

The Florida Writer

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2026
VOLUME 20, NUMBER 5

Writers' AI Fears Often Run Ahead of the Facts

Book Reviews: Above and Beyond Amazon

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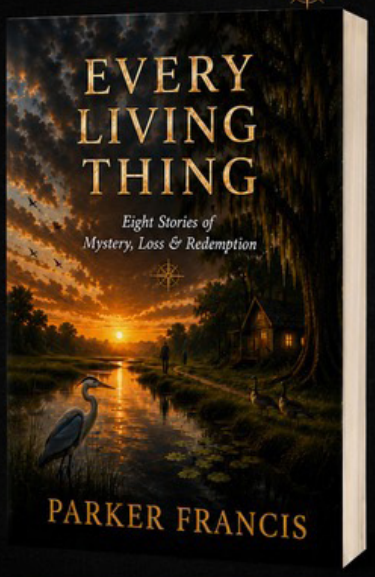
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Mileage signpost at Fort Zachary Taylor State Park, Key West, FL.

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The Florida Writer

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1. Submit a one-paragraph announcement written in third person.
2. Maximum word count, 100.
3. You may send one headshot or a photo of the front cover of your book to accompany your announcement, but it is not required.
4. One entry per issue, per person.
5. Type "Celebrations" and month of the issue you're submitting to in the subject line of your submission email.
6. Follow all the instructions listed in the "Additional Requirements" section below.

Paragraphs & Stanzas

We publish selected creative writing by members who respond to the issue's prompt.

1. Prose, poetry, and excerpts from longer works that can stand alone are welcome.
2. Maximum word count for prose, 700; maximum line count for poetry, 50. Title is included in word count.
3. You may send a headshot to accompany your entry, but it is not required.
4. One entry per issue, per person.
5. Type "Paragraphs" and month of the issue you're submitting to in the subject line of your submission email.
6. Include a one-line bio, no more than fifteen words including your name, within your attached submission document.
7. Follow all the instructions listed in the "Additional Requirements" section below.

Additional Requirements

1. To be eligible for publication, you must be a member of the Florida Writers Association
2. Send your entire text submission as an attached Word doc. Do not embed any of the text that is part of your submission in the email.
3. Include your name and contact information within the attachment.
4. Photo image files must be high resolution, 300 ppi, jpg or png format, and sent as an attachment, not embedded in a document.
5. Acknowledge in your submission that you have read and agree to *The Florida Writer* Magazine Contributor Agreement. *floridawriters.org/tfw-contributor-agreement*
6. Email your submission to mdestefano@floridawriters.org

Prompts & Deadlines

- **December/January 2027 Issue** – Deadline: November 1, 2026
  Include this line in your piece: It was over, and that worried me.
- **February/March 2027 Issue** – Deadline: January 1, 2027
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How to Cope with Rejection and Be a Resilient Writer

Mary Ann de Stefano

EDITOR

"I wasn't going to give up until every single publisher turned me down, but I often feared that would happen."

—J. K. Rowling (Twitter, 3/25/16)

When agents, editors, publishers, or contest judges respond negatively to a submission, it can feel as though they are rejecting not only the work but also the writer.

Feel your feelings. Give yourself time to feel disappointed or angry. Those emotions are valid. Just don't let those feelings make your decisions. And most certainly don't reply to the rejection while you are still in the heat of the moment!

Rejection does not necessarily mean the piece was flawed or that it could not succeed elsewhere. It simply reflects one decision by one outlet at one point in time.

A useful way to cope with rejection is to separate your identity from the submitted work. Treat the response as information rather than as a verdict on your talent. There could be any number of reasons for the rejection: the market may be oversaturated, the genre may not fit the current editorial needs, or the timing and word count may simply be off.

Once you have shifted your mindset, you can implement a practical system to mitigate the emotional blow. Some writers maintain a spreadsheet to track where they have submitted their work and the responses they receive. This can turn a negative experience into a data point and can help reveal patterns.

If you receive repeated rejections for the same piece, consider revising it or targeting a different market. If an editor sends a personalized note with feedback, treat it as a valuable opportunity to learn. Even a brief "not for us" means your work reached a human reader—a small victory in itself.

You cannot control whether an agent or publisher accepts your work or whether you win a contest. Instead measure your success by the actions you take as a writer that are actually within your control:

- Number of words or pages completed
- Number of completed drafts
- Number of submissions
- Hours dedicated to studying the craft
- Consistency in seeking new opportunities

Avoid investing all your hope into just one story, poem, or article. Protect your creative spirit by writing something fresh while you pitch or polish your past work. That way, if a rejection comes in, it's just a bump in the road instead of a total roadblock.

A successfully published mentor once told me that although writing is deeply personal, submission is a business transaction. They recommended a "submit and forget" strategy: once you send out your work, mentally archive it and move on to the next project instead of waiting in a state of anticipation. Your happiness and sense of accomplishment can then come more from the act of creating—which you control—than from acceptance—which you do not.

Finally, join a community of writers. Writing is solitary, but its challenges are universal. Sharing experiences with other writers can transform rejection from a source of shame into a shared reality for growth. Fellow writers can offer encouragement, practical advice, or simply a remind you that rejection is part of the process—not proof that you do not belong.

Resilient writers are not those who never feel discouraged. They are the ones who develop habits that keep rejection from stopping them. They feel the disappointment, learn what they can, continue to write, and submit their work to the next appropriate opportunity.

Mary Ann de Stefano is a Lifetime Member and longtime volunteer. She is President of the FWA Board and edits the official magazine, *The Florida Writer*. An independent editor with 30+ years' experience, Mary Ann is mad about nurturing creative and community spirit.

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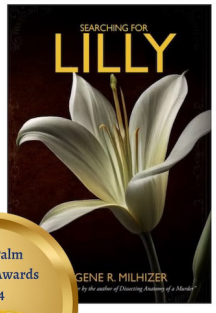
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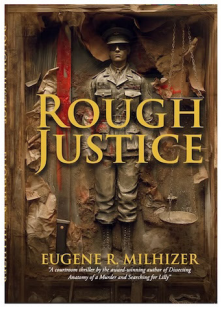


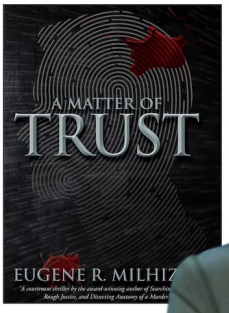
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Book Reviews: Above and Beyond Amazon

by Paul Iasevoli

With over 33 million books available on Amazon—1.4 million of which are self-published—how can a book stand out among the teeming crowd? Friends and family offering five-star reviews for a book may add up to 200 or 300, but is that enough?

So, short of an interview on CNN with Anderson Cooper, what's the best way to have a book stand out from the crowded field of millions? I'm not writing here to offer a solution, but rather alternatives to help traditionally published and self-published authors get their books front and center.

Recently I had the opportunity to attend a *Narratively* Zoom coordinated by the esteemed Lee Gutkind and *Booklist's* Director, Donna Seaman. For those who've not heard of *Booklist*, it's a not-for-profit publication that's been around since 1905. The American Library Association publishes *Booklist*, a magazine which recommends books to libraries and schools across the nation—to quote Lee Gutkind, "It's the gold standard to get a book into a library."

Wouldn't that be a dream? To walk through the stacks of your local public library and see your book on a shelf. Well, dreams may come true, but it may take a bit of determination. Then again, isn't that what writing is all about? Write something; let it fall in the forest of 33 million trees, and hope someone hears the crash of your story's trunk and limbs … or maybe not.

Booklist Unfurled

I have no allegiance to *Booklist*, or any other book reviewing site online or in print—*Kirkus* for one—however, in my opinion, *Booklist*, seems more user friendly.

But, before I continue to praise *Booklist*, I must offer several caveats:

- *Booklist*, only accepts electronic submissions.
- It gives preference to the Big-5 publishers (Hachette, HarperCollins, MacMillan, Penguin Random House, Simon & Schuster); small publishers and university presses are welcomed along with hybrid publishers.
- They do not review self-published books.
- With limited peoplepower and time to cover all their submissions, only 300 books a year are sent to their preliminary editorial staff, i.e., readers who recommend a book for review to their executive selection committee.
- *Booklist* adheres to strict guidelines. For example, a book submitted for review must be received four to six months prior to its calendar-year release date, so a book set to be published in January 2027 needs to be submitted no later than September 2026.
- More guidelines are on their website, *booklistonline.com/get-reviewed.*

Taking all the above into consideration, it's free to submit to *Booklist*, and if a book from a small or hybrid publisher gets reviewed in their magazine, that review is "gold." Even *The New York Times* looks at *Booklist's* recommendations in determining what books to include in their Sunday "Book Review" section.

Self-Published Books

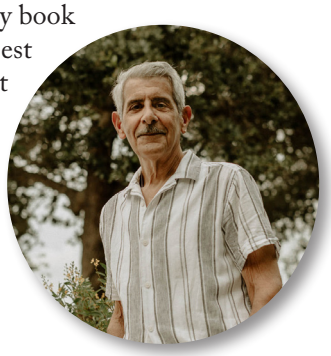
With 3.5 million self-published books coming out each year, Seaman stated that *Booklist*, now farms out self-published submissions to a company called BlueInk [*blueinkreview.com*]. For a fee of $455, this service will review a self-published book and, if it meets their standards, they'll recommend it to *Booklist* for consideration where it would have to again go through the scrutiny of *Booklist*'s editors to get into their magazine. But BlueInk also offers other marketing opportunities by posting reviews in *Self Unbound Magazine* and on social media, all included in the $455 fee.

