

March/April 2025

Affaire de Coeur

Bringing You the Best and Most Honest Reviews

*Spring is here, bringing with it two of
AdC's Favorites*



Tamalyn Scott



Ester López

Reviews

Reviews

Reviews!



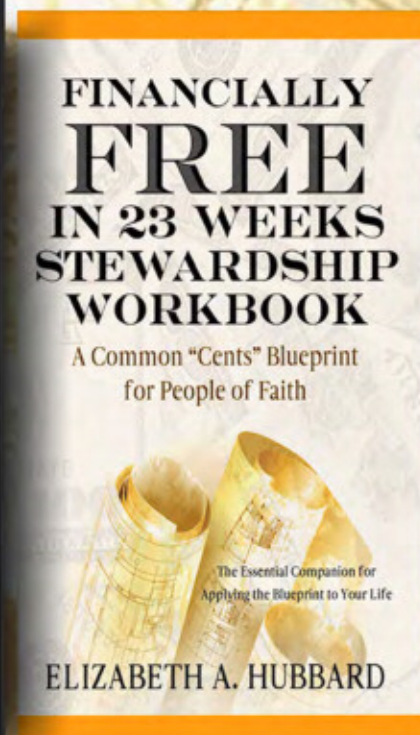
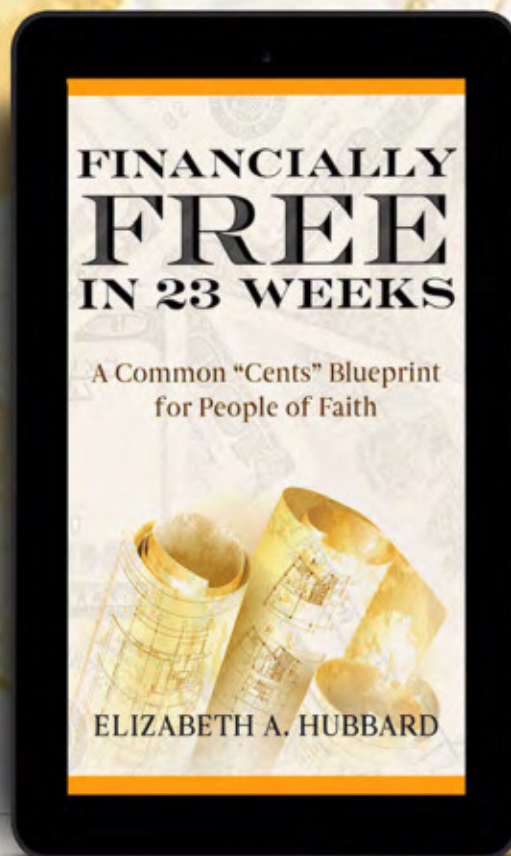
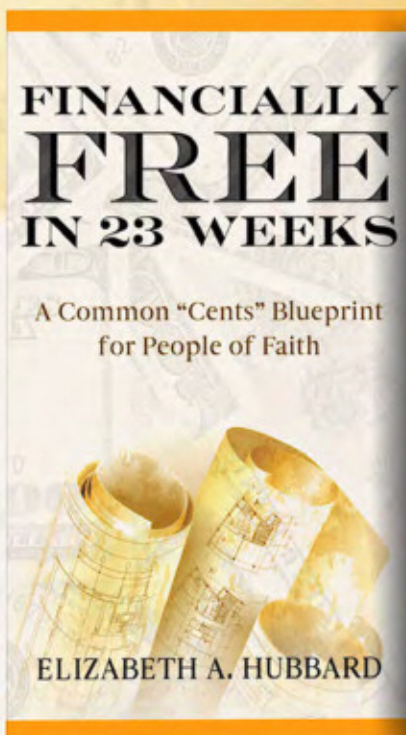
And Cover Model

Stefan Andreas Schwarze

ISBN 978-1-7358338-7-3

available at
amazon

BOOKS  READ



"Highly recommended for anyone who doesn't understand the concept of money, how to use it for their best interest and comfort, and how to avoid living paycheck to paycheck."
-- Kitty Lane, author

www.financiallyfreein23.net

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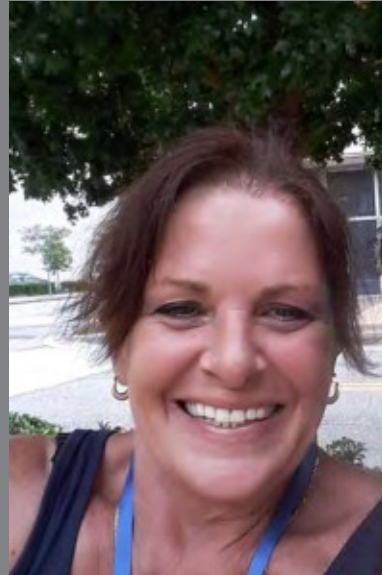
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Dear QWERTY
**“What is Developmental
Editing?”**
Pam knows, and she’s shar-
ing it with you for a better
writing tool.



8

**The Spotlight is on March,
Ms. Tamalyn Scott**



**The second spotlight is on:
Multi-talented, multi-genre author
Ester López**



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**Debra Parmley brings us
Cover Model
Stefan Andreas Schwarze**



March/April 2025

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Dear QWERTY

by Pamela Ackerson

What is Developmental Editing?



Dear Qwerty,

What is developmental editing?

A developmental editor assists the author in improving the structure and organization of their story. The editor focuses on the plot line, characters, theme, and the ingredients needed to make it an enjoyable comprehensible story.

Their job is to take a first or second rough draft and polish it into an amazing story.

What's the difference then? Isn't that what an editor is supposed to do?

There are several different types of editors. Proofreaders, refiners, content, line, and copy editors all with their specialty to improve the story.

A line editor points out sentence structure and word choices and makes suggestions. Their job is to make sure the read is smooth, and the rhythm of the story stays intact.

A copy editor corrects grammar and spelling. They will make sure there is grammatical consistency throughout the story.

A proofreader/refiner is also a copy editor with one exception. Their job is to catch and proofread the final passage before it's sent to print. They will catch the final

The Guardian Awaits: 'FATA MORGANA'



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PAMELA ACKERSON
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mistakes that somehow always manage to be missed.

Don't confuse beta readers with proofreaders. Most aren't professionals and don't have the proper training to point out mistakes. However, they can find those glaring errors that cause everyone to face palm and wonder how it was missed.

All editors are a necessity for a professionally written book.

The developmental editor is a must-do for new and aspiring authors. They will help the author keep their storyline intact and in the proper, clear direction. They'll point out the head-hopping, kick back on too many POVs (point of views), and make sure it's done in the proper storytelling order. You've heard it from your English teachers: Beginning, middle, and end...

They'll red line unnecessary and wordy sections and scenes. They'll stress the build-ups, the arcs, climaxes, and resolution.

The developmental editor will direct you with understanding your character's goals and character development, which, in turn, creates a strong, consistent plot.

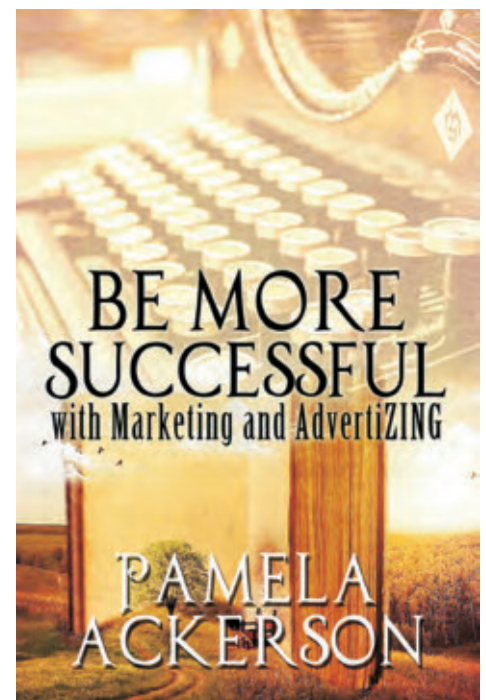
With the right developmental editor, you'll know you've got a good, clean, well-written story and you'll come away with more knowledge and improve your writing skills for the next book.

One thing they will NOT do. They will not change your story or change the words in your story. It's your story. They can and will suggest and make recommendations on the best manner in which to proceed.

Their input will include suggestions on where your storyline needs to be improved. The bottom line is that it's your story.

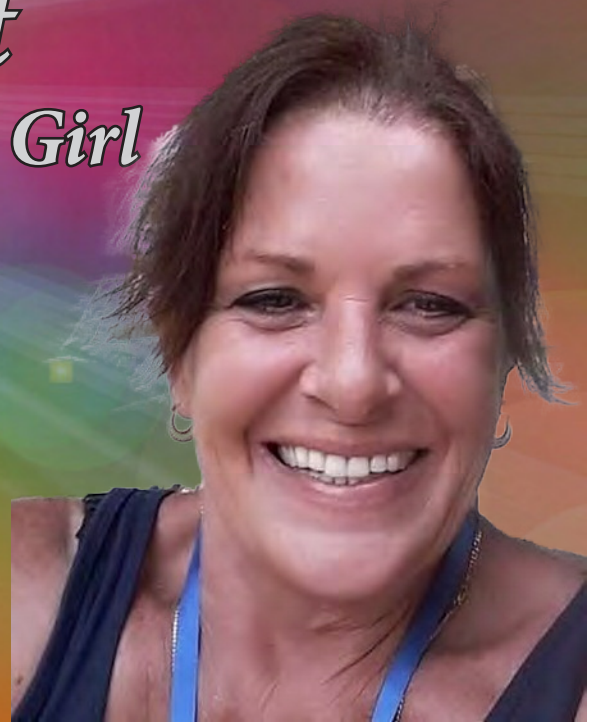
Even if you're going to be traditionally published, publishers do have an editing team. It will not hurt in any way, shape or form to hire an editor.

The better your manuscript, the less work they have to do on their end and the sooner your book may be published. The less time-consuming work they have to do on their end, the happier they will be.



The Spotlight is Shining on...

Tamalyn Scott *AdC's Ms. March Calendar Girl*



*Tamalyn is a writer, an artist and loves all music. Tamalyn's love for taking people on a journey to a place where you actually become the main character and experience something amazing is her goal. As she puts it, "I love to take people somewhere where true love exists." Tamalyn's first novels, **Gracey** and **Rebecca**, are still well loved, and she has just released her third novel, **Bethany**. Currently, Tamalyn lives in Florida, married her very own knight and is finally...living happily ever after... All of her books are self-standing.*

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

T.S.: I write a series that is actually in the future but reads like a long ago past. I am currently writing the sixth novel. They are all in the same timeline but self-standing.

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

T.S.: I would be in the future starting in the year 2552 and in the southern territory.

AdC: *How do you name your char-*

acters?

