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## Publishing in the Pacific Northwest

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# Publishing in the Pacific Northwest



The region is home to some of the nation's most innovative publishing companies—from Amazon to indies

BY KATHI INMAN BERENS, RACHEL NOORDA, AND NATHALIE OP DE BEECK

The Pacific Northwest is famously home to Amazon—but it is also home to the indie press that publishes *How to Resist Amazon and Why*, a fact that reflects the richness of one of the nation's most vibrant publishing scenes. The Pacific Northwest is known for its many bookstores, publishers, colleges and universities, and for its innovative libraries. And there is a strong ethos of community and cooperation which has served the region well during the Covid-19 crisis.

Much has changed since *PW* last highlighted the region back in 2016. But if anything, the challenges of the past two years have highlighted the qualities that make the Pacific Northwest book publishing community exceptional: tech savvy and a spirit of innovation, individualism and resilience, environmental awareness, and a deep commitment to equity and fairness, independence and community. For this look at publishing in the Pacific Northwest, we conducted more than 50 interviews. What we found is a region that has creatively weathered the challenges of the past few years.

A sampling of the region's publishers follows, but check out the *PW* website for an expanded look at the region, including booksellers.

## A Kids Company About

In 2018, Jelani Memory wrote a book for his kids: *A Kids Book About Racism*. "Growing up as a Black kid in the whitest city in America, it felt important that my kids not only know and understand what racism is but be able to talk about it openly," he says. So began Memory's journey from concerned parent to media business owner—still in "the whitest city in America," Portland, Ore.

There are now dozens of A Kids Book About titles, all on important topics that can be hard to explain to kids. The books are distinctive for their beautiful textual design—but are not illustrated. "Sorry, but no dragons or princesses here," Memory says. "Kids have real experiences, ideas, and questions. These books talk up to them, treat them like they're smart, and create space for conversation."

What began as a direct-to-consumer book business for kids ages five to nine is now a multimedia company that allows kids to interact with content in the many places they live—on phones, in books, at home, in the car, or through headphones. The company recently expanded the age range of kids for whom it makes content to 10–16. And AKCA now has launched nine podcasts, all featuring diverse hosts and covering topics like

climate change, how to investigate facts, and how to be an activist (which is hosted by an eight-year-old).

For Memory, much has changed in the wake of the pandemic hit. "Covid-19 has impacted our business in a few ways," he says. "First, we are a fully distributed team because of Covid-19, and intend to stay so even when the pandemic cools. Second, our business accelerated when e-commerce boomed in 2020 because of the pandemic. Lastly, we believe our products are more important than ever because of the inequities highlighted by the pandemic."

## Amazon

You can't talk about publishing in the Pacific Northwest—or, in fact, anywhere—without talking about Seattle-based giant Amazon. But how do you talk about a global powerhouse that holds enormous leverage over the publishing industry in a local context?

As a publisher, Amazon continues to push boundaries. Its Kindle Direct Publishing unit empowers vast numbers of self-published authors. Its Audible division is a leader in the surging digital audiobook market. And since its founding in 2009, Amazon Publishing, the company's trade publishing unit, has grown to 16 imprints and is home to up-and-coming writers as well as some major authors, such as Dean Koontz and Patricia Cornwell. Last year, the company struck a deal with the Digital Public Library of America to lend its digital books in public libraries. And its Amazon Crossing imprint is a leader in a market that has been vastly underserved for years: translated works.

"I've lived in Seattle and worked at Amazon for 13 years now, and it's proven to be the life I left New York for—a vibrant literary scene surrounded by nature and a spirit of possibility," says Gabriella Page-Fort, Amazon Crossing editorial director. "In my time at Amazon Crossing, we've accomplished more than I ever imagined. We've published over 471 books by authors from 51 countries writing in 30 languages. One of my favorite local events last year was hosted by the Seattle Public Library, featuring Iraqi author Mortada Gzar discussing his PEN Translation Prize–longlisted memoir *I'm in Seattle, Where Are You?* It was the perfect example of how our big-world focus at Crossing fits right into the local community."

## Ashland Creek Press

A boutique, vegan-owned publisher of environmental literature, Ashland, Ore.—based Ashland Creek Press recognizes "the urgency

## PLA & Pacific Northwest Spotlight

to save and protect our planet and its creatures,” says cofounder Midge Raymond. A believer in “literary activism,” Raymond says her job extends beyond selling books. “If we can inspire change through good stories, we’ve done our job.”