A word of caution, beware of unsolicited offers to review your book—with BlueInk the author approaches the company, not the other way around.

The Upshot

With all the maneuvering it takes to write a book, perhaps the last thing writers have on their minds is reviews. Nonetheless, reviews are an integral part of the marketing scheme. Five-star reviews from family and friends on Amazon and Goodreads are nice, but they fall flat with libraries and bookstores. So maybe reviews should be the first thing on an author's mind when their book is published.

Look at the front matter of any book from *The New York Times* "Best Sellers" list and you'll find at least a page of in praise of … followed by reviews from *Booklist*, *Kirkus*, and the like. ❧



Paul Iasevoli is a member of Florida Writers Association's Board of Directors.

Writers' AI Fears Often Run Ahead of the Facts

by Jane Friedman

Based on my years of reporting on AI and publishing, in this article I answer questions writers ask me most—about detection, disclosure, proof of authorship—and discuss where I see the most risk. Separately, I've addressed straightforward issues of fact, and where things stand legally, in AI and Publishing: FAQ for Writers. [*janefriedman.com/ai-and-publishing-faq-for-writers/*]

The biggest questions I get right now about AI:

- How do I protect myself from an agent or publisher (or other publishing professional) using AI on my work?
- How do I protect myself from a false accusation of AI use?
- How can I prove that I wrote my work and/or how can I prove that my particular AI use is not a problem or doesn't run afoul of agent/publisher guidelines?

Unfortunately, these questions don't have straightforward answers.

How do writers protect themselves from publishing professionals using AI tools on their work without permission?

First things first, be sure to read any available policy from the agent, publisher or publishing professional about their AI use. Increasingly you'll find a statement on their website, in their submission guidelines, or other documents they provide authors. If you can't find one, ask. Generally you can trust them to keep their word, although I admit trust can be in short supply these days.

Over time, it will become difficult to find agents, editors, marketers, and publishers who don't use AI at all. Every major publisher currently uses AI as part of normal business operations, even if it's not used during the creative process by editors and designers. At least one Big Five house, Penguin Random House, has gone on the record as using AI detection software. My guess is that many publishers may be using it without disclosure, and large corporations don't always know what their thousands of employees are doing. So the pragmatic and realistic answer is that you can't protect yourself from this use—anyone with access to your work can decide to pop it into an AI tool without disclosure. Could you sue them for it? I don't know; I see no clear legal standard for doing so unless they signed a contract that prohibits the behavior. Even if you do have legal recourse, I'm not sure it's worth pursuing given the time, money, and effort that would be involved.

Some publishers and agents use AI systems that are closed or proprietary, meaning your work is not available beyond their own virtual desk and is not used for AI model training. Most publishing professionals care about that and don't desire to use these tools to compromise you and your work. They're using it to make their jobs easier. I know some writers will view that statement quite cynically, but it's logical they'd look for efficiencies in a business that pays modestly while being time intensive. Most professionals I know want to save time and energy to focus on more desired and creative tasks, like working with authors and others in the business. (But whether they're using AI skillfully or thoughtfully is another matter.)

Where I have the most concern: The temptation is high for service providers, among others, to use AI in ways that aren't well disclosed to clients. E.g., maybe you hire a marketer or publicist to help you with a campaign, and you don't realize a good part of it has been AI generated. Whether it's a good plan will depend on the expertise of that marketer or publicist in using AI, evaluating its outputs, customizing it for your project, etc. Or maybe an editor uses AI to generate feedback without telling you. How would you know? Probably only by having a human conversation with them, with plenty of back-and-forth that would catch them out if they didn't read or engage meaningfully with your work.

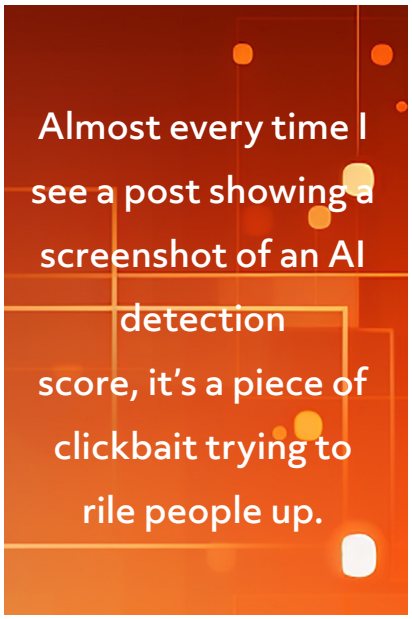
Any author partnering with publishers or hiring freelancers needs to be doubly diligent about doing their research, knowing what they want from the relationship, and taking steps to ensure that it is indeed a relationship,

not just a transaction. AI is great at transactional work and if you just want boilerplate feedback, boilerplate campaigns, etc., ask one of the many AI tools out there for the average guidance one would receive.

How do writers protect themselves from AI companies training on their published books?

There is no realistic way to protect yourself from this. Sure, you can put a notice in your books that essentially says, "no AI training." But in the US, courts have so far found that AI training on copyrighted works is fair use, although that could change. Currently, AI companies are buying up print books, scanning them, and using them to train AI models. They're also pursuing licensing agreements with big publishers and media companies.

If the courts find that AI training is not fair use, then you can rely on your publisher or the Authors Guild to litigate on your behalf. (They already are.) If you're a self-published author, I would recommend signing up for one of the licensing services, like Created By Humans, that give AI companies a legal path to licensing your work. Still, if AI companies or others choose to train on your work without permission (e.g., by gaining access to pirated copies or scanning a print edition), there's no good way to know on a case-by-case basis. And most authors don't have the resources to file a lawsuit and will have to depend on class-action lawsuits, as they do now.



What if AI detection scores on my writing are wrong and cause me to lose a publishing opportunity?

Right now, I find people ask this question more often out of fear, not experience.

But, like everyone else, I see people using free AI detection tools, testing them with short excerpts of their own writing, and claiming false positives. They then declare the detection tool cannot be trusted under any circumstance.

It's clear these tools aren't 100 percent right all the time, but if used under appropriate conditions, they are a helpful tool when paired with human judgment.

When someone posts AI detection results online, look for the following information:

- **What service is being used?** There are many bad ones that can't be relied on. Pangram is so far the industry leader, for good reason: studies have shown it's reliable. Many people have been trying to say these tools aren't reliable based on studies conducted 2–3 years ago. AI detection has advanced since then. If you've heard that it can't correctly identify writing from neurodivergent writers or non-English speakers, you're hearing about an older study.
- **How much text was used?** AI detection doesn't work well on small amounts of text (fewer than a couple hundred words). For novel-length work, it's far more accurate.

Almost every time I see a post showing a screenshot of an AI detection score, it's a piece of clickbait trying to rile people up. Causing fear and panic is a good way to get attention these days.

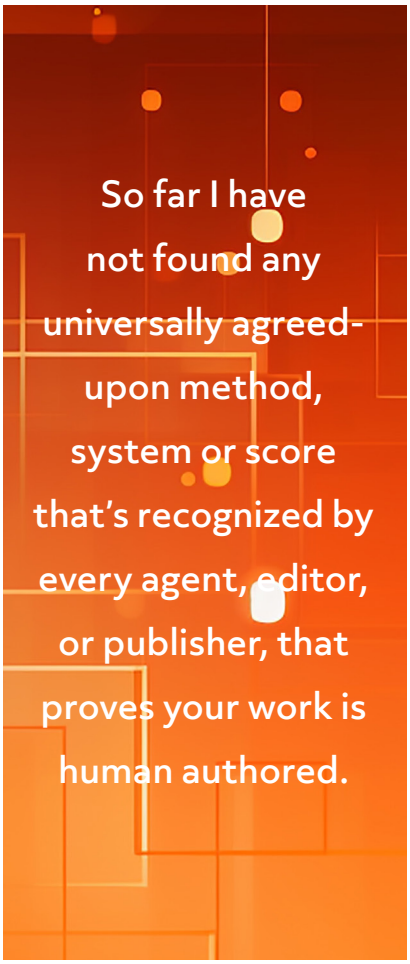
What's missing from the AI detection discussion is that, for the purposes of agents and publishers, these tools serve a real need, and it's rarely a punitive one. Agents report that, since February of this year, about half of all submissions now involve AI use. As of today, I'd consider it part of a market analysis to know a work's AI detection score. (Funny enough, some people who are against detection software seem to be using AI to write. Here's an article on that. [*theargumentmag.com/p/the-core-anti-pangram-constituency*])

I see two primary uses of AI detection among agents and publishers:

- **With contracted authors:** Publishers use AI detection to help have conversations about submitted manuscripts, where there's a relationship in place with the author. Educational and university publishers in particular feel it necessary to use AI detection because of the high stakes involved. It is exceedingly rare to see a public case of a contracted author getting canceled over AI use. (More on that below.) Professionals prefer to deal with these cases quietly and in conversation with the author, and put remedies in place to make the manuscript acceptable.
- **With uncontracted authors submitting:** Agents and publishers alike are beginning to use AI

detection to help them quickly filter out work with very high scores. One agent and one editor told me once a manuscript scores above 20 or 25 percent likely AI-written, they start to hesitate, as that reflects more heavy AI assistance that could prove problematic.

