back, we had a long-drawn-out union strike.

Debra: It had to be rough not being able to work for so long and it must feel great to be back now. I'll bet you did some reading during your down time. What kind of reading do you do? Do you read when preparing for an acting role?

John: I read my scripts. And boy do I read them. And depending on what the role is will depend on what I must read to prepare for the role. It all varies.

Debra: You've portrayed many diverse characters and haven't been typecast which is good! What about photo shoot? Have you done any outside of the U.S.? Do you have a favorite place to shoot?

John: I have done lots. All over the world. Starting from the beginning of my career. I started working all over Europe in my first few years: Germany, France, Italy, London, Brazil, to name a few. My favorites are Italy and Brazil. In the US, Hawaii is tops for me.

Debra: How exciting! If you could whisk a lucky lady anywhere in the world for a romantic getaway vacation, where would you take her, and what would you most want to show her?

John: For me it doesn't really matter where we go in the world or where we are. It's all about who you're with. The company. With the right person it can feel like paradise and a vacation from reality and the outside world when you're together no matter where. But to get back to your real question, sorry (laughing). Italy is probably it for me. I know the country well and the hot romantic spots with the best food and views. I've done this and would certainly do it again!

Debra: She would be a lucky lady indeed. Many ladies will be dreaming of this now. ;-)

You have maintained a great fitness level over the years. Please tell our readers what sort of exercise routine, and nutrition plan you follow to achieve and maintain your level of fitness.

John: Thank you. Yes, it's a lifestyle. Lifelong too. And it's a family affair and in my genes too. I go to the gym

early in the morning 6 a.m. I go to the gym six days a week usually. Some weeks I go every day. I do cardio and abs. And I train each body part one time a week typically. Sometimes I'll train a body part twice. But I still train hard and intense as I always have. My diet is clean and its mostly protein of 5-6 meals a day. Lots of water. I cheat occasionally but only on a weekend.

Debra: I understand you had an injury. What happened and how have you rehabbed yourself to be in great shape again?

John: Oh, yes. I ruptured my bicep muscle. Not fun. Big setback. But bigger comeback. Had surgery at the end of October 2023. It was a rough surgery and long hard recovery process. And I am still not 100%. But I am surely back in the gym and training hard. As careful as possible at the same time (grin and wink). I had to take off from the gym completely for two months post-op. It was extremely hard for me. I did physical therapy for a short time after. But I felt I was better off doing my own thing as far as rehab. But now I am back!

Debra: We are so glad you are back and healing well! What tips would you share for readers today to stay healthy both before and after an injury?

John: Consistency is most important as with anything in life. Work hard and push yourself. But after an injury you must be a lot more careful. Get into a routine and make it a part of your lifestyle. Get your nutrition on point. It's really the most important. But always stay active and keep your heart rate up. Drink lots of water daily.

Debra: Thank you, John. Those are great tips. Now it's cheat day and I've heard you make a great pizza. Tell us about it. What kind of pizza do you make?

John: I sure do. I've been making pizza since a little boy. Started out very young making the Chef Boyardee pizza in a box with my mom. It was so fun and delicious as a kid with my sweet young mom. Obviously, I'm Italian and so food and pizza are always an enjoyable constant in my life. Especially when I cheat and treat myself. It all just evolved. The pizza making. Going to Italy so much and learning the tricks

Continued on page 27

The Spotlight is Shining on Ms. June



Kat Elle

Kat Elle is an American writer and educator based in Atlanta, Georgia. She has a master's degree in English Language and Literature from Georgia College & State University, and she teaches both domestic and international students in courses ranging from American Literature to English as a Second Language. Written at the height of the tumultuous Trump era, Elle's debut novel Epoch highlights social and cultural issues that are difficult to discuss and impossible to ignore.

AdC: *Hi, Kat, and welcome to the world of AdC! Tell us about the genre(s) you write, and the type of characters you love to write about.*

K.E.: I write mostly science fiction, although I'm dabbling in other genres. I love anything with action and adventure, but having multi-dimensional, morally grey characters is important to me. Nothing ruins a story like flat characters.

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

K.E.: I'm currently working on a sequel to *Epoch* that follows a different group of time-travel survivors to a completely new era!

AdC: *Which tasks/projects do you find you tend to procrastinate on and*

why?

K.E.: Sometimes I put off emotionally exhausting scenes because I'm not mentally prepared for them. I've got to work my way up to it!

AdC: *If you had to pick any character in one of your books, who is most similar to you, who would you choose? Why?*

K.E.: I'd probably say Iain Claffin in *Epoch*. He's just a nerdy goofball who gets caught up in a crazy situation. He's doing his best.

AdC: *If you were transported to the setting of the book you're currently reading or writing, where would you be?*

K.E.: On a ship in the middle of the

ocean...

AdC: *If you saw a doorway/portal in the middle of the forest, would you enter it?*

K.E.: Absolutely. Good-bye, real world!

AdC: *What do you wish you were better at?*

K.E.: Writing elegant literary prose. My writing is straight-forward and raw, which works well for some scenes and not so well for others. Sometimes, I'll read really beautiful descriptions and just wish for that kind of talent.

AdC: *What is something you say a lot?*

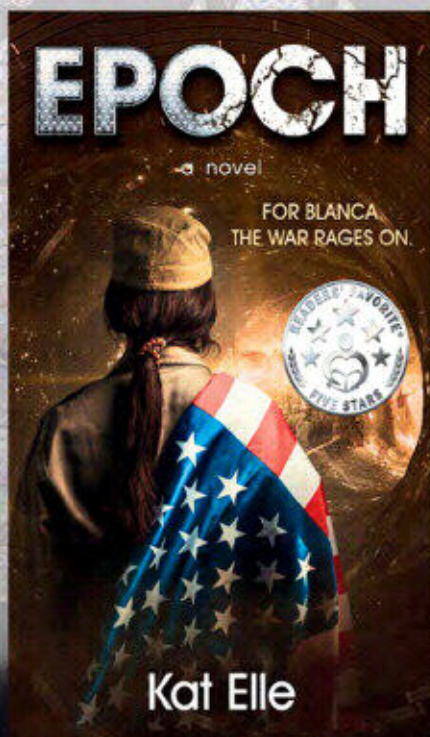
TIME-TRAVEL. WAR. A TALE OF SURVIVAL.

“A surprising, gleefully frenzied ride to the end”

- *Kirkus Reviews*

“Epoch stands out as a novel in a class of its own”

- *Readers' Favorites*



“The deeper currents behind her tough façade give [Blanca] unexpected depth.”

- *Booklife Prize*

“Grips the reader and doesn't let go until the very end!”

- *Affaire de Coeur Magazine*

“I recommend this to all fans of historical fiction.”

- *Readers' Favorites*

K.E.: I teach college students, and whenever something tragic happens in a story we're discussing, I'll say, “womp womp.”

AdC: *What do you do when no one is around?*

K.E.: Sing to my dog. There's a whole “greatest hits” Spotify playlist we have together.

AdC: *When running away for fun, where can you most likely be found?*

K.E.: Kayaking on a river. It's so peaceful!

AdC: *Where is one place you don't like to be?*

K.E.: Children's birthday parties.

AdC: *You get in trouble, who are you most likely with?*

K.E.: I find plenty of trouble on my own.

AdC: *What are one of your quirks?*

K.E.: I love Skittles, but I don't like the purple ones, so I pick them out and put them in a pile until I eventually throw them away.

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

K.E.: I don't have any lined up at the moment, but hopefully soon!

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

<https://kat-ellewriting.my.canva.site>

<https://www.facebook.com/katellewriting>

SEPT 13-14, 2024
IP CASINO | BILOXI, MS

Hot in Biloxi Authors Events

IP Casino and Resort
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Friday the 13th
Noir Party
50+ Authors

Saturday Book Signing
11:30 am to 4:00 pm

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Sneak Peek

Epoch

An Excerpt by Kat Elle

After a traumatic deployment in Afghanistan, twenty-three-year-old Army medic Blanca Hernandez is ready to leave the life of a soldier behind so she can help her younger brother Mateo start college. His orientation goes awry when a secret university experiment malfunctions and sends Blanca, Mateo, and several others back in time to Nazi-occupied Poland. Just like that, Blanca is back in a war.

Matters are complicated further by the arrival of Otto Zimmler, a Nazi fighter pilot who agrees to help them in exchange for his freedom. Now Blanca and the others must fight to survive the elements, avoid hostile soldiers, and keep the timeline intact—all the while never letting Otto know the truth of their origins.

Heavy splatters of blood, partially obscured by debris and loose paper, came into view. More blood, faded to the color of rust, decorated the barricade itself. Some of the temporary panels were riddled with bullets. The gate, smashed to the ground, bore track marks from heavy truck wheels.

Blanca turned in a slow circle and looked for bodies, but she didn't see any. The wind picked up once more, and the flapping sound returned. Blanca's eyes snapped to the canvas covered truck bed, but that wasn't the source of the noise. Finally, she caught sight of a metal pole next to the barricade railing.

Her eyes traveled up, up to the top, where a flag billowed in the wind.

Blanca stepped closer and squinted to see the flag in the dying afternoon light. This should, at the very least, tell her what kind of military detail was nearby. This could be their chance to get help.

But as the wind gripped the flag and unfurled it to its full length, stark and bright against the colorless sky, Blanca felt her heart sink. For a moment, her mind refused to register what she was seeing. And then it hit her all at once.

The waving banner above her was the flag of Nazi Germany.
This is impossible.

Blanca took a step back and reached up to grip her hair and look around, as if someone else might appear to tell her this was all some sick joke. Her throat felt dry, and she tried to swallow, but the effort only left a painful bubble in her chest. She looked back at the dark forest. *No*, she thought with conviction. *There has to be some kind of mistake. There's a reason for all this.*

Trembling, but staunchly refusing to give in to panic, Blanca reached for the long beads wrapped around her wrist and said a quick prayer. This gave her a small bit of peace, and her breathing steadied. After tucking the charm back into the beads, Blanca turned to the truck with renewed purpose and yanked the canvas back so she could peer inside.