T.S.: I prefer old-fashioned names for the main characters and the men are usually a Scottish name.

AdC: *What part of the book was the most fun to write?*

T.S.: For me, it's always my main character, a female, discovering that there is so much more to the man in her life than she ever could imagine.

AdC: *How much fun do you have coming up with names for your characters and how do you find them?*

T.S.: Since I write in first person and I love old fashioned names, my female

names come to me as if I heard their names audibly and as if the book has already been written.

AdC: *Where and when would you travel to if you were given a time machine?*

T.S.: I would travel to a middle territory like Missouri to start my journey. I would also travel to a southern territory like Louisiana along the beach to find my place. I would most likely end up in the territory of Kentucky and Tennessee.

AdC: *What do you do when you can't quite get into writing mode?*

T.S.: I dream of the time I wish to



Rebecca

In the wake of tragedy, Rebecca's journey to Oak Grove is a testament to her resilience. She carries on, her spirit undeterred, her determination as unwavering as the legends of old. Rebecca's courage, a reminder that even in the darkest times, there are glimmers of hope and unexpected guardians along the way.

Gracey

In a world still healing from the ravages of "The Great War," a secretive order of knights stands as the guardians of peace. These valiant protectors, sworn to God and Union, are shrouded in mystery, their existence a subject of debate among the elders and the young.

Bethany

In the year 2564, Bethany's secret wish for a stunning birthday gown was overshadowed by an unexpected turn of events. Alone and anxious at Lord Andrews's estate, Bethany's fears intensified upon his bloodied return without Daniel. A poignant reminder of the bonds of family and the unforeseen moments that define our lives.

Sarah

Sarah unfolded the ancient parchment, the air seemed to hum with the echoes of the past. The letter, penned with an elegant script, revealed a treasure map leading to a secret chamber within Beckham's walls, a room untouched by time and filled with artifacts from her family's storied past. This was more than a house; it was a gateway to her destiny, a place where her true adventure was just beginning.

Jocelyn

Jocelyn stood at the crossroads of her destiny, the winds of change whispered of adventures yet to come. With each step, she left behind a silent past and moved towards a future filled with unknown voices—a new beginning, a tale of love and self-discovery waiting to be told.

TamalynBooks.com



write about. I also may read my last novel to be refocused.

AdC: *What traditions do you believe should be brought back?*

T.S.: Well, the future holds a time where men are men and don't complain about taking the garbage out and men put God in their lives first. Women are respected and courted properly.

AdC: *What do you like to do when it's time to kick back?*

T.S.: I love to watch movies that make me laugh and that I don't have to think or guess what will happen.

AdC: *Is there something you've always wanted to learn to do?*

T.S.: I am blessed with so many talents that the only thing I would like

to learn about is marketing and sales. So many Indy authors are not recognized these days as there are now so many that publish books.

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

T.S.: I go to state book fairs. I'd love to attend them all.

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

Personal web page: tamalynsbooks.com

Twitter: @tamalynscott

Facebook: [AuthorTamalynScott@facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com/AuthorTamalynScott)



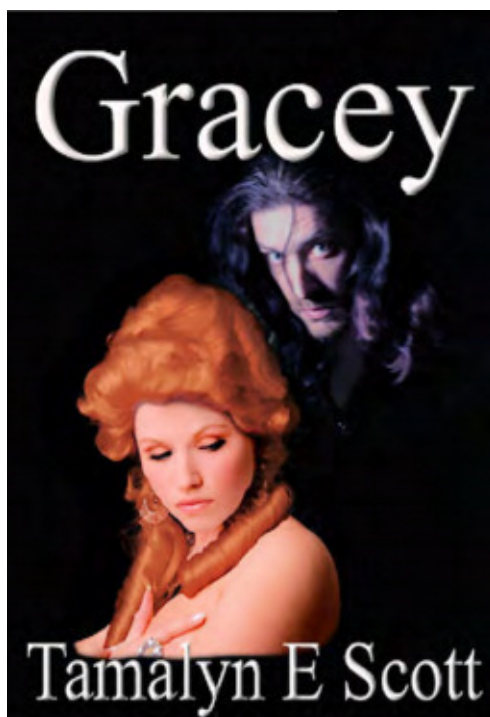


Gracey

After “The Great War” of years past, by the Grace of God, Man survived. A different kind of military was formed to protect, preserve and defend peace. The secrets of the past are guarded from infiltrators trying to obtain information, and the means to control the world. The men, who dedicate their lives to God and Union, live by this oath and would give their lives to protect the world from this ever happening again.

On her family’s ranch, time had slipped away from Gracey after the passing of her father and mother. She had not realized that it had been five years since she had seen her lifelong friend Emily Stanford, until she received an invitation to visit Emily on holiday. Upon her arrival, she meets a tall, dark, mysterious and painfully handsome man, the likes of one she has never seen. One who was about to change her life forever.

Through Gracey’s eyes, you will see, feel, and experience this epic journey as she does. You will know what it’s like to have all that you



Sneak Peek

thought and all you believed, change, realizing that things aren’t always what they seem to be and legends just might be real.

Rebecca

After Robert and Rebecca were married in 2564, they moved to the North West Territory to start a new life and a family. Their lives seemed peaceful and perfect...until a horrific fall storm ripped through their land and changed Rebecca’s life forever.

So grateful that her horse Fella and dog, Jack, were spared, she somehow found the strength to load the wagon with the little that was left. But how was she going to do this? How would she honor Robert’s last request?

For days, they traveled without seeing a single person. The sound of hooves thundering in the distance brought two enormous men in a cloud of dust. The men questioned her for what seemed hours about her destination and finally moved on. But something was strange about those men. They offered to escort her to Oak Grove. Why? Why would they do that? Who were they?

To Rebecca, they seemed like knights in shining armor, and she laughed out loud...after all, they were only a legend, a fairy tale...weren’t they...?

Bethany

All Bethany wanted, was a new gown for her birthday ball. Her brother Daniel insisted upon escorting her to the big city of Wellington. She should be happy, but, on February sixteenth, twenty-five sixty-four, she would be officially old enough to be considered a Spinster! Their trip came to an abrupt stop as Lord Andrews intercepted them requesting Daniel’s immediate assistance. Daniel, a Corpsman, did not hesitate to accept, while Bethany was quickly swept away to Lord Andrews’ home to await their return.

Lord Andrews returned, covered in blood, and without her brother! Lord Andrews and his wife, Rebecca, escorted Bethany to Wellington to be by her brother’s bedside.

Once there, Bethany found herself helping the doctor as his nurse. One patient in particular, Colonel McInnis, a widower with two small children, had a temper so hot, he regularly decorated Bethany’s day dresses with oatmeal! Even so, something about him called to her. Perhaps it was the sadness in his eyes?

Whatever it was, when it came time for Daniel to go home, leaving the Doctor and the Colonel behind was harder than she thought. She believed she would never see them again. Little did she know...everything...was about to change!

Sarah

Upon the death of her grandmother, Sarah was shocked to learn that she inherited her grandmother’s estate. From the stories her grandmother whispered, Beckham was a grand and mysterious place, rich with history, secret passageways, hidden rooms, and even ghosts! And now...it was hers.

Several months after grandmother’s passing, it was time...time for Sarah to start her new life. Sarah’s brother John helped her pack her things, and they were headed to Beckham.

Sarah fell in love with Beckham the moment she first saw it. IT was truly grand! John gave his grandmother his word that he wouldn’t leave until Beckham was in perfect order.

Sarah thought her life was perfect, but little did she know that her life wouldn’t truly start until the day she found something extraordinary...a hidden letter!

Then and there, Sarah would know that one day, she and Beckham would have their own story to tell...

AdC LOVES Conferences

The Sunshine State Book Festival

The sixth annual Sunshine State Book Festival was held on January 31-February 1, 2025, in Gainesville, Florida, at the Best Western Gateway Grand. The free event included 200 local and regional authors. Authors from all around the US participated in the festival to sell books and discuss their work.

The event included guest speakers, giveaways, and storytelling, along with a Meet and Greet on Friday evening and the book signing event on Saturday.



Sunshine State Book Festival



Meet and Greet



Author Gracie Cooper



Debra Parmley



Author Sara Tunder

An Interview with Cover Model Stefan Andreas Schwarze



AVON BOOKS * LINT. ANA CAMPBELL * ART DIRECTOR : GAIL DUBOV * ART : CHRIS COCOZZA





ing them reclaim their bodies through movements. It's very gratifying.

D.P.: *Oh yes, that would be. What's one question you wish an interviewer would ask you?*

S.S.: "Whom did I get my hair from?"

D.P.: *If you wrote a book, what would it be about?*

S.S.: That's a good question. It wouldn't be fiction. It would be something about the state of our world and how we got to this place post WWI and WWII. I don't think the majority understand.

D.P.: *Thank you. I would read this book, if you wrote it. Now this question is almost always asked in interviews because your fitness level is beyond the average person's. What is your exercise routine and what sort of nutrition plan do you follow to achieve and maintain your level of fitness?*

S.S.: I'm really into "fast exercise", not a lot of volume but high intensity, high heart rate. I also love getting out to the high school track and I just run one lap as fast as I can. I time myself.

D.P.: *If you could share three simple fitness tips the average romance reader could do every day to stay healthy, what would they be?*

S.S.: Get your heart rate up with weights, that means high reps, 20 - 30 reps is great.

Consistency is the only secret. You need a routine that you can access easily and often.

Eat clean. No processed foods. If I can't grow it, hunt it, or fish it, then I'd rather not eat it.

D.P.: *Excellent advice. It's your birthday dinner and the calories don't count. What's on the menu and what are you drinking?*

S.S.: Lollypop Lamb Chops and nice sherry to sip with it.

D.P.: *Describe the perfect romantic evening:*

S.S.: I don't even know where to start, but location would be somewhere in Spain in a coastal town, maybe with small plates at a seaside table, some Cava, followed by an evening walk on the shore.

D.P.: *That sounds lovely. Please share one unusual fact about you or your life.*

S.S.: I had a really hard time speaking as a kid, I mumbled broken English. I started studying people who spoke really well, one of them was David Lee Roth, he could really deliver his lines when he spoke to the audience which was captive to his verbiage. Today I can impersonate many of my friends because of my time spent studying the way people spoke.

Today I am thrilled to be chatting with Stefan Andreas Schwarze who you may recognize from the many romance book covers he has appeared on since 1997.

D.P.: *Stefan, what was the first cover you appeared on and how did this come about?*

S.S.: *BELOVED EMBRACE* by Cassie Edwards. I played a lot of chess in the gym back in the 90's (I worked like 12 hrs a day so I brought my chessboard in and played members). One of my members George played and one day as I was walking back to the desk, he was looking at me and said, "Stop, back up under that light, look up and tilt your head to the left. Yeah, yeah, you'll work, I'm going to make a phone call." Then I learned that George was the Art Director for Penguin Books.

