

# Self-Published Books Showcase

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from



## Adult

### **Almost Innocent: From Searching to Saved in America's Criminal Justice System.**

By Shanti Brien.

Mar. 2021. 240p. Amplify, \$24.95 (9781645432036). 345.

A criminal defense attorney specializing in appeals, Brien introduces us to nine defendants convicted of various crimes and explores the circumstances that informed their sentences, including inherent racial bias, socioeconomic disparity, the "War on Drugs," and a criminal code replete with inconsistent arrest, prosecutorial, and sentencing guidelines. For example, Jake was prosecuted for murdering a man outside a bar. During his trial, his court-appointed attorney arranged a plea deal guaranteeing a chance at parole in seven years. Jake took the deal—only to discover his lawyer had misinformed him about parole. For poor defendants, Brien contends, it's less about justice than resolving their cases quickly so lawyers can move to the next one. The author dissects these cases against the backdrop of her own life, including being blindsided when her husband's name arises in a fraud investigation. Still, she makes clear her awareness that being a white, financially secure woman offers her protections unavailable to many. Although the book offers few suggestions on how to improve this deeply flawed system, it is a gripping, eye-opening, sometimes-shocking read.

### **The Artist Spoke.**

By Ted Morrissey.

2020. 188p. Twelve Winters, \$29 (9781733194921).

In this gently bizarre story, poet and professor Christopher Krafft has lost his romantic partner over his involvement with Logos, a literary project engineered by eccentric author Elizabeth Winters that requires participants to absorb her words into their bodies. When Winters dies as her faithful are assembling for their instructions, Krafft

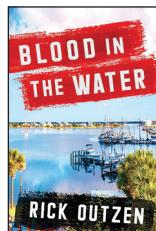
spends a hallucinatory weekend in Chicago connecting with fellow Logos participants, including an attractive librarian, while he navigates a snowstorm, contemplates his failed love affair, dwells on the power of words, and finds a renewed passion for his own work. Allusions to great classics and literary theory, along with meta moments in which Krafft describes inventive scenes from Winters' novel *Orion*, are a bold wink to fellow literati. And Morrissey's supple sentences offer a mini-tutorial on craft, pulling a world of emotion from the smallest image. Those who revel in how closely observed detail and powerful language can infuse the most mundane human experiences with beauty and tenderness will relish this novel, which is highly recommended for fans of Robert Olen Butler and Alison Lurie.

### **Blood in the Water.**

By Rick Outzen.

2020. 288p. Waterside, paper, \$16.95 (9781941768501).

A sequel to Outzen's debut, *City of Grudges* (2018), this novel continues the investigative adventures of Walker Holmes, publisher of a struggling alt-weekly based in Pensacola, Florida. Here, the hard-drinking Holmes has sunk into an impressively long bender while coping with myriad personal issues, including his girlfriend leaving him, a corrupt sheriff who has it out for him and his newspaper, and a murderer walking free and taunting him with texts. After a flood ravages the city and the Booking and Detention Center inexplicably explodes, Holmes' ex-wife becomes involved in the case, forcing him out of his drunken stupor. Matters grow more complicated when Holmes and his staff uncover decades of grand-scale government corruption and police ties to white supremacist groups. As knotty as the best-constructed mysteries, Outzen's novel is unapologetically dark. The writing goes



down like smooth bourbon; Holmes is a complex but endearing antihero; and Outzen brings the Florida Panhandle alive with a story that seamlessly blends Carl Hiaasen's readability and Charles Willeford's thematic impact. Readers will find the book impossible to put down.

### **The Cardiff Giant.**

By Larry Lockridge.

2021. 164p. Iguana, \$26.99 (9781771804240); paper, \$14.99 (9781771804233).