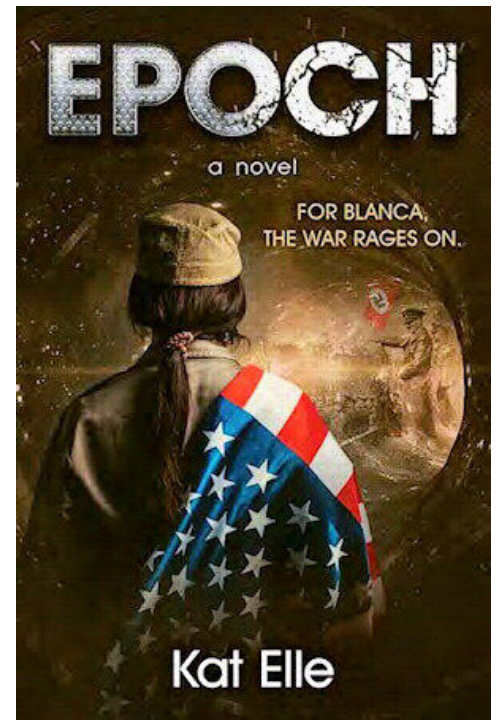
There had to be a clue, a sign—anything to tell her where they were or what was going on.

Blanca stepped inside unsteadily and looked around. The truck was mostly empty. A few bare crates lay in various states of brokenness and decay. A glass bottle with no label sat motionless in the center.

Just then, she spotted a piece of paper jammed in the passenger-side door. Hopping up, she pulled on the crooked door until the paper came out in her hand. It looked like a newspaper.

Der Stürmer it read on the top, and below that, a blaring tagline in German: *Die Juden sind unser Unglück!*

After that was a grotesque cartoon featuring Jewish priests committing



a god-awful ritual sacrifice. Blanca flinched. She didn't need to know the language to feel disgusted; the intention of the publication was brutally clear. Her eyes drifted to the top of the page.

2 December 1943

Blanca's fingers tightened on the page. Panic overwhelmed her, hitting her right in the joints and making them feel weak. She sucked in a deep breath and folded the paper with unsteady hands.

This is wrong, this is wrong—you're wrong, Blanca! Don't be stupid! This can't be real!

She shoved the paper into the back pocket of her jeans and turned to head back to the others. A humming noise in the distance drew her attention, and she stopped. The hair on her arms stood up. Like the sirens, this noise was painfully familiar to her. Blanca shifted fearfully to look up at the dim gray sky.

A regiment of fighter planes, uniform as a flock of birds, sped through the northwest corner of the sky. Whipping her head around, she saw another group of planes flying right at them from the opposite direction. Her blood ran cold.

Blanca couldn't see their insignias, but it didn't matter. The two squadrons were about to meet right over the group of people she'd left behind.

"Shit," she whispered shrilly, before turning on her heel and sprinting into the woods.



Across

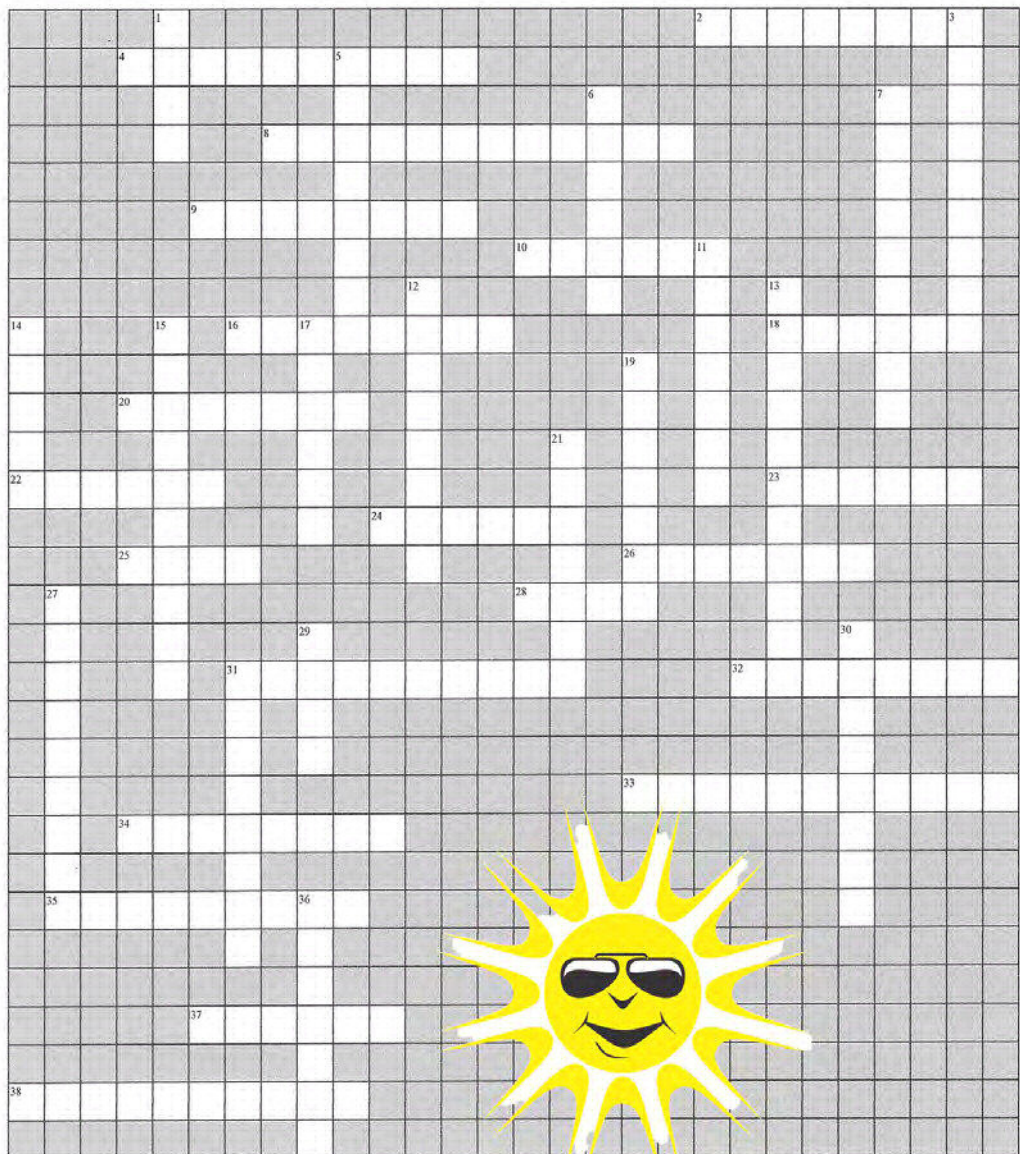
- 2. Boating in a one-seater, headed toward the waterfall.
- 4. This sport ends in June without LeBron.
- 8. Identify the cardinals, wrens, ravens, etc.
- 9. Muscial offerings outdoors.
- 10. Serena Williams' game.
- 16. Game or sport of summer.
- 18. Put on your gear and haul up that hill.
- 20. Day to celebrate Dads.
- 22. This ice-skating sport ends in June with winners getting a cup.
- 23. Brand of garmets seen in the pools.
- 24. These skates don't have blades, but can be fun, too.
- 25. Employment for the summer.
- 26. Outdoor movie.
- 28. Non-motorized instrument children like to fly.
- 31. Finding the constellations in the sky.
- 32. Day to remember the dead.
- 33. Top down on this during the summer.
- 34. This every four-year sporting event takes place in Paris in 2024.
- 35. This hunt has clues and prizes.
- 37. Skimpy attire for #31.
- 38. Ceremony that marks end of matriculation through school.

Down

- 1. Rustic place to make s'mores.
- 3. Planting or working the dirt.
- 5. Outdoor cooking.
- 6. Take out your Schwinn or Mongoose to do this.
- 7. Another name for "lightning bugs."
- 11. Going in boats that use the wind and cloth to move.
- 12. Away from work and school.
- 13. This bard's work is performed in the

- park.
- 14. Where water meets the sandy shore.
- 15. Kids balance themselves on this device on cement hills and dips.
- 17. This dessert, made of fruit juice, melts in your mouth.
- 19. This journey takes place in a wagon filled with cow's food.
- 21. Use a board, soar on the water and hang loose.

- 27. Pyrotechnic show.
- 29. County or state, the 4H clubs come to these.
- 30. When the sun's path is farthest from the Equator.
- 31. Pool activity consisting of strokes.
- 36. The moment the sun crosses the Earth's equator.



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.

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

Because of You (Calypso Key #2)

Erin Brockus

Green Sage Press

Trade Paperpack/Kindle
978-1957003313

★★★★

Evan Markham, a handsome resort manager wounded and broken by the past, and Liv Jacobson, a curvy baker running from her past, pretend that they are in a fake relationship after fate throws them together. Evan manages his family's Florida Keys beach side retreat. While it's neither his dream job nor completely fulfilling, Evan excels at it. For months, Evan's been crushing on Liv, the owner of the Sweet Dreams bakery, who he's too shy to ask out. Burdened by past injuries and pain that Evan refuses to move on from, he remains a shadow of the man he used to be.

Unexpectedly, fate intervenes when Liv's bakery catches fire. Evan offers her refuge with him and his family at their resort, giving him a chance to deepen their tentative friendship from his daily bakery visits. He says he and Liv are dating to put off familial

pressure to find a date for his brother's wedding. Liv agrees to play along and be his pretend girlfriend.

The smoldering attraction Evan and Liv share ignites from time spent together, closeness, pretend kisses, and shared secrets. Unfortunately, unresolved anger, issues, and pain from Evan's past begin to wear on his family, life, and even his developing relationship with Liv. Forced to confront them, he pushes his family and Liv away. Has he lost his chance at happiness forever?

Evan and Liv fit together perfectly. Their chemistry and attraction are instant, and their relationship develops delightfully in a slow burn. Brockus slowly transitions their relationship from friends to lovers through sweet, steamy, sexy, emotional, intimate interactions and love scenes. They encourage and support each other emotionally and have fun together. Both have self-esteem issues they're dealing with, but they want and desire each other just as they are for the person they are.