D.P.: *What a surprise that must have been! If you could do a photo shoot anywhere in the world for a cover, where would you most want to go? What sort of shoot would it be?*

S.S.: I've done almost every type of scene and genre; I enjoyed settings in the Golden Age of Piracy the best. Errol Flynn was my childhood idol, Captain Jack Sparrow rekindled that for me.

D.P.: *What fun to be a swashbuckling pirate! Beyond romance novel cover shots, what other projects or jobs keep you busy?*

S.S.: I really got back into Personal Training these last ten years. I really enjoy working with the elderly the best, help-

MELODY'S HAVING A VERY BAD DAY

A CLEAN & CRISP
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BY THE AUTHOR OF:
'SCENT OF A MAN'
'MY NAME IS NOT CUPID'
'HOT CHOCOLATE ON
A COLD WINTER'S NIGHT'
& MORE!



A
SQUEAKY-CLEAN
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DELIGHT!

A
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PUBLICATION



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CITY GIRL LOOKING FOR LOVE JENNIFER PATRICIA O'KEEFE,
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D.P.: That's an amazing skill, to be able to impersonate. Here are Eight Quickie questions:

Watching the sunrise or watching the sunset and the stars?

S.S.: Sunset and Stars

DP: The beach or the mountains?

S.S.: Beach

D.P.: Primitive camping or luxury hotel?

S.S.: Luxury Hotel

D.P.: Snow skiing or water skiing?

S.S.: Snow Skating, something I recently started.

D.P.: Favorite movie?

S.S.: Point Break with Patrick Swayze

D.P.: Best book you ever read?

S.S.: Which Way Western Man by

William G. Simpson

D.P.: Fav. Sport to play?

S.S.: Chess (if you can call it a sport)

D.P.: Fav. Sport to watch?

S.S.: American Football

D.P.: Thank you for chatting with me. It's been fun getting to know you. Before we say goodbye, how can fans stay up to date with you?

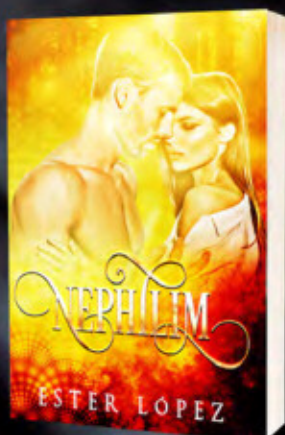
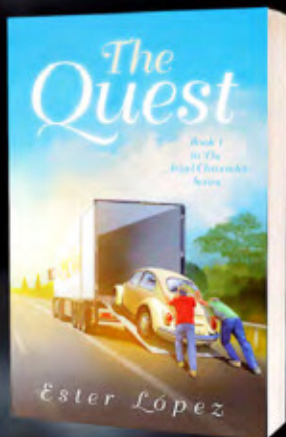
S.S.: I'm not very current on social media but I have an insta @stefan.andreas.schwarze.

D.P.: A search on Pinterest will turn up many more covers and paintings featuring Stefan as well as bookshelves on Goodreads devoted to his covers.

Debra Parmley writes romantic suspense, historical and contemporary romance, and urban fantasy romance.

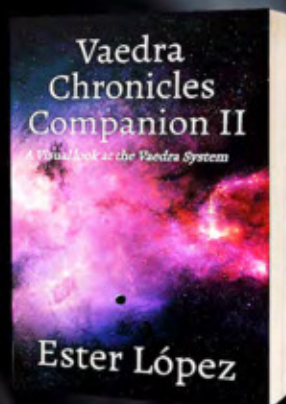
She lives in a motorhome fulltime with her husband as they travel the U.S. Since 2011, she has interviewed cover models on Cover Model Corner and enjoys sharing her interviews with readers of Affaire de Coeur Magazine. Readers and Models contact debra@debraparmley.com She loves to hear from you!



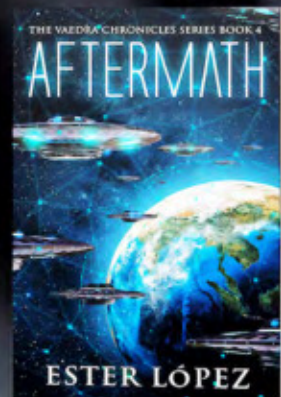
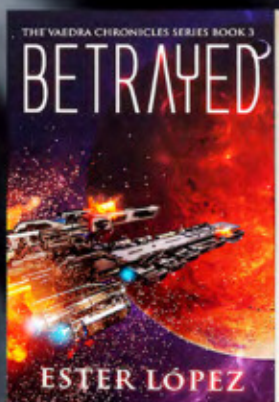


Writing on the Edge of Reality

The Angel Chronicles
The Vaedra Chronicles



Ester Lopez.com
@EsterLopez1



*Our Other Spot-
light is on...
Ester López
AdC's April Calen-
dar Girl*



Ester has been writing sci-fi and paranormal adventure romances for over 33 years but has been published for ten years this year. She lives in the Smoky Mountains with her husband, Jerry, their dog, Chewie, and two mini horses, Pepper and Bucky.

Ester began her writing career after her close encounter with a UFO, September 1989. This event got her thinking about “what if?” scenarios for a couple years until she was able to put it down on paper. Once she started her writing journey, it took her through several stages of writing: 1) for children and teenagers, 2) a journey with RWA (Romance Writers of America), where she learned the most about her craft, and 3) how to publish her own work and start a publishing business. She currently has 17 books published.

In 2026, Ester will be hosting her first writing convention, Smoky Mountain Writers Expo and Book Soirée in Pigeon Forge, TN, April 23-26, at the Black Fox Lodge.

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

E.L.: My latest series is “The Vaedra Saga” in “The Vaedra Chronicles” Series and the latest book is *Redemption*.

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

E.L.: My current WIP takes place in Miami.

AdC: *How do you name your characters?*

E.L.: Sometimes the names just come to me, other times, I choose them because they mean something.

AdC: *What part of the book was the most fun to write?*

E.L.: My current book, *Guardian Investigations*, takes place in Miami. I’m starting with characters that I’ve used in other stories, but I’m introducing some new characters. This is the first time I’m using an ensemble cast, as well as one of my readers

who is a character in the story. This will make the story more challenging to write.

AdC: *How much fun do you have coming up with names for your characters and how do you find them?*

E.L.: I try to use unusual names since these stories are either sci-fi or paranormal. In my children’s books, I used the name of the pet as the real name, but in my middle school stories which will come out later, I may use my siblings’ names since



A powerful narrative about survival, redemption, and the strength of the human spirit.

Dram: A former slave trader

Tam: A former sex slave

With a life sentence on Plumaris, Dram and Tam's alliance forms amidst the chaos of the quake, their harrowing hardships forge a bond stronger than the toughest tulin ore. With the opportunity to escape, they navigate the treacherous paths of freedom, their pasts haunt them, and redemption drives them towards a future neither dared to dream.

Together, they learn to work together, a testament to the power of unity in the face of danger and adversity.



Writing on the Edge of Reality

The Vaedra Chronicles Series catapults readers into a galaxy brimming with human intrigue and interstellar alliances. An epic journey when Earthlings discover the Vaedra system and forge a pivotal alliance. The thrilling blend of adventure and the timeless question of what it means to travel the vast expanse of space across a cosmic universe.

EsterLopez.com



they are the people I'm drawing the characters from.

AdC: *Where and when would you travel to if you were given a time machine?*

E.L.: First, I would travel to the past in Ireland, Czechoslovakia, Spain, Costa Rica, and Puerto Rico. The time would be in 1799, so I could learn the history of each of my families and see how they lived before coming to America.

AdC: *What do you do when you can't quite get into writing mode?*

E.L.: I will find the most boring work, like folding clothes, washing dishes, pulling weeds, cleaning

house, so that my mind is free to wander and work out story problems or ideas.

AdC: *What traditions do you believe should be brought back?*

E.L.: I believe saying grace before meals and eating together as a family was important for me growing up. I had my children follow the same tradition, but now, I don't think any of them do that in their own families. But eating together gives you a time to socialize with each other—find out how their day went, what are they doing now, etc.

AdC: *What do you like to do when it's time to kick back?*

Affaire de Coeur

E.L.: I enjoy doing crafts, sewing, watching movies when I can, taking pictures of wildlife or landscapes, gardening in the spring and summer, or going to the beach.

AdC: *Is there something you've always wanted to learn to do?*

E.L.: I've always wanted to learn to play an instrument. I've tried guitar and piano, but I don't have enough time to keep at it. I'm working on learning Spanish and Gaelic. If I had my 40-year-old body, I would like to learn kickboxing for the exercise.

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

Sneak Peek

Excerpt from

Redemption

By Ester Lopez

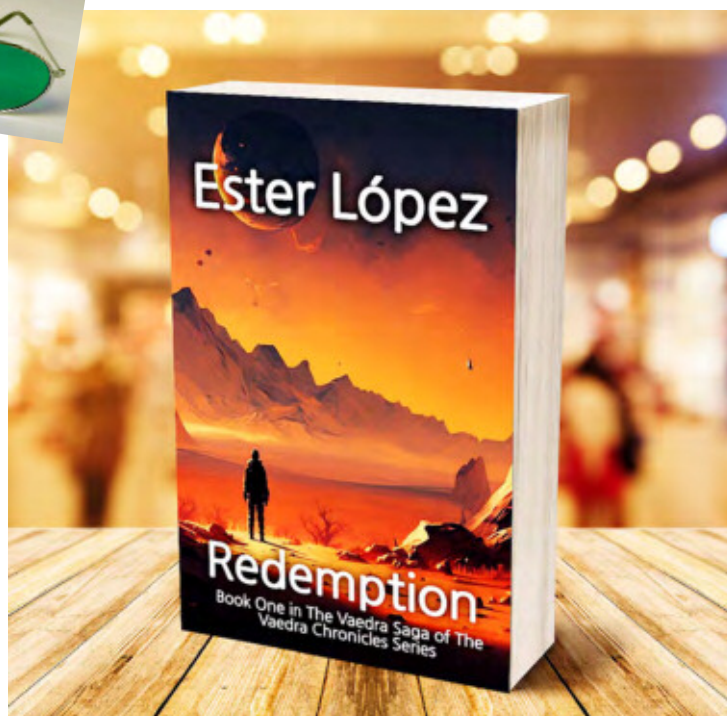
Chapter One

As the shuttle flew over Plumaris, Tam could see the southern portion was inhabited with small clusters of villages among wooded or forested areas with lakes and streams flowing nearby. It was beautiful. She had heard otherwise. Finally, the shuttle moved north. The farther north they went, the more the terrain changed.

The northern portion was a desolate place. The treeless, rocky terrain was depressing. A voice came over the comms unit.

“If you look closely, you can see some definite shapes in the rocks. Buildings inside these rock formations house the single guards who patrol the area, so there’s no escaping.”

