

November-December 2024

Affaire de Coeur

Bringing You the Best and Most Honest Reviews



Nia Farrell

Two of the best gifts
in the world...
Best selling authors:



Teri Riggs

Reviews

Reviews

Reviews

Do you
want to
know who
this guy is?
Go inside!



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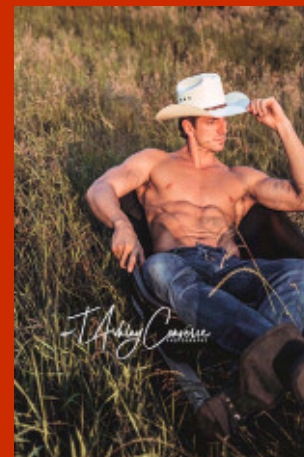
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Dear QWERTY

by Pamela Ackerson

You're the Cover!



The dictionary states etiquette is the customary code of polite behavior in society or among members of a particular profession or group.

Etiquette is extremely important in the publishing industry. We all know, or should know, stepping on toes, along with cheating, attacking readers/authors, behaving in any cutthroat manner, or negative behavior in a professional environment is unacceptable. Too many authors don't care, and have the attitude of tough turkey.

Here's the thing. The people

around you have the same right to do things their way, just as you have the right to do things your way. Getting along with your fellow industry professionals shows merit.

The book industry is a multi-billion dollar industry and you are a part of it. Your actions reflect on everyone around you, whether it be face to face at a convention, library, book signing, or social media.

Decorum:

Decorum is one of the keys of success. Stand out as the go-to author, and take advantage of some of the rules of etiquette. It will help you be notable in a positive way.

I'm not referring to old school, don't chew gum, don't drink alcohol, and don't show your ankles...

Some people may think the use of etiquette is outdated. It isn't. Society may have slackened its rules, and it's not as strict as it used to be years ago, but it is still very important.

No one's going to freak if you don't put your napkin on your lap, or your hair is out-of-place, or even if it's purple, orange, and blue.

Respect:

Etiquette requires treating those around you with respect.

I'll give an example. Several years ago, I was at a book event. The author next to me was speaking with another author at her table. She'd dropped the F-bomb a couple of times, and was being a bit crass.

No big deal to me, I personally don't care.

You may be saying, who cares? The interested reader at her table did. She frowned, put the book down, took her young daughter's hand, and walked away.

A lost sale, all because the author wasn't 'reading the room'.

Protocol:

Protocol is just another word for etiquette.

When arriving at an event, you should find the hostess and thank her for including you. You may stop and acknowledge people as you search her out, but it's considerate and customary to **acknowledge her**. Let her know how appreciative you are for being included in the event. Especially if it's a small limited event. For example, if it's a librarian allowing you to do a book signing at her library, buy her a small



Now in Pre-Production as a Feature Film!

The battle lines were drawn.

In the heart of Cedar Ridge, nestled in every corner, whispers and secrets traversed the haunted, shadowed corridors. As the sun cast its light, betraying a false sense of calm, the walls of the museum stand as guardians to tales unfold, inviting the brave to uncover the truth hidden within its embrace.

Warnings of a witch send ripples through Locke Bay. The malevolent danger was as strong and relentless as the waves from Superior. With each step through the echoing corridors, Thalia Jefferies gathered her allies to fight against a powerful, vengeful witch, drawing on ancient lore and modern cunning.

The witch's anger was a tempest, but Thalia's resolve was firm against the storm. As the moon rose to its zenith, casting silver light through the stained glass, Thalia's death-defying battle began—not with a clash of swords, but with the silent strength of unity and the power of a determined heart.

The creaking doors swing open and you're cordially invited to delve into the depths of a narrative rich with mystery and suspense.

Grab your thrilling adventure today.

PamelaAckerson.net

[@PamAckerson](https://twitter.com/PamAckerson)

gift, and send her a hand-written thank you card.

Yes, thank you cards are appreciated.

However, there are ways to avoid unintentionally offending someone or causing issues.

For example, introducing people in the proper order.

What? There's a proper order? Absolutely.

Let me give you an example:

You're at an important luncheon. A graphics designer, a couple of authors, and the hostess are sitting at your table. An author you personally know approaches the table. Whom do you introduce first?

If you chose the hostess, you're correct. Then you go around the table in order from the right side of the hostess. Archaic? Perhaps, but no one will feel insulted.

Not sure where to start? Start on your left and go around the table.

Is someone else making the introductions? Stand and shake their hand when being introduced. (Unless,

of course, you aren't physically capable.) At a large gathering where there's introductions and it's not a reception line, murmur hello and niceties.

We all know how to be polite. This is the time to show it off on how awesome you can be. Please, thank you, you're welcome, or pardon me go a long way.

Consideration:

Etiquette also includes being considerate of those around you. There are more than enough readers in the world. There's no need to feel threatened by another author's success.

You've heard the expression *paying it forward*. It is also important to *return the favor*. Helping goes both ways.

Always.

An author does you a favor by promoting your book, mentioning it on their blog, etc. Besides thanking them, return the favor. If the author says, don't worry about it—pay it forward and help someone else.

Many authors have blogs, are you having trouble keeping it active? Share other author's cover reveals, launches, and anything else to help them. Put your focus on the reader and they will see it's not all about you.

Dress for Success:

Wearing clothing that is proper for the occasion helps put your best foot forward. Remember, especially at a convention, you are on from the moment you walk into the hotel to check in.

Old t-shirts and stained shorts are no-no's.

You want people to take you seriously as a professional. You want members of the publishing industry to know you believe your position is important to you and them. Your readers want to meet you, and read your books.

There's no need to spend hundreds of dollars on designer clothing. You can wear dollar store clothing. It doesn't matter. No one is going to look at your tags. You can still be comfortable and casually dressed, as long as

Happy Holidays from
Affaire de Coeur



Danielle Hill



Lacy Hill



Pam Ackerson



Sheila Griffin



Lani Roberts



Louise Sneed



Hannah Rowen



D. Antonio



Sarah

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 knew that one day, she and Beckham would have it's own story to tell.

Bethany

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...



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?

Gracey

To have all that you thought and all you believed, change... things aren't always what they seemed to be and legends just might be real...

TamalynsBooks.com



it looks like you didn't just scrub the floors and mow the lawn.

Let me give you a nightmarish example. Husband and I were searching to purchase a rental property. We made arrangements and an appointment with an agent to show us the house.

The next morning we waited for her at the house we were interested in purchasing.

She arrived late, in a pair of dirty, baggy shorts that looked like they belonged to her husband, and a stained, frayed t-shirt.

Um, no. We weren't about to do business with her. To us, it was obvious she didn't care. She may have, but she didn't look like it and she didn't act like it.

Appearances are important. People subconsciously see things concerning day-to-day actions. We're visual.

Readers are visual.

Punctuality:

Punctuality is a priority. If you're late, it means the event wasn't

important enough for you. (Unless it's out of your control. Spit happens.)

In my opinion, the agent made two grievous mistakes. She was late, and she didn't dress or behave like a professional.

Use etiquette as a part of the creation of the professional you. People do judge a book by its cover.

You are the cover:

First impressions are important.

They see you, and if they like what they see, they'll approach you. It's similar to them looking at the back of the cover. You've gotten their attention, now don't mess it up when you open your mouth.

Whatever do you mean?

Frown at those words all you want but we must retain our professionalism, whether it's on social media, or in person.

Be considerate, be polite, be respectful, and listen to them. Treat them as an equal or better, and greet them with a smile.

That's right better. You're not a queen/king. Without the reader,

and other industry professionals you wouldn't be where you are as an author. If it weren't for their interest in you and your books, they wouldn't be following you on Facebook, Twitter, or any other social media sites.

They wouldn't be standing in front of your table wanting to purchase your books.

They are precious to you and you need to treat them that way.

Authors who personally know each other swear around each other, tell raunchy jokes, talk about sex scenes, etc. They're comfortable and relaxed and 99 % of the time, no one else is around.

Don't curse around other members of the industry you don't know. It's unprofessional. Especially, don't swear around readers, even if they've been a loyal fan for years.

Stand out. Don't stick out.

A little comparison for you to understand why I say you're the cover.

Creating a book cover that sells your book is the number one priority in

continued on page 34

The Spotlight is Shining on...

Teri Riggs

AdC's Ms. November Calendar Girl



As a small girl she didn't read bedtime stories, she made up her own. Who needed Little Red Riding Hood or The Three Little Pigs when there were so many great tales bouncing around in her head? When she became a mother to three little girls, she continued the tradition of making up bedtime stories. She would give the fairytales a bit of tweaking here and there or add a new ending. Her girls loved it. She still tells herself stories as she falls asleep. The only difference now is when she wakes up the next morning, she turns them into books.

AdC: *Tell us about the genre(s) you write. Why did you choose to go in that direction?*

T.R.: I write mostly romantic suspense. It's what I read so I like to write it.

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

T.R.: My heroes are Alpha males, and the heroines are always strong.

AdC: *Do you have a new book or*

series?

T.R.: Still working on my paranormal trilogy and my historical western trilogy. I'm way behind after unexpectedly taking the summer off from writing.

AdC: *Favorite quote?*

T.R.: Never give up.

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

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T.R. The beach.

AdC: *Do you hide any "Easter eggs" secrets/truths in your books that only a few people will find?*

T.R.: I used to, but it's been a while.

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

T.R.: Nope.

AdC: *What scenes do you find*



Teri Riggs
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Bestselling Author

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hard to write and why?

T.R.: Sex scenes. Maybe because my son-in-law and brother-in-law are in the ministry.

Personal web page
<https://teri-riggs.com/>

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

Facebook
<https://www.facebook.com/Teri-Riggs-329379907142621/>

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

T.R.: I'll be at 20BooksVegas in November. I'm going to Readers Take Denver, Trop-iCon, and Space Coast Book Lovers in 2025.

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

T.R.: I used to be a nurse.

Please give us the following contact information:



Rebecca

by Teri Riggs

Disclaimer: Although the Blue Stocking Society books are based on historical facts, not all are historically correct.

When a man who vows to never love again falls for a woman who has made the same pledge, things can turn fiery in an instant when an undeniable passion sparks between them.

REBECCA

~A Blue Stocking Society Romance

Rebecca tried to relax into her seat, watching as the other passengers took theirs. It seemed to take longer than usual for the train to get moving. Or perhaps she was just anxious to get home to Colby Springs? She glanced around and noticed that many of the people in their seats were fidgeting and seemed just as annoyed by the delay as her. The woman behind her leaned forward, interrupting her thoughts. “What do you think is going on out there?”

Rebecca peered out her window. Two men were struggling with a third man. “I have no idea. Whatever they’re up to, I imagine it’s the reason we haven’t left the station yet.”

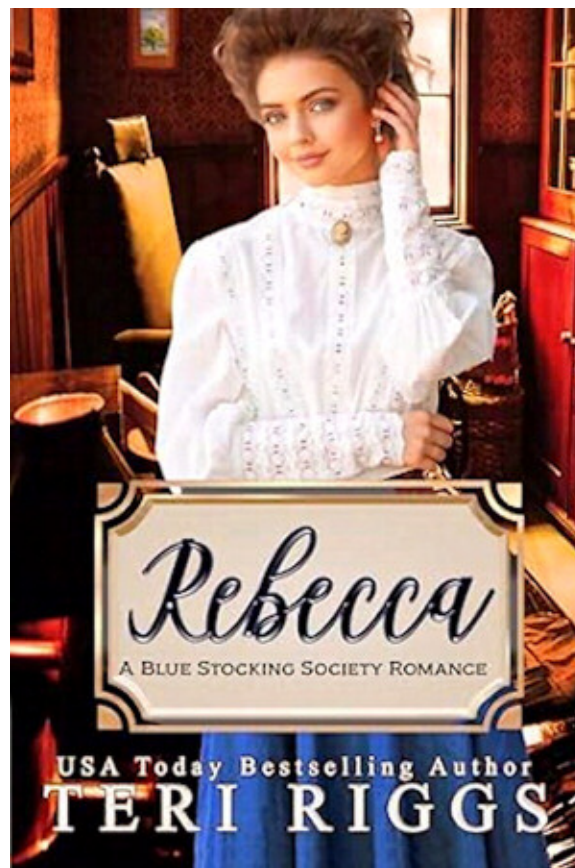
“Oh, my goodness. Will you look at that? One of the men is in handcuffs!” Alarm filled the woman’s voice. “Surely, they aren’t going to bring a convict on our train. That can’t possibly be safe. I have small children with me.”