Brockus' descriptive and characterizations draw readers in from the first scene, keeping them reading her multifaceted, emotional story until the last page. Her deft world building

Affaire de Coeur

Contemporary Romance

makes readers feel like they are in the Keys and the ocean with the characters and enjoying the delicious meals and desserts they prepare and eat. The family atmosphere, how they love, support, and give each other a hard time, feels familiar, like family and friends with hilarious, snarky banter and emotional interactions.

Brockus deftly manages multiple storylines and varied tones without affecting the novel's quick pacing. She deals with weighty and emotional topics with nuance and care, deeply touching readers' hearts. Angsty, sweet, steamy, emotional, funny, sexy, and fast-paced, *Because of You* is perfect for fans of small-town, fake relationships, forced proximity, and slow-burn romances with cinnamon roll heroes and curvy heroines.

Lacy Hill

The Good Ones Are Taken

Taj McCoy

Mira

Trade Paperback/Kindle

978-0778305422

☆☆☆ 1/2

Maggie longs for a lasting relationship after a bad breakup and jumps back into dating. Her two best friends pressure her to find a date for their upcoming weddings because she's the maid of honor. On the verge of giving up, she meets a handsome doctor who seems promising. However, her best friend and wingman Garrett confesses that he's harboring feelings and is in love with her. This muddies the waters. Now, she's torn between choosing her best friend, who represents all she's always wanted, and the perfect guy. Maggie doesn't know what to do, but she knows she can't lose the most important person in her life.

McCoy's vibrant description, storytelling style, and language use for her characters bring with it an emotional, multi-layered, funny story. She develops her complex, and fallible, characters through entertaining interactions that make readers care about them and their lives.

Maggie and Garrett's relationship is solid and foundational. Their

The Keeper (Playing to Win #1)

Bella Matthews

Self-published

E-book

B0C9LPT4QF

☆☆☆☆



Easton Hayes has been my knight in shining hockey skates since he saved my life.

This devastatingly handsome grump may be everyone's favorite goalie, but to me, he's my strength when demons haunt my dreams. And okay-so maybe he's also the only man I've ever loved. But he doesn't need to know that.

We're friends.

It works for us.

At least, it did. Until I awakened up with his ring on my finger and the hangover from hell. But what happens in Vegas doesn't stay in Vegas when he refuses to give me an annulment and follows me across the country instead.

Now our families are furious.

Our friends are playing matchmaker.

I'm getting goosebumps each time I hear the words "my wife."

And I think my husband might be in love with me.

The Keeper is a spicy sports romance, between a hot hockey player and an ice princess figure skater, with an angry teammate twist, plenty of banter and a happily ever after. This is the first book in the second generation of Kroydon Hills and can be enjoyed as a standalone.

The author took all the tropes, threw them at the wall and they all stuck. Best friends brother, opposites attract, friends to lovers, grumpy/sunshine, sports romance and drunken Vegas wedding. There may be more. And damned if she didn't make it work in this delightfully fun hockey/figure skater romance.

D. Antonio

love and support for each other are apparent, as is their reliance on one another. However, the attraction and the unresolved connection remain unexplored. It's clear there is something powerful and possibly romantic between them, but Maggie is resistant to taking a chance on them because she fears risking losing what they have. Her blindness to Garrett's feelings grates, especially how she treats him once she knows.

Garrett is a supportive best friend who respects and cares about her, what she needs and wants, and what's best for her. He's patient, gives her space and room to make her own choices, and loves her imperfections. While initially it seems their relationship feels one-sided, Maggie supports his dreams and does care about him, much more than she is willing to admit to herself. As her friends try to get her to see throughout, she's in some deep denial.

The Good Ones are Taken is a frustrating read because of Maggie's stubbornness and attitude. Although there are romantic moments and a sweet ending, Maggie's so aggravating that it's hard to enjoy them as much as possible. But other readers may feel differently. Maybe her behavior and fear are legitimate concerns about losing the most vital, foundational person in her life, whom she relies on to be by her side and has done for 20 years. And so often in friends-to-lovers novels, people express fear but get past it maybe too quickly. The novel's overall pacing is okay, though it drags a bit in the middle, picking up toward the end. Sweet, steamy, hilarious, emotional, and romantic, *The Good Ones Are Taken* should appeal to fans of friends-to-lovers, wedding dates, online dating, Black romance/love, and Black women and women/men friendships.

Lacy Hill

Contemporary Romance

Meant for Her

Natasha Madison

Self Published

Trade Paperback

978-1990376908

☆☆☆

The son of an NHL legacy family, Christopher grew up loving hockey and learned to love and protect his teammates. Teammates celebrated wins together and picked each other up when one of them fell. So, it was natural for him to help his best friend and teammate's wife, Dakota, and her children when they lost his teammate and best friend Benji. However, he's confused and thrown by how deeply he's drawn to them and begins to feel like they belong to him.

Dakota's life was perfect until it fell apart when her husband became a stranger right before her eyes. Then after he left her and their daughters alone, she pushed away anyone who knew about the things he got involved in that took her husband and their father away from them. His best friend Christopher, however, just won't take no for an answer and keeps helping and doing things for them. And maybe she wants Christopher to be there for her despite herself.

Dakota and Christopher are similar. Neither has gotten the chance to be themselves because of doing what others think they should. Dakota puts her girls first and wants them to feel protected, loved, and safe, even if it means she might be unhappy. Christopher puts the people he cares about first and does whatever he can to help them, even to his own detriment.

Madison transitions their relationship from husband's teammate/best friend to friends, then lovers after giving them time to get to know and see each other differently. After establishing a closer, intimate friendship, their perspectives shift, and feelings of intense chemistry/connection shimmer between them.

Dakota and Christopher balance each other, giving one another what's missing in their lives. Christopher values Dakota, making her feel respected,

appreciated, desired, and loved as she's longed for. He also loves and spends time with her girls as their absentee father failed to. Madison explores the characters' loss with emotion, realism, grace, and nuance.

Meant for Her is a fast-paced romance about self-discovery, healing, passion, and love.

Lacy Hill

Mine to Shield: A Second Chance, FBI Standalone Romantic Suspense (Protection #9)

Kennedy L. Mitchell

KLM Books

Trade Paperback

978-1962509176

☆☆☆

Killian Cooper, a damaged FBI agent, and Millie Anderson, a heartbroken young professor, work together to take down a dangerous cult despite their rocky past.

Millie goes undercover as Killian's pretend wife. Killian is the man who broke her heart ten years ago. She

loved him with all her heart before discovering he's been safe all this time, but she's decided to (try to) hate him. Once Killian and Millie are undercover inside the cult's compound, they're surrounded by danger and lies and forced to trust and rely on each other. Will they make it out alive together once they uncover the truth, exposing the cult's leader and his evil depravity? Or will Killian leave Millie alone again forever, as she fears?

Mine to Shield is written in Millie's and Killian's first-person dual POVs and tells their love story alternating between flashbacks from the past—when they met in college and fell in love—and the present. Once Killian and Millie meet, that's it. They are soulmates, and so meant to be. While Killian was emotionally tortured even then, the things he's suffered between then and now are unimaginable, changing him in ways Millie has yet to discover.

Millie and Killian complement and balance each other so well. He keeps her safe. She keeps him emotionally centered. Both are brilliant individuals who are all about each other, though each is deeply insecure about whether those feelings are returned. Readers will love Killian and Millie's

On Her Watch (Bree Taggart #8)

Melinda Leigh

Montlake

E-book

B0B1PVRK45

☆☆☆☆



Sheriff Bree Taggart becomes a target when she follows the twisting trail of a serial killer in a bone-chilling novel of suspense by #1 *Wall Street Journal* bestselling author Melinda Leigh.

A pair of hikers find a tarp-wrapped body in a clearing in the woods. When a search in the surrounding area yields two more, Sheriff Bree Taggart knows they've stumbled onto a serial killer's dumping ground. With the help of investigator Matt Flynn, Bree works the case. They go to interview Jana, the best friend of one of the victims. But when they arrive at her apartment, it's been ransacked and set on fire. And Jana is missing.

It's clear the killer is escalating. To make matters worse, he threatens Bree's family and a young mother vanishes. Will Bree and Matt uncover the link between the victims before more women die?

I LOVE THIS SERIES! In this installment, Bree is dealing with a serial killer, sick kids and cops with the flu. This case is filled with twists and turns and I will admit to being totally surprised at the killer and the motive. Another fantastic addition to the series.

D. Antonio

Contemporary Romance

Pulse (Landry Family Security #1)

Adriana Locke

Umbrella Publishing, Inc

Trade Paperback/Kindle

978-1960355270

☆☆☆☆☆



Pulse focuses on co-workers Troy Castelli and Dahlia, who are sent by their boss to a one-bed tropical paradise where he uses his bodyguard skills to protect them from a stalker threatening to kill her. *Pulse* is a satisfying, steamy, romantic suspense novel that hits the spot for readers looking for romantic, suspenseful, and steamy romances that are not too dark, disturbing, or angst.

Troy keeps people at arm's distance. Handsome and sexy, he's thoughtful and protective of those he cares about. Dahlia, on the other hand, has a cheerful personality. She's unpredictable and tends to try to see the positive in every situation. Dahlia likes to push his buttons and challenge him. Forbidden and untouchable, she gets under Troy's skin. But it's the same for her. This reviewer loves Troy and Dahlia's banter. Though they're complete opposites, they click and balance each other perfectly. Dahlia and Troy share an intense chemistry, attraction, and connection they're both determined to deny because it's forbidden. Locke's vividly detailed and descriptive writing draws readers into the story and makes them feel like they are with them each moment. Locke's characters are likable, relatable, complex, conflicted, and messy, but readers can't help but root for them to be successful in their endeavors. She deftly develops Troy, Dahlia, and the secondary characters, including the villains—whose identities she keeps you guessing about. Her colorful, hysterical, and natural-sounding dialogue perfectly suits her characters, setting, and theme.