The shuttle set down in front of a massive door and the voice came back. “This is Leviticus Station. Welcome to the Gates of Hell.”



López Spotlight continued

E.L.: Yes,

March 1st is the Rose Glen Literary Festival in Sevierville, TN

March 21st-23rd is the MidSouthCon-40 in Ocean Springs, MS

July 24th-25th is the Greenbrier Mountain Festival in Pittman Center, TN

September 5th-7th is the Happily Ever After Convention in Sevierville, TN at the Convention Center

October 16th-19th is Tropicon, Pensacola Beach, FL.

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

Personal web page www.esterlopez.com

Twitter [www.twitter.com/@esterlopez1](https://twitter.com/esterlopez1)

Facebook www.facebook.com/EsterLopezAuthor

P U Z Z L E R

Across

1. This chubby little bird allegedly flew to the moon.
2. Heard in early March and April, this loud-mouth amphibian is found in the pond and sings at night.
4. The element of spring.
7. This nasty pest presents itself early, especially at picnics.
8. These birds, also known as snow-birds, are found across the continent in the early spring.
10. The color of spring.
11. The "great" and the "barren" species of this hooter comes out early.
13. The twin's sign.
14. These insects come by order of a queen to get nectar.
17. The common illness that comes in the spring with the pollen.
19. The zone where the U.S. experiences spring.
21. When you see these colorful birds, winter is over for sure.
24. Beautiful red bird that comes out early in the Midwest.
26. Saffron comes from this plant.
29. Ceremony marking end of school.
31. Red-headed bird that drums on wood.
32. Eggs that turn into tadpoles.
33. This yellow flower serves as a symbol for cancer research.

Down

1. An amphibian that comes out in March and lays eggs in a venal pond.
2. This plant symbolizes eternal love and enjoys a long history of being in medicine.
3. The Blue Capped species of these are known for singing.
5. According to old wives' tales, this insect sews naughty children's lips together.
6. The bull of May.
9. Ladybugs.

12. Beautiful colorful flower is found on the east coast. Allegedly, it sprang up from the blood of a dying prince.
14. Its five petals are pinstriped which make it shaped like a star.
15. The astronomical start of spring. _____ equinox.
16. One of the first trees to bloom, its sap is wonderful on pancakes.
18. The red-breasted birds are first on the scene in the spring, and they rock.
20. This Ram comes in April.
22. These green-necked ducks are among the first to fly south.
23. Animal that represents spring.
25. This butterfly travels from here to Mexico.
27. This little tufted bird bears the name

of a rodent.

28. Plant that symbolizes chastity, friendship in adversity, hope and purity.
30. _____ showers bring May flowers.

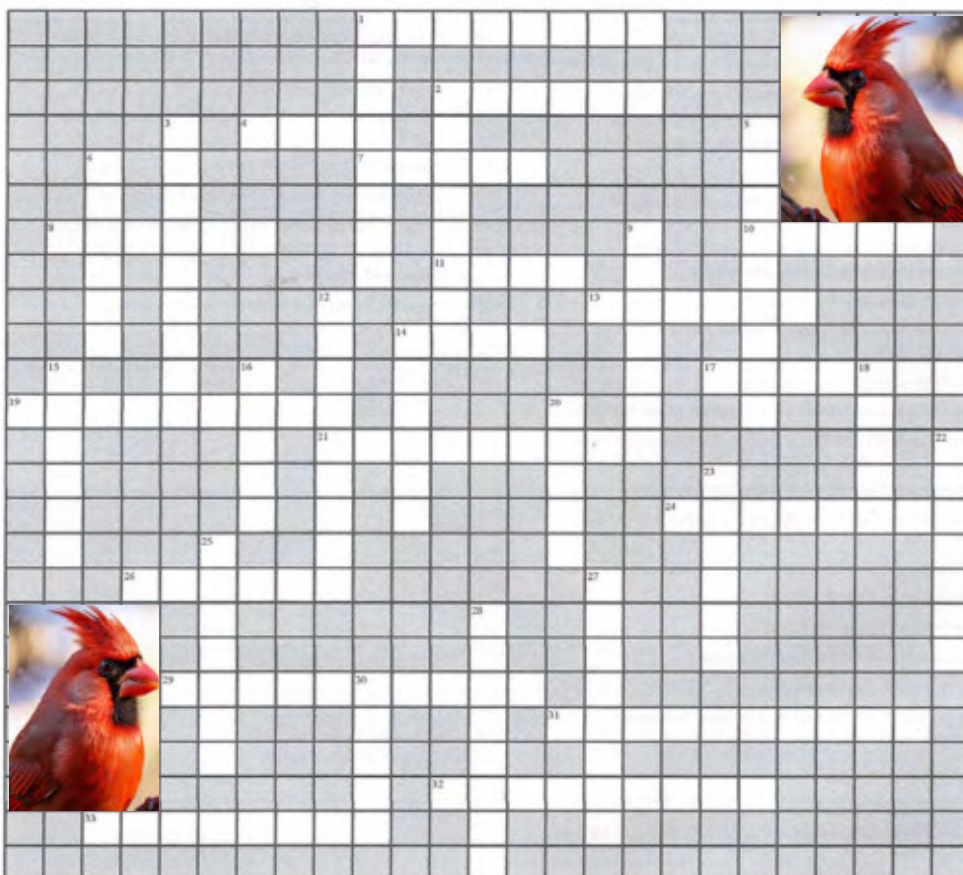
Answers on page 27

HAPPY EASTER !



Announcing...Spring!

Louise B. Sneed



Affaire de Coeur

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

Be Our Guest



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

Blade (Shadowridge Guardians MC #10)

Pepper North
With a Wink
Publishing

E-book
B0CW1MZDC3

★★★★★



Sapphire Jones owns a small jewelry store in town. She is instantly on alert when a tough-looking biker with way too many obvious blades decorating his leather vest reveals his tender side.

Blade loves the feel of a well-formed piece of steel in his hand. As the MC's weaponry expert, he enjoys combining artistry and protection. Blade is a big biker with a heart of gold. Toddlers can see right through his tough exterior.

Sapphire is an artist who makes and sells her own jewelry. When Blade meets the blue haired, tatted woman, he is smitten. Theirs is a sweet and sassy

love story.
D. Antonio

Break Point (Six Gems #6)

Yahrah St. John
Afterglow Books by Harlequin

Trade Paperback
978-1335574921

★★★½

Teagan Williams and Dominic Fletcher, former tennis rivals and lovers—face off for a rematch when she's asked to compete in her country club's tournament and he enters too. Each of them blames the other for the end of their relationship and has a score to settle. They discover their attraction and chemistry are as fiery and strong as before, and they have difficulty resisting. Can Teagan and Dominic win on and off the court and prove they can be a winning team in love?

Teagan lost her heart and her pro tennis career after suffering an injury and a breakdown the last time she

Affaire de Coeur

Contemporary Romance

saw Dominic. After his betrayal and that big loss, she gave up tennis and started her life over with a career in real estate. Dominic's primary focus in life has always been tennis, and he gave up everything to excel at it and become a star and make enough money to support his family. He'd achieved his dream, becoming a success, but doesn't understand why he's so restless and unhappy until he attends a charity tennis tournament and sees Teagan again.

St. John's vivid, descriptive writing style and colorful dialogue fit her characters, and draw readers into the story and her characters' lives. She develops Teagan's and Dominic's relations with snarky, intensely emotional, steamy interactions and love scenes. Their feelings for one another are so deep that, despite how things played out in the past, it's difficult for them to resist the attraction and stay away from each other. So, they give into their desire, agreeing to be friends-with-benefits while preparing for the tournament.

St. John's characterization and interactions between Teagan, Dominic, and their families are wonderfully written. Steamy, emotional, sexy, funny, *Break Point* is a fast-paced read perfect for family-centered, Black love, second-chance, and tennis sports romance fans.

Lacy Hill

The Girl Most Likely To

Julie Tieu

Avon

Trade Paperback

978-0063245248

★★★★

High school best friends turned enemies, Rachel Dang and Danny Phan reunite as adults at their 20-year high school reunion, experiencing a night of mishaps around her hometown and encounters with familiar faces from their childhood. Unlike in school, Rachel

is adrift and lost in her life and career, while Danny is grounded and successful. Danny and Rachel discover their shared feelings and connection still run deep, along with a fiery, adult attraction burning between them. Is this night a fun trip down memory lane or a second chance at a happily ever after?

After being laid off from the job and working nonstop without vacations, Rachel receives Danny's invite to the reunion and attends, hoping to see him again. They haven't spoken in years and never resolved things after a fight. Because Danny was smart but didn't focus on his school work. He and Rachel were partnered so he could learn her work ethic. However, they didn't become friends until they met under pseudonyms online. On late night AIM chats, they learned different sides of one another and became close friends with the possibility of more.

I love Tieu's lively and descriptive down-to-earth narrative style flowing with colorful and natural-sounding dialogue. Her skill with writing hu-

mor and characterizations make it a page-turner. Her characters are quirky, relatable, likable, nerdy, complex, and goofy with animated, funny, sexy, sweet, emotional, steamy, and intimate interactions.

Rachel focused all her energy and time in school on studying and excelling to get into a top college to have a brilliant career that'll lead to a successful life. Losing her job throws Rachel into self doubt about her future and whether she had wasted her time in school, work—life—trying so hard to be the best. Catering to her boss's every whim and working non-stop without vacations had only led to her being laid off without career advancement. Returning to her hometown and being with Danny again gives her perspective on their friendship, the past, her dreams, and her future. It also gives them the opportunity to talk to each other and deal with the miscommunication issues that tore them apart before and decide whether they want to fight for a future together.

Pieces of Me (The Wilder Brothers #9)

Carrie Ann Ryan

Self-published

E-book

B0CW1M551K

★★★★★



Gabriel Wilder is a Rock God with the voice of an angel. And in love with his best friend's sister. Resisting Briar Ashford has been one of the hardest things he's ever done. Until the one night he breaks his promise.

Briar Ashford wanted to live in the shadows, writing the songs for the stars who shined the brightest—not finding a way to co-parent with the man who refuses to pick up his guitar again. The world is waiting for Gabriel Wilder to rise from the ashes.

Pieces of Me is a rock star, best friend's little sister, accidental pregnancy romance in the "Wilder Brothers" series featuring Gabriel and Briar. Each one can be read as a complete standalone. A HEA is guaranteed!

This story starts out with tragedy and heartbreak and ends on a high note of happiness. Gabriel and Briar will steal your heart. Another terrific story from Carrie Ann Ryan.

D. Antonio

Contemporary Romance

Sweet, sexy, funny, and steamy, *The Girl Most Likely To* is a fast-paced read perfect for friends-to-lovers, high school reunions, second chance romance, night around town with and frenemies-to-lovers romance fans.