“I’m sure the lawmen wouldn’t bring him on the train if they thought he would cause any danger to the passengers.” At least that’s what Rebecca hoped.

The larger of the two men with badges had wrestled the man wearing handcuffs onboard. She heard them arguing on the platform between her car and the car in front of hers. It was strange how she could hear them and see how big they were, but she couldn’t quite make out what their faces looked like. They hadn’t quite turned to face her. Through the open windows, Rebecca heard a lot of swearing going on between the men and she prayed the woman and the kids behind her couldn’t hear what they were saying. If so, she hoped the mother had covered her children’s ears.

“I’m appalled at the language. My children shouldn’t be exposed to such vile words. I have half a mind to get off this train right now.”

“I’m sure they’d be happy to give you a refund,” Rebecca said. “However, keep in mind, it may be a few days before you can get another train. There’s always the stagecoach but the trip would take forever and think of how hard it would be on your children. I took the stagecoach here, and I will never do a long trip again if it’s at all avoidable.” Plus, Rebecca had several crates of supplies on board



in the cargo area.

“That’s true. I can’t afford to be a few days late. I’m meeting my husband in Colby Springs and traveling to Fort McIntosh. We’re finally going to live as a family again. I haven’t seen my dear Richard since he was home the last time. It’s been...” She studied her young son for a few moments and smiled. “Well, it’s been about five years. My Richard hasn’t even met our son yet.”

“I’m sure we’ll get to Colby Springs safely. And look, they’re taking the man to the car ahead of us. We should be safe.” If she said it enough, surely it would be true.

“I suppose you’re right. I’ll just sit back, enjoy the landscape, and try not to worry.” The little girl with the woman laid her head on her momma’s lap, apparently ready for a nap. The young boy leaned against the other side of his mother.

For a moment, Rebecca’s thoughts drifted to the baby she’d lost. Would he have enjoyed a train ride? She shook the notion off. It was too painful to think about all the things that could or should have been. She had to stop wondering how her child would’ve turned out. It certainly wouldn’t bring her baby back.

Rebecca glanced ahead through the open doors and between the cars, as the two lawmen shoved the convict into a window seat in the second to the last row. One of them took the seat next to the man in cuffs. Before he sat

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The Dusky Club

62-year-old Susan travels back in time in her 17-year-old body to meet 20-year-old James, the man of her dreams. Will James end up being the paragon Susan's always thought him to be? Or, will she learn that sometimes when a dream comes true, it's not quite what you expected?

Back to Brighton

Unable to put James out of her mind after returning from her trip to the past, Susan discovers that her link with James is because she left her ballerina necklace with him. The only way to break the tie that binds them is to return to the past and retrieve the magical necklace, but it doesn't turn out to be as easy as she thinks.

London, July 1967

When Susan discovers her attorney husband is having an affair with his new paralegal, forbidden thoughts of James invade her once again. She decides to return to the past to be with him, this time taking two girlfriends with her. Joy and Alice are shocked when Susan decides to stay in the past with James, telling her she can't change history. But can she?



Brighton, December 1999

Having brought the engagement ring James gave her back to the future along with her magical necklace, Susan becomes so depressed that her daughter, Michelle, decides to take her back in time to return the ring which will hopefully break the tie between the two star-crossed lovers. But when Michelle falls in love James's handsome son, everything goes awry.



Strawberries and Wine

After several futile attempts to stay in the past with James, Susan resigns herself to the fact that she will never be with him again. But when Thomas, James's son, finds the mobile phone she left behind from her trip back to 1999, he tracks her and her daughter, Michelle, down. It's now 2016. While the past could not be changed, what about the future? Will there finally be an HEA for James and Susan?

Snow on the Mountain

The year is 2017, and Susan's lifelong dream to be with James has finally come true. As they age and grow old together, there is more drama that threatens to break them apart. Will their love be strong enough to endure, and will their last days together on earth bind them together for all eternity?



AdC LOVES Conferences

HOT IN BILOXI



Hot in Biloxi was hosted by Rachel Rivera at the IP Hotel and Casino in Biloxi, Mississippi, on Sep. 13 and 14, 2024.

Friday the 13th started our weekend with a Noir Party, costume contest, and great food. Saturday was breakfast with the over forty authors and a fantastic book signing event with prizes and games.

The basket donations went to a great cause, the Gulf Coast Center for Non Violence.



Hostess Gillian Zane



Author Kris Michaels



Author Dana Wayne



Noir Party

Flirty in Tampa Book Event

The Flirty in Tampa book signing event on October 5th started with a small meet and greet with readers for some breakfast snacks, donuts, and a good round of book conversation. Fun, games, basket raffles, and lots of books were featured throughout the day.

For more information on other book events, check out AnytimeAuthorPromotions.com to see if there are any events in your area.



Hostess Virginia Johnson



Author T.K. Lawyer



Author Tamalyn E. Scott



Flirty 1



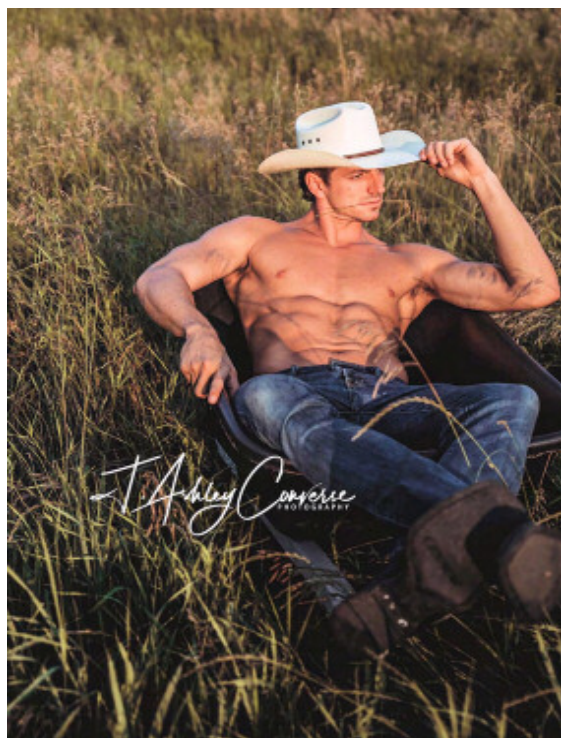
Flirty 2



Author Gracie Cooper

Debra Parmley presents...

An Interview with Cover Model Keith Manecke





Debra Parmley

Today I'm excited to be chatting with cover model Keith Manecke.

Debra: *Keith, what was the first cover you appeared on, and how did this come about?*

Keith: The first cover I appeared on and released was *Illusion on Ice* by SR Grey. In 2018, I was approached by Chris of CJC Photography. I was new to the modeling scene, brand new in fact, and he explained his work and the possibility that I could be on a book cover. After the shoot, SR Grey and LA Cotton both found images that they wanted for their respective upcoming books. Although Cotton purchased her image first, it was Greys' book that made the initial publication in May of 2019.

Debra: *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?*

Keith: Modeling has allowed me to travel to places I never would have gone to and I am very appreciative of that. It has also changed my mindset and even if I'm traveling and not technically working, I still want to create an amazing image with the given scenery. In terms of a book cover, I would want to do the same thing and create a beautiful work of art in one of the amazing natural wonders of the world. The Amazon rainforest, Mount Fuji, Machu Picchu, the list is almost endless. With all the great beauties in the world, it's hard to pick just one, I would be happy to grace the cover of a novel with many of the great backdrops in this world.

Debra: *Any one of those places would make for an amazing cover. Perhaps an author will see the places you've listed*

and set a book there! Beyond romance novel cover shots, what other projects or jobs keep you busy?

Keith: I am involved in all types of modeling, and I love it. The list ranges from bridal shoots, infomercials, music videos, e-comm shoots, runway walks, commercials, and even the occasional guest bartending gig for parties. I love staying busy and encompassing all that the modeling world has to offer.

Debra: *What's one question you wish an interviewer would ask you?*

Keith: Honestly, I never have any expectations from an interviewer ha-ha. I'm always curious about what they want to know and wonder if I am as interesting as they think I will be. I tend to answer questions more straightforwardly, so I need to work on adding a bit more pizzazz and flair!

Debra: *You are interesting just as you are, so be yourself, no added flair needed. If you wrote a book, what would it be about?*

Keith: I'm more of a nonfiction reader so the only book I've ever seriously considered writing would be a memoir. I've read some great ones in the past (*Shoe Dog* by Phil Knight was written extremely well and I am impressed with the effort that went into him recalling all his life events) and I would want to make sure that I took my time and truly wrote it to the best of my ability.

Debra: *I hope you write that book one day and I look forward to reading it. Now I ask this question in interviews because your fitness level is beyond the average person. What is your exercise routine and what sort of nutrition plan do you follow to achieve and maintain your level of fitness?*

Keith: I have my Bachelor of Science in Nutrition and Exercise Science. I started caring about my health in high school so I could excel as much as I could on the basketball court. I took that interest and made it my major and love what I learned. I think the foundation of sports followed by my schooling really gave me the tools I needed to succeed. I try to stay active constantly, I hate sitting and incorporate a healthy lifestyle by eating right and moving more. In simplistic terms that's all it is. My current fitness regime is as follows: basketball league on Monday, upper body workout on Tuesday, leg work out on Wednesday morning and beach volleyball on Wednesday night, another upper body workout on either Thursday or Friday (depending on my schedule), pickup basketball on Saturday morning, yoga once a week, and a rest day on Sunday. I also walk my dog about 1.5-2 miles every morning and every night.

My diet consists of a lot of lean proteins, veggies, fruits, and nuts. I try not to eat too many carbs. Although they are definitely important, I know how easy it can be to overindulge. I'm still a human and enjoy pizza and will go out for wings and drinks with my friends, but I try to be smart and don't miss a workout the following day. There are always excuses to not eat right or to not exercise. I know how life can be and try to negate those excuses before they can happen. Even this morning I did hot yoga before my 9 a.m. shoot because I was up and thought that was a better use of my time than just sitting on my phone.

Debra: *If you could share three simple fitness tips, the av-*

FREE FOR ALL

ZOE DAWSON



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erage romance reader could do every day to stay healthy, what would they be?

Keith: The big key here is to get into a habit that's doable. The best diet and/or workout program in the world doesn't mean jack if you don't go through with it. I'm bad at generalizing, I like to take each individual for who they are, but for the sake of this interview, I'll give it a shot:

Find an activity you like doing, going for a walk/run, playing a sport, weightlifting, etc. Sometimes the comradery can help, and it becomes a fun social time as well.

Eat foods that are closer to their natural state. Oranges instead of orange juice or orange drink, peanuts and dark chocolate instead of Reese's, even just whole meat and potatoes instead of deli meat and white bread are all great steps to take. It doesn't have to be tricky, just less processing and more realization of what it is that you're actually eating.

The third step would be to watch/limit the liquids you have. I'm not talking about water but the sodas and alcohol choices. Even going from six Cokes a day to four is an improvement, same with alcohol. Americans do not have the best diets and in general,

these are some steps that I think could help millions of Americans live healthier lives.

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

Keith: Do calories ever count on a birthday? Ha-ha. There are always reasons to eat poorly and drink, but I'll play along ;) Honestly, I absolutely love pizza and sushi and would (and have) eaten copious amounts of both. Washing it down smoothly with craft beer and old fashions. I love food so much that if I didn't work out or have any discipline, I would weigh a hell of a lot more than I do now!

Debra: *Describe the perfect romantic evening:*

Keith: To have a romantic evening be truly perfect, it would have to be something that the girl would want to do so it is very subjective to her. I'd want to take her on a fun adventure first, followed by a dinner with an amazing view, possibly the sunset after (living in Florida I'm prone to gorgeous sunsets). I admit that there is a lot of wiggle room in these statements, but they are up for

interpretation. This could be done in Italy, Tokyo, a rooftop in New York, so many amazing options. I'm envisioning two well-dressed individuals, candlelight, and the sweet smile on her face that lets me know she's truly happy.