Locke transitions their relationship from co-workers and friends to lovers and more through hilarious, snarky banter, and love scenes that reveal and evolve their characters and further the novel's plot. Dahlia and Troy support one another and help each other to feel comfortable with each other in a way they haven't been able to with anyone else. Their love scenes are sexual but emotional.

In *Pulse*, the suspense and romance are nicely balanced, and the action sequences are intense and thrilling. A sweet, steamy, funny, emotional, romantic, and fast-paced romance, *Pulse* is perfect for fans of erotic romance, age gap, grumpy sunshine, workplace, romantic suspense, bodyguards, and touch-her-and-die romances/tropes. It explores themes of self-discovery, anxiety, falling in love, believing unlovable, self-confidence, self-esteem, anxiety, and stalking.

Lacy Hill

relationship and their interactions—past and present.

An intense, dark, suspenseful, sexy, emotional love story, *Mine to Shield* is perfect for fans of second-chance romances, forced proximity, undercover, pretend marriage, and romantic suspense. While *Mine to Shield* is a standalone romance, it has character crossovers with the other books in the "Protection" series and is best read in order.

Lacy Hill

Sabotage Operation (Book 1: South Beach K-9 Division)

Caridad Piñeiro

Harlequin-Romance

Mass Market

978-1335591664

☆☆☆1/2

Security expert Matt and his K-9 dog Butter are assigned by the South Beach K-9 Division security team to protect thoroughbred racing stable owner Teresa Rodriguez, whose property recently suffered sabotage and threats

from an unknown person. She's set to testify against her former trainer, and the danger and threats against her intensify to murder attempts before Matt and the team can even get in place and begin protecting her and investigating. All evidence points to her trainer as the primary suspect.

Teresa and Matt don't get off to a great start. Matt carries baggage from a previous relationship, making it difficult for him to view Teresa without bias. Nevertheless, Matt and Teresa are intensely attracted to one another. However, neither Matt nor Teresa wants to get involved because she's focused on her ranch, and he doesn't want to be hurt again. Still, they cannot resist the intensity of their attraction and feelings that develop while Matt protects her from her unknown saboteur, and the South Beach K-9 Division is investigating.

Piñeiro's descriptive, and concise writing style draws readers in right away. Her suspense, mystery, and action sequences are well-constructed, and the novel has steady pacing. Piñeiro deftly develops her characters. Her colorful, dialogue perfectly suits her characters when she combines Spanish with English in the characters' dialogue. Additionally, she explores the characters' Cuban culture through food, language, family history, etc.

Although the characters, romance, story, action sequences, and suspense are engaging and well-developed, the mystery resolves too quickly and is a letdown. *Sabotage Operation* is a steamy, suspenseful, and well-paced read recommended for horse ranching and riding, K-9 security, Latin American/Cuban culture, and romantic suspense/mystery fans. However, the rushed resolution of the mystery may leave some readers unsatisfied.

Lacy Hill

Smoke on the Water (Wayward Sons)

Harper Jackson

Take the Leap Publishing

Trade Paperback

978-1648351693

☆☆☆☆

Firefighter Hoyt offers waitress Caroline his protection as her boyfriend



Historical Romance

Reviews

All's Fair in Love and War

Virginia Heath

St. Martin's Griffin

Trade Paperback

978-1250896070

☆☆☆^{1/2}

Georgina Rowe was an outspoken redhead with a temper to match. Her life, after her mother died, became unbearable, bound by military quotes and strict rules of her military stepfather. After making fun of his pomposity and mouthing off one time too many, Georgie

found herself dumped outside of a fashionable little house in Mayfair, Ms. Prentice's school for governesses. It was one of the most highly acclaimed schools of learning, and anyone who graduated from Miss Prentice's school was considered a protégé and highly sought after... except Georgie. Unfortunately, she had been dismissed from her last two positions for being too outspoken and disagreeing with her employers. She strongly felt that children should not be confined to the classroom, their curiosity encouraged by going outside and studying

nature, answering their multitude of questions and, generally, not follow the old adage, "children should be seen but not heard."

Captain Harry Kincaid was the "golden boy" of the Admiralty. Never had anyone as young as he advanced so quickly in rank. Harry and his sister Flora had been raised by loving, but non-disciplinarian parents. Their house was always chaotic, lots of fun, but chaotic. Then Harry's grandfather, the Admiral, stepped in and took Harry under his wing, teaching him the meaning of discipline, order, and the military

Historical

way. Harry's house became an oasis of calm, order and discipline. His refuge. Until the day he returned home after another grueling 12-hour day and found utter pandemonium in the shape of his sister's three unruly children and their large howling sheepdog! Flora and her academia husband, it seemed, had left for an extended tour of Egypt and left their children (and dog) with "Uncle Harry." He needed help and fast!

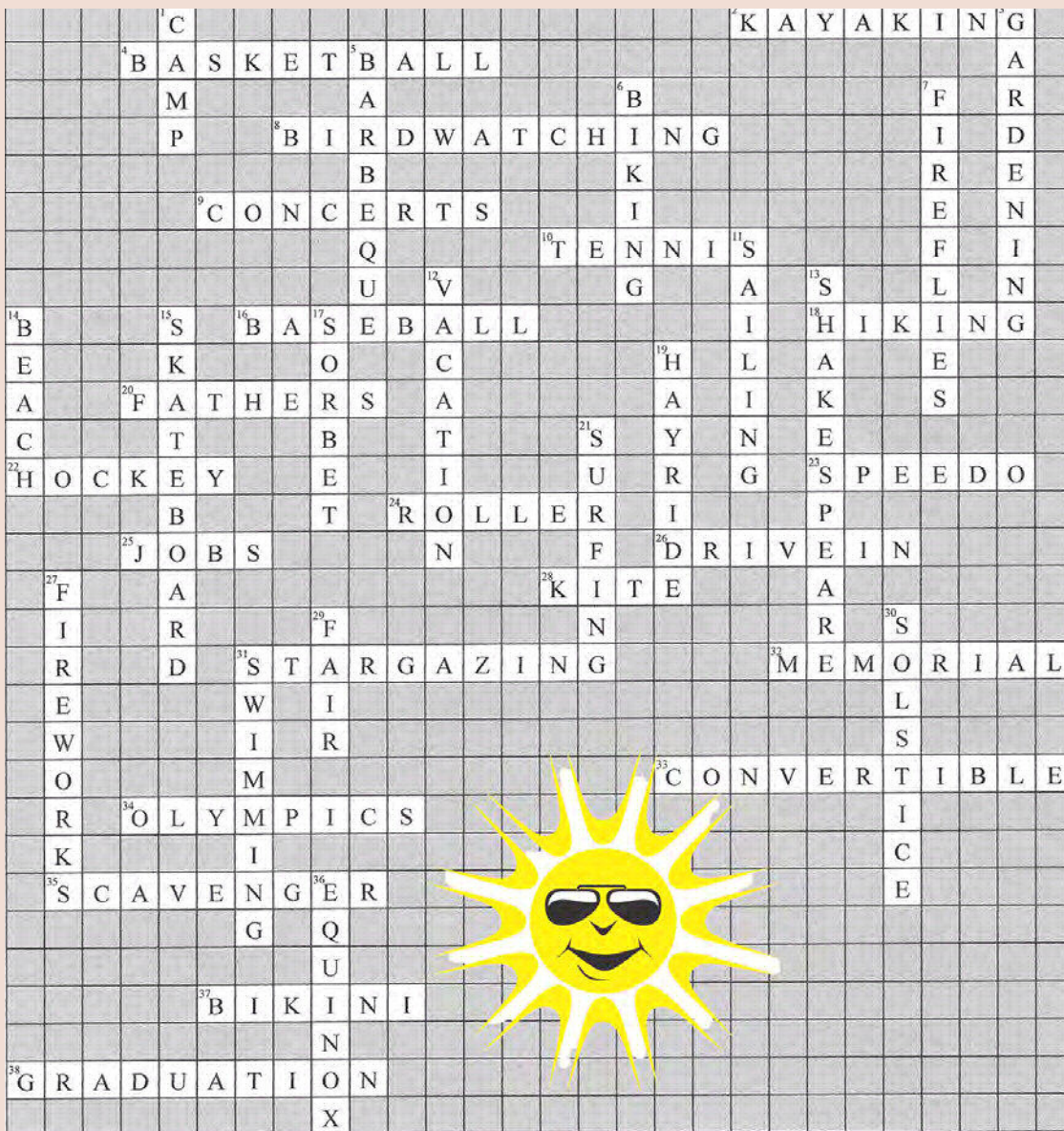
Virginia Heath's *All's Fair in Love and War* is a delight from

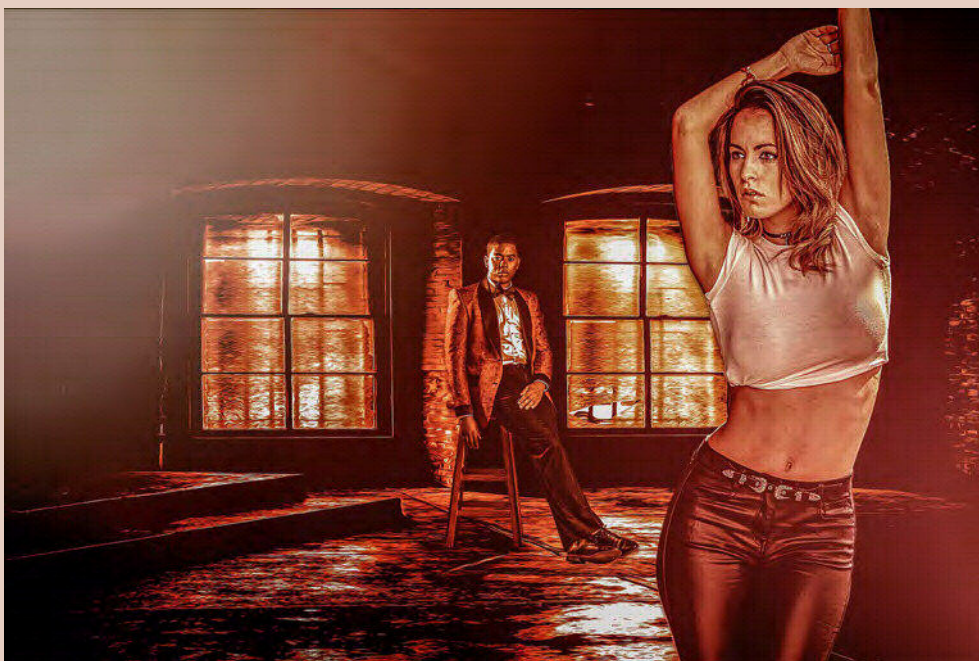
the first page. Because of Georgina's miserable childhood and strict upbringing, and her two previously failed employments, she is desperate to make this last job work. Then she meets Harry and realizes he is just like her abhorrent stepfather. Harry grew up in a world of freedom and chaos until his grandfather stepped in and molded him into a model of himself – made for the Admiralty, disciplined and comfortable only in a non-chaotic world. Can Harry and Georgie actually get along and understand each other, though

Georgina's governing style is everything Harry was taught to hate, and Harry's rigid military upbringing is everything Georgina hates?