Aspiring authors are telling those tales: in 2021, submissions poured in for the press’s sixth Siskiyou Prize for New Environmental Literature, which promises a \$1,000 prize and a two-week residency at the Sitka Center for Art and Ecology. “A lot of people who had a book in progress had time during the pandemic to finish it and send it out,” Raymond says.

In February, Ashland Creek published the 2019 Siskiyou winner, A.E. Copenhaver’s *My Days of Dark Green Euphoria*. Raymond described Copenhaver’s work as “a satirical literary novel that perfectly captures the challenges and eco-anxiety we face in the 21st century.”

Raymond says she’s looking forward to pandemic conditions easing up enough to once again gather in person with other writers and publishers. “We will continue to publish literature that we hope will open hearts and minds to the issues facing our planet.”

## Blackstone Publishing

From its modest roots selling audiobook cassettes out of a garage in Southern Oregon in the 1980s, Blackstone publishing has grown into one of the most respected and formidable indie publishers in the nation. In the booming audio market, Blackstone is a major player—and its push into print and e-book publishing in 2015 has proven well-timed.

“Despite Covid-19 challenges, Blackstone Publishing has been able to adapt and expand during the pandemic,” says Lauren Maturo, director of publicity. “Last year, we successfully launched our own on-site printing press at the Blackstone headquarters in Ashland, and we now print the majority of our physical books in-house. The flexibility, customization, and speed created by printing on demand and in-house has benefited Blackstone, our authors, and our partners.”

Blackstone’s growth is also benefiting workers. “Our team is growing and we are creating new jobs as part of the in-house printing initiative,” Maturo



Josh Stanton, CEO and president, Blackstone Publishing



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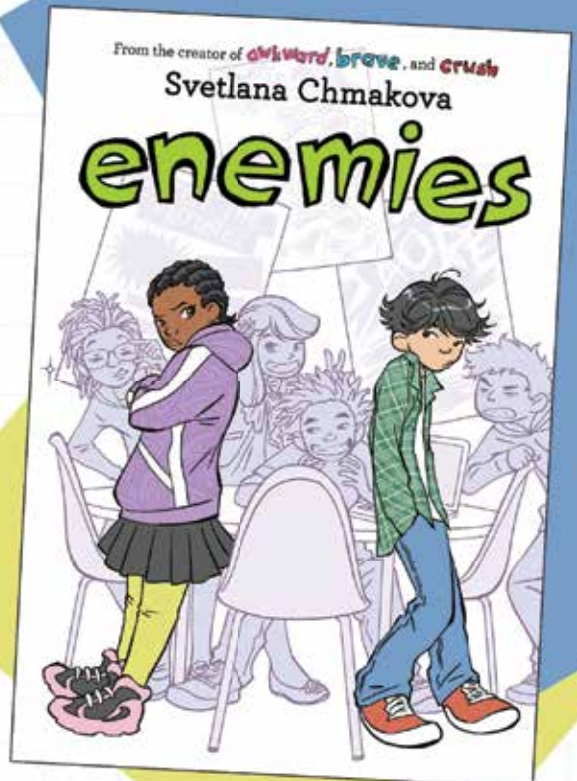
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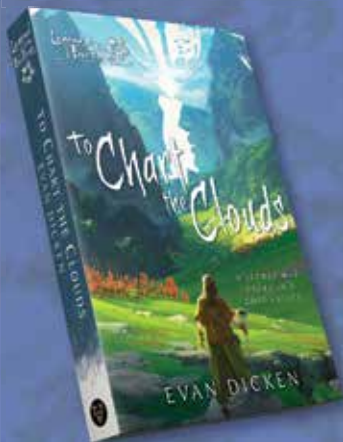
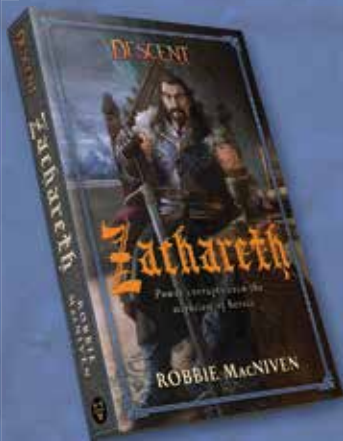




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## PLA & Pacific Northwest Spotlight

says. “We are also expanding our sales, production, editorial, marketing, and publicity teams, as we increase the number of books we publish each year in print, e-book, and audiobook.”