Debra: *She would be one lucky girl. Please share one unusual fact about you or your life:*

Keith: I came from a very small town in Wisconsin. The hometown vibes made me who I am, and I like that (a lot of people think I'm from a city). I was a Green Bay Packers cheerleader in college, and I can't swim. I know that's more than one, but, oh well, ha-ha.

Debra: *More than one is even more fun. Now eight Quickie questions: Watching the sunrise or watching the sunset and the stars?*

Keith: Sunset.

Debra: *The beach or the mountains?*

Keith: MMM Beach.

Debra: *Primitive camping or luxury hotel?*

Keith: Depends on my mood, but I'd say a luxury hotel.

continued on page 28



Songs of the Season and the Singers Who Made Them Famous

Across

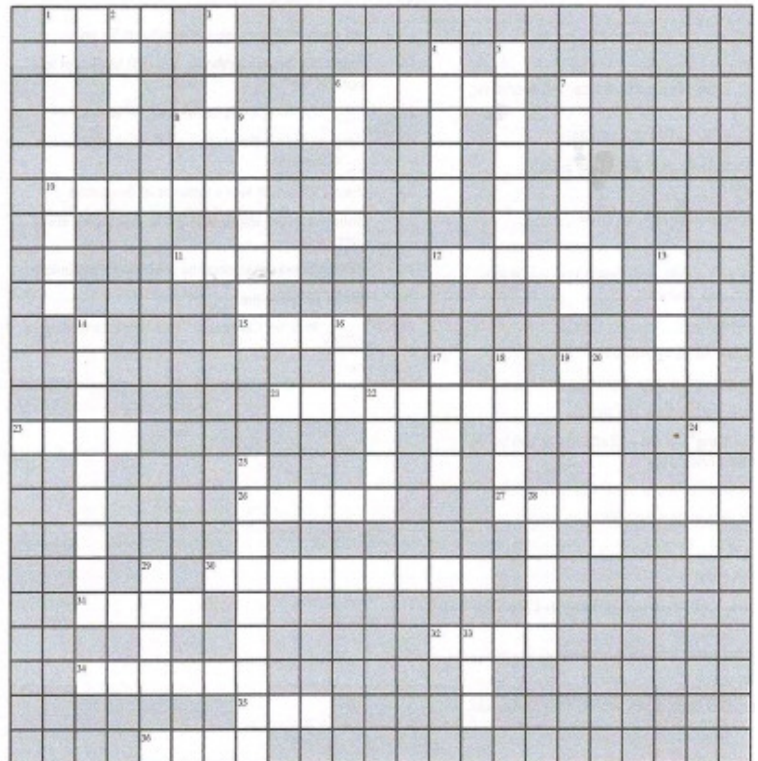
1. "Santa _____, bring me a yacht, a ring, and everything expensive."
6. This C&W singer did a Christmas duet, "The Gambler."
8. _____ Carey's favorite part of the year is the Christmas season.
10. Famous Spanish Christmas song "Feliz _____."
11. "Baby, It's _____ Outside."
12. Heartthrob to millennials, this Justin is more famous for "Despacito" and "Baby."
15. "Do You _____ What I _____?"
19. This Rogers knew when to hold 'em.
21. Mexican actor and singer who was the villain in *Star Trek II, Wrath of Khan*.
23. Christmas, "not the first, but the _____."
26. Known as "The King", he did a Christmas album, but he is most famous for "Hound Dog."
27. The fireside is burning bright in his Christmas song.
30. This Canadian singer's famous Christmas song.
31. "Let it _____! Let it _____! Let it _____!"
32. "_____ did you know?"
34. This Lee likes to rock, especially around the Christmas tree.
35. _____ King Cole sang of Jack Frost nipping at your nose.
36. Not a designer, this Perry crooned several Christmas hits, some on his own show.

Down

1. "It's _____ to look a lot like Christmas."
2. Known as a crooner, he sang the song and was in the movie.
3. Alvin still wants a _____ hoop for Christmas.
4. He wrote the song heralding folks dressed up like Eskimos.
5. An original backup singer, this Love had her own hits: "Going to the Chapel," "He's a Rebel," "Be My Baby," etc.
6. "_____ Are You, Christmas?"
7. This Houston, who wants to dance with somebody, made "I'll Always Love You" famous.
9. This deer's nose was red.
13. This Martin was part of the Rat Pack.
14. They are roasted on an open fire.
16. _____ D.M.C. was the first group to release a rap Christmas song.
17. Not a white Christmas, but another color one.
18. Forget Tim McGraw, her famous husband, this Hill has talent and looks of her own.

20. _____ Kitt sang a Christmas song of avarice.
22. "Hang up the mistletoe, turn all the lights down low," _____ Christmas.
24. George Michaels was a member of this group.
25. Blind, Mexican singer who sang the hit about Christmas.
28. He wrote and sang about the nose glowing reindeer.
29. "Baby, please come _____."
33. "_____ I Want for Christmas" was written and sung by Mariah.

For an extra challenge, match the song in this puzzle with the singer who made it famous.



The Spotlight is Shining on..

Nia Farrell
AdC's Ms. December
Calendar Girl



USA Today Best-Selling Author Nia Farrell is a four-time Golden Flogger Finalist, a founding member of the Wicked Pens, and author or co-author of four titles voted The 50 Best Indie Books of the Year. Nia writes contemporary and historical romance as Nia Farrell, historical romance as Erinn Ellender Quinn, sizzling romantic comedy as Ree L. Diehl, and Young Adult as Grace Cafferty. Regardless of genres, ultimately, her books are about the healing power of love. She was blessed to share fifty-one years with the love of her life before losing him to cancer in 2024.

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

N.F.: I write a wide range of genres—historical, contemporary, dystopian, sci-fi, fantasy, shifters, MC, MM, MMF/MFM menages, BDSM, sports... the list goes on. My favorite stories are MMF menages where the relationship between the men is as important as their relationship with the woman they share. I find the psychology of BDSM fascinating and enjoy writing dominant Alpha males and strong women who are submissive by choice. Many of my characters are survivors whose journey toward healing is woven into the fabric of the story. When I'm writing, I just follow the threads.

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

N.F.: Claire Marta and I are currently editing *Hell's Fury MC: Emerson (Guarded Hearts Order of the Dragon Book 7)* and writing a Fae Academy novel, the first book in a YA series written under our new YA pen names, Anna Sinclair and Grace Cafferty.

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

N.F.: My writing has been on hold the past months due to my husband's health. I lost him in September, six days after our fifty-first anniversary. I'm looking forward to finding my new "normal" and diving back into writing.

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

N.F.: Grace Murphy from my "Three Graces" series is the most like me, from her red hair and Irish blood to her sixth sense and her belief in soul-mates who share multiple lifetimes. Like Grace, I'm a healer by nature.

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

N.F.: I'd be at Wildwood Fae Academy in alternate reality Northern Ireland.

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

AVENGING ANGELS MC



Amazon <http://mybook.to/AvengingAngelsMCSeries>



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enter it?

N.F.: I might be tempted, but it depends on what happened when I approached it. I'd either step through or back away, depending on if it felt right or wrong for me.

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

N.F. Cooking. It's one of my joys, and I'd love to up my game.

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

N.F. Stay safe.

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

N.F. I'm addicted to home renovation and cooking shows, learning new tricks and filing ideas for future use.

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

N.F. A period reenactment, preferably in period dress. From Ren Faire to 18th century to Civil War, I love to play in the past.

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

N.F.: Like others with an empathic nature, I try to avoid anywhere with disturbing energy, whether it's from a current turbulent situation or a traumatic past event.

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

N.F.: My sister.

AdC: *What are one of your quirks?*

N.F.: I pay attention to numbers and to daily zodiac signs in the *Farmer's Almanac*.

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

N.F. I won't be doing any until my husband's estate is settled and real-life things get back to "normal."

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

Personal web page

<http://niafarrell.wordpress.com>

Amazon author page

<http://viewauthor.at/NiaFarrell>

Twitter

<http://twitter.com/AuthrNiaFarrell>

Facebook author page

<https://www.facebook.com/NiaFarrell-Author/>

Facebook group <https://www.facebook.com/groups/TEFOLD3>

Newsletter <http://bit.ly/My3PensNews>

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

I Did Something Bad

Pyae Moe Thet War

St. Martin's Griffin

Trade Paperback 978-1250330512

E-Book B0CQHLLFX74

★★★★

Freelance journalist Khin Haymar has the opportunity of a lifetime: traveling to Myanmar for two months to write an in-depth profile of superstar Tyler Tun for *Vogue*. Her editor is expecting her to uncover a secret, and the outcome of this article could very well land her a full time job with the magazine.

Tyler and his best friend and co-star May Diamond are filming the first film ever with Myanmar actors and set in that country. Khin immerses herself in their world, spending her days on the movie set or getting to know Tyler when the day is over. Disaster strikes when Khin takes a break and wanders away from the set, deep into the surrounding

park. A stalker comes out of nowhere to attack her, and to defend herself, she stabs him in the ear with the only weapon available, her pen. Undeterred, he continues to assault her and pushes her against a railing while he chokes her. To her relief, Tyler intervenes just in time, but the assailant tumbles over the railing and into a lake, where he dies. Fearful of going to the authorities because the dead man is white and they are Myanmar and afraid their claims of self-defense won't be believed, they run away from the body and hope no one ever connects them to the death.

Tyler and Khin grow closer, partly because of their shared fear of discovery, but mostly because they develop feelings for each other. But Tyler has to be cautious because many women are only attracted to his fame. And Khin is afraid to trust, still reeling from her recent divorce.

The police hound the two, focusing especially on Khin, and the discovery of the pen with her initials

Contemporary Romance

engraved on it heighten their suspicion. Circumstances lead Tyler to believe Khin has been faking her attraction to him in order to get a scoop, and their fledgling romance comes to an abrupt end.

Both Tyler and Khin must come to some serious decisions about their futures while mourning the loss of their growing love.

I Did Something Bad gives us a glimpse into the good and bad sides of celebrity life, an introduction to an uncommon setting, and a heartfelt, emotional love story all wrapped in one.
Hannah Rowan

If I Stopped Haunting You

Colby Wilkins

St. Martin's Press

Trade Paperback 978-1250292902

E-Book B0CQLFSRV

☆☆☆

Native American horror author Penelope Skinner has no respect for her rival, Neil Storm, also a Native American horror author. She believes he's exploiting and perpetuating the "savage" image in order to sell books. And he has indeed made a huge success out of it, while Penelope is barely squeaking by.

When they both end up at a book signing in Seattle, Penelope grows so outraged by his needling that she hurls a book at Neil, hitting him squarely in the head and drawing blood. This show of temper doesn't help her reputation at all.

When friends arrange a writer's retreat in a haunted Scottish castle, Penelope is dismayed to discover they've also invited her nemesis. But there's no way out, and they must endure a week in this isolated part of the country. Introductions from a very odd housekeeper who promptly disappears do little to quell the uneasiness they feel in the castle, but eventually they encounter enough other-worldly phenomena to

start believing in the tales of a haunting.

Spirits seem to want to throw Penelope and Neil together while simultaneously putting them in danger. Their alliance against the supernatural might gradually wear away their hostility until their relationship explodes in a delightfully sensual way.

This book not only provides a nail-biting experience but also tempers it with humor and lots of steam.

Hannah Rowan

A Legend in the Baking

Jamie Wesley

St. Martin's Griffin

Trade Paperback

978-1250801876

☆☆☆ 1/2

Sloane Dell had been in love with August Hodges since she had been a teenager. August was her older brother's college roommate that he had brought home with him one holiday. The rest of her family had been unaware that Sloane and August had been having long phone conversations way before Donovan had brought him home, but Sloane was the outgoing perky type who made friends easily, so no one thought it strange that she and August immediately hit it off. And, after meeting the tall, chocolate brown, handsome athlete in person, Sloane fell hard. Too bad August was engaged to his high school sweetheart and rejected Sloane's clumsy attempt at a kiss.