This Regency romance will keep you reading straight through to the end laughing at the protagonists' head-butting while trying to convince each other that their way is the *best* way! Throw three devilish children and a giant mad dog into the equation, and you have a five-star romance that will keep you up laughing!

Lani Roberts





Erotica

Some Like It Hot!!!

Same Sex Couples

SM

Multi Couples

Lights, Camera, Passion

Isabel Lucero

Self-Published

Trade Paperback

B0CJDN2LX8

☆☆☆

Roman and Jacoby “Heart-throb” Hart take lead roles to play lovers in a book-to-movie adaptation with a wild fan base and quarrel, snark, and banter their way from enemies-to-lovers in Isabel Lucero’s *Lights, Camera, Passion*.

In all these years, they’ve never gotten along. Most people believe Roman stole Jacoby’s girlfriend. But Roman’s still hurt that Jacoby gave him the cold shoulder years ago, and he’s not sure how they’re going to successfully play lovers in the film when all he wants is to strangle Jacoby. Roman is shocked by their intense chemistry because, behind the scenes, all they do is quarrel or avoid each other.

The chemistry flaring between Roman and Jacoby becomes so intense that it can’t stay confined on set any longer. While engaged in a passionate argument, the unexpected happens, changing their relationship and them both forever. Jacoby and Roman’s relationship becomes more complicated than either could have anticipated behind the scenes and privately, and keeping things secret is difficult to do, especially in Hollywood.

Lucero’s vivid and descriptive writing, colorful and deft characterization draw readers into Roman’s and Jacoby’s story and keep them turning the pages. Her colorful, hilarious, and natural-sounding dialogue perfectly suits her fascinating, relatable, and likable but conflicted and messy characters.

Lucero develops and transitions Roman and Jacoby’s relationship from active dislike—for reasons both genuinely believe well-founded—to lovers through hilarious, snarky banter, sweet,

sexy, steamy, and intimate interactions, and love scenes that draw them closer, reveal and evolve their characters, and further the novel’s plot. Somewhere along the way, they become something more despite themselves. When you see these two with their back-and-forth bickering banter plus sizzling chemistry and eyeing each other up when the other’s not looking,—for two men who can’t stand each other—it’s not that hard to start putting the pieces of the puzzle together. There’s something between them neither is ready to acknowledge nor deal with, and their past interactions make it easy to fight instead of facing those feelings and each other.

Sweet, steamy, funny, sexy, and emotional, *Lights, Camera, Passion* is a fast-paced, passionate romance perfect for filmmaking and behind-the-scenes in Hollywood, enemies-to-lovers, and M-M romance fans. It explores themes of self-discovery, secrets, family, friendship, first love, sexual exploration, self-identity, and coming out.

Lacy Hill

2024 Book Events

We Look Forward to Meeting You.

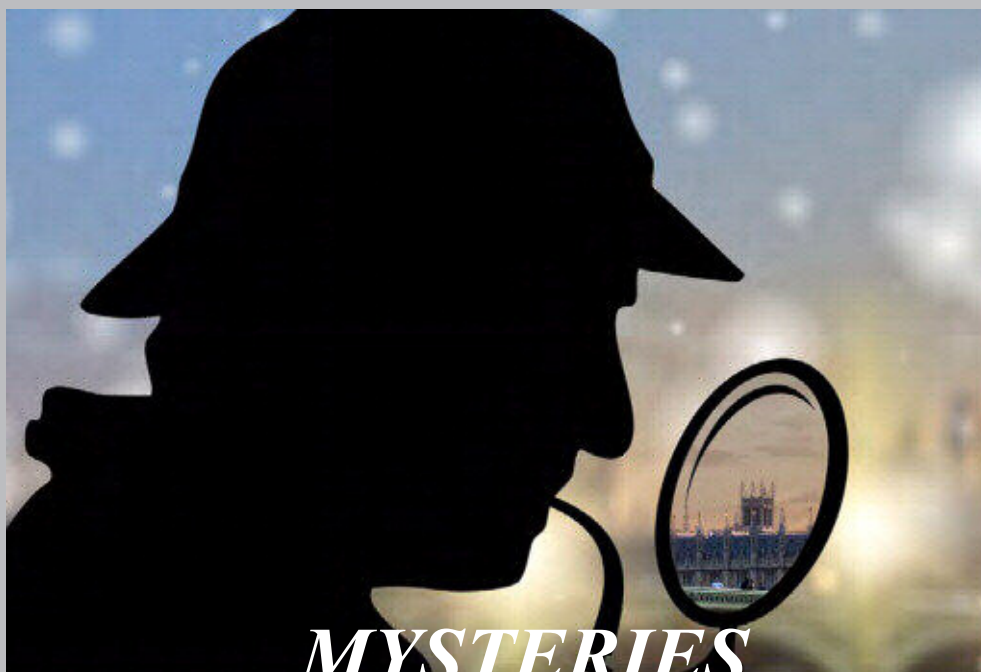
Space Coast Book Lovers
Cape Canaveral, FL
June 19-22

Literary Love Savannah
Savannah, GA
July 18-21

Hot in Biloxi
Biloxi, MS
September 13-14

Flirty in Tampa
Tampa, FL
October 4-5

Meet the Authors
Melbourne, FL
November 16-17th



MYSTERIES

Historical and Contemporary Whodunnits?

Kill Her Twice

Stacey Lee

Penguin Young Readers Group

E-book

B0CCN92WB4

☆☆☆☆ 1/2

In 1932 Los Angeles Chinatown, on the brink of being demolished to construct a new railroad Union Station, two sisters, May and Gemma Chow seek answers to the death (likely murder) of Lulu Wong, a Chinese American movie starlet and good friend to May. May and Gemma have had to step up and take the reins of their family due to unfortunate circumstances. While the sisters are polar opposites, their strengths complement each other in their search for truth about Lulu's death while they run their struggling family floral business. Time is running out as the City's plan to evict them from their community comes to fruition, and the police investigation is prematurely closed, both due to corruption and anti-Asian sentiment in influential circles.

Kill Her Twice is a period mystery full of atmosphere. The Chow sisters are vividly rendered. May is the oldest sister who carefully follows the rules of being a traditional Chinese daughter, but deep inside she desires to break free to reach for her own dreams,

including following in the footsteps of her friend Lulu and becoming an actress. Gemma is a rule-breaker, fiery and impulsive, unafraid to take risks. Peony is the youngest at twelve, always being left behind to watch over their mother. Together, they are stronger. As first generation children, their viewpoints show the injustice of being American but treated as aliens, with limited ability to protect their own community and denied the same ability to achieve goals that are the bedrock of American values. May's closeness with Lulu before her death strikes a poignant note as she reflects on the important lessons and encouragement Lulu provided her. The reader gets to know the woman that Lulu was, making her murder even more tragic and senseless.

Kill Her Twice is an intimate look into the behind-the-scenes of the growing Hollywood movie industry forms a backdrop to this mystery as the sisters dig deep to find Lulu's killer. Lee captures the 1930's period very well, immersing the reader into that setting with descriptions and dialogue that feels very authentic. The racism that Asian Americans faced during the period is untenable, but it's the reality, and it's extremely important for light to be shed on factual events of America's dark past so that zero tolerance is allowed for its repetition in the contempo-

Affaire de Coeur

rary time period and future.

The atmosphere and characterization are strong points, along with a tightly plotted mystery that will keep readers guessing. There's a nice hint of romance as well that fits in very well with the narrative, without overshadowing this story of sisters who find themselves, each other, and the power they have under circumstances that seem to be stacked against them. *Kill Her Twice* is well worth a read.

Danielle Hill

Last Note of Warning

Katharine Schellman

Minotaur Books

978-1250325792 Hardcover

978-1250325808 E-Book

☆☆☆☆

What's a girl to do when she's the perfect scapegoat, charged with a murder she didn't commit? Vivian Kelly, who delivers fancy custom dresses to wealthy clients by day but works as a dance hall girl in the Nightingale speakeasy by night in 1920's New York City during prohibition, seems an easy target for harried police officials to blame in the death of a prominent businessman so they can close the case quickly and satisfy the public and the powers that be in the city.

Vivian enjoyed a cozy chat with Mr. Buchanan while waiting for his wife to return home so she could try on her new dress. When a housekeeper called Buchanan away to meet a colleague in his office, an exhausted Vivian fell asleep while sitting in his study. After waking abruptly, she went in search of someone to tell that she was leaving, not having time to wait for the client to return. That's when she made the shocking discovery of Buchanan's body slumped over his desk, stabbed to death.

The police considered Vivian their prime suspect, since she was the last person known to have seen the man alive. Only because the police commissioner was the uncle of her boyfriend, Leo, Vivian was granted a reprieve of one week before going off to jail, during which she was determined to find the real killer.