In this farcical tale, journalist Jack Thrasher has been sent to Cooperstown, New York, to investigate the disappearance of the Cardiff Giant, a ten-foot-five icon made of pure gypsum that was originally dug up in Cardiff, New York, in 1869. Once in Cooperstown, Jack meets a host of colorful characters. Esther Federman, a psychologist seeking her roots, takes Jack in search of an ancient Jewish text while schooling him in Jewish mystical traditions. He also meets, among others: Esther's half-sister, a set designer and believer in "new age notions"; an opera singer who refuses to perform until the planets are properly aligned; and Tabby and Harris, co-hosts of *The Morning Show*. This is a rollicking, multifaceted tale, which, despite its humor, is packed with information on myriad subjects. The conversation is quick, witty, and often snarky, such as Esther's catty observation about Tabby: "I thought they fired anchors [of] . . . a certain age . . . Those Chiclets hurt my eyes." Any reader looking for escape, laughter, and information about a bit of everything will surely enjoy this tale.

### **Confucius Analects: A New Translation with Annotations and Commentaries.**

By Raymond K. Li.

2020. 220p. iUniverse, paper, \$24.99 (9781663200235). 181.

The Analects, originally compiled by Confucius' disciples after his death, have been an enduring focal point for defining human character and purpose. In this new version, Li

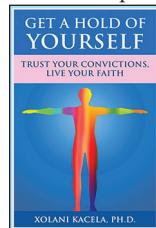
translates the text into contemporary English and includes some needed annotations and definitions. A broad range of human behaviors and attitudes is expressed by Confucius and his disciples. Their ideas sometimes exclude a certain “Zen” element of surprise, as when Confucius asks students about their ambitions and happily agrees most with one whose main dream involves dancing and singing “in the breeze and under the clouds.” Yet the master can also be strict, suggesting, for example, that people should ceremoniously honor their deceased parents for three years, just as their parents cared for them the first three years of life. Repetition of words, concepts, and names might become burdensome, but readers can easily skip over such portions. Particularly relevant are observations regarding government and sound leadership, which will resonate in today’s contentious political era. Overall, Li’s prodigious efforts to translate Confucius for an English-speaking audience will be greatly appreciated at this tumultuous time in world history.

★ **Get a Hold of Yourself: Trust Your Convictions, Live Your Faith.**

By **Xolani Kacela.**

2020. 219p. X to the K, paper, \$15.99 (9781513663920). 204.

A Unitarian Universalist minister and chaplain for the New Mexico Air National Guard, Kacela shares how he went from his mother’s African Methodist Episcopal faith and his father’s religious skepticism into a life as a “spiritual humanist, meaning that spiritual practice and study are vital to me, yet so are the works of philosophers, poets, scientists, and musicians.” With daily practices such as prayer and meditation, spiritual journaling, and reconciliation, he believes anyone can build a unique foundation of personal conviction.



Kacela emphasizes how to cement such practices into our daily lives and has mapped out a unique space between traditional religion and New Age spirituality, illuminating this spiritual trail with sacred texts of all religions and writings of myriad spiritual mentors, including renowned civil rights activist and mystic Howard Thurman. Kacela’s writing is slightly formal, which doesn’t obscure his authenticity, warmth, and humor, but rather gives his book gravitas. His ability to credibly and passionately convey the benefits of a life of faith and the steps to achieve it will enlighten anyone seeking a more fulfilling way to live.

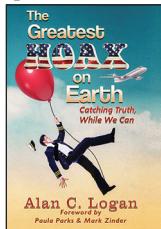
★ **The Greatest Hoax on Earth: Catching Truth, While We Can.**

By **Alan C. Logan.**

2020. 470p. Glass Spider, \$34.99 (9781736197400). 364.

In this fascinating true-crime exposé, Logan aims to debunk Frank W. Abagnale’s claim in his best-selling autobiography turned

feature film, *Catch Me If You Can*, that he’s “the world’s greatest con man.” The self-proclaimed master criminal has managed to parlay his Robin Hood-esque, yet rarely vetted, stories of a youth spent stealing from the rich into a million-dollar cottage industry of speaker’s fees and crime-prevention seminars.