Donovan, August and Nicholas were the triad of terror of the San Diego Knights. They were also the co-owners of Sugar Blitz, the best cupcake bakery in San Diego. But, as good as they were on the football field and in the kitchen, marketing through social media just wasn't their thing. But it was Sloane's. Donovan had been trying to hire his little sister since Sugar Blitz opened, but Sloane wasn't having any of it. Be-

sides the total awkwardness of having to work with August (whom she still loved), she refused to ride on her brother's famous coattails. But Sugar Blitz needed her skills. Super shy August had been caught telling off some Neanderthal customers who had called his baking "unmanly" and every woman and some men that saw him on Facebook had taken it viral. Now his nickname was "Sugar Bae" (which he hated) and their customers wanted. Sloane knew how camera and people shy August truly was, so she stepped in to help him.

August had realized early on that he was in love with Sloan, and had hurt her not once, but twice. He was so smitten that he couldn't find the right words to apologize for his stupidity about their kiss and convince her he loved her. Would her handling his "sudden" social media success give him the time he needed to convince her he loved her and would never hurt her again?

A Legend in the Baking is a true second chance romance that starts out as a friends-to-lovers. Both August and Sloane made stupid mistakes when they were younger, but now need to find the courage to confess their grownup love to each other. The banter between the two is witty, humorous and sexy, but Sloane's constant bravado front of her never-let-a-man-hurt-you-again attitude actually gets tiring after a while. But other than that, this is a superb read that will have you hungry for their mouth-watering cupcakes while applauding their HEA.

Lani Roberts

Contemporary Romance

The Nightmare Before Kissmas

Sarah Raasch

Bramble

Trade Paperback 978-1250333193

E-Book B0CTY66CQP

★★★★

In the fantasy world, each major holiday has a dynasty of somewhat magical people, unseen by mere mortals, who are charged with making the holiday special for humans.

Nicholas Claus believes his father, Santa, has lost the spirit of Christmas since his wife left him. Rather than focus on bringing joy to the world, he has become more interested in expanding his dynasty, and in gaining power.

In an effort to form an alliance with Easter, Nicholas Claus is betrothed to his friend, Easter Princess Iris, against his will as part of his father's machinations, even though Nicholas' brother, Christopher, clearly has eyes for her.

In a meeting with the Halloween dynasty, Nicholas meets prince Hex and is instantly attracted. He doesn't dare let his father know his true feelings but tries to find a way to cancel his upcoming wedding to Iris without losing face.

Hex and Nicholas are from two rival dynasties and view many things differently, but they certainly agree on their attraction to one another. Will Nicholas find the courage to stand up to his father? Will he manage to bring the joy back to Christmas? And will Hex and Nicholas, Iris and Christopher, be able to act on their feelings for one another?

The Nightmare Before Kissmas is a delightful way to imagine what lies behind the scenes of the holiday spirit, even if it is a fantasy, and the conflicts contained in family dynamics, along with the characters' attempts to solve

their dilemmas and some steamy love scenes make for a gripping tale.

Hannah Rowan

Until Then

Micaela Smeltzer

Micaela Smeltzer LLC

Trade Paperback

979-8330454389

★★★★

Forty-four-year-old widower contractor Derrick Crawford falls for 27-year-old social media-influencer Izzy James, when she moves in with him after fleeing Los Angeles following a celebrity interview that goes awry.

Izzy is funny, sweet, intelligent, sassy, and creative. When she first returns to town, she's lost. Derek allows her to stay with him to give her time to heal and to take time for self-reflection. She loves the coastal town's beauty, slower pace, and being close to her sister and new friends. However, it's difficult keeping her crush and attraction to Derek hidden.

Derek's kind, caring, and devoted to his family. He's lonely and longs for love in his life and to have children again, but he doesn't want to risk his heart or lose the person he loves and experience heartbreak again. Derek isn't prepared for Izzy, who he craves intensely. He feels it's wrong to want her because she's much younger. The age difference doesn't really have any importance or effect on how they get along or connect. Derek must face his issues and let himself love Izzy without self-judgment, criticism, or fear.

Derek and Izzy's banter and interactions are sexy, sweet, steamy, and tension-filled from their intense chemistry and desire for each other. There's such ease between them as their lives become intertwined transitioning from reluctant roommates to friends to lovers. Izzy comes into his life like

a ray of sunshine and a breath of fresh air, livening up his dreary routine and changing life, and he cannot say no to her. It's adorable. They're opposites that fit together perfectly and balance each other. Izzy brings laughter and fun into his life and makes him smile. Derek helps her find purpose, direction, and new dreams. They support and encourage each other's dreams.

Smeltzer's writing is vivid, descriptive, and detailed with excellent characterization. She transitions Izzy and Derek from strangers to friends to lovers in a way consistent with their personalities and relationship. Their love scenes are emotional and intensely sensual and more than a one-night stand because even that first time Izzy and Derek are already emotionally invested, and their hearts are more involved than they expect.

Until Then is a beautiful, sweet, funny, sexy, small-town, family-centered slice-of-life steamy romance.

Lacy Hill

The Way We Play

Tia Louise

TLM Productions

Hardcover

979-8338811603

★★★★^{1/2}

Retired football kicker Zane Bradford believes he only breaks people, but that doesn't scare 30-year-old virgin and massage therapist Rachel Wells. She moves into his home, invades his workplace and tempts him to let down his guard and control with her fearlessness and desire.

With her mother and father ill-equipped as parents, Rachel's life hasn't been easy. She's been the primary care giver for her neuro-divergent preteen brother since her teens. Earning a living and caring for him doesn't leave much time for her to rest, let alone have a social life. Despite being risk averse and

Contemporary Romance

cautious, she's positive and courageous. Moving to become Miss Gina's nurse and assistant is a chance for her to make a new life for herself and Edward. The attraction she feels for Zane is unexpected, making her long for things she's never wanted before.

Zane and Rachel's interactions and the attraction they share are combustible, intense. Zane fights to resist. He's so into Rachel, he cannot deal! Zane is cold and mean to her. And so moody and broody. Rachel relentlessly pursues his friendship, especially after he helps her brother. Louise develops/transitions their relationship from enemies to lovers through hilarious snarky banter and sweet, sexy, steamy, and intimate interactions and love scenes that reveal their characters. Their first

kiss and intimate scenes are sensual and steamy. Strong survivors, they balance each other's lives. She helps him heal. He makes her feel safe and helps her to feel confident, seen. Zane and his family take some of the weight of being Edward's sole caretaker from Rachel's shoulders, giving them a sense of belonging and home.

The story feels grounded in grumpy Zane's emotional POV, which explores the losses he's experienced. An accident with his sister haunts him, making him believe he only breaks and hurts people he loves and gets close to. Then he suffered a career-ending injury he believes he deserved and still causes him pain. Burdened by trauma and pain, he has closed himself off to emotional and romantic connections. He works as

a repairman for Miss Gina, helps with equine therapy for special needs children, reads, and spends time with his family, and comes home. Until Rachel and her brother, Edward, move into his home and tilt his world off its axis.

Louise's vibrant storytelling, rich with detailed descriptions, characterizations, and vivid world-building, makes the pages fly by. *The Way We Play* is a sweet, steamy, hilarious, sexy, charming, fast-paced, poignant, and emotional, contemporary romance.

Lacy Hill

Ultimate Justice

Tee O'Fallon

Entangled: Amara

E-book

BOCHQKHDZP

★★★★★



Some truths are worth dying for.

While tracking down an escaped felon, FBI Special Agent Evan McGarry and his K-9, Blue, uncover a smoking hot lead on the location of dozens of missing children—including Evan's own sister. The shocking discovery reopens cold cases throughout Colorado, along with painful wounds and the heartbreaking guilt Evan's kept buried for decades.

Three years ago, hospital custodian Marlie Foxe's world imploded, causing her to cut herself off from the world. But when one of the missing boys turns up at her hospital, he only allows Marlie to get close. Now, Evan needs her help with the boy—and he won't take no for an answer. When she finally agrees to work with him, Evan suspects there's more to the woman than she's letting on. She's hiding something. The question is what.

As Evan and Marlie unearth a cult targeting runaways, they're forced to confront not only dangerous criminals but the truths they've both been avoiding—including the blistering passion they can no longer deny. But when more children disappear, they'll have to risk more than just their hearts.

This story tore me up. Evan and Marlie each have a tragedy in their past that they have pushed aside to get through the day to day of life. A new event brings them together to save a boy's life and perhaps save more children. Watching these two heal was like watching a rainbow come out from behind a cloud. This story left me with a happy heart.

D. Antonio



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Paranormal
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Vampires
Shape Shifters
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How to Help a Hungry Werewolf

Charlotte Stein

St. Martin's Press

E-book

978-1250352347

★★★★★



Cassie Camberwell came back to her hometown of Hollow Brook to clean out her grandmother's home, only to find that she has actual magical abilities. Her ex-best friend Seth Brubaker is hanging around with a goal. He needs her help to control his unruly werewolf nature, and he can teach her about the hidden world her eyes have recently been awakened to. But after he betrayed her to the mean jocks at her school in the most humiliating way possible, she can't trust him. They'll just have to keep it all business until strong emotions and needs rear their heads and make it impossible to ignore their insistent mating urge

How to Help a Hungry Werewolf is a delightful read. Both Cassie and Seth are lovable, unforgettable characters and the interactions between them are satisfying on an emotional level. Flashbacks to their history as best friends are heartwarming, and the juxtaposition to their present situation makes their broken friendship all the more poignant, as it's clear how much they meant (and mean) to each other. Their powerful attraction and simmering chemistry heats up the page, making a reader root for them to get together. Cassie and Seth are one of those couples you just can't wait to find their happy ending. The magical elements are so fun. Charlotte Stein gives a witchy storyline a delightfully unique and enjoyable feel. The same can be said for the exploration of Seth's lycanthropy. Readers looking for a satisfying, cozy paranormal romance with witches and werewolves will find so much to love about this book. The introduction to this small town full of magic begs for more installments about other magical characters.

Danielle Hill

Fletcher

E. G. Manetti

Buniac Entertainment, LLC

E-book

B0CW8GN7L7

★★★★★

A broken warrior. A woman's frozen heart. An adventure into the unknown.

FLETCHER

Once a galaxy-renowned Moon Racer, Fletcher's competitive career ended in the battle for the Thirteenth System. Shot down over Bright Star Deuce, he was fortunate to survive, his left arm and leg replaced with state-of-the-art prosthetics.

Now only half a warrior, he is relegated to testing new technologies for Serengeti, the first step in the Fourth System, where the technology will be tested before being deployed to the Thirteenth System. However, there are forces in the Thirteen Systems that do not want the colonization to succeed and will do anything to ensure the expedition's failure. When chance places Clarice on the same transport to the Fourth System, he discovers the former apprentice has developed into a beguiling woman. Torn between duty and desire, he must forge a new path into the future.

CLARICE

Once a lowly apprentice, she

Paranormal Romance

has now been promoted to legalistics protégé because of her skill, courage, and honor. Through years of deprivation, she learned to value every success. Years of humiliation have conditioned her to weigh every relationship for benefit and never risk her heart.

Handsome, charismatic, and a warrior of impeccable lineage, Fletcher Detrenti has been on the periphery of her life for half a decade. She admired his bravery, respected his honor, and enjoyed his easygoing nature. She was shocked by the withdrawn and taciturn man who returned from war. Bound for a distant system in his company, she cannot resist the pull between them.

Fletcher is fantastic! For those who haven't read the author's previous books (do go back and enjoy), it might be a little daunting getting started, but if you concentrate on the characters, the world will fall into place for a terrific adventure.

D. Antonio

The Mirror

Nora Roberts

St. Martin's Press

Hardcover 978-1250288776

978-1250288783 E-Book

☆☆☆☆

Inheriting Lost Brides Manor hasn't been easy for Sonya MacTavish. She has accepted and embraced the information that her father was a twin who was separated from his family as an infant. Along with this startling revelation, she discovered that the twin left behind has passed the family home in Maine along to her provided she lives there for three years.

She expected her problem with the bequest would come from having to leave her urban life in Boston to live on the coast of Maine. She didn't expect to have to contend with a haunted mansion and a vindictive ghost who wants the

mansion for herself.

Most of the ghosts have pleasant interactions with Sonya, her roommate Cleo, and the men they're involved with. They do housekeeping, play music, and play with the dogs. But these benefits are offset by the horrors inflicted by the evil spirit intent on driving them away.