Lacy Hill

My Big Fat Fake Marriage

Charlotte Stein

St. Martin's Griffin

Trade Paperback

978-1250867971

★★★★^{1/2}

Connie Evans never trusted nice guys. In her world, they were all phonies. They say the right thing to get into her pants, then once they have what they wanted, they dump her. So, she avoided nice guys like the plague. She went with the aggressive, rude kind, so she always knew what to expect and was never surprised...until the day she met her neighbor from across the hall. Her big, burly American neighbor wears bow ties and suspenders and is really, really nice. And he brought her a cake.

Henry Samuel Beckett, or "Beck" as his colleagues called him, is a truly nice guy. He went out of his way to do things that he had observed people like, not to get compliments, but just because...why not? When he observed his neighbor looking a little down, he baked her a cake. No judgement because she was full-figured, he did it because he thought she might could use a piece of cake. He was very aware that he was a big guy, so he did everything carefully and slowly so as not to scare people off. Consequently, he didn't have very many friends, had never really dated and was a virgin.

What do a jaded, suspicious, self-proclaimed slut and a great big shy teddy bear virgin have in common? He's the new managing editor of a pub-

Single Dad Hockey Star (Walker Brothers at Willow Creek Ranch 1)

Rose Luv

Self-published

E-book

B0DVT6GQRN

★★★★★



Single Dad Hockey Star tells the tale of a hockey star of a fading team who is trying to raise his son after an ugly divorce. The press dragged him through the mud and didn't spare his young son. So when the team manager sets him up to be trailed by a pretty reporter to gin up attention for the team, Logan is not thrilled. Olivia is not excited about this assignment either, but she is a pro and will do the job no matter how hostile Logan is.

This is a sweet closed door romance that will leave readers with a smile.
D. Antonio

lishing house that Connie, an aspiring author, has been trying to get to accept her book and, in a moment of panic, he tells his staff that he's married. When his nemesis starts in with the bullying and disbelief that he has a wife, Connie steps in to defend him and ends up being his fake wife for the next two weeks at a writing retreat.

My Big Fat Fake Marriage has everything you could want in a romance, except sex. Ms. Stein has written such an intimate, in-depth story of love, understanding and acceptance of two opposites that it makes you want to keep reading to the end to see if they ever "go all the way." My only problem with not giving this sexy romp five stars is the constantly doubting and suspicious Connie. Her "he's-too-good-to-be-real" attitude, although understandable, after awhile becomes wearing on the story. But, other than that, this is one story that you won't want to put down until you find out whether they reach their Happily Ever After ending!

Lani Roberts

Shoot Your Shot

Lexi LaFleur Brown

Canary Street Press

Hardcover

978-1335016562

★★★ ^{1/2}

Brown's debut focuses on NHL hockey player Jaylen Jones and aspiring tattoo artist Lucy who share an anonymous one-night stand. Jaylen fears his career is over when he doesn't receive an NHL contract once training camp ends. A last-minute roster spot opens up on the team. Superstitious, Jaylen wants to keep Lucy close. Lucy works as a tattoo assistant, hoping for an apprenticeship. Unfortunately, her job hasn't provided financial stability nor career advancement. When Jaylen asks her to be his lucky charm, she agrees to send him good luck texts before his games. Lucy convinces him to appear at her friend's charity event and give her hockey tickets, too.

While they agree to avoid getting physical again because neither is looking to get involved,

Contemporary Romance

spending time together draws them closer, and their chemistry and attraction deepen. Jaylen and Lucy can't resist each other, and their one-night stand lengthens, leading to feelings they weren't expecting.

Brown's down-to-earth writing style, vivid, detailed description, and superb world-building make readers feel present with the characters. She uses their emotions to give the descriptions more depth and layers. Her colorful and natural-sounding dialogue fits the characters, settings, and themes. Her conflicted, complex, and messy characters are relatable and likable. Brown includes fun, well-written scenes where they share information about themselves to get to know each other and interactions with her friends and his teammates that bring lightness to the story's melancholy tone.

Brown's writing shines through her use of hockey knowledge as she focuses on her characters' relationships and development. She dives deeper into the hockey players' psyches through Jaylen while she explores how Lucy's relationship with her father affects her as an artist. Brown's diversity of characters and LGBTQ and mental health representation are well-developed, and integrated into her narrative and not gratuitous.

Shoot Your Shot is more emotional than expected though it includes lighthearted and funny scenes. Starting strong and interesting, the pacing lags, but picks up. Poignant, funny, steamy, angsty, and sexy, *Shoot Your Shot* is a fast-paced romance perfect for character-focused romance featuring interracial romance.

Lacy Hill

Unloved (The Undone #2)

Peyton Corinne

Atria Books

Trade Paperback

978-1668068489

★★★★

Biomedical Sciences student/tutor Ro Shariff tutors hockey player Matt "Freddy" Fedderic when he's having trouble passing biology. Over tutoring sessions and late-night phone calls, their attraction simmers and a connection they deny flares to life as they become friends, then more, and Freddy and Ro learn the person meant for you will love your every part—flaws and all.

Despite a reputation as an exceptional NHL player with a great future ahead, Freddy has dyslexia, ADHD, and dyscalculia, and struggles with a 2.0 GPA, and retakes classes. He can't enter the draft early because his controlling/estranged father added a "graduation" clause to his inheritance. The only open biology class is with a professor he shares a past of betrayal, distrust, and control. A hopeless romantic, Ro is dreadfully unlucky in love and in an on-again/off-again relationship with a boyfriend who's emotionally abusive and manipulative.

Burned into Ro's memory is her first kiss with Freddy, which he doesn't remember. She secretly longs for him. Fighting his attraction, Freddy tries to safeguard Ro from his reputation. Ro wants to show Freddy he's more than just his body and skill, no matter what the world tries to make him believe. Their relationship is a wonderfully written, developed, and evolved slow-burn romance. Surprisingly, they share similar personality traits. Both put on facades that everything is great. Freddy's self-esteem issues relate to his educational disabilities and his reputation. Ro's boyfriend preys upon her self-worth and insecurity. Gentle,

caring, and soft with Ro, he makes her feel protected. She helps him focus, study, and succeed despite his learning disabilities and without judgment. Their love scenes are sweet, sexy, steamy, and emotional.

Corrine's writing and narrative style draws readers into the characters' lives from the opening scenes. Her writing vivid with detailed description, and colorful, natural-sounding dialogue contributes to her world-building and character development. She develops her story and characters, peeling back a layer at a time. With unexpected twists and turns, Corrine keeps readers in suspense. Angsty, sexy, sweet, steamy, emotional, *Unloved* is a fast-paced, poignant, romance.

Lacy Hill



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Beaches Beside Us
and a Book in our Hands**

**The 9th Annual Space
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Historical Romance Reviews

With Love in Their Corner (The Boxers of Brook Street #1)

*Sandra
Sookoo*
**Dragonblade
Publishing**
E-book
B0DTLK2R71

★★★★★

*When you want something out
of life, you'll have to fight for it.*

Lewis Stapleton, eighth Earl of Lethbridge is a man hovering on the edge of breaking. He works through his anger and grief at the loss of his father

while in the boxing ring. His father was a prize fighter so matching his over-large footsteps is difficult, but something must give else he'll explode.

Miss Cecilia Dawson keeps the books for her father's shipping company, but is desperate for a way to defend herself against the coarse and crude men she encounters in the office near the docks. The day she steps into the Stapleton Boxing Salon while disguised as a boy rapidly becomes both the best and worst day of her life.

Lewis ignores his attraction in favor of teaching Cecilia how to box for protection, but their forbidden desire evolves into scandal for them both. Distracted, they never see danger coming

that puts them into a corner of peril.

With Love in Their Corner is an interesting Regency Romance that takes place in an unusual setting. Our heroine is a smart woman used to getting her way from a loving father. Our hero is an unhappy Earl being harassed by his mother to find a bride despite or because of the family's tenuous financial condition. Cecilia and Lewis meet in a rather peculiar situation and the author takes us on a wonderful trip through their acquaintance. I thoroughly enjoyed their tale.

D. Antonio



Paranormal Romance Reviews

Fantasy

Vampires

Shape Shifters

Time Travel

Werewolves...

The Bane Witch

Ava Morgyn

St Martin's Griffin

Hardcover

978-1250835453

★★★★

Ava Morgyn's *The Bane Witch* follows Piers Corbin's treacherous journey of self-discovery and her affinity for poisonous things. Piers has eaten pokeweed berries since she was five years old and accidentally caused a stranger's death.

She fakes her death to escape a volatile marriage to an abusive husband with dark tendencies and taste. Then, Piers travels to the mountains to stay with her estranged great aunt, where she discovers her love for eating pokeweed berries isn't just a hunger but her birthright.

Piers' lineage is of the Bane Witches—poison eaters—a long line

of women who eat deadly plants to fuel their magic to help them purify the world of evil men. She trains with her Aunt Myrtle and works at her cafe while learning about her family heritage, kept secret from her by her mom.

Taking advantage of the chemistry that simmers between her and Detective Regis Reyes, the local sheriff, she gives into a deadly flirtation to distract him from his suspicions about her aunt, herself, and the deaths multiplying in town because of her. Unfortunately, Piers also catches the attention of a serial killer. She must accept her family legacy and feed, so her magic prepares her for the hunt.