Many authors envision that agents and publishers have a zero-tolerance policy where they reject anyone for even a 1% AI score. No reasonable agent or publisher is doing that—and it's not realistic to expect today's writers to shun every single AI tool available to them, especially when major publishers are using such tools. That said, agents and publishers who are most avidly against AI are not likely using AI detection in the first place and don't trust it. Those who are more accepting of AI use will have some tolerance and see it as an inevitability.



What about Jerry Falade? Agents who considered his submission (but did not offer to represent him), told me the manuscript had all the hallmarks of AI writing from the first paragraph. They did not need AI detection to tell them that. Why other agents didn't see that for themselves is an interesting question, and there are theories, but that discussion is for another day. Suffice it to say, what sells in today's market (both traditional and indie) includes both human-written work and AI-assisted work. Why Falade's agent made any comment to the media about the situation is a mystery to me, but that agent didn't use AI detection either. Some media outlets did.

What about *Shy Girl*? Readers believed her work had the hallmarks of AI writing before AI detection was used by bystanders. The publisher pulled the book so quickly when media scrutiny arrived; it feels like they were scared and caught unprepared. I have to wonder if today they would do the same thing. The environment is changing fast.

What about *Daggermouth*? Some academic researchers surfaced this book in a large-scale study using AI detection, and *The Atlantic* picked up on it and published the detection score. The author is being supported by her publisher and even signed another deal with them after *The Atlantic's* article was published. This just goes to prove my earlier point: I don't see agents and publishers on witch hunts, eager to reject anything touched by AI. The very online crowd who are trying to publicly shame authors for using AI, those are the ones to worry about. Publishers using AI detection punitively and/or to deliberately cause a public scandal are not the sort of people I consider professionals.

One agent confided in me that it's common for writers to complain to her that, when doing their own private testing, their writing has been flagged positively for AI, even when they didn't use it. After gentle questioning, she comes to find they did in fact use AI, sometimes via Grammarly, ProWritingAid, and other tools that have AI capabilities. Sometimes writers aren't being honest with themselves about what AI writing is or they're just being willfully obtuse. (More discussion about software below.)

What concerns me: I think some agents and publishers are rejecting work and citing AI as a reason when it's not the reason, to shut down conversation and get rid of people. Who knows why. But these days, it's something of a casual insult to tell someone "I think you used AI." As I see it, the risk of an overly casual assumption that you used AI is greater with smaller outlets, less experienced outlets, and less professional outlets. (This would describe countless literary journals and online publications.) If I receive a submission that's unacceptable for any reason (and that includes heavy reliance on AI), I reject it on editorial grounds. I don't accuse the writer of using AI.

My submission was rejected because I used AI (and I admit to using AI). Now what?

Some agents and publishers ask you to disclose upfront if you used AI and may reject you if so, based on your disclosure. Frustratingly, it may be unclear what they mean by AI use. Does it include research? Spellcheck? Grammarly? Brainstorming? There's no way to know unless they have a clear policy.

Regardless, there are any number of publishers and agents who have strict anti-AI policies and will tell you not to touch it at all. They might even say your work will be ineligible for copyright if you do (not true unless your work appears obviously AI written, but a good way to scare writers). As time goes on, I would consider these policies to be comparable to policies that rule out certain genres or categories of work, or certain themes or certain issues or events. If a prospective agent or publisher for your work announces, "No AI use ever, without exceptions," but you regularly use AI for aspects of your creative process or research, then don't submit to them. I would not try to convince them or fool them. If the latter, you're destined to have a bad relationship. It is very hard to conceal consistent AI use over time.

I didn't use AI in my work. How do I prove it?

I don't think you can prove it unless you're willing to rely in part on tools like Verify My Writing, which use the same technology as AI detection. The Authors Guild Human Certification does not prove anything, nor does any other certification method currently on the market that doesn't use AI detection.

So far I have not found any universally agreed-upon method, system or score that's recognized by every agent, editor, or publisher, that proves your work is human authored. You may find individuals laying out procedures or policies for how they determine something is human authored. But that doesn't mean it will be shared by others.

I am regularly pitched by authors, tech people, and service providers who all think they have found "the way" to prove human authorship. You haven't heard of them because none of them have achieved mainstream adoption. When one does, I promise you will hear it from me first. (If anyone tries to sell you on a tool or software like this, ask them what agency or publisher is using it as proof.)

The good news: It's rare that agents or publishers demand proof of human authorship that you can't provide. Right now authors' desires to have proof seem to be fueled by anxiety over possible future demands or reader accusations. Unfortunately, just like *Goodreads* review bombing, you can't stop readers from doing obnoxious and awful things. It may become part of what all authors experience. But as for agents and publishers, I simply don't see anything yet that indicates they're looking for any special proof of process that you wouldn't normally be able to provide.

I am worried that using AI tools in Grammarly, ProWritingAid, Word, or XYZ software will make my work unacceptable to agents and publishers.

This worry is largely misplaced unless you are using these tools to generate or rewrite significant portions of your manuscript. I would not, under any circumstance, load up my entire manuscript into an AI-enabled editor and let it rip without reviewing every change. Would you let a freelance editor make countless changes without having them tracked in Word? Don't let AI do it either. Fortunately, AI tools have become sophisticated in this regard—e.g., you can install Claude for Word and have it track changes for you.



Final thoughts

I believe writers are overly anxious about these issues, mostly because of misinformation online and some outlying, headline-grabbing cases, not because of anything they've experienced personally. Just like other issues in publishing where writers have little or no control, this can all be a grand distraction from getting your writing done.

That said, much as I try to bring clarity and calm to discussions about AI, none of these questions have good answers right now. It's a world of uncertainty and frankly you just have to get on with your writing and your business as best you can. ❧

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NOTE FROM THE EDITOR:
The overall environment regarding AI is changing fast. This information is correct as of mid-September 2026.

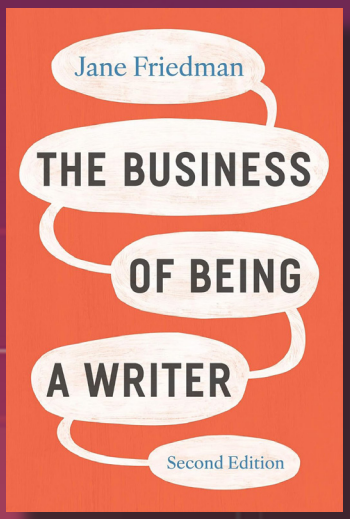
More Info:

- **Website:** *janefriedman.com*
- *The Bottom Line*: **Highly recommended! There is also a free version.** *janefriedman.com/the-bottom-line-janes-publishing-industry-newsletter/*
- *The Business of Being a Writer, Second Edition: businessofwriting.org*



Jane Friedman has spent her entire career working in the publishing industry, with a focus on business reporting and author education. Established in 2015, her newsletter *The Bottom Line* provides nuanced market intelligence to thousands of authors and industry professionals; in 2023, she was named Publishing Commentator of the Year by Digital Book World.

Jane's expertise regularly features in major media outlets such as *The New York Times, The Atlantic, NPR, The Today Show, Wired, The Guardian, Fox News*, and *BBC*. Her book, *The Business of Being a Writer, Second Edition* (The University of Chicago Press), is used as a classroom text by many writing and publishing degree programs. She reaches thousands through speaking engagements and workshops at diverse venues worldwide, including NYU's Advanced Publishing Institute, Frankfurt Book Fair, and numerous MFA programs.



The Business of Being a Writer advises writers on how to build a platform in a way that aligns with their values, how to spot critical mindset issues that might sabotage their efforts before they even begin, how to publish strategically, and what it means to diversify income streams beyond book sales. For this second edition, Friedman has updated every topic to reflect how the industry has evolved over the past half decade. New features include a section on business and legal issues commonly faced by writers, exercises at the end of each chapter, and a wealth of sample materials posted on a companion website.

Reaching beyond the mechanical aspects of publishing, ***The Business of Being a Writer*** will help both new and experienced writers approach their careers with the same creative spirit as their writing. Friedman encourages without sugarcoating reality, blending years of research with practical advice that will help writers market themselves and maximize their writing-related income. Her book will leave them empowered, confident, and ready to turn their craft into a sustainable career.