Seven brides have been murdered by Hester Dobbs over the past 200 years, and with each she grabs their wedding ring. Only by finding the seven stolen rings will Sonya be able to break the curse imposed by Hester, which not only prevents the brides from living happily in the manor but puts their husbands in danger.

Sonya and her cousin Owen are able to step through a magical mirror which transports them to past events where they're forced to watch helplessly as Hester Dobbs carries out her malicious plan. But Sonya is determined to make the house her own and to become part of the community.

The Mirror is the second book in the "Lost Bride" series, and combines sweetness, sensuality, romance, and friends and family with a sense of dread as the ghost tries to frighten them away. Stay tuned for book three, hoping Sonya is able to finally defeat Hester Dobbs and live peacefully in the manor.

Hannah Rowan

Tori and her Wolf (The New York City Werewolves)

Zara Doyle

Self-Published

E-Book

B0D3WZY6S4

☆☆ 1/2

Zara Doyle's *Tori and her Wolf* explores the fated-mate bond between werewolves Tori and Hunter. After a less than positive first impression on Hunter, Tori believes he'll reject her. To

avoid the brutal pain of mate rejection, she flees. Mechanical engineer Tori lands her dream job and moves to New York. She enters her building's gym and encounters Hunter. He's the CEO, owner, and her boss. She's not only freaked out about rejection but also being fired. Rich, handsome, arrogant, rude, and frightening, Hunter is a werewolf who can have anyone he wants. Why would he choose Tori?

Doyle's vivid, descriptive and intriguing opening draws readers in. However, the author fails to provide context for Tori's fear of rejection and subsequent behavior so it doesn't work narratively. However, Doyle delves into their mate relationship so quickly it hurts the story. Giving them time to get to know one another better before starting an intimate relationship would have felt more organic. They go from zero to 60.

While we get to know Tori fairly well, we learn little about Hunter's background—hearing only his apology, explanation, and declaration of feelings. Although he takes responsibility for his mistakes and caring for Tori and her brother, it's difficult to say we know him. Hunter and Tori share sweet and funny interactions, and their sexual tension is palpable and intense before they explore their bond. However, their love scenes feel awkward and it's difficult to connect with their relationship.

Tori's an unreliable narrator. Because it's written in Tori's first-person POV, we have only her limited perspective of events and thoughts or beliefs about what Hunter thinks and feels about her. Her confusion over her feelings of attraction to Hunter is overwhelming, and colors all her thoughts, making it difficult for her to think rationally. This heightens all the mistaken ideas, self-esteem issues, and mistaken communication that occurs. It becomes frustrating eventually because the story goes nowhere.

Lacy Hill



Erotica

Some Like It Hot!!!

Same Sex Couples

SM

Multi Couples

Claim (Fury Brothers #5)

Anna Hackett

Self Published

Trade Paperback

978-1923134379

☆☆☆

Bella is on the run from a serial killer when she has a one-night stand with a gorgeous stranger she meets in a Texas diner—never expecting to see him again. A month later Bella enters New Orleans' best gym to learn how to defend herself and fight and discovers that ex-boxer and gym owner Beauden Fury is her one-night stand whom she hasn't stopped thinking about. Beau hasn't stopped thinking about her either. Can Bella bring the killer after her down and prove to Beau that the connection and feelings they share are worth fighting for?

Former military, mercenary, and foster child, Beau is a grumpy, but kind loner, dealing with trauma and baggage from his childhood. He also has a pro-

tective streak, which leads him to push Bella away, believing she deserves better than someone with his background. After discovering a psychotic killer is hunting her, he agrees to train her and offers her a job. However, he wants to keep things professional because he feels she's young, vulnerable, and too good for him. As they train together, their attraction and connection deepen, though they try to resist.

Bella is a college student whose life was destroyed by a serial killer. After the tragic night that puts her on his radar, she disappears to stay alive. On the run from a killer for a year, Bella fights to survive by never staying in one place long and avoiding attachments to keep herself and anyone she comes in contact with from getting hurt. She's courageous, stands up for herself, and doesn't give up without a fight. Bella and Beau are deeply drawn to each other from the moment they first meet, and it only grows stronger the more time they spend together. They make a good pair.

Affaire de Coeur

Hackett draws the reader in with her vivid, detailed, descriptive writing, and superb world-building. With high stakes that keep readers on the edge of their seats, her intriguing story is suspenseful and disturbing. She deftly develops her characters through snarky banter and sweet, sexy, steamy, and intimate interactions and love scenes that reveal and strengthen their characters while furthering the novel's plot. It's fun when characters that are attracted to each other train to fight and defend themselves and the author explores their attraction within those scenes. Hackett includes some of these scenes, with a sexy twist.

The action and fight scenes are well-structured and exciting, and the conclusion of the suspense arc is breathtaking and tension-filled. *Claim* is a captivating, angsty, sexy, suspenseful, steamy, romantic, and fast-paced romance.

Lacy Hill

Eye of the Buyer

K. R. Hall

Self-published

E-book

B0CN85VHLB

☆☆☆☆



Callie Foster is at a loss for how to care for her twin daughters. She needs to come up with her co-pay so her girls can get new kidneys. Life of a single mom doesn't leave much wiggle room in the budget for costly buys. Knowing her girls need life-saving care means she will do just about anything to help them.

Dewayne Doyle is a computer genius. His dealings with women, on the other hand, are greatly lacking. He is absolutely clueless when it comes to female interactions. So he enlists his three buddies to help him out. Their plan, on the other hand, is to attend the auctions at Club Lust. Is Callie open-minded enough to be someone's merchandise from Friday till Sunday at midnight? Is this just what Dewayne needs?

Eye of the Buyer is a sweet

Erotic Romance

and smexy tale of a single mother doing what she must to provide for her daughters and finding happiness along the way. I loved how strong Callie was and fell for Dewayne along with her.

D. Antonio

Take (Fury Brothers #4)

Anna Hackett

Self Published

E-Book

B0DFVLFXCK

☆☆☆☆

Black security expert Reath Fury and scientist Francesca Park share an intense attraction at first sight from across the room at a party and share a kiss—unaware she’s his military BFF’s sister. They agree it’s a mistake after learning each other’s identities.

When she’s attacked and someone attempts to steal top-secret research from her lab, Reath brings her to his home to keep her safe. Forced into close quarters, they have difficulty resisting their powerful attraction/desire. They agree to no-strings, no-emotions sex. Reath doesn’t believe he needs love, but what happens when they catch feelings?

Abandoned as a baby and raised in foster care, Reath owns a security firm. Ex-CIA and former military, Reath is closed off, focused, intense, and a skilled investigator, and fighter, scarred because of how his life started and trauma from foster care experiences. He’s determined to keep Francesca safe, then walk away. Francesca is a courageous, resilient fighter who can defend herself and others. She’s intelligent, stubborn, sassy, fearless, and independent. Like Reath, she’s focused on her work and uninterested in entanglements because love is too risky, something she learned from her childhood.

Reath and Francesca give in to a forbidden desire that’s too strong to resist. They’re likable, relatable,

Faust

Pepper North

With a Wink Publishing, LLC

E-book

B0CR7RTCSJ

☆☆☆☆

“Pixie, you’re always safe with me.”

Always the quiet one, Molly Abrams is used to being overlooked. Safe and secure in the church office, she tries to help people as much as she can. When she feels like someone is watching her, she runs to the toughest guy she knows.

Faust always expects the worst from people. Burned too many times, he’ll never allow his feelings to overrule his heart. When his gruff ways make Molly cry, Faust takes a second and third look at the tender-hearted woman he’s sure is a Little. Could she find that under his tough exterior beats the heart of Daddy who’ll treasure his Little forever?

Combining the sizzling talents of bestselling authors Pepper North, Kate Oliver, and Becca Jameson, the Shadowridge Guardians are guaranteed to give you a thrill and leave you dreaming of your own throbbing motorcycle joyride. Grumpy Faust never expects to find his “Little Girl” so imagine his surprise when he finds her stranded by the side of the road with a flat. Watching Molly melt the heart of Faust brought a smile to his face and a happy to my heart.

D. Antonio



Rebecca by Teri Riggs continued

only gotten a look at the lawman from the backside. She couldn’t miss how tall and very well-built the man was. Between him and the other lawman, they could surely handle any trouble that might come up.

Rebecca sat in the well-worn, uncomfortable leather seat and placed her satchel on the empty space beside her. She drew in a deep breath, pushed herself to relax, and prepared to let herself enjoy the trip. Perhaps, she’d even take a short nap. Then, much to her dismay, she noticed the second lawman as he left the train. Thankfully, the nervous woman sitting behind her didn’t say anything, indicating she probably hadn’t noticed his exit. Not with trying to entertain two small children.

No problem. Rebecca would worry enough for both of them.



Surviving the Storm

I.J. Miller

Blank Slate Press

E-book

B0D9YP17NJ

☆☆☆ 1/2

Yankee, the security guard for the Long Beach Bluff resort on Antigua Island, feels the hurricane on their doorstep. He pushes the employees and residents in the resort to get to safety; time is very short.

Yankee, making a safety round outside the resort, comes across Alvin, the assistant manager, with a bloody wound across his neck. It appears to be an accident, but it's murder.

The story jumps back a year to set the scene. Alvin is quite the lady's man. He gets around with several ladies without their partners' knowledge. He offers some things that attract them, and a little blackmail goes a long way. Sexual escapades and love fill their time but Alvin puts a cloud over it all, setting the stage for jealousy.

Jealousy, it seems, gets the better of Alvin just before the storm. The detective on the island follows many leads and the couples as he closes in on the killer.

The story gets to the murder quickly, then, it goes back in time to set up the characters. Relationships and sex fill the pages. It jumps between couples

as it tries to build a momentum with the crime. The story is more about the couples and their escapades than it is about the initial plot, even though the detective comes in later to try to bring back the relevance of the crime.

Lauren Calder

Cover Model Interview Continued

Debra: *Snow skiing or water skiing?*

Keith: I've only snow skied, I'd like to try water skiing

Debra: *Favorite movie:*

Keith: I don't have a favorite but maybe *Training Day*, *Good Will Hunting*, or the "Back to the Future" trilogy

Debra: *Best book you ever read:*

Keith: No favorites ;) *Greenlights* by Matthew McConaughey, *Shoe Dog* by Phil Knight, and *Fast-Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal* by Eric Schlosser are phenomenal books.

Debra: *Favorite Sport to play:*

Keith: Basketball

Debra: *Favorite Sport to watch:*

Keith: Anything live. Maybe football.

Debra: *Keith, thank you for visiting with me today. It's been fun getting to know you. Before we say*

goodbye, how can fans stay up to date on your latest news? Do you have any news or announcements to share?

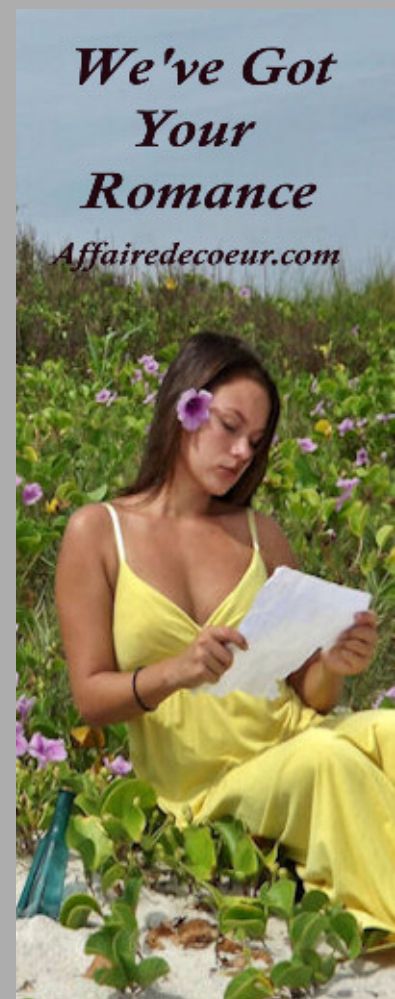
Website: <https://keithmanecke.wixsite.com/theekeith/about>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/keith.manecke/>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/theekeith/>

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

Affaire de Coeur Magazine. She loves to hear from you! Readers (and Models who wish to schedule an interview) may contact debra@debraparmley.com





The Legacy of Arniston House

TL Huchu

Kimberly Mandindo

Tor Publishing Group

Audiobook

B0CW4JP66S

☆☆☆

Ropa Moyo is a magician whose goal is to make a living to support her grandmother and sister. She walked away from an apprenticeship to a Scottish Magic official and is working for the English Sorcerer Royal when her grandmother is murdered and she becomes the prime suspect. Ropa has to uncover her grandmother's secret connection to a magical conspiracy, both to avenge her death, and to save herself, as a cabal seeks to resurrect a powerful and dangerous foe.