Mysteries

Sleuthing was not an easy task, and each discovery made it more difficult to trust even her dearest friends. Vivian single-mindedly pursued the clues up until the last agonizing second. But would she find the real killer before her time was up? She was sure that if she failed, she'd go to prison and never return.

Vivian is no shrinking violet, and her quest for the truth keeps the reader rooting for her success right to the nail-biting conclusion.

Hannah Rowan

Still Waters

Matt Goldman

Tor Forge

978-1250325679 Hardcover

978-1250325693 Paperback

978-1250325686 E-Book

☆☆☆☆

Liv and Gabe Ahlstrom are siblings who live on opposite coasts. Neither has any desire to revisit Leech Lake in Minnesota, where they grew up. The estranged siblings come together for the funeral of their older brother, Mack, staying in the lakeside resort owned by their family.

Liv is a successful entrepreneur who runs a fashion agency in Manhattan, while Gabe is a ne'er-do-well aspiring rock star who tends bar in Los Angeles while he waits for his big break. Neither has much respect for the others' way of life.

Their visit is off to a strange start when they both receive an email from their newly deceased brother informing them that someone is trying to kill him. If they receive the email, it states, that means someone has succeeded. They don't know if it's real or if their brother was in denial, and they don't get any support from the police.

An uncle they haven't seen in ages is running the resort, which has undergone many changes since they last visited. They also reunite with a cousin

who is all grown up and who has plans to turn the resort property into a wind farm. A neighbor who owns competing resorts around the lake also has designs on the property.

Liv and Gabe have first right of refusal before the resort can be sold, which may be why they're receiving various threats that are putting their own lives in danger. It's a race against time while they wade through a host of possible suspects and a variety of motives for the untimely deaths of people associated with the resort.

The Ahlstrom siblings face so many choices as they struggle to repair their relationship, decide what to do with the resort, and puzzle over which of the people from their pasts they can trust. Their dilemmas will keep the reader guessing until the exciting climax of the story.

Hannah Rowan

Antorino Interview cont.

and such there. With the dough. And taking a little bit from mom and both Grandmothers on the sauce recipe. Trial and error. Being able to get ingredients from Italy. Making it for friends and family. And it being such a hit. Eventually I believe I'll own some of my own pizza spots. And oh, it's thin and crispy. The only way pizza should be!

Debra: Gosh you have made me hungry now. Thin crust is the best and if you open a pizza parlor I want to visit! Do you have any other specialties that you might cook for a romantic evening in?

John: I can cook anything really. I make great sauce and meatballs Chicken parm. Lasagna. Seafood dishes. Romantic evening in. Chances are it'll either be my homemade pizza or an Italian extravaganza with chicken parm and pasta meatballs. Or lasagna. She must be special if I am putting in that kind of effort (laughing and sexy

smile)

Debra: Yes, she would be, and cooking is one way to say, "I love you" and to celebrate. So, when celebrating, I remember you telling me you avoid alcohol and drugs and all those vices that are so common today and more so in the Hollywood scene. Is that still the case? Is it difficult for you?

John: Yes. I still avoid all those things. And have zero desire for any of it. It's not difficult at all, no. It's my choice and I love it. I am strong minded.

I love life and am high on life. And pizza (cracking up). People that feel they need drugs and alcohol to have fun and enjoy life are doing it all wrong. You are truly wasting your health, mind, and money on things you don't need. If someone wants a drink occasionally have at it. I don't criticize. But I am super proud that I remain different in this regard and have no need or desire for any of it. I have a wonderful fun exciting life and career without it.

Debra: We do not have to celebrate with alcohol. There are other, healthier ways! Let's say we are celebrating your covers. Do you have any personal favorite covers you've graced?

John: I love them all really. Gracious for all opportunities. I loved the first *Gingerbread House* cover I did for Pamela Ackerson. I loved the Christmas one I did with you, *Jenna's Christmas Wish*. Awesome cover and story. *Out of the Wilderness* with Pamela Ackerson where I play a cowboy is up there too. I truly love them all and all the authors I have worked for.

Debra: Now it's summertime, and the living is easy. Here are eight Quickie Summertime Questions. First: What is your favorite fun thing to do in the summer?

John: Beach. My wave runner and being on the water all day. Boardwalk.

Continued on page 35



Audio Books

Includes all genre,
and all time periods.

The Hookup Plan

Farah Rochon

Narrated by Marissa Hampton

Hachette Audio/Forever

Audiobook

978-1668605732

☆☆☆

London Kelley is a successful pediatric surgeon who needs to find balance in her life and reduce her stress. Her friends Samiah and Taylor suggest a casual hookup—a fun night with no strings. But the last person London or her girls expected her to hook up with was London’s archnemesis, Drew Sullivan, at her high school reunion of all places. London is even more frustrated when she discovers Drew is back in Austin to decide whether her beloved hospital stays open or will be sold.

Drew will do whatever it takes to change London’s view of him. But London has no plans to fall for his nice guy act or him. She will sleep with him, but falling in love is not part of her plans. A bossy perfectionist and control freak, London is a gifted doctor and surgeon but a hot mess. However, her need to be perfect and in control can be traced back to her relationship with her

absentee, critical father. Drew Sullivan left the hedge fund he worked for to form his own business to help people and change the world. Now a multi-millionaire, Drew’s still gorgeous and intelligent, and he likes to give London a rough time. But more than anything, he wants them to become friends, then more. He doesn’t want just to have a sexual relationship.

Rochon’s story-telling is vibrant and detailed in her world-building. She excellently develops complex, relatable, and likable characters, whom you can’t help but love and root for all the happiness in the world. Her colorful, authentic, and natural-sounding dialogue, dialects, and language perfectly suit her characters and settings.

Hampton’s expressive narration complements Rochon’s down-to-earth, vivid storytelling style. Her voice perfectly fits London, Drew, and the secondary characters, bringing them to life. Hampton’s narration differentiates the characters using all of the narrative devices such as pacing, intonation, inflection, and dialects which draw readers into Rochon’s romance and keeps them enthusiastically listening as the novel flies by.

Readers will love London and Drew’s relationship because their in-

teractions, banter, and how they talk to each other are fun to read. London just wants sex from him. Drew continues to be himself—gentle and sweet, giving her what she wants until she’s ready to let him in. He cares for her, listens, and supports her and her needs. Their love scenes change as the novel progresses to become more sweet, gentle, and intimate. They grow closer, the relationship transitioning from hit-it and quit-it to something more serious.

London, her girls, and their friendships are terrific. They support and encourage each other, giving them a place to express their joys, fears, challenges, etc. Additionally, Rochon explores disparities in health care availability based on income and the difficulties facing professional Black women in practicing self-care with nuance and care.

The Hookup Plan is a sexy, funny, and fast-paced enemies-to-lovers romance that explores themes of common family issues, health issues affecting Black Americans, and financial effects on health care access and availability.

Lacy Hill

Reckless Heart

Jane Suen

Narrated by Devon Grace and

Troy Duran

Self published

Audiobook

B0CP8JMXLH

☆☆☆

Devon Grace and Troy Duran narrate Jane Suen’s *Reckless Heart* in alternating dual-POV. *Reckless Heart* is a small-town, second-chance romance in which Brad and Mary, former childhood friends and classmates, reconnect as adults when Brad is in town for Mary’s sister’s wedding. They lost touch after high school because Mary broke his heart right before prom. They’re drawn together again by a matchmaking friend.

Suen draws readers into this story with her vivid description and deft characterization of her complex, fallible, and relatable characters. She

Audiobooks

tells Brad's and Mary's story alternating between the present and flashbacks, mostly in the characters' thoughts and memories.

Narrators Grace and Duran, especially Brad, sound older than expected for their ages. But as the novel progresses and Brad and Mary spend more time together, their narration seems to soften. The narration provides distinct voices for the characters, using cadence, tone, and pacing to capture the characters' emotions and states of mind.

Readers who love friends-to-lovers romances, especially when love is perceived as unrequited as here, should enjoy this novel. All the pining, yearning, and things unspoken between them are overwhelming. Weighed against Brad's anger and bitterness, still, the way it was resolved, however, may be unsatisfying to some readers. The novel is so short that some other scenes could have been sacrificed instead of a proper resolution for the issues between them. The lingering frustration and disappointment made the really sweet, romantic ending hard to enjoy. Nevertheless, *Reckless Heart* is an introspective, sweet, angsty, sexy, funny, and nostalgic audio listen for second-chance, small-town, secret crush, and closed-door romance fans.

Lacy Hill

Wild Crush

Kacey Shea

Narrated by Erin Mallon and Robert Hatchet

Self Published

Audiobook

B0D4F7XC5B

☆☆☆☆

Erin Mallon and Robert Hatchet narrate Kacey Shea's *Wild Crush*. Shea takes your heart on a wonderfully written, heartbreaking, rocky, but ultimately rewarding romantic journey with child-

hood best friends Rainer and Maeve Wilder. Rainer's love and friendship for Maeve are steadfast. He's been in love with Maeve all his life, pining for her, but never told her for fear of losing her friendship. When Maeve marries and has children, Rainer believes he's lost his chance but still never stops being her best friend or longing for her. After her husband leaves Maeve, Rainer comes and stays with Maeve to help take care of her and the children. Living together in close quarters removes Maeve's blinders and she sees Rainer as a man and a romantic possibility.

The narrators complement Shea's introspective, emotional, and lively narrative style, expressively bringing her captivating, multi-layered novel and fascinating characters to life. Mallon and Hatchet's voices perfectly fit Maeve, Rainer, the children, and the secondary characters. However, Mallon's narration is better for Maeve and the other women secondary characters. Their narration differentiates the characters using accents, dialects, pacing, inflection, and emotion to give them distinct voices that reveal their personalities, quirks, and states of mind. Both terrifically express the characters' loneliness, fear, anger, happiness, desire, love, and passion for each other. The novel's tone ranges from humorous to intimate to angsty to intensely emotional to sizzling hot, and Hatchet and Mallon shift between these tones without affecting the story's pacing. They use their vocal ranges to portray the intimacy between characters and their chemistry, sensations, and moods during the novel's emotional love scenes.