Morgan's vivid and descriptive writing, detailed world-building, and colorful and natural-sounding dialogue pull readers into each scene. Once you start reading, you can't stop turning the pages. Morgan focuses on developing the fantasy, paranormal, and mystery elements because the novel is about Pier's journey of self-discovery and becoming a powerful Bane Witch, a poison eater, and a hunter of evil men. The mythology is fascinating, original, dark, and ominous. Morgan uses the novel to explore relatable, thought-provoking territory that gets to readers, lingering

Affaire de Coeur

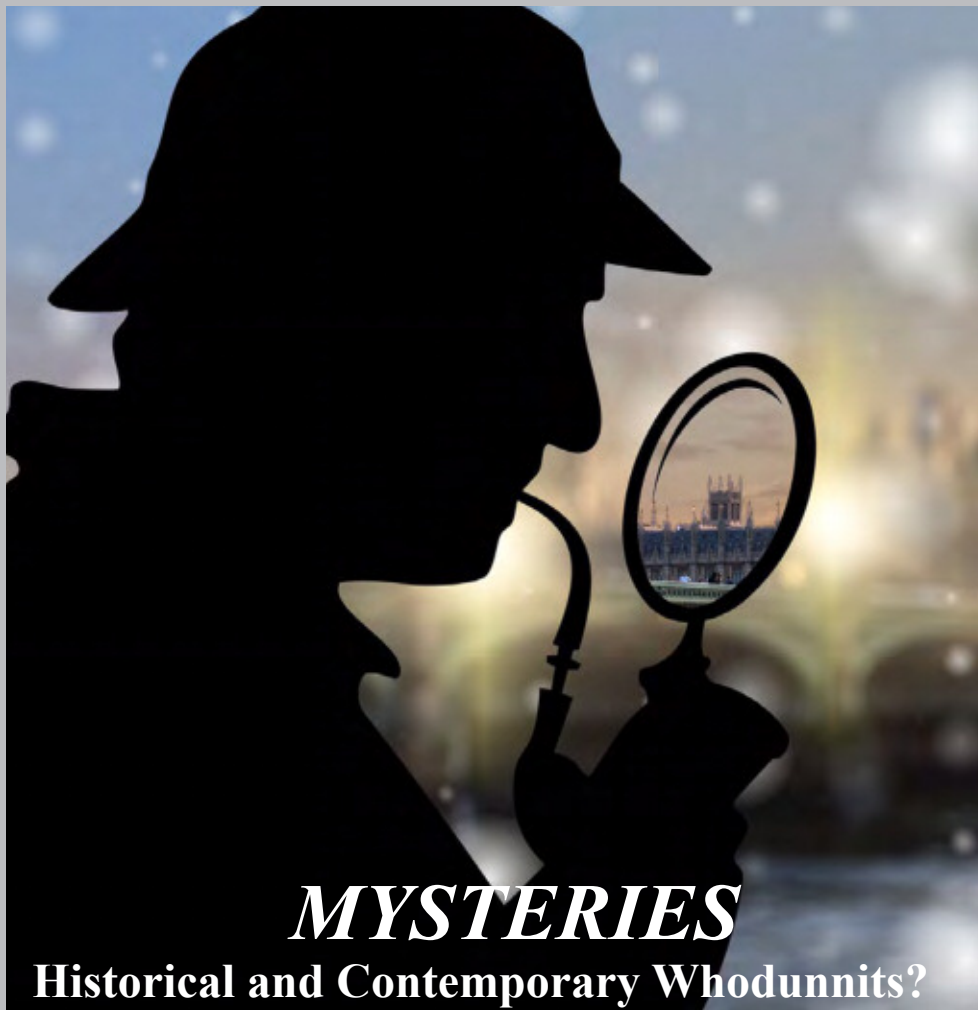
on their minds.

Piers is likable, relatable, complex, and intriguing. The other characters are, too, while some are revolting and creepy. Detective Reyes and his story are interesting. While Regis helps Piers' evolution, more character development would improve the romance. Nevertheless, Piers' and Regis' interactions and chemistry bring light, love, and hope into the novel.

The Bane Witch is a dark, suspenseful, captivating, fast-paced fantasy and paranormal romance perfect for fans of witches, magic, mysteries, thrillers, serial murders, and dark themes and stories.

Lacy Hill





MYSTERIES

Historical and Contemporary Whodunnits?

Murder by Memory

Olivia Waite

Tor Publishing

978-1250342249 Hardcover

B9D1PKWVDR E-Book

☆☆☆ ½

Three hundred seven years into the 1000 year interstellar journey of the H.S.S. Fairweather, ship detective Dorothy Gentleman awakens in an unfamiliar body. The ship's library holds memory books for each traveler, so that when a body dies, the memory can be transferred to a fresh new body. But Gloria didn't plan this abrupt transition into a new body and suspects foul play.

Everything necessary for a comfortable life is provided on a ship that not only keeps the people alive for centuries, but also provides food from a garden, entertainment, and so much more.

Dorothy not only has a murder to solve, but she must uncover the perpetrator of an even more sinister

crime—the destruction of memory books. Without their personal record, the passengers are unable to transfer their consciousness and memories into a new body. In order to survive such a long journey, memories are essential in order to keep the humans alive when their bodies finally wear down. She is determined to get to the bottom of this, but her investigation is further stymied by a fierce electrical storm that puts the entire system at risk.

Dorothy must be suspicious of everyone, including those she considers close friends.

The idea of keeping a person's true self alive by cataloging their memories in a library system is unique. The threat to the very survival of the travelers on this mission is very real.

Murder by Memory is the first in a series of Dorothy Gentlemen mysteries. The story could be considered a combination of Jessica Fletcher, the sleuth in the "Murder She Wrote" se-

ries, and a futuristic tale similar to *Star Trek*.

Hannah Rowan

The Murder Show

Matt Goldman

Forge

978-1250325723 Trade Paperback

978-1250325709 Hardcover

B0D1P94NH1 E-Book

☆☆☆ ½

Screenwriter Ethan Harris can't seem to find an acceptable plot for the fourth season of *The Murder Show* on network TV. At least the writer's strike in Hollywood affords him some time to develop a new plot. Hoping to clear his head, Ethan returns to his hometown in Minnesota. Perhaps the change of scenery will spark some new ideas. The town is the same, but old friends and acquaintances have grown up and changed in surprising ways.

One such old friend is Ro Gree-man, his teenage crush, who still lives in her parents' home, while Ethan stays in his parents' home and their yards are back to back. They are reunited when Ethan rushes to Ro's rescue when he hears shouts coming from her house.

But Ro, now a police officer, may have ulterior motives in rekindling her friendship with Ethan. She believes exploring the very cold case of the suspicious death of one of their crowd might be just the thing to renew Ethan's ability to write, but also might solve the mystery that's been haunting them for twenty-two years, namely why their friend Ricky O'Shea was found dead under suspicious circumstances on a deserted country road while Ethan and Ro necked in his broken down car, waiting for him to go for help.

Ethan isn't sure there's anything to the potential case but he's willing to give it a try. As he and Ro delve deeper into the past, it becomes clear there's still someone around who doesn't want them to find the answers. Whoever

Mysteries

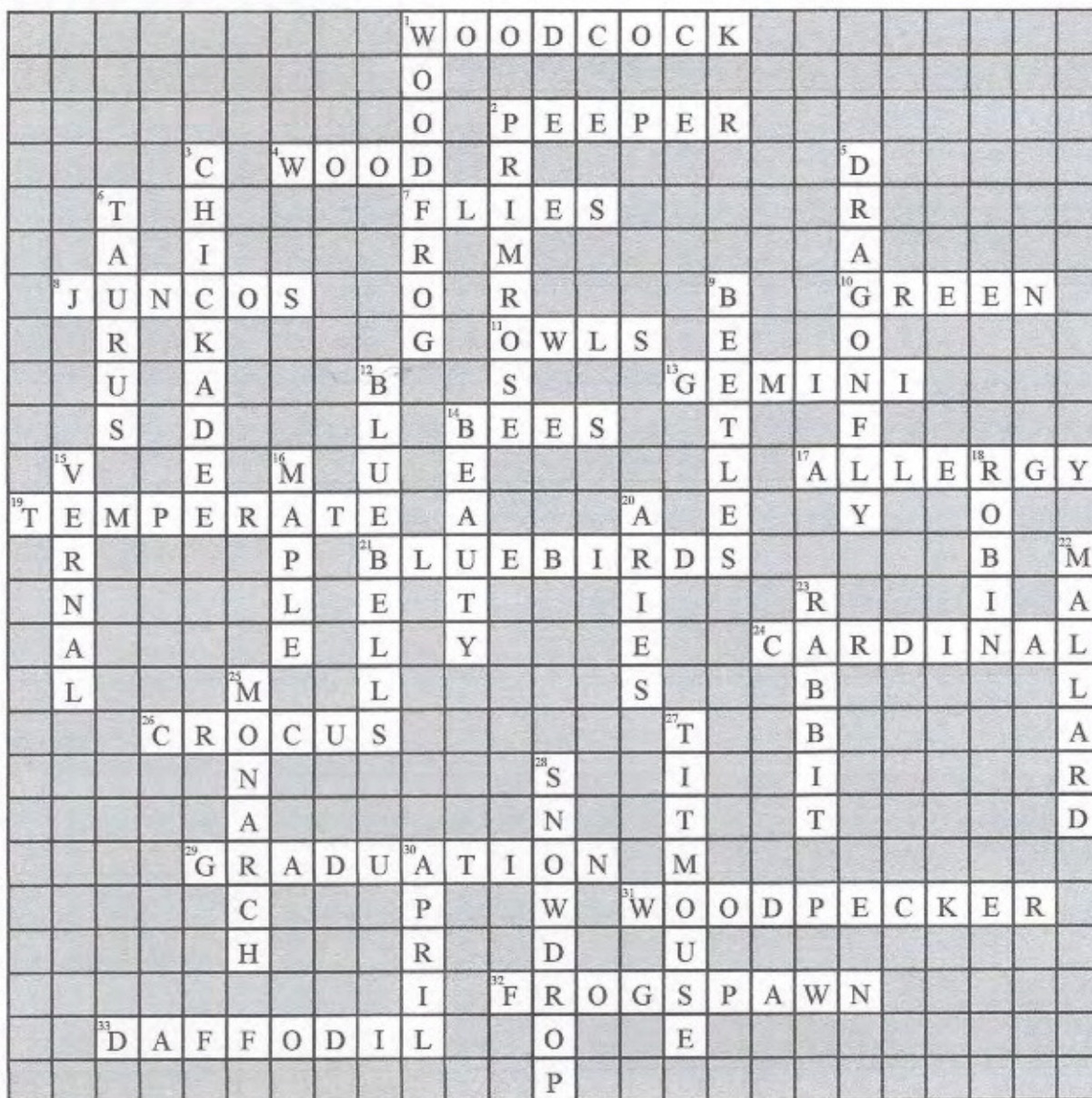
they are, they seem determined to stop Ethan and Ro at any cost. Meanwhile, Ethan and Ro uncover many surprising truths about people they once thought they knew. As they delve deeper into the mystery, their very lives are in danger. They must also deal with the possibility of rekindling old feeling from a love affair that never quite worked out.

The Murder Show is an excellent mystery filled with many surprises and enhanced by the lingering emotions of long-past relationships in more ways than one.

Hannah Rowan

Announcing...Spring!

Louise B. Snead





My Favorite Holidate

Lauren Blakely

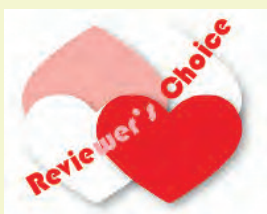
Samantha Brentmoor and Jason Clarke 's Cast which includes: Andi Arndt, Connor Crais, Vanessa Edwin, Andi Eloise, Teddy Hamilton, Erin Mallon, Noah B. Perez, Shakira Shute, and Ryan West

Lauren Blake-ly Books

Audiobook

B0DL6K82ST

★★★★★



Fable needs someone to pose as her Christmas boyfriend to make her cheating ex jealous at holiday parties. Single dad Wilder, her billionaire boss, needs a plus one for his best friend and her sister's Christmas Eve wedding—where they're maid of honor and best man. They attend their destination wedding as a couple.

Wilder has massive trust issues. Focused on raising his daughter, he doesn't believe he's capable of love. He fears he's like his father. Fable longs for an extraordinary love, but she's unsure whether she believes it exists. She holds her feelings inside for self-protection.