This is an atmospheric and immersive book to listen to on audio. The narrator, Kimberly Mandindo, has a great voice and is excellent with the various characters. Her Scottish accent is authentic and brings the reader right into the book's setting. In Huchu's hand, magic is written as an established discipline with a long and storied tradition and well-defined set of rules for its

practioners, although different cultures have a unique way with it, such as English, Scottish, and Zimbabwean magicians (like Ropa and her grandmother).

This is a dark story that pulls no punches. It seethes with Gothic atmosphere, and has moments that feel downright horrific. Ropa is a ghost talker, who can banish evil spirits and access the realm of the dead, and those scenes are quite chilling. While Ropa is still a young adult, she has been seeking her way in a world that is closer to dystopian than contemporary. Ropa learns some hard lessons about her family, their heritage, and herself through the unfolding story. At times, things feel confusing, but ultimately finds its way to a thrilling climax that leaves the reader on the edge of their seat. Readers who enjoy urban fantasy with a unique spin, heavy with well-described and defined magic, will enjoy *The Legacy of Arniston House*.

Danielle Hill

Merriest Mistery

Timothy Janovsky

Narrated by Mark Sanderlin and Zach Barela

Macmillan Audio

Audiobook

B0CT445PSD

☆☆☆

Newlyweds Patrick Hargrave and Quinn Muller struggle with the strain that the pressures of married life and a burdensome mortgage have put on their passionate romance barely a year in. Can they bear the additional responsibility of taking on the roles of Santa Claus and the first-ever Merriest Mister to save Christmas and keep it from being canceled forever and fix their relationship problems?

Mark Sanderlin and Zach Barela's expressive narration complement Timothy Janovsky's animated, lighthearted, writing style. Sanderlin and Barela perfectly fit Patrick and Quinn, bringing the characters and his multi-layered story to life.

The Merriest Mistery is more angsty than expected. However, Janovsky balances the angst with humorous, sweet, fun, reflective, and festive moments that lighten the tone. Janovsky's characters are complex and relatable. He develops Hargrave and Muller's relationship by alternating between flashbacks to the initial days of their relationship and the present. Janovsky's descriptive world-building, rich with details, draws readers into the book, along with his intriguing idea and multi-faceted story. His colorful, hilarious, and natural-sounding dialogue brings the characters to life.

Janovsky digs into the complexities of how day-to-day adult responsibilities of married life can affect romantic relationships. The personal/childhood baggage people bring into marriage affects how they relate to one another and decision-making. He shows that when characters have unresolved issues driving their

Audiobooks

lives those things come into play as in Janovsky's novel. Quinn and Patrick marry and buy a fixer-upper, sticking them with a burdensome mortgage. Patrick works all the time and spends less with Quinn. Quinn faces on-the-job challenges. They barely see each other, spend quality time together, or even talk much anymore. Quinn feels a separation and like he's changed, they've changed—and it's on his mind. But Patrick's too busy to notice. Janovsky's skillful characterization makes it easy to empathize with Patrick and Quinn. At least Quinn has his best friend and co-worker, but Patrick only has Quinn.

The Merriest Mist is a sweet, funny, angsty, cute, closed-door LGBTQ holiday romance.

Lacy Hill

It's clear early on that they don't hate each other as much as they pretend. Once they become intimate, that conceit falls away and the banter, and snark becomes flirtier, sweeter, and sexier. The attraction deepens, transitioning into a deeper connection that forms the foundation for love.

Hamilton and Edwin's duet narration smoothly delivers Blakely's colorful and snappy dialogue, and funny, but snarky banter. They complement Blakely's down-to-earth, vibrant, and detailed writing style using the characters' senses and emotions to create vivid imagery in the readers' mind. Before you know it, you're halfway through the audiobook.

Everly and Max learn to care about each other which makes the

pages fly by due to the intensity of their attraction and undercurrent of raw emotion stemming from the trauma they've experienced and have been shaped by. How Max cares for Everly, showing her how beautiful and strong she is and sees and gets her, is special.

The Romance Line is a sweet, steamy, funny, sexy, angsty, romantic, and fast-paced romance.

Lacy Hill \

The Romance Line (Love and Hockey #2)

Lauren Blakely

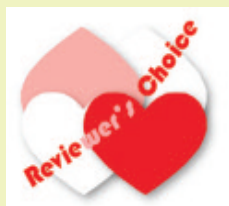
Narrated by Teddy Hamilton and Vanessa Edwin

Audible Audio

Audiobook

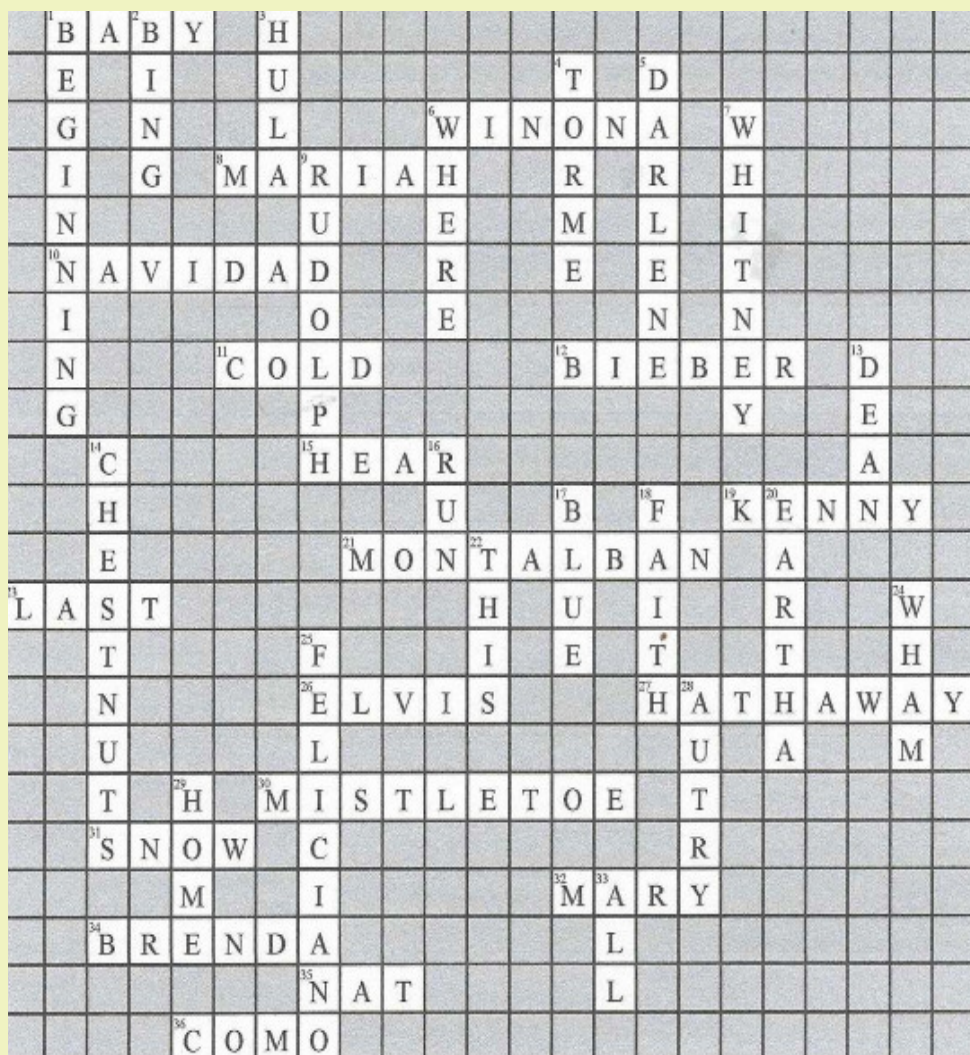
B0DG9BJCSQ

☆☆☆☆



Publicist Everly Rosewood is assigned to make over the image of Max Lambert, the grumpy, hot goalie who hates and spars with her. Getting her dream promotion relies on the outcome. Rule #1 of handling hockey team PR is never to hook up with players. What happens when you fall for one?

Strait-laced and focused, Everly is brilliant, clever, and determined not to break the team's most important rule. Even for Max—the bane of her existence. Max is cocky, sexy, and grumpy AF, but there's more to him than he lets most people see. From their forced proximity, they discover they're not so different after all. Max and Everly give each other a hard time.





Devils Kill Devils

Johnny Compton

Tor Nightfire

E-Book

B0CQHMNW5R

☆☆☆ 1/2

Sarita has had a guardian angel watching over her most of her life, saving her when she most needed it. She'd always trusted him to take care of her until he viciously murdered someone she loved deeply. This is the beginning of a harrowing journey that opens doorways to a dark world she could never have known was real, where there are monsters beyond conception.

Devils Kill Devils is an imaginative novel that is as philosophical in tone as it is horrific. At times, the story drags because the narrative spends a lot more time in the mind of its characters instead of showing the events occurring. More dialogue would have imbued a greater momentum and a more active feel to the

story. However, Compton excellently builds tension and a sense of wrongness that explodes into outright horror in moments, even up to a spellbinding climax.

Devils Kill Devils explores the concept of belief and how having a strong faith in something gives it a profound power. While this is portrayed in an overtly fantastic and supernatural way, this theme does have relevance in society in which extreme, fundamentalist beliefs without nuance can lead to the justification of horrific acts. It's also a very insightful analysis of how humans have the tendency to demonize and make monsters out of others and not realize that hatred has made them as much of a monster. Readers will find something unique, thoughtful, and consistently unsettling with *Devils Kill Devils*.

Danielle Hill

The Sum of All Things

Seb Doubinsky

Meercat

Trade Paperback 978-1946154392

E-Book B0DF2H5984

☆☆☆ 1/2

In the future dystopian world of Samarqand, artists and writers are on thin ice in the conservative political climate. An illegal drug called Synth allows users to manipulate reality in such a way that they can change their surroundings, move through time and space without actually moving their bodies, and even travel back in time. A global society called the Subliminal Empire is attempting to control one of the last bastions of personal freedom.

New Samarqand is ruled by a king who is gravely ill. His possible successors include a prince and princess with opposing political views. The king's choice of an heir could determine the future direction of society.

Many underground forces, including the Agregorians, seek to fight

Booty

intolerance and prevent their world from coming under the jurisdiction of the Subliminal Empire. Other factions include an Eastern Alliance, a Western Alliance and a Chinese Confederation.

Central to the plot is an upcoming exhibit of the preserved ancient remains of the Amazon Sisters, believed to be female warriors of long ago, with their legacy memorialized in a newly opened wing of the museum. However, it is discovered that the women were not actually sisters, but lovers, and this knowledge threatens the standards of the conservative society.

Much intrigue abounds as the various factions squabble, terrorists attack, lovers spy on lovers and no one can be quite sure whom to trust. Poets and artists who push for more personal

freedom find themselves in danger.

The cast of characters in this book is so extensive, and their motives so diverse, that it is often difficult to follow all the twists and turns of the plot. This final installment of Doubinsky's "City-States Cycle" series provides quite a bit of suspense, but perhaps it would benefit from having read the previous books in the series.

Hannah Rowan

"Happy Holidays



Pam Binder

Time is an Illusion,
and Love, the Only Reality

Step back in time to Regency
England as the worlds of
an American heiress and an
English Duke collide.

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Y A

The Doomsday Archives: The Heart-Stealer Mask

Zack Loran Clark, Nick Eliopoulos
Zando Young Readers

E-book
B0CW1J88LQ

★★★★ 1/2

The second book of “The Doomsday Archives” focuses on Hazel, the rational scientist of the trio of kids who have taken on the duty of protecting New Rotterdam from a sinister arcane cabal. Hazel possesses the Magnus Crown, a relic that gives her the potential to transmute objects, an ancient practice known as alchemy. She has not had any luck getting it to work, and circumstances have driven her to the point of desperation. There’s a new threat, a being who kills under the guise of giving its victims exactly what they want, and Hazel is the next target. Can the friends work together to stop the latest evil threat, before it exacts a very personal price?