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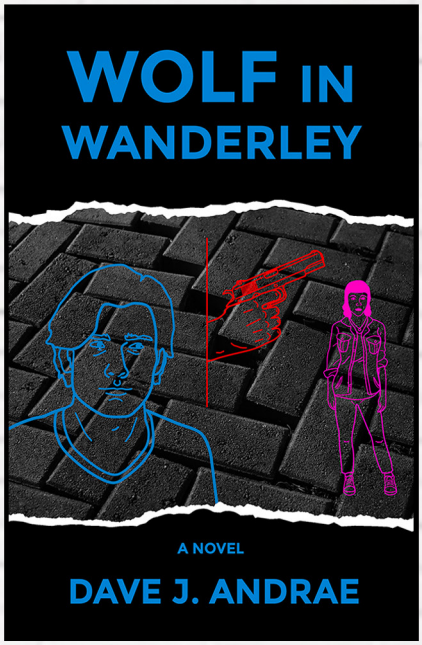
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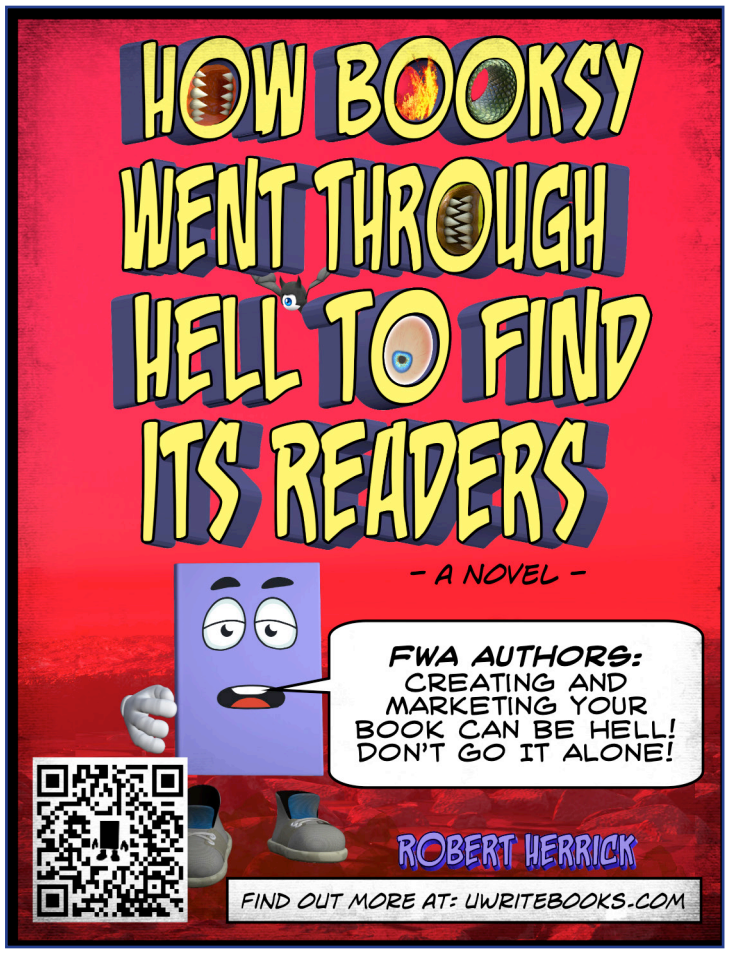
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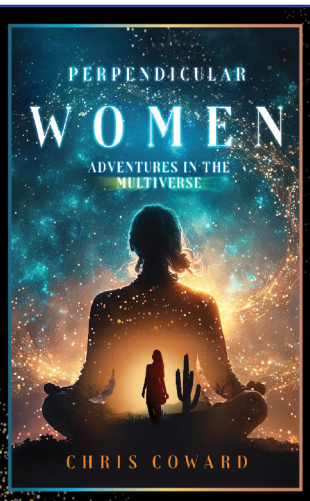
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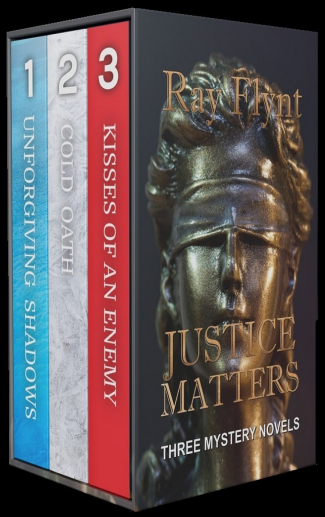
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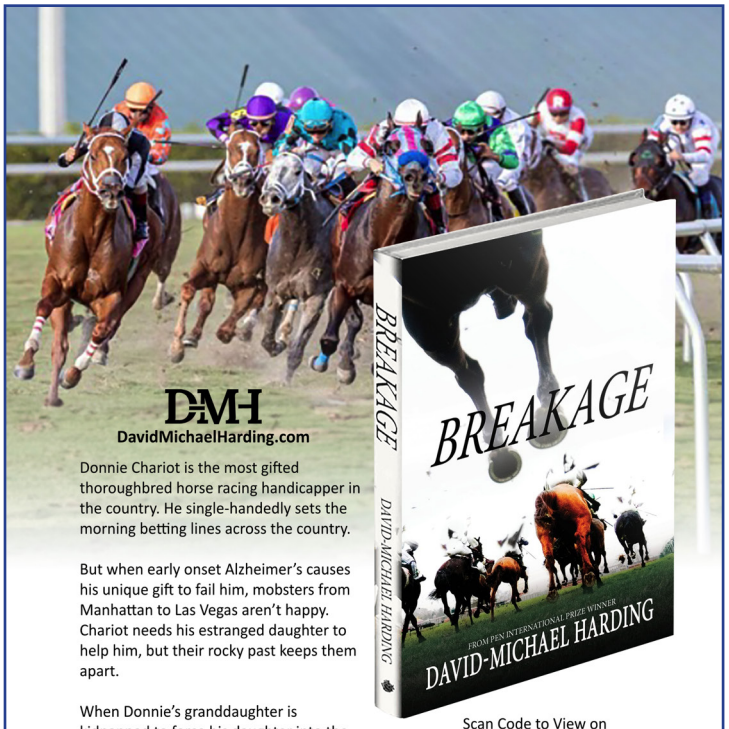
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Donnie Chariot is the most gifted thoroughbred horse racing handicapper in the country. He single-handedly sets the morning betting lines across the country.

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Romeo

Lynn Bechdolt

"If I could just get out to work the garden,
That's all." And, of course, the rabbit pen.

He meant the long days seeing his wife fade away
No pill could bring back the one he tried so hard to save

The hopeless task would end, they'd always been a pair.
But he wouldn't hear of visiting her elsewhere

Just a little help with feeding and bathing to staunch the despair.
He tended the garden, something responding to his care,
something green and flourishing, something they once shared.

He could bear the vacant eyes, the cheeks thin and wordless.
He had to do it, never thought of someone else.

Pure and simple, always true, he was no lothario,
just a plain, gallant man named Romeo.

Lynn Bechdolt is a retired pastor
and currently trying to get a novel published.

The Phone Call

Jacque Jacobs

What has changed
about us?
Friends, over many years,
who now
have to make an appointment
to have a phone call.
Once upon a time,
we called
and if no one answered, we hung up.
Then a machine
started to require a message.
Now in the world of texting
we ask permission
to call,
and schedule it into our lives
like an appointment with a physician.
Oh, what has been lost
in the rush of life
giving way to technology!

Jacque Jacobs , a novelist who writes poetry,
is past-president of the Laura (Riding) Jackson Foundation.

A Night at the Barrymore, 1948

Tom Bruce

Tonight, the marquee of the Barrymore Theatre glowed bright against the early evening spring sky, and the hundreds of hot white bulbs sparkled like clusters of stars. In the rush of darkness, the avenue breathes in deeply, and the city's pulsing heart starts seeping into my veins. I can hear the sounds of industry blending with human voices, and I feel the constant motion of a fast-paced world, shifting beneath my feet. In night's cover, the midtown landscape transforms into a glimmering metropolis. A kaleidoscope of city light illuminates the buildings from below and a soft celestial light etches the skyscrapers against the night sky.

From out of the darkness, crowds melt onto the busy thoroughfare and blend in with the electric illumination of the city. There are uptowners and downtowners, redemption seekers and soul searchers, barkers and vendors, good and bad, angels and demons, all walks, all creeds, scurrying about, laughing, crying, all following the avenue's heartbeat. People of the night, my people, and we all share the same love for the anonymity of this towering concrete jungle.

The neon signs for the small, murky, lonely-hearts clubs are alive with colors, and the wide entrance doors are propped invitingly open. The smell of stale beer and cigarettes escapes from within the shadowy amber darkness and mingles with the clean spring air. The swankier restaurants are brimming their seams, patrons spilling out to the sidewalk café. There's a constant murmur of human voices hovering over everything and I connect to this cacophony world in some prehistoric way. Tonight, we are all dancing our way through this fiery life, just as easily as we pirouette through the rows and rows of bright yellow taxis, lined up one after another, gleaming, like bits of sunshine in the night.

The bedazzled Celia and I mingled in with the well-heeled hipster crowd in front of the ornate arched stone theater. I wondered what this newly self-proclaimed avant-garde thought of us, as they elegantly smoked their trendy Picayune cigarettes before the start of New York's trendiest new play. Celia wore a smile as bright as the blazing lights above us, and she glimmered with all the grace and innocence you could ever hope to find in this city of dreams. I would never tell her how society can always see right through us, expose us without so much as a gesture, without a word, and with a nonchalance that can burn right through you.

The heavy scent of tobacco smoke rose up in a giant plume of pale mist, shrouding the bright lights above. The heavy brass doors of the Barrymore Theatre slowly opened, and the antique yellow light cast out through the open doors. Instinctively, we all shuffled toward the light, like moths drawn to a flame. The bold black letters on the marquee above me reads:

A Streetcar Named Desire
with NY's Best New Stage Actor
Marlon Brando

I took a long last drag before crushing what was left of my Lucky Strike under the heel of my new black oxfords. I tugged and straightened my worn-out gray esquire jacket, while Celia stroked her faux fur and diamond brilliance, and we strutted, arm and arm, heads held high, into the plush theater.

Tom Bruce has published a book of poetry and essays and enjoys different writing genres.

The Case of the Missing Stool

Nanette Davis

Annie and Bart scoured the house like they were looking for gold. They couldn't find the stool. It had been in Bart's family for generations. Bart paced the floor wringing his hands while Annie turned over furniture and even went as far as popping up loose floorboards to peer into the dark corners of their century old home. No stool.

Bart turned to Annie and said in a shrill voice, "What the hell is going on here? I just saw it last week. We painted the stool and it looked incredible. I'm certain that I put it back near the window where it belonged, but it's gone. It's gone!"

Annie looked like she had a brilliant idea and her eyes got wide with excitement.