Both carry parental/childhood baggage because of their fathers.

Samantha Brentmoor's and Jason Clarke's animated and expressive narration bring Blakely's playful and sexy narrative/storytelling style to life. They seamlessly shift between hilarious, intensely emotional and sizzling hot, intimate, and poignant tones. Blakely's beautifully written character interactions, and love scenes benefit from their skill and full vocal ranges. Their voices perfectly pair to portray Fable and Wilder, providing distinct voices for the characters.

Wilder and Fable's banter, and cute, sweet, sexy, and steamy interactions show how into each other they are. Watching them attempt to resist their intense attraction is adorable and funny. How Wilder cares for Fable and worships her is exceptionally sexy, steamy, and sweet. Blakely takes her time developing an authentic relationship between Wilder and Fable, allowing them to learn about each other, become friends and lovers, and fall in love. Fable and Wilder—two sides of the same coin—are opposites with similar traits and life experiences. Despite how their childhoods and fathers shaped their views of love and romance,

themselves, and what they believe they deserve and can have in life, they are so loving and selfless toward the people they care about, putting them first.

With perfectly written and narrated fun scenes, the novel's tone is a nice balance of hilarity, angst, and steamy heat. Full of moments that left me laughing out loud and others emotionally compromised and holding back tears, *My Favorite Holidate* is a sweet, sexy, steamy, hilarious, emotional, romantic, heartfelt, and fast-paced audio listen I highly recommend.

Lacy Hill

The Rom-Com Agenda

Jayne Denker

Narrated by Erika Schindele

Dreamscape Media

Audiobook

978-1666624021

★★★★★

While working multiple jobs to save money to move after her foster mother's death, Leah Keegan gets drawn into helping heartbroken Eli Masterson win his girlfriend back. Eli can't believe his girlfriend Victoria turned down his proposal and left town. His friends and sisters devise a scheme to help him become husband material to win her heart.

Sarcastic and witty, Eli is a hot mess. His romantic education is sorely lacking. Eli is a clueless but sweet, loyal, thoughtful, small-town backwoods boy. His sister and girl pals devise the perfect plan to get Victoria back—turn him into husband material by making him a romantic hero. Changing his physical appearance is step one. After encountering Leah at her various jobs around town while enacting their make-over plans, his sister and friends recruit her to be his make-over whisperer. Next, they need to make him the ideal man—vulnerable and romantic—by watching classic rom-coms. Leah and Eli marathon rom-com movies in sweet, humorous scenes, where they get to know each other, become closer, and their attraction deepens. Leah is drawn

Audiobooks

into their make-over scheme, becoming Eli's rom-com, meet-cutes, and grand gestures guide. Unexpectedly, they fall in love.

Committed, and honest, Leah fears abandonment after growing up in foster care and moving from home to home until placed with Cathy. Leah is genuine, thoughtful, and caring. Before she was drafted into Eli's warm, friendly, and loving circle of friends and family, she'd been lonely with no friends after her foster mom's death. It's an unfamiliar experience for her to be among people who want her around and treat her kindly with warmth.

Erika Schindele's vibrant narration brings Denker's hilarious, sweet rom-com to life, making the audiobook fly by. Her voice perfectly captures Denker's funny, complex, relatable, and likable characters. She provides distinct voices for them to reveal their personalities, feelings, and quirks and express the book's emotional beats.

Denker's vividly descriptive writing, world-building, and intriguing diversity of characters quickly draw readers into this entertaining listen. The hero's circle of friends and family are amusing, supportive, and quirky. Denker's premise is a creative and fun way to get her protagonists together, and her book is filled with pop culture references that rom-com fans will love.

The Rom-Com Agenda is a sweet, hilarious, and slightly angsty read perfect for friends-to-lovers, found families, small-town romance, and rom-com fans.

Lacy Hill

That Prince Is Mine

Jayci Lee

Narrated by Olivia Song

Macmillan Audio

Audiobook

978-1250349828

☆☆☆

A Los Angeles Korean culinary instructor, who doesn't believe in love and a hopeless romantic French Prince visiting America for three months, fall head-lover heels in love for each other at first sight.

Dreaming of opening a culinary school, Emma Yoon teaches court cuisine to young women wanting to marry into exclusive Korean families. With no time for dating, she's in no hurry to marry and can wait for her matchmaker godmother to find her match. When her grandmother's competition sabotages her, Emma lets her set her up on dates. While on a date, she's immediately drawn to Michel. Prince Michel Aubert will soon become his country's king. Michel's parents want to arrange a marriage for him. During his reprieve as a visiting professor, he seeks an all-consuming love like his parents.

Songs' expressive and dynamic narration brings Lee's characters and story to life, drawing listeners into the story from the first scene. She wonderfully captures Emma and Michel's personalities and gives all the characters distinct voices that match Lee's descriptions.

Michel's and Emma's awkward dates and Emma's matchup dates are hilarious. They're so together and competent professionally that the difference is remarkable and fascinating. They share an intense chemistry that deepens into a life-changing connection after spending time together and getting to know each other. Emma and Michel find home in one another but fear the intensity of their love and the unexpectedness of

falling in love so quickly.

While Lee's characters passionately fall in love, she expresses it in her vibrant description, creating sensual, emotional, steamy, and funny character-driven love scenes that fit her characters' personalities and develop world-building. This may be Lee's steamiest novel. She explores the nature of genuine, selfless love. Lee is excellent at developing her characters and following through on letting the story grow out of who they are.

That Prince is Mine is a sweet, funny, steamy, sexy, emotional, and fast-paced audio romance listen I highly recommend.

Lacy Hill



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Never the Roses

Jennifer K. Lambert

Bramble – Tor Publishing Group

178-1250360342 Hardcover

B0DDJBHJZ7 E-Book

★★★★

Sorceress Oneira is living as a recluse, using her magic to construct a beautiful fortress between the mountains and the sea after a life spent fighting for the queen of her lands. Her peaceful solitude is broken by the arrival of a near-mythical wolf who becomes a pet. Next comes a kestrel who was once the hunting companion of a goddess. Finally, a feline whose own magical powers make it much more than an ordinary cat joins the group.

So much serenity can get boring. Oneira uses her powers to infiltrate and manipulate other people's dreams, and even to physically travel to other places to invade the library of her archenemy, Stearanos, the only other sorcerer with powers equal to hers. She enjoys being able to secretly visit his library and even to "borrow" one of his

prized books without being detected.

Soon the two begin a correspondence even though Stearanos doesn't know the identity of the thief. Both sorcerers chafe at their obligations to serve their royal masters in war, and Oneira has vowed never to kill another. Is it possible for the two sworn enemies to become allies? Will their alliance lead to something deeper?

This story abounds with fascinating magical powers and the deeply felt emotions of two people who on the surface make an unlikely pair.

Hannah Rowan

Raised Bed Gardening for Beginners

Dana Rachele

Self Published

E-Book

B0DW9FFTXM

★★★★ 1/2

This self-help gardening book is a guide to beginner gardening for small areas and a generous amount of the knowledge needed for larger

gardens. It starts with the fundamentals and encourages natural methods. From needing and using the proper tools to designing the perfect set-up, to planning a healthy garden for all to enjoy. The author is also realistic and has sections where the new gardener can troubleshoot issues that may arise.

Chocked full of information, this guide will help even those gardeners who don't have a green thumb. It's a must read for anyone interested in starting their own garden.

Lauren Calder

You Deserve to Know

Aggie Blum Thompson

Forge

978-1250892010 Hardcover

978-1250892034 Trade Paperback

B0D1P3B15R E-Book

★★★★

In a stereotypical suburban neighborhood on a cul-de-sac in East Bethesda, Maryland, three couples form a tight bond. They have weekly dinners or cookouts, vacation together,

watch one another's children, and are regularly in and out of each other's homes.

Little by little, their idyllic life begins to unravel as secrets are revealed, especially since Gwen's husband Anton is killed in a hit-and-run accident that looks deliberate. The three wives, Lisa, Aimee, and Gen, are supposedly bosom buddies, but there are unspoken rivalries and resentments between them.

Their marriages are not as perfect as they seem on the surface. Their children are generally happy, but a pre-teen daughter is beginning to display disturbing behavior. The husbands are either too involved in their business or not productive at all, and infidelity rears its ugly head.

The once close-knit group of wives maneuver, manipulate, and plot revenge for slights real or imagined.

You Deserve to Know is the story that reveals the sometimes gritty underside of a seemingly perfect suburban life, with one surprise revelation after another until it's difficult to discern who exactly is "the bad guy" or "the bad woman" in any situation. This stimulating read keeps the reader guessing right until the end, bringing one surprise after another, and even offers a bonus surprise when it seems that the story is finally over.

Hannah Rowan

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Or, maybe you can go to both. See you there!

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Late!

Didn't quite make in the last issue



Includes all genre and all time periods

Church Girl

Naima Simone

Afterglow Books by Harlequin

Trade Paperback

978-1335574875

☆☆☆ 1/2

Preacher's daughter Aaliyah Montgomery flees her wedding and small town to escape her parents' expectations and control to find herself and live on her own terms. She moves to Chicago, stays with her cousin, and applies to be a nanny to single father and tattoo artist Von Howard.

Gritty, grumpy, and tatted, Von is a committed, single father with a lot of baggage. He hires Aaliyah despite her inexperience and distracting beauty and sensuality because he needs a nanny. Von and Aaliyah experience an intense, fiery desire and connection that draws them to each other. Will they stand together against their pasts that haunt them and fight for the love they find together?

Aaliyah kept her college accep-

tance from her parents. A dependable, capable artist, Aaliyah always did as told and is still restrained by years of parental control and training. But there's more to her than what she's been allowed to express. Now she's free to find out who she is. Although Aaliyah embraces her new life, she's still trying to outrun her fears of living her life, burdened and weighed down by another's expectations, being who she wants to be, and making her own choices.

Von has primary physical custody of his daughter, Gia. One of the country's best tattoo artists, he made his daughter's well-being his priority. Next is his tattoo shop. Blunt and reckless, he cusses all the time and speaks his mind without thinking about the effect of his words.

Simone's writing and story-telling is vibrant with detailed descriptions. She incorporates all the characters' traits resulting in excellent world-building that puts readers feel present in each scene. Von, Aaliyah, and other characters are conflicted, but likable, and

well-developed through snarky banter and sweet, funny, and emotional interactions.

Aaliyah and Von's are consistent, furthering their evolution and the plot. Besides their amazing chemistry and attraction, they bring balance and what's missing from each other's lives. Von steadies and grounds Aaliyah while she becomes a partner to him, helping to ease some of the stress and worry about Gia and whether he's a good father.

Sweet, steamy, funny, sexy, and fast-paced, *Church Girl* is perfect for Black love romance fans.