The Doomsday Archives once again captures the scary and Gothic feel that manages to be kid-friendly, but also

captivating for older readers who enjoy classic horror motifs. It is genuinely scary in parts, with very creepy imagery. The inclusion of wiki articles for a website involving paranormal events in New Rotterdam is ingenious.

It tackles very real life issues for kids, such as having parents who have to work overtime just to make ends meet, and the helplessness of being a child and unable to financially pitch in, how it feels to be the poor kid, and even developing potential romantic feelings for the first time. In this book, these kids face some serious jeopardy, and while it’s not overtly gory, the subject matter does not shy away from getting gruesome. Although it feels a little short, and the pacing at the end was somewhat rushed, *The Heart-Stealer Mask* lives up to the potential of the first book, *The Wandering Hour*.

Danielle Hill

E-Mortal

Steve Schafer
Koehler Books

E-book
B0DDR1JNJW
★★★ 1/2

Olivia, Liv, is in a competition to code an artificial intelligence being living in a computer. If she wins, a scholarship will come her way, but there are rules. She can’t interfere in some aspects of the development in Breck which is her construct.

Lana, her best friend and neighbor, is super supportive. The two teenagers grew up together. They go back and forth in their conversations about life and Breck. Lana tells Liv she has to move away because of her father’s work, and it makes Liv unhappy. She wanted her close friend with her until the competition was over.

Breck develops. He has to play a game that proves he’s sentient, and the deadline is looming.

The end of the contest looms, and Liv needs Breck to make a breakthrough. She now knows he’s sentient, but if he doesn’t make the

proper move, he will be terminated from the server. Also, she's been informed that if she's successful, she'll win the scholarship and Breck will continue without Liv.

E-Mortal is a story that moves and alternates between the lives of Liv and Breck in almost every chapter, eventually coming together. It might seem to be repetitive but the story moves on as the reader becomes invested in Liv and Breck's challenges.

Lauren Caulder

Where is all the Grass Going?

D E Fox

Blossom Spring Publishing

E-book

B0DG31PTYS

☆☆☆☆

At the horse race track, the contestants are trying hard for the win, but before they can get to the finish line, a weird thing is taking place. The grass is completely disappearing behind them!

Our hero dogs, Jake, Sammy, Gino, and Phillip will soon be on the case. With their secret headquarters and working behind the scenes, they will find the underlying cause of it all. Sammy and Jake will have to go to spy training before they can go on the important mission. After the training, the two come to the rescue of other animals. All animals may need help, even cats! They do come to find the cause of the disappearing grass and the reason is out of this world!

The story starts right off with the mystery in this young adult adventure. The next chapter introduces some of the main characters and takes you along on their adventures as they interact with newfound friends and accomplices.

It is a lighthearted story with the heroes having many human relatable qualities while they converse in their animal languages among each other. Their human friends have no idea about their networking.

Lauren Calder

Dear QWERTY--"You're the Cover" continued

marketing. First readers look at the front cover, if they find it interesting, they look at the back cover where the book description is located. Readers do judge a book by its cover.

Then, the really smart and wise author focuses on marketing, and advertising. How else will you sell the fantastic book you just wrote?

Here's one of the secrets to success. You can't stop there.

You're the cover.

Keywords:

Keywords are important to marketing your book—and yourself. You're one of the keywords.

If they are impressed with you, they're going to RT and share. If they enjoyed the time they spent speaking with you, whether it be in person or online, they're going to remember how pleasant it was.

They will think of you with fond memories. Those keywords in their heads should all be positive thoughts.

It all leads to how it helps you become more successful. If they like you, and enjoy your book, they'll talk about you; give you those much-needed reviews, etc.

Getting reviews and increasing fans/following is important to an author. Using someone else's mailing list or building your own increases your clientele and creates sales that funnel down the road.

Interacting with readers, being kind, and showing how awesome you are helps you. Readers and authors will offer to send an announcement to their

email list, because they'll want to help you. They'll want to pay it forward, and/or return the favor.

You're it.

They're there for you.

When people see you, the way you're dressed, how you present yourself, it's like looking at the cover of a fantastic book.

When they approach you, they're interested. They want to know what you have to say and about your book. What comes out of your mouth is a blurb about yourself. Short, sweet, and to the point, a back cover description of who you are.

Keywords are important to marketing yourself. Listen to the reader and see if they've mentioned specific keywords that will encourage you to continue with talking about your books.

Most of all, you don't want your keywords about you to be negative. You don't want the reader walking away with any negative feelings or thoughts.

How you behave toward the people around you is 'the inside story'. They want to know you, chat with you, and spend a few moments with you. Make them feel appreciated, and they'll remember you and return.

When you interact with the readers, make sure they walk away with a smile on their face. Good memories are always better than negative ones.

Where does etiquette come in to all this?

Look professional, act professional, and add a little bit of class to your actions. Treat the people around you as if they are the gold in your heart, not your pocket.

You are the cover.

You are the back copy.

You are the inside of the pages.

Just as it is important for you to have an awesome book cover, description, editing, promotion, and advertising, it is just as important for you to present yourself as a professional.

It's on you to be your best for your readers, for other authors, and other industry professionals.

Late!

Didn't quite make in the last issue



Includes all genre and all time periods

Blindside Beauty: A Small Town, Single Dad, Sports Romance (Varsity Dads #6)

Lex Martin

Self Published

Trade Paperback

978-1950554188

★★★★

The lives of college students Abigail, and Nick Silva, single dad and football player, seem fated to collide because their paths keep crossing. She interviews to be his four-year-old daughter's nanny but doesn't get the job, after accidentally backing into his bumper. The single dad and daughter move in next door to Abigail and her roommate. Abigail jeopardizes her life, breaking into his window to rescue his daughter. She becomes their nanny. With the intense, fiery attraction flaring between them and the connection

deepening each moment spent together, can she avoid being blindsided by the single-dad quarterback?

Abigail is a sweet, kind, clumsy, nerdy, hopeless romantic, studying to be a teacher. Her internal dialogue is fascinating and funny. She can't seem to catch a break, going from one chaotic mishap to another. But also, she doesn't have much luck with men. Her ex cheated on her, breaking her heart. Now, she's determined to avoid jocks to protect her heart.

Anxious, protective, burdened by the past, and overwhelmed, Nick is a grumpy single parent raising his daughter. He's still grieving Hazel's mother. Nick focuses on making it into the NFL to secure his career to provide for Hazel. This year is his last chance to make the NFL.

Martin's deft characterizations of the characters make you

care about them and their dreams. Abigail is really likable. Nick has to grow on you, because his control issues and judgmental treatment of Abigail may put readers off. His daughter is adorable.

Abigail and Nick's relationship scenes are well written and the novel's best part. They form a connection almost immediately and try to resist it and their fiery sexual attraction. After it becomes more difficult to fight in close quarters, they agree to a casual relationship. Martin transitions their professional relationship to friends, then to lovers with emotional, sweet, funny interactions. Nick and Abigail's intimate moments feature sexy banter with steamy, emotional love scenes. They balance one another, providing what's been missing from their lives. Abigail experiences authentic passion and being wanted for herself. Nick finds peace with Abigail. They encourage and support each other's dreams and help each other heal.

Though it includes surprising and tightly written suspense scenes that keep you on the edge of your seat, the pacing lags. *Blindside Beauty* is a sweet, steamy, funny, sexy, melancholy new adult romance.

Lacy Hill

Courting Wildfire

B. A. Chayut

Chayut Publishing

E-Book

B0DDDBQHR65

★★★★

Using her alias Juliet Capulet, elite military task force member Tyler Montgomery lets down her guard for a night and has a mind-blowing and unforgettable one-night stand with bounty hunter Quinton Young. She then vanishes without a trace, never expecting to see him again. But Quinton can't get her out of his mind because

that night with her changed his life.

A year later, she comes back into his life, and he discovers her identity when their fathers assign them to work together to retrieve a bail-jumping fugitive and find his kidnapped girlfriend. Quinton won't let Tyler ghost him this time. Can he prove to her the connection they have is worth fighting for?

A sharpshooter with military in her blood, Tyler is competitive, efficient, and protects others. She's a loner who can be hard to like because she makes things more difficult than necessary. Because of her parents' toxic relationship and messy romantic history, she's not into dating, relationships, or love. She fights Quinton and the depth of their connection, believing it's not safe for them to be together because they're too different and she's being stalked. Quinton works for his father's firm but wants to work and have a life separate from him. Before meeting Tyler, he was bored with his life. But she changes that, becoming his obsession. Quinton's so gone for her, he stubbornly fights to fit into her life and world.

Their attraction is intense, and from that first night, a deep connection forms. They're a perfect match, balancing each other's lives. She brings color and life into his world. Self-sacrificing, she always takes care of everyone else, especially her team, her family. He takes care of her and doesn't let her push him away, scare him off. He respects her strength and knows she can handle and protect herself, but he wants to do it because he cares for her. While they are opposites—she's grumpy, he's sunshine—their jobs and lifestyles are similar. Their lives would merge well together.

B. A. Chayut's writing style is active, down-to-earth, and sparse, but vivid with detailed descriptions and deft, efficient world-building and characterization. She develops her

complex, likable, relatable, and flawed characters through snarky, humorous, emotional, intimate, suspenseful, and action-packed interactions.

Courting Wildfire's action and fight scenes are well-constructed, thrilling, and suspenseful. Chayut balances the romance, suspense, and action of her multi-layered story. *Courting Wildfire* is a thrilling, sexy, emotional, suspenseful, romantic, and fast-paced romantic suspense.

Lacy Hill

The Haunted States of America

Various Authors

Henry Holt and Company

E-book

B0CHFZGTB2

☆☆☆

Every state has its unique character and personality, including the ghost stories, lore, and legends that people, especially kids, trade to freak each other out. With *The Haunted States of America*, writers take on the task of bringing new life to the iconic tales from each state.

This collection is chock full of original stories based on urban legends, scary stories, and ghost lore from each state that makes up the United States of America, including Puerto Rico. Overall, this turned out to be an enjoyable collection. A few of the stories fell flat, but the majority definitely had substance. There were a lot more than expected that turned out to be quite chilling and downright scary. The subject matter varies, although they all seem to be based on local legends from the state where it takes place. It's not just ghost stories. There are also some creature feature stories and definitely some urban or rural legend type scenarios that don't easily classify into specific categories. There was a lot of good diversity in the

characters, reflecting that America is a place of people of all colors, ethnicities, backgrounds, and creeds. Tones and maturity levels between stories vary, so some stories will impact younger readers differently from older, more seasoned horror reading teens and tweens. For its short length, there's a lot of substance in this collection of super short, but largely impactful stories.

Danielle Hill

The Lightning Bottles

Marissa Stapley

Simon and Schuster

Hardcover 978-1668015766

E-Book B0CV23KQ78

☆☆☆

In 1990's Seattle, Jane Pyre and Elijah Hart are the darlings of the grunge scene. Together since they were teens, from online chat rooms to actual snail mail, they bonded over their love of music and gradually opened up to each other about their ambitions and collaborated writing songs.

At first nobody took Jane seriously as a musician. Instead they resented her relationship with Elijah, who played in a band called the Marvel Boys. Jane stayed in the background, contributing songs but not part of the band, until a huge flare-up split the band leaving Jane and Elijah on their own to form a band called the Lightning Bottles.

Jane normally wrote the lyrics while Elijah played and sang the songs in an incredible voice, but one song Elijah wrote after the pain of his parents' death in a car accident, became a big hit.

As their fame grew, their relationship grew rocky, and like many rock stars, Elijah got caught up in drinking and heroin. Their off-stage life was full of stress, until one day on a trip to Iceland, Elijah took a rowboat out to sea and never came back. Eventually, when

Late!

his jacket and the damaged boat floated to shore, he was presumed dead, and people hated Jane all the more, blaming her for his loss, and not satisfied that she chose to keep her grief private.