"Hey, remember a few months ago when we had that old house tour? There were a couple of odd people going through this house. Do you think someone filched it?"

"I don't know," Bart said. "There was that one dude who kept touching everything and saying to his friend that they should put some things under his shirt. The guys were joking about it, though."

"That does it, Bart. We're going to do a neighborhood home check."

Annie and Bart grabbed their keys and sunglasses and headed out toward the cobblestone street. It was a beautiful day. The air smelled of fruit trees and jasmine and the sun was warming. A perfect day to spy on their neighbors' homes and see if they could recover their beloved stool.

As the young married couple walked hand and hand down the beautiful tree-lined street, they passed an array of exquisite homes which revealed many years of tender loving care to restore each home's unique historical features. Plinths, sconces, gables and gingerbread filled every square inch of Mrs. Verbena's lovely cottage. They couldn't resist giving it a second glance.

"You know, Annie, we're so fortunate to live in this neighborhood. It's an architect's dream to be surrounded by so many beautiful homes. I don't think there's a neighborhood around this state that matches the diversity in homes and people, do you?"

"Not a chance," Annie replied.

"Talking about diversity in homes, let's walk down to Mr. Beetle's house on Magnolia Street. I've been itching to see his four-square traditional."

"I know how you like things square," Annie said. "It's a pet peeve of yours. Everything in life has to be square. I, on the other hand, love my angles."

"Oh, I know you, do." Bart turned to Annie and smiled.

"Cornice, brick headers, chamfer, transoms, and gambrel. I love it when you talk dirty to me, Bart. I have no idea what you're talking about, really, but it sure sounds sexy."

Bart blushed a deep red and said, "Don't you know it, baby."

Bart and Annie continued down the street, happy with their lives in the glorious sunshine, when something in Mr. Beetle's front yard caught their attention. They froze in their tracks.

"Annie, Annie, look over there behind the coontie bush, it's … it's ... uh-oh, my, it's our stool."

Annie was flabbergasted. *Sure, enough, it was the beloved stool.*

Without hesitation, Bart moved stealthily through the front yard, grabbed the stool in one swift motion, and both he and Annie raced down the street back toward their home. Once they reached their front porch, they gave a sigh of relief that Mr. Beetle didn't call the cops.

Bart went into the house and attached the stool below the transom window that he built with great care. He was proud of his work and the stool fit perfectly.

"Bart, isn't a stool a strange name for a window ledge?" Annie inquired.

"I know it sounds weird. Like … um," Bart searched for the right word.

"Bodily function!" Annie screamed out. Bart winced at her remark.

With the beloved stool in place and the mystery solved, Annie and Bart retired to their front porch, cold drinks in hand, and watched the world go by in their lovely historic neighborhood. ❧

Nanette Davis is an author and retired educator. She writes fiction, memoir and poetry.

A Landlady's Memoir

Judith Glynn

Like most homeowners on Providence's East Side, I watched as the real estate market sizzled and envisioned a ka-ching moment for my cash cow multi-family house. I'd owned it for 20 years and occupied one of its three apartments. It had a sliver-view of Narragansett Bay, wide-plank hardwoods and working fireplaces. I occupied one of the three apartments. To sell traumatized me.

"This was always a happy house," an elderly neighbor said when I bought the sad-sack place, built in 1882. Once a grand single-family, after being divided into apartments and decades of college rentals by absentee landlords, it needed extensive work. Maybe that's why the realtor lowered the sales price on the purchase contract without me asking.

My mother remembered that my grandfather, whom I never knew, had lived on the same narrow street when he emigrated from Ireland to join his siblings. I was an only child with few relatives and pictured my ancestors visiting the house I now owned close to theirs. Silly, maybe, but knowing we walked the same sidewalk soothed my soul.

Years later and under my bone-breaking devotion, alongside competent contractors, the house had a soul with strong bones. I knew every inch of it. I'd joke that Home Depot named an aisle in my honor since I shopped there constantly.

Being alone, divorced and worldly, my housemates sought my sage advice. Some cried when leaving. Some became life-long friends. I was thrilled when babies were conceived there and sad over a breakup. And when my grandchildren re-enacted Cinderella on my hearth and stuffed their toys in closets for return overnights, I was complete.

But, over time, I got cranky about crowded street parking and noisy concerts from India Point Park. Placing For Rent ads became tedious as was being a hands-on landlady aging into a senior landlady.

Then there was the occasionally disrespectful tenant such as the young doctor who moved out of the second-floor apartment at 1:30 AM. "Are you crazy? What are you doing?" I asked him in the hallway, clutching my robe. "This was my only free time," he said as he and his girlfriend carried a futon couch down the winding staircase.

An email to me from the new tenants entitled "Difficult subject to discuss" was funny to read but their complaint about the amorous, male stud living below them needed a resolution. He'd recently separated from his wife and was exploring new women in bed. Since I sympathized with both sides and realized there was zero insulation between floors, I soundproofed his ceiling. That compassionate fix cost $3,000 to assure harmony under our roof.

Although I'd lost only one month's rent during my ownership, day-to-day operation was closing in, especially when thieves smashed the sliding glass door on my back apartment twice in two years. What was worse? The robbed $500 I left in a bureau drawer or feeling unsafe at home. Installing security cameras and lights was costly. Another problem was brown water damaging plumbing because century-old city water pipes needed replacement.

Another season for me of getting snow shoveled and tending to blooming lilacs was coupled with my hair turning grey and my back hurting more. With no repairs left, profits went into my pocket. But reality meant my 137-year-old home built with handmade nails brought challenges as we'd grow older together.

"List it fast before I change my mind," I told my realtor, stifling tears. "It hurts, but it's time to cut the cards." I believed in exits no matter how good the memories. Living well meant moving on. That night, I sat by my blazing fireplace, sipped wine and mourned a place I loved more than life itself on some days. In the morning, I packed for my goodbye.

My happy house sold in three weeks for an unimaginable profit. The new owners said I could rent there but that would never work because it would still be my house in my mind, never theirs. I declined. Instead, I paid in cash for a high-end, spanking-new condo several miles away, no longer a landlady but thankful and at peace for the experience.

Judith Glynn writes travel articles and books, but her favorite genre is personal essays.

Night Magic

David Godin

Summer days in Wisconsin could be as humid as a rainforest, and our small home on Second Street didn't have air conditioning. I slept upstairs, in an attic converted into bedrooms. Ventilation came from a box fan in the hallway, drawing air from the open windows in my sister's room, through mine, and out my windows, taking advantage of the prevailing air currents outside. The fan didn't provide much relief. Even less when my little cretin of a sister snuck into the hallway and reversed its direction.

I'd lie awake those nights on top of my covers, sweating and waiting for the sweet release of sleep to come rescue me. Outside, crickets and other night creatures who made the large unmowed lot behind the Glomstead house their home chirped and called into the night air, looking for mates, or simply announcing to the world that they were there. Even two houses away, I could still pick up their unscripted symphony, as clear as if they rested on my shoulder to sing.

The leaves on the black walnut tree outside my room rustled if I were lucky enough to have a breeze, but on humid nights the air was stagnant, and the tree stood silent. If I pressed my nose against the window screen, I could see a dark sky, illuminated by stars and maybe the moon. My town wasn't big enough for its lights to outshine the heavens, not yet anyway.

On game night, a human sound drowned out the natural world. Goodland Field, home of the minor league Appleton Foxes, occupied a whole block just three streets over. Games started at 7:00 PM and were always well attended. I could see the glow of the bright stadium lights outside my bedroom window.

Organ notes, carried on the breeze from their origin on the top row of the grandstand, entered my window and danced around my room before dissipating. I heard the National Anthem, the seventh-inning stretch song, and my favorite, the da-ta-da-da-ta-da, followed by a thousand voices yelling "Charge!" I heard all the cheers and jeers. The swell of the crowd, like a wave crashing to shore, cheering for a good catch, or the collective sigh when the opposing team made it to home plate safe. Bullhorns blared, echoing in the dark. When the game ended, so did the crowd noise, replaced by the sound of cars leaving parking lots and the disembodied voices of people who were smart enough to avoid the traffic jams and walk.

It is magical how far sound travels at night, as if darkness were its superpower, a cloak of invisibility giving it the strength to ride the air for miles. I heard crickets as small as a nickel sing from halfway down the block. I heard the crowd roar three blocks away, even though the sound had to wind through an obstacle course of concrete buildings, wooden houses, and trees to reach my ear. Music floated on the night air, as light and breezy as if carried by angels.

I remember listening to those sounds as I lay flat on my back in the dark, imagining myself in the tall grass with the crickets or in the stands at the game. Night magic may rob us of our sight, but it gives us something in return: the quiet to hear sounds from faraway that are lost in the discordant crescendo of the daytime world.

Dave Godin is a late blooming writer chasing meaning in small moments.

My Grandfather's Foot

Madeline Izzo

He comes home from work, collapses into
a chair, reaches down to untie his boot—aces
around metal hooks, crisscrossing between
eyelets, an unsheathed foot, sock nudged
down—one foot stiff, shriveled, curled—

aftereffects of the polio he had as a boy.
Despite two operations and the brace he wore,
he walks with a distinctive hitch: swivels his hip,
brings the stiffened leg around. He was lucky as
a boy, an only child, adored by maiden aunts.