Shea's vivid, descriptive, active, down-to-earth, and expressive writing style is easily accessible, effortlessly grabbing hold of your heart and whole attention. She deftly develops her likable, relatable, fallible, messy, and sometimes frustrating characters, making you care about them and their lives. Maeve and Rainer's love scenes are

incredibly emotional and steamy, contributing to evolving their connection, relationship, and burgeoning romance.

You can't help but love the closeness of Rainer and Shea's relationship and how they talk about nearly everything. Unfortunately, their relationship is so unbalanced. Rainer's love for Maeve is bottomless. He's all about her, putting her, her needs, wants, and children first—as a partner should. But when you're pouring out everything you have into everybody else, you need to be refilled too, and for most of the novel, Maeve wasn't in a place to be able to do this or see things with enough clarity to realize she might need to do this for him. This is a frustrating part of the novel. Especially when she makes choices in the novel that are in character for her but are not the best for her or her children and are incredibly hurtful to Rainer.

Exploring the challenging parts of being married and having young children for whom you're the primary caretaker and are left to do it all on your own with no help from your spouse, Shea writes about the emotional, mental, and physical toll that can take on a person plus caring for the home and sustaining a relationship with your spouse. She's pushed to her limit when he walks out on her and their children. Rainer's there to be her rock. He's a fantastic example of selfless love and what a husband/father/life partner should be. Maeve's blessed to have a friend like him in her life always willing to be there and love her and her children without asking for/expecting anything in return.

Funny, emotional, angsty, sweet, sexy, and fast-paced, *Wild Crush* is an audio listen recommended for readers who like romances with tropes and stories about small-town romance, friends-to-lover, unrequited love, family-centered, parents with babies/children, and heroes who fall fast/hard for the heroine.

Lacy Hill



Booty

Reviews from other genre

Every Time We Say Goodbye

Natalie Jenner

St. Martin's Press

978-1250285188 Hardcover

978-1250285195 E-book

☆☆☆ ½

Post World War II, the American movie industry was in peril when Communist-hunting Senator Joseph McCarthy put many actors, directors, and writers on a blacklist. In Italy, British and American movie makers sought to ply their trade freely but were, instead, monitored by the Catholic Church whose representatives were powerful enough to put a halt to any storyline they didn't approve of.

London playwright Vivien Lowry works in a bookstore to finance the production of her plays. She accepts an invitation to work on a controversial play in Italy. It tells the story of a young female assassin who worked with the Italian resistance to undermine the Nazis occupying the country before her capture and execution. Vatican representatives dislike the play which calls into question the Church's failure to rescue Jews from the Nazis.

Traveling to Italy gives Vivien

the opportunity to investigate the fate of her fiancé, David, presumed killed in the war, which was never confirmed. Vivien is immersed in the Italian movie culture, hobnobbing with such notables as Gina Lollobrigida, Sophia Loren, Ava Gardner, and Brigitte Bardot. She gets romantically involved with a movie executive named Lassiter, married but supposedly separated from another glamorous and powerful actress. All of these factors intertwine: the Vatican's disapproval of her script, her uncertainty over the nature of her relationship with Lassiter and his daughter, her quest to find the truth about David, and her complex relationships with her other friends and coworkers.

Every Time We Say Goodbye takes place during a time period not often explored in novels and provides a glimpse into a little-known side of the movie business. Combining those factors with Vivien's emotional journey makes for a fascinating read.

Hannah Rowan

Head Fake

Scott Gordon

Maxwell Street Books

979-8990103528 Hardcover

979-8990103511 Paperback

979-8990103504 E-Book

☆☆☆ 1/2

Mikey Cannon is the son of an award-winning high school basketball coach who can never live up to his father's expectations. Mikey has been deeply depressed since his mother's death, unable to hold a job or stay in school to the point where he became homeless and even in a mental hospital at one point.

Because of the intercession of a family friend, Mikey has one last chance at a respectable job—driving a school bus for a Los Angeles high school for juvenile offenders and mentally ill students. The principal makes no secret about not wanting him there and expecting him to fail, and he almost immediately gets into trouble.

Almost by accident, Mikey watches the motley basketball team practice and can't stop himself from giving advice based on things he learned from his father. They've never won a game. When the last coach quits,

Booty

Mikey steps into his spot.

Coaching this team of misfits isn't easy. He has to earn their trust, a difficult task because they come from dysfunctional family situations or have trouble controlling their tempers. Under it all, they have very little confidence in themselves, but then neither does Mikey. Mikey's challenge is to whip the team into shape in spite of the negative attitudes of the people around them. He has to resolve some serious issues with his father who makes no secret of expecting both Mikey and his team to fail.

The emotional journeys of Mikey and his team leave us rooting for the underdog. There was perhaps a bit too much basketball jargon for those readers who don't follow the sport. Overall, it was a story that made readers care about the characters and hope things work out for the best for them.

Hannah Rowan

Loy and Beyond Book 2

Todd David Gross

Sunlit Lane Productions

E-book

B0CW1FRMTY

☆☆☆

Tremlo of the Reloy has an undeniable destiny, but he must grow with the journey before him. His senses since birth are so overwhelming it takes many years before he can even speak. In the meantime, he is taking everything in, mastering nature and himself together.

The Reloy stay to themselves until the outside world gives them no choice. Baronus, a member of the Elite of a distant kingdom, is bent on conquest, a rival with an almost superior army. Kriiton, his top commander, forms a plan using the Kurr, a terrible almost indestructible beast he thought once untrainable. That opinion is changed and a quest to capture some eventually results in a great battle that kills all the Kurr but not before they hand Kriiton a victory.

The quest to acquire more Kurr ensues, and eventually Kriiton and the Reloy cross paths when Jormah, traveling with an almost mature Tremlo, is captured by Kriiton.

Kriiton feels a power from this creature he can't quite get a grasp of, while Tremlo hides and watches as his friend studies his captors. Kriiton tortures Jormah and it's too much for Tremlo and they effect an escape and are pursued for months. The two grow in spirit and their power as they tap into and merge with nature. Their power becomes strong even as the pursuit by the obsessed Kriiton has fallen behind. He wants that power at all costs.

Loy and Beyond Book 2 begins with Tremlo and his upbringing with the Reloy people. This helps build the world the author will give you. As the Reloy are moving through life, a story of a kingdom with conquest is built and the two stories eventually merge.

The personalities are well done and the story moves along well. There are some characters who do not seem to add to the story but they do help preserve the world that has been built. This is the second book of a series. It is a long read and could easily be a starting book if you didn't read the first book, but you will definitely have to wait for the third in the series to know how the characters will carry on.

Lauren Calder

A Mythical Case of Arson (A Mythical Pet Sitting Mystery Book 1)

Melissa Erin Jackson

Ringtail Press

E-book

B0CW1K3243

☆☆☆☆



"Just when she thinks her day can't get any weirder, she finds a baby dragon"

Deandra Hendricks works her fingers to the bone at two jobs to keep her Los Angeles apartment. With a rapidly dwindling savings account, the prospects for her future are bleak. So when her cousin invites her to visit Axia—the hidden, magical hub their grandparents retired to—she agrees. Deandra doesn't possess a stitch of magic herself, but a long weekend vacation in a strange new town might be just what she needs.

Her first day in Axia is so bizarre, though, she wonders if her bleak life in Los Angeles hasn't been so bad after all. And, just when she thinks her day can't get any stranger, she finds a baby dragon trapped in a dumpster. At a loss, she takes a trip to the vet, hoping they can help find the little guy's owner.

The dragon, it turns out, only appears in its true form to her, while everyone else sees a dire wolf puppy. She and the vet discover that as long as the dragon wears his bespelled collar, his true identity is hidden. Someone went to great lengths to keep this supposed-to-be-extinct animal a secret.

Then the "dog" is accused of arson and is seized by authorities. Determined to help him, Deandra searches for the real arsonist. She catches wind of a thriving black market that's populated by those who would stop at nothing to claim an animal this rare. She must work quickly to clear her dragon's name, because if he falls into the wrong hands, she could lose him forever.

As a mundane daughter of a witch, Dee has heard of the magical world but never visited till now. Her mind is blown from the very beginning in this adorable cozy mystery. The beings Dee meets along the way will make you believe. Along the way, Dee is adopted by a baby dragon who is painfully cute. Dee has choices to make and a murder to solve. Enjoy the ride.

D. Antonio

Booty

No Way Out of This

Sue Fagalde Lick

She Writer Press

Trade Paperback

978-1647426866

★★★★★



No Way Out of This is a difficult read for many reasons. The reader is exposed to a disease from which everyone who loves him, even tangentially, is affected. Alzheimers.

Sue married Fred who was fifteen years older than she. He had children from his first marriage and was not interested in more. Sue had no children and would have liked to, but Fred was emphatic. So they ended up with two dogs, one of which was uncontrollable and ran off all the time.

They decided to sell their home in San Jose, California, and move to Oregon. (You get more house/land for your money.) While she had a nice home on the beach, her family was in California, and she had no one. Other than occasionally not understanding his references to things before her time, everything was great. Then Fred began to forget things—small things at first. His memory loss blossomed, and Fred hardly remembered anything. Soon he could not hold his job, and he didn't remember her though she faithfully went to see him and played music he loved.

Meanwhile, Fred's children were basically disinterested in helping out. They rarely called to see how he was doing. Sue's family was too far away to be of help, and she couldn't afford to move back. So there she was in a strange environment with doctors she neither liked or trusted and facilities that rendered sub-standard care—on her own. She often fed him; she bathed and shaved him; she made sure he had clean clothes; she entertained him—all of this while she went to school and worked full time.

This reviewer doesn't know how she did it. Moreover, in all honesty, I don't know whether I would do all the things she did. She loved him, and that was the bottom line. I am certain there are spouses who love their mates just as much as Sue loved Fred but would not be able to do what Sue did.