When Jane retreats to a cabin in the country, it happens that her only neighbor is a teenage girl with a reclusive mother. Hen Vogel is an avid *Lightning Bottles* fan with a secret. Years before, she happened to witness an argument between Jane and Elijah. When Jane crumpled a paper with Elijah's artwork, Hen retrieved it from the trash. By coincidence she happened upon some graffiti in Berlin that matched the drawing style of Elijah's cartoon which convinced her he was still alive and leaving clues to help someone find him.

At first Jane wanted nothing to do with her young neighbor, but Hen finally convinced her to at least try to investigate the messages, which led the two unlikely friends on a quest for answers.

The Lightning Bottles gives readers a glimpse into the inner workings of very famous musicians and the struggles they face in trying to keep their personal lives private. It shows the pressure of fame, but also the devotion and perseverance of an idealistic young fan who ignites hope in the heart of a woman who thought herself broken.

Hannah Rowen

Passions in Death

J.D. Robb

St. Martin's Press

Hardcover 978-1250289568

E-Book B0CQHWMW7TD

☆☆☆☆

Detective Eve Dallas returns to the scene of an earlier trauma in this 59th book in J.D. Robb's "Death" series, when she is called to investigate a murder at the Down and Dirty Club, the very place where she once survived a brutal assault.

Erin Albright wasn't so lucky.

On the eve of her wedding at a bachelorette party, Erin planned to surprise her fiancé Shauna Hunnicut with their dream trip to Hawaii for their honeymoon. She financed the trip because she had sold one of her paintings. She left her friends drinking and dancing in the club and slipped into a private room where she planned to dress in a grass skirt to present the surprise tickets to Shauna. Instead, she was brutally attacked from behind and left for dead while her friends partied on, oblivious to her plight.

Eve Dallas had her work cut out for her, since no one noticed anyone suspicious in the club, and because of the nature of the establishment, the owner shunned security cameras. The killer could have been one of the guests, another patron of the club, or even someone who slipped through the unmonitored back door. All Eve knew for sure was that the killer had come prepared to kill.

By all accounts, Erin was well liked and no one could think of a reason anyone would want her dead. Eve is left with the task of combing through Erin's life, looking for someone with a motive. Or possibly someone who intended to hurt Shauna by taking Erin away.

Eve attacks the case with her usual hard-nosed attitude, even as she tries to ignore echoes of her own attack. The attention of her hunky husband Roark and her trusty sidekick Peabody soften her edges a bit, but nothing shakes her determination to apprehend the killer who ruined the lives of these young brides.

J.D. Robb delivers her usual gripping, breathless dive into a case where the reader is carried along with Eve every step of the way.

Hannah Rowan

Read at Your Own Risk

Remy Lai

MacMillan Children's Publishing Group/Henry Holt & Co.

E-book

B0D8GVFLD2

☆☆☆☆

Hannah has a journal where she records her terrifying encounter with a vengeful spirit that she invoked by playing a silly game with three of her friends. Hannah tells a harrowing story of a seemingly inescapable curse taking over her life. Can she find a way to break the curse before it's too late?

The reader is along for the journey as Hannah details the events of the curse and the scary happenings as it unfolds with malevolent consequences. This book is formatted like a ruled notebook with sketchy illustrations and handwritten entries detailing Hannah's daily events, conveying an escalating sense of dread to readers. Younger readers will enjoy the creepy-crawly, completely relatable type of horror with some humor thrown in. Remy Lai makes some interesting choices that keeps this story from being predictable, and it only adds to the fun.

Though short, the pacing is good, leading to an ending that is surprising, but satisfying. Hannah is spunky and likable without being unrealistically perfect as she tries to figure out how to save herself without putting loved ones and those around her at risk. Looking for a short and gratifying middle grade horror book that makes great use of its unique format? Check out *Read at Your Own Risk*.

Danielle Hill

Late!

Stage Fright

Wendy Parris

Random House Children's Books

E-book

B0CS2S2SBL

☆☆☆1/2

Avery is excited to go back to her small hometown to spend time with her friends for a summer visit. Her parents moved her to Philadelphia and she hates it there, mostly because she had to leave her best friend Paige behind. However, things have changed. Paige is so different now, more into things that Avery doesn't like, such as wearing makeup, hanging out with Avery's former bully; and her two buddies Jaylen and Tyler who fight constantly. The group seems to have grown apart. Avery gets the idea of doing a seance at the local closed, supposedly haunted, theater as a bid to bring everyone together. When things start to go wrong and the quartet gets trapped in the theater, they realize there is a dark presence there that doesn't want them to leave alive.

This is a book about growing up and facing fears and change. Avery is fixated on the past and things being like they used to be. Her anxiety keeps her from taking chances, such as making new friends and trying different hobbies, putting herself out there. She is distressed at how much her friends have changed and doesn't understand why Paige is making the choices she's made. Through their harrowing ordeal in the haunted theater, Avery learns to face her fears and conquer her insecurities.

Avid adult readers of middle grade books may be disappointed at how young the books read initially. Avery acts more childish than she should for this story, and the contrast between her and the overall tone of the book was jarring. This makes the narrative a bit harder to get into. But as the story progresses, the eerie, intriguing tone draws in the reader.

There are some genuinely spooky and unnerving parts that take this book to the next level. While it still feels a little simplistic in the way the characters are written, the horror delivers. The origins of the haunting and the sinister events in the theater were very interesting, and made this a more satisfying read. Underlying the narrative are good lessons about maturity and growth that readers may appreciate. *Stage Fright* has some good qualities that make it a fun, scary book for younger middle grade readers.

Danielle Hill

The Strange Tales of Oscar Zahn, Volume 1

Tri Vuong

Ten Speed Graphic

Hardcover

978-1984863270

☆☆☆☆

Oscar Zahn is a paranormal detective, the one to call when one needs an exorcism. Essentially a trenchcoat-wearing skull, it's clear that he's not human, and definitely connected to the otherworldly. He understands exactly how to deal with unquiet spirits. But there seems to be an unusual amount of activity lately. Soon, Oscar comes to realize that they may be related to his own origins.

The Strange Tales of Oscar Zahn, Volume 1 is a must read for fans of occult detective stories with a unique twist. While this feels unique, it also favorably evokes memories of Mike Mignola's iconic "Hellboy" series. This is a volume full of episodic adventures that also tie into a greater, ongoing narrative. It has an alluring mix of dark fantasy, folklore, gothic horror and cosmic horror, with a smattering of science fiction. Both spooky and mysterious, there's a lot to pay attention to in the panels, which are beautifully illustrated, relying on the artwork to communicate the ideas as

much, if not more, than dialogue. Readers should not be surprised if they don't always get answers or understand exactly what unfolds in the stories. The sense of the unknown does add to the overall mood: intriguing and uncanny, leaving readers eager for more adventures with Oscar Zahn and his assistant Agnes.

Danielle Hill

The Village Library Demon-Hunting Society

CM Waggoner

Berkley Publishing Group/Ace

E-book

B0CQWX5YMY

☆☆☆☆

Sherry Pinklewhistle is a small town, upper New York State librarian with a knack for solving crimes. It seems like a whole lot of dead bodies and murders, when you think about it. She begins to believe that something just isn't right. Her cat, Lord Thomas Cromwell, suddenly starts talking to her, and tells her that an ancient demon demands that she keep solving crimes, and someone close to her becoming the next victim makes that an imperative. Can Sherry work with her small circle of friends, including the new, young, handsome priest, a newly widowed, cosmopolitan art gallery owner, and her skeptic therapist friend to figure out what exactly is plaguing their town?

This book is tailor-made for fans of cozy mysteries mixed with episodic, ensemble paranormal tv shows. There's something very innovative about the feel of this story. While aspects feel familiar to fans of genre fiction in this niche, the execution feels very fresh. The pace is very leisurely, but things progress nicely towards the conclusion. The cast of potential suspects is diverse—with murky pasts and motives that make them quite morally questionable—bringing to mind British mystery and crime shows. While not overtly gruesome or bloody, the dark side of human nature is more than evident. Sherry's own past ties very well

Late!

into the overall story, as her compulsion to solve crimes relates to past trauma. When the demonic angle comes in, it makes for some well-written and nicely spooky scenes to remind readers that something very unnatural is going on in this town and with this situation. The humor is good, more on the wry and subtle side, fitting for this overall narrative. Small town life has its share of quirkiness and this is cleverly examined in the story. While initially it was hard to figure out where things were headed, the destination is satisfying, leaving the door open for future paranormal sleuthing for Sherry and her friends.

Danielle Hill

The White Guy Dies First: 13 Scary Stories of Fear and Power

Faridah Abiké-Iyimidé; Kalynn Bayron; Kendare Blake; H.E. Edgmon; Lamar Giles; Chloe Gong; Alexis Henderson; Tiffany D. Jackson; Adiba Jaigirdar; Naseem Jamnia; Karen Strong; Mark Oshiro; Terry J. Benton-Walker

Tor Publishing Group/Tor Teen

E-book

BOCPCWMDG7

★★★★½

Horror movie buffs will often play the guessing game of who's going to survive until the end of the movie, and often it's not the person who looks or identifies like themselves. In this collection of stories, that's flipped on its head. Because, across the wide variety of these spooky tales, "the white guy dies first."

In this volume, thirteen authors explore the dimensions of fear, terror, and horror, along with the concept of identity (from the concept of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality) and how that often places people into the category of "other," with a feeling of isolation and a lack of safety that causes a kind of existential terror in and of itself. The authors don't hold back on the horror, scary imagery, disturbing sub-

ject matter, and gore while bucking the trend of choosing marginalized people to victimize first in horror stories. This volume is for older teen horror buffs, who love a good scare and aren't traumatized by stories with visceral imagery and a pervasive sense of dread that will keep them on the edge of their seat. If there's a horror movie category out there, there's a story in this collection to scratch that itch. It's definitely worth reading.

Danielle Hill

The Wingman (Vancouver Storm #3)

Stephanie Archer

Orion

E-Book

B0DD357DWQ

★★★★★



Actuarian Darcy and pro-hockey defenseman Hayden Owens are best friends. After her breakup from her long-time boyfriend, Darcy needs to gain confidence. Hayden agrees to be her dating coach and give her practice lessons. Starting with flirting and kissing, their lessons eventually push the boundaries of their friendship, igniting his jealousy and sparking new feelings for him within Darcy. Could the right man for her have been by her side all these years?

Hayden and Darcy's interactions and friendship feel authentic and grounded in genuine emotion and love for each other. Before the book's first scene is over, you'll fall in love with Hayden, who's earned a player reputation. However, he's undervalued by people—especially women. Thoughtful, generous, funny, selfless, and loving, he's so much deeper than people give him credit for. The people in his life come first. Like Hayden, you want Darcy to live her life as she chooses, without another's limitations. More importantly, to see that the man for her, who loves her as she is and will never keep her from chasing her own dreams and

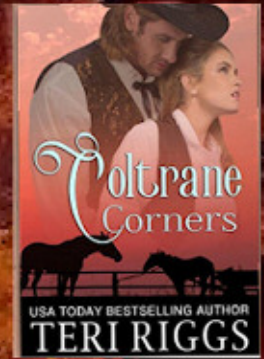
keep her from being who she wanted to be, is Hayden. He would do anything for her.

One of *Wingman*'s best aspects is that Archer's intimate scenes are the perfect balance of fun, laughter, heat, sexiness, emotion, tenderness, and love. The scenes with Darcy and Hayden practicing dating, flirting, and kissing build upon the chemistry that exists between them, bringing it to the surface. Archer deftly transitions their relationship from friends to lovers with snarky, humorous, steamy, sexy banter, interactions, and intimate love scenes.

The Wingman grabs hold of the readers' imagination and doesn't let go—even when the novel ends. The reader is left with a feeling of euphoria from reading about these characters falling in love, chasing their dreams, discovering their inner strengths, and realizing they're worthy to be loved for who they are.

Archer's multi-layered story and terrifically developed complex, genuine characters draw readers in and make *The Wingman* a page turner. Her down-to-earth vibrant and animated writing and world-building, rich with life and color, make it easy to visualize all the characters and scenes. Archer's character interactions are animated and captivating and help reveal the characters, while furthering the plot. Beautifully written, romantic, sweet, and steamy, *The Wingman* is a funny, sexy, emotional, and fast-paced romance.

Lacy Hill



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