Lacy Hill

Frenemies with Benefits (Peachtree Cove #3)

Synithia Williams

Canary Street Press

Trade Paperback

978-1335430555

☆☆☆☆

Peachtree Cove Bed-and-Breakfast/inn owner Tracey Thompson stops trying to be perfect and doing what's expected of her and starts making herself happy. Her soon-to-be ex's public affair with her business partner resulted in a pregnancy that drags her into the spotlight/rumor mill. Nursery owner Brian Nelson is more than happy to help her out, and they become friends-with-benefits

Tracey is intelligent, sassy, and speaks her mind. Townsfolk didn't expect her marriage to last, expecting the worst from her, too. She's focused on making her dreams of owning a B&B come true. Now, thanks to her ex, she's at the center of a public scandal again! If they're going to gossip about her anyway, she's ready to have fun and give them something to talk about.

Brian is divorced and living his best life, running his plant nursery and avoiding serious relationships. He's always found Tracey sexy, and interesting—even in high school. Unfortunately, like Tracey, he can't seem to escape his past and her drama-filled life.

Late!

William's vibrant, descriptive, and down-to-earth writing flows. She develops her characters through funny, sweet, sexy and snarky banter and intensely emotional and steamy interactions and love scenes. Her use of the dialogue and her southern setting add layers to her narrative, character development, and world-building and draws readers in and makes this a page-turner.

Brad and Tracey become friends as they talk, share life experiences and pasts, and get to know each other better. While she knows he doesn't revel in her mistakes and messy life, it drives her crazy that, since high school, he's always been the one who's been there for the most embarrassing moments of her life and offers unsolicited advice she ignores. She pushes his buttons, making him lose his ever-present cool. But he's had her back when she needs help with plants and florals for her events. He never lets her down..

Frenemies with Benefits is a sweet, steamy, and fast-paced romance.
Lacy Hill

Greenteeth

Molly O'Neill

Orbit

E-book

B0D5X4RVBD

★★★★

Jenny has lived in her lake for at least a millennial, and it can be frustrating when the humans throw things in it. She likes to keep things tidy. This time, it's a woman with magical powers. Jenny is not interested in eating her, so she saves the woman and nurses her back to health. It's been a long time since she had a friend. The woman is Temperance, and she needs Jenny's help to save her young family and the village from an ancient evil that represents a local and far-reaching threat to all of Britain. Jenny must venture from her lake and engage in a world that has changed greatly in her many years.

Greenteeth is a warm, engaging fantasy that makes a reader want to curl up and enjoy the journey. Jenny Greenteeth is thoughtfully and vividly personified from the British legends and in such an appealing way. The water hag faerie being who is often depicted as malevolent or at least predatory is brought to life as a character who is just living her life in her natural environment. Her point of view is insightful, earthy and humorous at times, and melancholic in others.

Jenny's loneliness is evident through her comments and observations, and she serves as an allegory for the ancient magic of the land that fades with time and the encroachment of humankind in natural spaces. Jenny's interactions with Temperance, and Brackus, a tinker/trader and her goblin frenemy, as they go on their quest to save their home, run the gamut between a companionable, unlikely friendship to ideological clashes for how they can achieve essentially the same goal, defeating their enemy. Jenny is not treated well by humans who hate everything they don't understand. Similarly, Temperance also faces the distrust and suspicions of her own kind because of her magic, but she also feels the need to protect those, even when they would harm her. This is emblematic about how people face that same struggle with others who treat them wrong because they are different.

Greenteeth is so enjoyable, with all the elements that fantasy readers would enjoy, great world-building, a clash between evil and good, awe-inspiring magic and creatures of lore and legend, and eerie beings and places in faerie lands. There is a bittersweet element in that this story recognizes that things always change with time, but there is also joy in looking forward. This book is recommended for fans of faerie lore, legends and the creatures that inhabit those legends.

Danielle Hill

A Legend in the Baking (Fake It Till You Bake It #2)

Jamie Wesley

St. Martin's Griffin

Trade Paperback

978-1250801877

★★★★

August Hodges, Sugar Blitz Cupcakes baker and silent partner, and social media manager Sloane Dell, August's best friend and partner's baby sister, discover that their shared connection and attraction from 12 years ago still exists and are just as powerful when Sloane joins the business to revamp the bakery's social media presence.

Responding to sexist comments mocking him for being a football player and baker, August ranted that men baking isn't a threat to their masculinity and supporting women as the industry's backbone. His meltdown went viral, making him a popular bachelor.

Stubborn, and determined, Sloane hates relying on anyone. She quits her job after being denied a promotion. To help her career prospects, she agrees to help the bakery take advantage of August's popularity to open a new location.

Wesley's writing style, language, authentic dialogue, and vivid descriptions add layers to her excellent story, character development, and world building. She draws readers in from the first scene. The characters' snarky banter and sweet, funny, sexy, emotional interactions help evolve the characters and further the plot.

August and Sloane are conflicted, likable, and relatable with fiery chemistry supported by genuine love. Wesley develops Sloane and August's relationship through flashbacks between the past—when they meet, become friends, and Sloane develops a teen crush on him—and the present. August and Sloane's thirsty interactions and

Late!

love scenes are sweet, funny, intimate, and intensely sexy and steamy.

Sloane has been haunting his dreams for years. He wants to keep his promise not to touch Sloane, but his desire for her is too strong and he's never stopped caring for her even believing she doesn't feel the same—if she ever did.

A Legend in the Baking is great for fans of second chance romance.

Lacy Hill

The Locke Institute (The Crimes of Rooker Flynn (Book 1) and The Trial of Rooker Flynn (Book 2)

AR Witham

Nepenthe Press

E-Book

B0D88KFTT4

★★★★ 1/2

The Locke Institute is a bind up of two novels: *The Crimes of Rooker Flynn* and *The Trial of Rooker Flynn*. An epic portal fantasy about two characters, the roguish ship captain and pirate Rooker Flynn who has a unique bond with his vessel, and a young teen from Chicago named Jack who has a near-mythic reputation as Black Jack. Both are kidnapped and imprisoned in The Locke Institute, a place that is closer to a living nightmare than a traditional learning institution. Its headmaster has deep and troubling motivations for holding both Flynn and Jack captive, and a sadistic streak the size of an ocean. Can Flynn and Jack find a way out of the Locke Institute with their bodies, souls and sanity intact?

These books are riveting, exciting and unputdownable. Witham's character work is exceptional, which is crucial for this kind of narrative. The reader gets to know both Flynn and Jack intimately, warts and all. The extreme circumstances they face, along

with other inhabitants of the Institute's re-educational program, demand growth and facing the parts of themselves they are deeply uncomfortable with. Rooker Flynn is the kind of character that isn't a "good man," but readers find themselves rooting for and feeling entirely sympathetic for him. His bad decisions and cringeworthy behavior clearly show his character flaws, but the reader is also able to see that he has his reasons for the selfish path he has followed in his life. Ultimately, Flynn learns the value of community and self-sacrifice. In the case of Jack, his previously sheltered life, naivety, and optimistic views of others are put to the test as he is subjected to viscerally harrowing experiences in the Institute. At the same time, he is refined by his suffering, learns and adapts to his circumstances, using his powerful intellect and his will to survive. Even the secondary characters are distinctive and memorable. The setting is in itself a lead character in these books. The world has its own rules, and the Locke Institute is situated on an island that is as voracious as a monster from nightmares. Magic has rules and consequences, and the characters have to navigate those twists and turns where it harms as much as it helps

Danielle Hill

Second-Chance Bodyguard (The Touré Security Group)

Patricia Sargeant

Harlequin

Mass Market

978-13356 02602

★★★★

Hezekiah Touré goes into hiding with private investigator Celeste Jarrett to protect his brothers after being threatened by a serial killer. Zeke and Celeste met working together on a criminal investigation. They went out a couple times but stopped seeing each other because it didn't work out. Per-

Affaire de Coeur

haps sharing a safe house alone together may help them get close enough to encourage Celeste to let her barriers down and trust Zeke. Or will her past wounds drive them apart again?

The Touré Brothers' parents died two years ago, leaving them to carry on their security firm. Zeke, the firm's de facto head, handles corporate security and manages the firm with strength and security. He feels guilty about the outcome of a past case and responsible for the Group's stability—driving him to leave the business.

Celeste owns a private investigation firm with her best friend. Her ex betrayed her, framed her for his corrupt acts, and turned her department and family against her. This, plus her already burdensome family baggage, makes it difficult for her to trust and let people in.

Zeke and Celeste are each convinced they're not good for each other and send out mixed signals. She's certain he's not into her, which makes sense with how he ended things with her before they could even see what they could be. He's all wrapped up in his guilt and refusal to forgive himself. Celeste is haunted by her past and family drama.

Sargeant's writing is vivid and descriptive and her active, straight-to-the-point narrative style and superb world-building place readers with the characters in each scene. The action and suspense scenes keep readers on the edge of their seats. Sargeant compellingly writes how the characters work through the cases/investigations step by step.

Thrilling, suspenseful, steamy, funny, emotional, and fast-paced, *Second-Chance Bodyguard* is recommended for mystery, bodyguard, Black love, romantic suspense, and second-chance romance fans.

Lacy Hill



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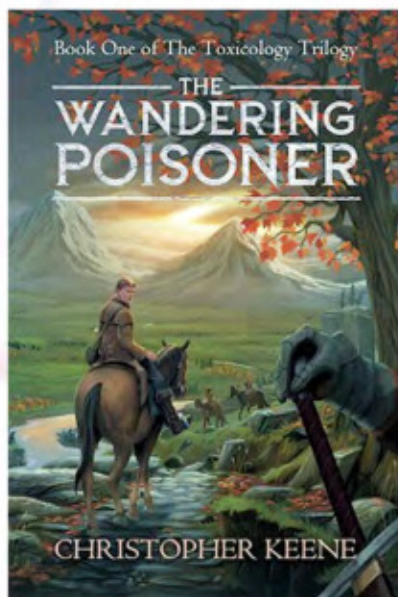
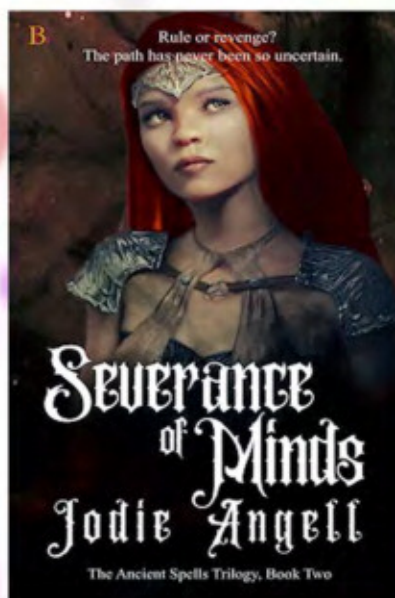
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