As a young man, he went door to door; women
welcomed the handsome man with a full head
of hair and a prominent brow, and purchased silk
stockings during the Depression when streets were
filled with the hats of men. My grandmother's

Italian family of nine embraced the son of
Germans from an earlier wave of immigrants.
He opened a lumberyard for all those soldiers
returning home from war—from Europe, from the
Pacific. Today, he comes home like clockwork,

smells of sawdust and cigarette smoke. We play
with samples of wood paneling and floor tiles on
circlets of long metal bead chains. My grandmother
carries in a basin of hot water, opens a packet of
Johnson's foot soak; islands of powder swirl and

dissolve—the smell familiar to me still. His high
brow, his defined cheekbones, hairs bristling in his
nostrils, in his ears, the smell of sawdust and
cigarette smoke in his clothes. My cousins, siblings,
and I circle around him on the floor. These few

moments between the coming home and the going
upstairs.… He lifts his feet from the tub, dries them on
a towel, rolls on fresh socks, and we climb the stairs
to supper, leaving the basin for some other grandfather
to soak in, shriveled foot or not, bristly nose hairs

or not, smells of sawdust and cigarette smoke or not,
for some doppelgänger family on the other side of
the universe, before going to their pork chops and
sauerkraut, or their meat sauce and spaghetti, their
salad with oil and vinegar—rich, tangy, sweet.

Madeline Izzo runs a flower farm in Pittsburgh where she writes and contemplates the universe.

When They Came Home (An Excerpt)

Terri Lewis

August 1918, Milton: The Argonne, France

Milton's war begins with one long journey: train from Kansas to New York, ship to France, truck through the countryside, and finally just feet. He's twenty-one and has left behind his father's farm, days of plowing and milking, mucking out the barn. He misses Ol' Dan's greeting whinny. Also beds, dry socks, cherry pie. And Becca. In his pocket, the tiny blue feather she gave him.

First, the train. On board, how Company K laughs. How they eat! Townspeople at the stations hand in the country's bounty: Indiana garden tomatoes, Pennsylvania home-canned pickles. Sugar's rationed so Milton reaches for sweetness. A square of fudge, a jar of jam. He shares the bounty with his cheeky friend Herbert who waves and winks at the girls and who, if they giggle and turn away, pretends to cry. "We might not be back," he says.

The young men don't believe that. Stored in the baggage car are their guns. They have months of training and, packed in their kits, new union suits, jackets, boots. They are fresh in more ways than one, unlike the English blokes they are going to help, broken by years of battle, the Marne, Ypres, Verdun, Passchendaele. Company K crosses America, sprawled asleep in seats and aisles, waking at every stop, leaning out the windows, hollering, laughing, pounding their chests.

"They need us Yanks," Milton yells, thrilled by his daring, a daring he lacked with Becca.

"One week and boom. All over but the shouting." That's Oberly.

Three days on the train. Outside spring unfurls, mint green and passionate. Fields of early wheat row past, a stray windmill, a cluster of grain elevators. Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio. Milton brushes the feather and scans the passing land for horses. Thinks of Ol' Dan. The soft muzzle, the nicker and nudge for a carrot. Becca, also soft. Her cheek, the quiver of her eyelashes.

One morning he wakes to the smell of pickles and farts; also a thought like a charley horse. He puts his head out the window where wind lifts his hair and roars in his ears. The thought remains.

When he pulls his head in, Herbert's awake. Crossing his arms, Milton leans back casual-like on the rigid train seat. Says, "You ever see a dead body?"

"Our milk cow got the bloats and keeled over," Herbert yawns.

"Not an animal. I seen those." His bowels clench. "A person."

"Like as not. All four my grandparents died." Herbert fist-scrubs his eyes awake.

"Was they laid out in coffins?" The most direct words he can find. They don't ease him as he hoped.

"Stiff as boards. Ma made us kiss them goodbye." Herbert swats away the memory.

"I reckon some of us are gonna die. We'll see bodies." There; said.

"How could we miss?" Herbert squints at Milton. "You ain't scared?"

"Naw." Milton realizes he cannot say fear-death-pain, not even to his best friend. "The Huns are gonna get what they deserve."

"Hell, yeah." Herbert relaxes. "I ain't got a problem with dead bodies as long as they ain't mine. Strung over barbed wire like we'd seen in the papers. That's not for me."

"You'd be dead." The kid behind laughs, har, har, har. "Dead, you ain't gonna see nothing."

"Lookin' down from heaven I might," says Herbert.

"More'n likely lookin' up from hell, soldier!"

Laughter rackets over the rocking of the train. ❧

Terri Lewis's *When They Came Home* won the Miami University Press Novella Prize.

Black Mambas Aren't Black

Jim Ramage

I stood, unmoving, with one foot in a trouser leg, having just realized that something wasn't quite right on my government issued desk. The five-foot-long desk that fits nicely between the wall and the end of my bed. Black Mambas, the deadliest snakes in Africa, aren't black. They're more of a sandy, brown color, like the one that was comfortably coiled atop the PC sitting on my desk.

How the heck did it get in? Why is it there on my PC? It hadn't moved. At least I hadn't noticed any part of its body moving, and I was really, really staring at it. Do snakes sleep? Are they asleep if their little, forked tongue is not darting in and out of their mouth? Dadgumit! There's not enough light to see its tongue. More light would be helpful in determining how big this guy was. The light was becoming brighter by the minute as the Djiboutian sun climbed higher into the sky over the Indian Ocean. But currently, a minute seemed longer than an hour.

The light switch located to the left of the CHU door, eight feet away, mounted the standard 44 inches above the floor, putting it 14 inches above the surface of my desk and my uninvited guest, may as well have been on Mars. Perhaps I could just put my back to the wall and slide along the wall to the door. At which point the location of the light switch wouldn't matter because I'd simply throw open the door and charge half naked into the lane between the rows of CHUs.

My fully awake brain was performing math calculations. The desk is 30 inches wide, and my pleasantly plump body was about 18 inches thick. The CHU is 93 inches wide, wall to wall, leaving me 45 inches of space to wiggle, not really a good word to use in this situation, along the wall to the door. Remembering that Mambas are supposed to be able to jump half the length of their body and bury their deadly fangs into the target of their choice, I was now concerned with just how much snake was coiled on my desk.

Let's see, I thought, my PC measures twelve inches by fourteen inches. What's that pie are round, not square, thing that Mr. Hughes tried to drill into me in junior high math? The formula flashed into my head, C=2x3.14x maybe 6 inches? Roughly three foot of snake in each coil. The question now became how many coils of snake are comfortably ensconced atop my PC? If there's more than one coil, fat boy ain't gonna make it to the door. WAIT! His head is moving.

He slowly uncoils, more than one coil, and starts sliding slowly across the desk towards my bed. Its head is suspended momentarily in space as it moves from the desk to my bed. I'm now pressed, back against the wall, trousers on the floor, gut sucked in until it was choking my spine, as I watched the scaly reptile glide slowly from the desk, tongue flicking constantly as it tested the air, and slither, disappearing beneath the turned back blanket on my bed.

Without giving it a second thought, I leaped to the door, threw it open, back to the bed now, wrapping the writhing creature in my blanket, I lobbed the bundle under-handed, into the lane in front of my CHU, startling two soldiers on their way to an early breakfast at the chow hall.

"Snake!", I shouted, as its sinuous body emerged from the bundle of bedding, undulating angrily, and claiming the lane as its own as it disappeared beneath an AC unit. The wildlife contractor was summoned, but he found nothing. Hopefully a Mongoose found it on his nightly patrol.

Whenever I walk by my former CHU, I think about that Mamba. I remember the wide open, black mouth, fangs clearly visible. I shudder as a shiver runs down my spine. Some days you're just lucky.

Jim Ramage shares a pond in Yulee, Florida, with ducks and a Kingfisher.

A Bench Outside the Library

Vicki M Taylor

If I ever wanted something named after me, it wouldn't be a building or a bridge. It wouldn't be a scholarship fund or a conference room with my name on a brass plate.

It would be a bench. Outside a library. Simple. Wooden. Maybe a little worn from weather and the weight of good company.

Because if my life's work deserves a marker in this world, let it be there—in the shadow of a place where stories live and breathe, where someone can sit down, open a book, and disappear into another life for a while.

I came to writing the long way around. First through service—as a United States Marine, where I learned that strength isn't the absence of struggle, it's what you do when struggle shows up at your door. The Corps taught me discipline, grit, and how to keep moving when every part of you wants to stop. Those lessons never left me. They just traded their boots for a pen.

Faith walked beside me through all of it. When the road was dark and the words wouldn't come, when my body reminded me of the cost of service, when I wasn't sure my story was worth telling—God was already writing the next chapter. He always was. I learned to trust that, even when I couldn't see the ending.

And so I wrote.

Forever Until We Meet. Not Without Anna. Trust in the Wind. Out for Justice. Good Intentions. And most recently, *Shadow Man: Unbroken – Fictional Chronicles of Warrior Resilience*—a book born from battle scars, hard-won healing, and the unwavering belief that survival is worth bearing witness to.

Six books. Six times I sat down with a blank page and a heart full of something that had to come out. Six times I chose the page over the silence.

If someone sat on that bench—a teenager on the way in, a grandmother on the way out, a veteran who isn't sure their story matters—and thought, she served. She struggled. She kept the faith. And she wrote books. Maybe I could write one too.

That would be enough. That would be more than enough.

That's the legacy I want. Not stone. Not bronze.

Just a bench, a library, and someone pausing long enough to believe they have something worth saying.

Because they do. They always did.

Vicki M Taylor is a U.S. Marine veteran and author of six books rooted in faith, resilience, and service.