With help from real-life victims Paula Parks (Abagnale weaseled his way into her parents’ home and bank accounts) and Abagnale’s former agent, Mark Zinder, the book exposes Abagnale’s most outrageous claims as not only untruthful, but also implausible. For example, Logan reports that in the seventies, a local journalist easily debunked Abagnale’s oft-repeated claim that he pretended his way into a job as a sociology professor at Brigham Young University—which Abagnale recounted to Johnny Carson on *The Tonight Show*—by simply contacting the school. A must-read for *Catch Me If You Can* devotees, this book masterfully weaves Logan’s research into an intriguing, entertaining, cohesive story that’s difficult to put down.

★ **Old School: The Evolution of America’s Pastime.**

By **Ted Kubiak.**

2019. 498p. iUniverse, paper, \$28.99 (9781532084553). 796.357.

Major League Baseball fans of a certain age remember Kubiak for playing with the Oakland Athletics (the “A’s”) during the team’s 1972–74 run of three consecutive World Series titles. Later, he managed minor league teams, eventually spending 42 years in baseball as a player, manager, and coach. Here, he reflects on his history while examining the present and potential future of America’s favorite pastime. It’s obvious that the game has changed significantly over the past few decades. Kubiak argues that these changes rarely make it better. He notes, among other ideas, that “the game has gone in a direction that has not produced better or smarter players” and contends that rule changes “accommodate and validate the lesser [level of] play.” Books of this genre tend to bog down with minutiae, and *Old School* suffers a bit from this. But if anyone typically prefers more information over less, it’s hardcore baseball fans. Such readers will appreciate Kubiak’s strong opinions on essentially every aspect of baseball and enjoy this book that combines an involving autobiography with incisive analysis of the unrelenting evolution of the game.

★ **Rascal on the Run.**

By **Howard Tate Scott.**

2021. 238p. HTS Productions, paper, \$16 (9781736211809).

Scott’s engrossing debut, sparkling with southern wit, family drama, and courtroom high jinks, opens in the late 1980s when brilliant attorney Guy Stillwell has been served

divorce papers. His years of self-medicating with alcohol are catching up with him, too. When an acquaintance of Guy’s and suspected killer in a cold case from the 1960s reappears after a long absence, Guy and his son Critter become embroiled in his defense.



As Critter dives into the details to help Guy, he faces his own memories of that tangled time and unsettling truths about his beloved father. The genial style of Rick Bragg meets the pathos of Pat Conroy in this touching, often laugh-out-

loud tale brimming with wry, knee-slapping metaphors (“Tatum was . . . as skinny as a mosquito’s leg and no taller than the slide-out cutting board in the kitchen”). The tale’s heart is the complex Guy, who, with his kindly brashness, seems a reenvisioning of Atticus Finch. This allows a correction of Harper Lee’s view of the South instead of an homage, and the novel persistently questions how a person, community, and region can recover from a haunted past. Fans of southern stories and historical fiction are sure to love this insightful, unforgettable debut.

Youth

★ **Snowflake.**  
By **Arthur Jeon.**

2020. 412p. Global Animal, paper, \$14.99 (9781734093506). Gr. 10–12.

Taking the form of 18-year-old Benji Wallace’s journal, *Snowflake* begins as a wildfire forces Benji and his family to evacuate their California home. Although they’re quickly able to return, this upheaval heightens the anguish Benji already feels over climate change. A thoughtful vegan with a prodigious memory, he records his days at school and relationships with his well-meaning parents, feisty kid sister, and beloved dog. But soon Benji falls into suffocating despair as he contemplates the state of the world and the antics of



the current president—clearly meant to be Donald Trump, although Benji refers to him as “Cretin.” When Benji decides to assassinate Cretin and his mental state continues to deteriorate, the novel careers toward a devastating conclusion. *Snowflake*’s controversial topic and relatively downbeat ending may be deal breakers for some. But Benji’s raging emotions are unnervingly palpable, and while Cretin is undoubtedly the book’s major villain, Jeon compels readers to question other forces in Benji’s life, including the roles of adults and technology. Though not for everyone, *Snowflake* will be immensely rewarding for anyone willing to tackle its tough subject matter.