No Way Out of This is heart-wrenching. Never have I felt both the empathy and sympathy for a woman who is a true heroine. Admittedly, some of the things she brought on herself, but I just shook my head and said, "that poor woman." She finds herself living with the decisions her husband made which seem extremely unfair. Yet she doesn't seem bitter. This reviewer doesn't know whether to encourage spouses of patients with Alzheimers to read this book—it might make them want to split before they get started, but if they want a blow-by-blow description of the awfulness of the disease, *No Way Out of This* is the book to read. Lick is very graphic in describing the hell of the disease. She leaves nothing out, sometimes making the reader cringe. Kudos to Lick; it must have been difficult to put her experience on paper.

Mildred Burkett

Trial by Betrayal (YR4 - The Nightshade Guild: The Trials of the Guild Book 3)

*Jennifer
Wedmore*
**Celtic Hearts
Press**

Ebook
B0D2SB913F

★★★★★



Morwen and Fauxon made it home from 1968, but there's no time to relax! The Creator of Magic said they are abusing their powers and doing more harm than good. Morwen has to prove she is worthy of magic, the Guild, and herself. She's facing seven trials with family and friends as her accusers. Can she survive the emotional toll of each person's accusations?

She has to convince the judges, and most importantly herself that her actions in the Guild were with the best of intentions, but can the words hurled at her shake her confidence or will she be found innocent and keep her place in the Guild?

Seven trials to determine her fate. Seven trials to determine if she keeps her life with Fauxon and her Magic.

Trial by Betrayal was so hard on my heart. Morwen no sooner gets back from 1968 than she is separated from Fauxon and put on trial to justify her actions. She has to defend her choices under stressful conditions. I kept wondering if I could be that gracious. I kept wanting to scream at the judges that she did her best and I dare you to have made better decisions under fire?

This is a solemn story that will make you think.

D. Antonio



Tales from Cabin 23: The Boo Hag Flex

Justina Ireland

HarperCollins Children's Book

E-Book

978-0063287839

☆☆☆

A young girl who is definitely not having fun at summer camp finds her way to a strange cabin that shouldn't exist, Cabin 23, with an even stranger woman who has a very scary story to tell both the girl and the reader. The story is about Tasha Washington, who goes to live with a father and grandmother she never knew in a run-down trailer park called Shady Pines. Her troubles are just beginning, when it quickly becomes apparent that a monster is preying on the elderly inhabitants. Tasha befriends a neighbor girl named Ellie, and together they undertake the mission of capturing the creature before it's too late.

The reader shares Tasha's point

of view as she deals with grief for the loss of her mom, the feelings of rejection by her absentee father who makes her the least of her priorities, and her sense of being unmoored in an inescapable new reality. While she likes her newly found grandmother, it's a lot to adapt to—changing homes, moving in with family she never knew, and now living in a rundown trailer park with some very strange goings on and a foul-smelling monster creeping around leading to mysterious deaths.

Tales from Cabin 23: The Boo Hag Flex is a genuinely scary book. The author does an incredible job of building and sustaining tension, and manages to incorporate some shocking moments that feel very edgy, but also age appropriate. Tasha is an avid reader, and her explorations into folklore ties seamlessly to the origins of the monster. While the reveal makes sense, it also creates a sense of drama and pathos for this coming-of-age story with its themes of how life can be rough and full of loss and disappointments, but we are also resilient in the face of daily troubles, and there can still be hope for the future.

While the transition between the frame story and the story of Tasha is a bit jarring and uneven, overall *Tales from Cabin 23: The Boo Hag Flex* is a very enjoyable and thrilling middle grade horror novel with much to recommend about it.

Danielle Hill



The Perfect Guy Doesn't Exist

Sophie Gonzales
Wednesday Books

Hardcover

978-1250819185

★★★★

Ivy Winslow has the house to herself for a week while her parents are away. Her plans to hang out with Henry, her best friend, and binge-watch her favorite fantasy TV show while avoiding Mack, her former best friend-turned-enemy, go awry when Ivy wakes up to find Weston, the gorgeous, fictional main character, in her bedroom, claiming he's her soul mate.

Ivy's fanfic writing brings Weston from her stories to life. But after spending time with him, Ivy discovers that the qualities and tropes she swoons over in her stories are not as romantic in reality. Having her fanfic/TV crush come to life causes her incredibly frustrating real-world problems. To discover why Weston is here and how to either get him back to where he belongs or help him settle

into life in the real world, Ivy teams up with Henry and Mack, grudgingly. Now that Mack is in her life again, Ivy must reconsider whether Weston—this “perfect guy” she created—is perfect for her or if she's been blind to the person who is genuinely ideal for her all this time.

Gonzales' lively, crisp, vibrant, and detailed writing quickly draws readers in from the opening scenes. She develops her complex, fascinating, messy, and conflicted characters through funny but witty banter and interactions. Gonzales throws surprising twists and turns into the story—she takes the time to develop efficiently—that makes you doubt that the characters will get the happy ending you want for them.

Exploring Ivy's and Mack's and Ivy's and Henry's relationships by alternating between the present and flashbacks, Gonzales smoothly manages these transitions without affecting the novel's pacing and tone, which is surprisingly a bit dark at times but works for the story. Ivy's relationship with Henry is nicely explored, showing how they could be honest with each other as friends should

be, but people find it difficult to achieve most of the time. It would have been nice to see more of Ivy's and Mack's friendship before the fractures started to show. Their relationship is primarily antagonistic or in the early stages of falling apart in flashbacks. We don't get to see much of the happy, healthy, deep friendship we presume they used to share—a crucial part of the story was missing. But sometimes, seeing people at their worst and how they interact tells you more about who they are and whether they can make it through the good and bad times. Gonzales' character interactions are one of the best parts of her writing and books. More interactions between Mack and Ivy would have improved the development and exploration of their friendship/relationship. It was missing from the novel.

The Perfect Guy Doesn't Exist is nothing like you expect. But Gonzales always provides thought-provoking stories that go beyond readers' expectations. However, readers looking for something more romance-focused throughout the book might be disappointed. Nevertheless, Gonzales takes readers on a compelling journey

Young Adult

with her multi-layered story and flawed, hot-mess characters. *The Perfect Guy Doesn't Exist* is a thoughtful, funny, suspenseful, sweet, witty, angsty, and fast-paced YA romance.

Lacy Hill

Serenade of the Sasquatch

Rachael Lundin

Ann Wyld Books

Trade Paperback

978-0931990106

☆☆☆ 1/2

Dakota and Sidney are two younger teenage best friends who enjoy spending time together and exploring the Washington state forests near their homes. Dakota wants to ask Sidney to be his girlfriend before he and his mom leave for a trip to the beach, but a series of events complicates that plan, including an encounter with a real Bigfoot, a sasquatch named River on his own unique quest, family troubles for both friends, and discovering a decades' old mystery.

Serenade of the Sasquatch is a coming of age story that explores the difficult situations that young teens face on the cusp of growing up. The inclusion of Bigfoot's point of view is odd initially, but it is an intrinsic aspect of the story. Descriptive prose of the wilderness vividly sets the scene. The use of a journal from twenty years ago is a very good narrative device that ties the contemporary point of view to the past mystery. The mystery is set up very well, with a satisfying resolution. Notes of humor mix well with *pathos* from realistic family drama and issues, including missing loved ones, alcoholic parents, parental abuse, and a lack of understanding extended from overwhelmed parents to their children.

There is a subtle Christian element that feels natural to the plot, in which faith is something that guides characters and helps them through difficult times, and not a weapon used against others. This book isn't for everyone, but *Serenade*

of the Sasquatch is a quirky, fun, but emotionally impactful young adult book with a unique storyline worth checking out.

Danielle Hill

Cover Model Interview cont.

Debra: Favorite beach?

John: Depends where. I've been to and go to so many. In the summer I am in my home area of NJ typically. Atlantic City NJ area. But I spend a ton of time in Florida and Miami and love their beaches. Hawaii is one of my favs. Paradise.

Debra: Favorite cold summer beverage?

John: I mostly drink water. But I do treat myself to lemonade or iced tea.

Debra: Favorite summertime movie?

John: Grease

Debra: Favorite amusement park ride?

John: Roller coaster

Debra: Favorite picnic food?

John: Sandwiches with BBQ chips and iced tea. Watermelon and pineapple. Ice cream.

Debra: Favorite ice cream flavor? Sugar cone, plain, or in a cup?

John: I have two, mint chocolate chip and chocolate. Waffle cone. Or sugar cone.

Debra: On that sweet note, thank you for visiting with me today, John. It's been fun catching up in time for summer.

John: Yes, it has. Thanks for having me. Truly my pleasure always. I want to wish you and the readers a fun sexy summer. Hope everyone gets out and lives life to the absolute fullest! After all, life is for living!

Debra: Before we say goodbye, how can fans stay up to date on your latest news?

John: Anyone can feel free and follow

me on my social media. I am not crazy active there and don't post daily my every move and thought like all these crazy people do today (shaking his head and laughing). But Facebook and Instagram would be where I would post. My email, as well, if someone wants to discuss doing a cover or appearances, any business opportunities. Email: johnantorino@comcast.net

Facebook: www.facebook.com/johnantorino

www.facebook.com/johnantorinofanpage

Instagram: @johnantorino

IMDb: <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm3016683/>

Debra Parmley is an author of suspense, military romantic suspense, historical romance, fairytale romance, and urban fantasy romance, who lives in a motorhome fulltime with her husband as they travel the U.S. She has interviewed many cover models in her Cover Model Corner since 2011 and enjoys sharing the interviews with readers of *Affaire de Coeur* magazine. She loves to hear from you! Readers (and Models who wish to schedule an interview) may contact debra@debraparmley.com



Lizette Hill, pencil pusher and paralegal for the FBI

Assigned to a desk job for the last ten years, the FBI had a major shift due to upper echelon decisions. Lizette was assigned to her first undercover position in an office owned by a mafia family involved in the transport of drugs through their shipping yard on Lake Superior.

Keoni Nani is a talented carpenter, working his magic on museums and Victorian homes. When he met Lizette, he had no idea it would throw him into the world of mystery, murder, and romance with a twist . . .