Feeding My Thoughts

Ava Michelle Thorne

I walk into the kitchen with little to no fight left,
Nothing left to give,
Just wanting to quit.

You see the bright person I wish to be,
But you don't see what's going on inside of me,
What my mind is feeding me.

It should be easy,
Though each step I take feels like I'm gaining weight,
Walking into the kitchen means extra calories.

I open the fridge, and the voices deepen,
As they start picking apart my entire being,
Leaving me with a broken image of my body.

Each voice yells at me to restrict,
To not give in,
Just get sicker,
So, I can continue to weaken.

As the thoughts deepen,
They sink their way through me,
Until all I can think about are the calories,
How much weight each bite will give me.
So much that my hand trembles,
As I try to grab the gluten-free, one-hundred-and-twenty-calorie Greek yogurt,
As though this would make me a hundred times thicker.

See, these thoughts are rooted so deep inside me,
They pick at anything to survive,
Even if it means tearing apart my confidence until I have none.

I'm left with my empty self,
Suffocated constantly by the noise, no one else seems to hear.

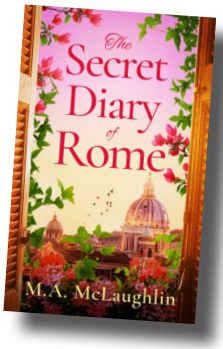
I want to scream,
So maybe, for even a slight second,
Someone could begin to understand
The intensity of these beliefs.

Leaving me with a dilemma:
Do I breach my recovery,
Or do I continue to push through these beliefs embedded in me?

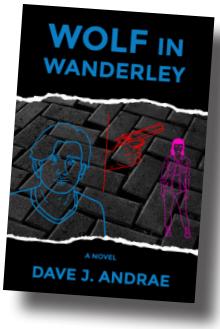
Ava Thorne wrote this in the grip of her eating disorder; freedom is in recovery.

Celebrations!

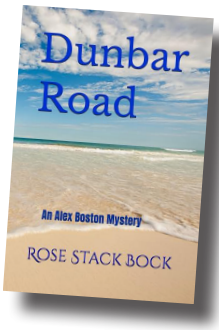
Where we shine a spotlight on our members & cheer their accomplishments!



Marty Ambrose (writing as M. A. McLaughlin) is thrilled to announce her historical mystery, *The Secret Diary of Rome*, will be published by Joffe Books (Choc Lit) on September 1, 2026. The novel is a dual timeline featuring the hidden diary Lizzie Siddal, the tragic Pre-Raphaelite muse & wife of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and the 1960s woman who discovers its secrets. A story that's waited a hundred years to be told. …



After nearly two years of work, Florida author **Dave J. Andrae** has written and released his third novel, *Wolf in Wanderley*, on his own imprint, Kaji-Pup Press. As with his previous books—*Rem's Chance* and *The Friends of Allan Renner*—the new novel is a character-driven, blended-genre work with literary fiction elements, primarily set in southwest Florida. The first edition of *Wolf in Wanderley* is available now in elegant hardcover with dust jacket, as well as ebook.



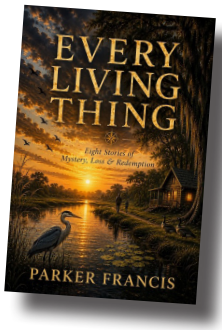
St. Augustine resident, **Rose Stack Bock**'s debut novel, *Dunbar Road*, is now published by Amazon as a paperback. In the captivating story, set on Georgia's charming St. Simons Island, real estate broker Alex Boston is hosting a Memorial Day weekend with her five life-long friends from Dunbar Road. Guest Pebble Connolly secretly arrives early and is murdered. The remaining four guests, Alex and housekeeper, Truly Lewis, vow to find Pebble's killer. Is it a local or a newcomer to the island? What part does genealogy play? This group of friends rely on their loyalty to find the killer.



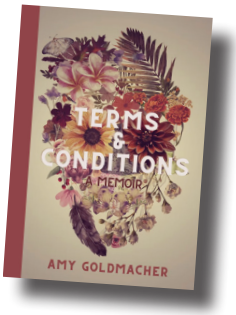
Becky Bohan's latest novel, *Slow Bright Things*, has won a Global Book Award Silver Medal in the LGBT category. This sequel to the award-winning *A Light on Altered Land* shimmers with humor, passion, and mature love as it explores the challenges of relationships and how exes can foster growth. *The Midwest Book Review* says: "Original, exceptional, and fascinating, *Slow Bright Things* … is a deftly crafted work. [The] compelling character-driven and narrative-driven storytelling lifts the novel to impressive literary excellence."



Middle-grade fantasy author **Janet L. Bond** is celebrating a wave of recognition for her debut solo novel, *Anthem Lightner and the Realm of the Fount*. Inspired by Saint Augustine's history and Florida folklore, the book has earned distinguished honors, including the Golden Wizard Prize and the Manhattan Book Gold Award. *Kirkus Reviews* praised the novel, noting, "Ample surprises and one young hero's valor propel this otherworldly adventure. Bond wishes to express her gratitude to the readers and judges who have embraced this Florida-themed tale. Something new is stirring in the oldest city.



Award-winning Northeast Florida author **Parker Francis**, aka **Vic DiGenti**, takes readers from the shrimp docks of 1960s Fernandina Beach to the crossroads of a young Elvis Presley—and beyond the boundaries of reality—in his new short-story collection, *Every Living Thing: Eight Stories of Mystery, Loss & Redemption*. The collection brings together eight stories spanning mystery and suspense, speculative fiction, nostalgia, and humor. Though widely different in setting and tone, the stories share a fascination with ordinary people facing moments that suddenly become anything but ordinary. *Every Living Thing* is available on Amazon.



When 46-year-old hypervigilant anthropologist **Amy Goldmacher** finds out she has a genetic mutation that means she is at risk of developing the same cancer that killed her father at 48, she must put her grief and anxiety over his death and her emotionally precarious childhood to rest or risk losing her sanity, her husband, and her carefully ordered life. *Terms & Conditions: A Memoir* incorporates into its glossary structure experimental forms such as blackout/erasure, artifacts, diagrams, and even hermit crabs that foster an intense, deep interrogation of the terms and conditions she grew up with. Publishing October 6: *stanchionzine.com/product-page/terms-conditions-a-memoir*

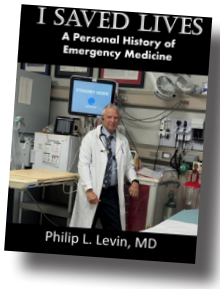
Celebrations! Where we shine a spotlight on our members & cheer their accomplishments!



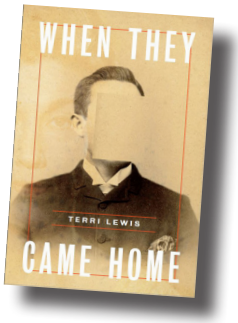
Robert Herrick has released his new book: *How Booksy Went Through Hell To Find His Readers*. Booksy's adventures through Hell take self-published authors on a humorous allegorical journey through marketing a book. The lessons learned are a practical guide for authors to finding their own readers. It's funny, sharp, and packed with real takeaways. Along with Booksy's story are five compact handbooks that detail effective strategies for creating and selling self-published books. For self-published authors seeking readers, or those considering self-publishing, read this book before spending any more money. Go to *UWritebooks.com* for more info.



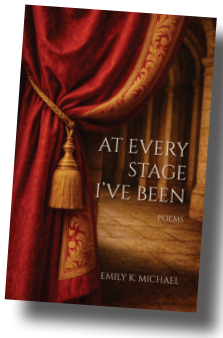
As a new member of the Florida Writer's Association, **John Hilton** is excited to share with all of you his third novel, *The Harlot of Gloucester*. In celebration of our 250th anniversary as a nation John has written what he hopes will widely be considered an ideal historical fiction for the period. Please feel free to visit John's website where his books, articles, podcasts and profile can be viewed. *Johnhhiltonnovels.com*



Philip Levin published two books last year, *The Magnolia Plantation*, a historical romance set in the 1830s–*Civil War, and Dragons, Wizards, and a Magic Storybook*, a fully illustrated children's book of three short stories. This year he published two more books, *Reflections*, a 48-poem anthology and *I Saved Lives*, his memoir of 48 years of being an emergency physician. This year he was elected president of the Mississippi State Poetry Society.



Winner Miami University Press 2025 Novella Award. Edith marries Milton, a soldier returned from WWI. They have two daughters, then the war's horrors engulf him. He collapses with shell shock. Edith struggles to build a home for their daughters while fighting for Milton's healing. **Terri Lewis**'s *When They Came Home* is a haunting portrait of a marriage tested by war's aftermath, based on the author's grandparents' story. "The book's progression is both intimate and epic. … A powerful historical novella, *When They Came Home* is about a rural home life marked by the lingering tolls of war." — *Foreword Review. terrilewis1.com*



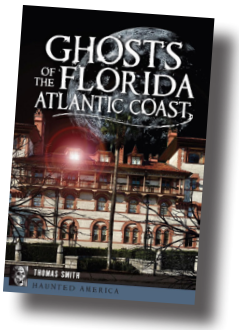
Jacksonville writing teacher **Emily K. Michael** is publishing her second poetry collection *At Every Stage I've Been* with Finishing Line Press. A blind poet, disability advocate, and TEDx speaker, Michael has been publishing poetry and essays for 14 years. This new chapbook explores identity, love, performance and interdependence. Michael returns to her celebration of music and the natural world. *At Every Stage I've Been* is scheduled for release in October 2026. The book is available for pre-order through *finishinglinepress.com*. Find more of Michael's work at *emilykmichael.com.*



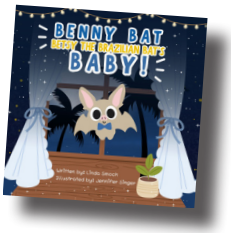
The historical novel *The Nature Lover*, by **Deborah C. Pollack**, is available for preorder (Histria Books, distributed by Simon & Schuster). Two women Hudson River School artists in Gilded Age New York find ways to succeed amid prejudice and mysterious art thefts. Julie Hart Beers, a young widow, longs for a new beginning, and Laura Woodward, in love with two rivals who thrill her, is lured by her passion for nature—a romance that changes the history of Florida. "Pollack's crisp and engaging style is a joy to read." Robert Harper, former executive director of the Lightner Museum. *histriabooks.com/product/the-nature-lover/*



The Dave Powers four-book thriller series written by **Michael A. Sisti** has now won 13 awards, has garnered four 5-star reviews, and is being considered for adaption as a TV series. For Book 1—*On the Brink*, the author wrote an eight-episode, limited series outline and a pilot script. If successful, the other three books may be included in a multi-season series.



Florida's Atlantic Coast is filled with quaint seaside towns, fascinating historic sites, and vibrant cities that blend old and new into exciting one-of-a-kind, flamboyant experiences. But every place has its shadows. Like the hotel in Miami that was the site of unspeakable cold war experiments that ripped a hole in the fabric of space/time and released walking nightmares. Or the theater where one seat lowers itself during each performance, remaining untouched until resuming its original position at the final curtain. *Ghosts of the Florida Atlantic Coast* by **Thomas Smith** will be released by The History Press in late September.



Author **Linda Smock** has announced the release of her new children's book, *Benny Bat: Betsy the Brazilian Bat's Baby*. The book is a scientific personification. Benny teaches the children about bats, and especially his family, the Brazilian bats, one of the most common bats in the United States and Florida. He continues the story started by his mother Betsy in *Betsy the Brazilian Bat*. Each book stands alone, so it is not essential to read the other. All of Smock's books are available on Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and Walmart websites.

"

I think I did pretty well, considering I started out with nothing but a bunch of blank paper.

STEVE MARTIN







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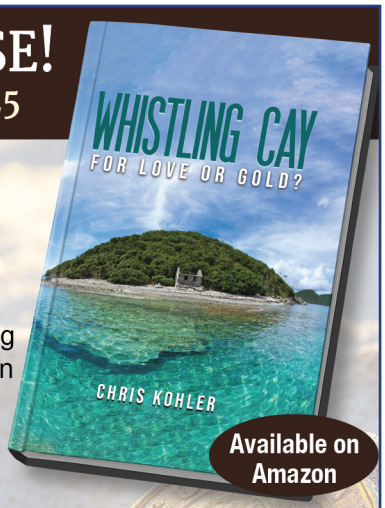
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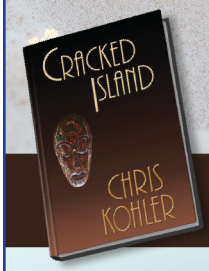
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NEW RELEASE!
December 5, 2025



Available on Amazon

Vivian and Rich Somners' Caribbean vacation turns into the ultimate fantasy when they discover a fortune in gold doubloons on an island called Whistling Cay. This sweet dream soon turns to a nightmare for Vivian when both Rich and the gold vanish.



Vivian believes her beloved husband was kidnapped and is obsessed with saving him despite endless ordeals. The police, the press and the local populace believe it was an act of selfish abandonment.

Cracked Island is available on ebook thru Barnes & Noble & on Kindle.

Chris Kohler, author of two multicultural suspense novels that take place in the Caribbean.

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Two highly awarded collections of poetry



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You can almost hear the roar of B-17 Flying Fortress Engines

You'll get caught up in this *exciting, action-packed, true to life, World War II adventure* that puts YOU in a front row seat.

SYNOPSIS

It is the spring of 1942 and as Steve Carmichael celebrates graduating from the University of Florida, it is clear to every young man in America that a war is on. Six months have passed since the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and ordinary citizens stand united, ready to fight against the tyranny of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan.

Steve grew up on a cattle ranch in Kissimmee, Florida. His two passions: baseball and flying. At the age of 11, his father, Ray, purchased an old mail-route biplane, and within a year, Steve was soaring with the birds. It was an easy decision for Steve to join the Army Air Corps and pursue his desire to pilot the B-17 Flying Fortress. In flight school, he meets his future copilot and best friend, Howie Van Dyke. Stationed overseas in Chelveston, England, with the Eighth Air Force, they form the tight-knit crew—Pappy's Pack in the 305th Bomb Group. Action-packed air battles ensue as they fight deadly flak and German Luftwaffe in the skies of occupied Europe. Though they must complete a total of 30 missions before earning a trip back to the States, a young British nurse named Maggie captures the attention of Steve, and he finds himself torn by both the uncertainty of love and the business of war.

REVIEW

"This is one of those rare books you won't be able to put down. The thorough and realistic descriptions of various situations made me feel like I was a part of the action. When missions were being flown. I felt like I knew the characters and found myself hoping they make a certain decision or cheering them on. It gave me a much better appreciation for what the airmen, as well as the ground crews, went through during WWII, including the emotional attachments that developed not only between people, but with the aircraft." **D. SAMUEL**

A story of hope, dreams, and love in a war-torn world.
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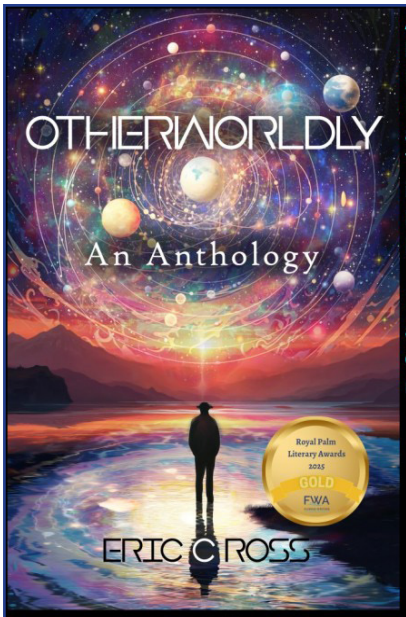
ALL THE HIDDEN PIECES

A NOVEL
BY DANA RIDENOUR

COMING AUGUST 2026

GRIEF TOOK HER TO THE TRAIL.
FRIENDSHIP BROUGHT HER HOME.

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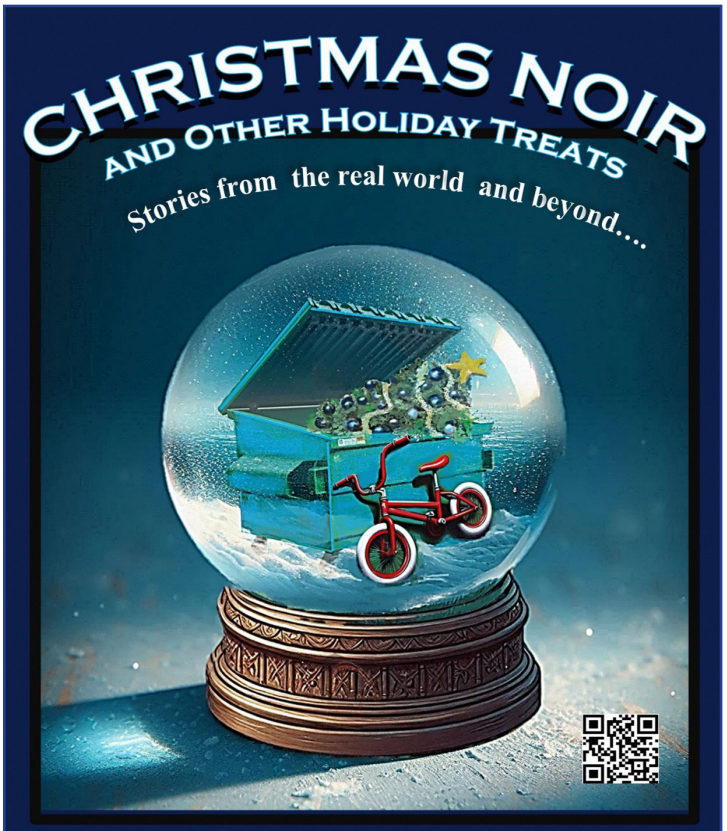


A collection of very short stories by FWA Lifetime member Eric C Ross:The Foe, Incomplete, Floaters, Thinning the Herd, All, and Welcome to Dysmetropsia. The story "Incomplete" won Gold in Flash Fiction and "Best Short Prose of the Year" at the 2025 Royal Palm Literary Awards.

If you like Sci-fi, fantasy, horror, a good twist, or flipping tropes on their head, this is worth reading!



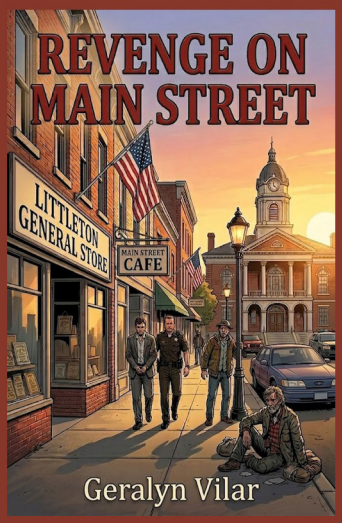
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