While business has been strong, it hasn’t been easy—and not just because of the pandemic. Blackstone Publishing staffers endured devastating wildfires in Southern Oregon in September 2020. “Fortunately, our headquarters in Ashland was spared from the fires, but many of our employees lost their homes,” Maturo says. “It rocked all of us to see members of the Blackstone family and the Rogue Valley community suffering from so much loss. Under the leadership of Blackstone President and CEO Josh Stanton, our company banded together and created a fund-raiser to aid employees who lost their homes in the fires, ultimately raising over \$125,000, with Blackstone matching donations to the fund.”

Despite the tough times, Blackstone Publishing staff and authors continue to have reason to celebrate. Stanton was named *Strand* magazine’s Publisher of the Year for 2021. And three of the publisher’s titles—Catherine Ryan Howard’s thriller *56 Days*; Cadwell Turnbull’s fantasy *No Gods, No Monsters*; and Eric Rickstad’s thriller *I Am Not Who You Think I Am*—were all named *New York Times* 2021 Best Books of the Year, among other accolades. Latina pilot Cecilia Aragon’s memoir *Flying Free* won the Nancy Pearl Award from the Pacific Northwest Writers Association, and Brian Freeman’s mystery *The Deep, Deep Snow* was an Edgar Award nominee and a Minnesota Book Award winner.

### Blue Cactus Press

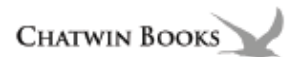
A hybrid micro-press in Tacoma, Wash., Blue Cactus Press spotlights queer and BIPOC authors—and publisher Christina Vega says the Pacific Northwest community is part of its success. “There is a bubble of safety and collaboration among queer and BIPOC creators in the Pacific Northwest that has allowed my press to grow over the last five years,” Vega says. “I don’t know if audiences and professional networks outside of this region would have received our message as gracefully.”



Vega says they have appreciated the mentorship of sweet pea Flaherty, owner of Tacoma’s King’s Books, and Blue Cactus members’ support through Patreon. “We’ve received heartfelt notes, had great discussions at workshops, and connected at virtual events on a level that I don’t think we would have if the pandemic hadn’t forced us to change how we relate to each other and the world around us,” Vega says, adding that part of Blue Cactus’s mission includes “teaching creatives how to self-publish high-quality, meaningful books.”

Vega pushes back against the “pervasive idea” that hybrid publishers are vanity presses. “We curate our catalog. We screen authors and search for the best manuscripts we can get our hands on. We edit our asses off and coach writers through the editorial process. We put 100% effort into making professional, market-ready, and attractive books. The only difference is that we are sometimes willing to share the financial risks and resources of publishing with authors.”

### Chatwin Books



As Phil Bevis, cofounder and publisher of Seattle’s Chatwin Books, sees it, we have entered an era of “continuous change,” which will require “continuous adaptation.” And Chatwin Books has embraced this new approach, he says, citing an example from the early days of Covid-19, when Seattle was effectively shut down.

“We are located in a part of Seattle where all the storefronts had to be boarded up, which was at first depressing, but then led to a huge creative explosion of storefront murals that raised the spirits of people in our city,” Bevis recalls. “Realizing that if this was not documented it would be lost, we started work on what was for us a breakthrough book.”

*continued on p. 39*

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ARE TO  
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## PLA & Pacific Northwest Spotlight

### Killer Serials: Amazon's Kindle Vella

From its inception, Amazon has pushed book publishing toward a digital future that other entertainment industries (video games and streaming media) have been quicker to embrace. And Kindle Vella, one of Amazon's most recent new digital programs, is worth watching.

Simply put, Kindle Vella is a serialized reading experience folded into Amazon's Kindle app. It quietly launched in July 2021, but if it can catch on, it has enormous potential to capture the attention of a new generation of readers and writers.

“We're in the middle of experimenting and learning,” says Kindle Vella product lead Virginia Milner, who adds that Vella designers are looking for “the bridge between reading and social connection.” It's a complex mission, but a fairly simple concept: bring to reading the excitement and shared anticipation that makes streaming TV so bingeable. Vella also seeks to “break the wall” between authors and readers by offering its platform as a place to communicate and interact. With Vella, readers can give a thumbs-up at the end of each chapter, and conversations can spill out into social media.

As of February 18, Vella's #1 performing story, *The Marriage Auction* by Audrey Carlan, had more than 75,000 total chapter likes. And strong engagement numbers are good news for authors like Carlan, because Vella authors are paid bonuses for reader engagement. Authors also take 50% of a story's revenue. For readers, the first three episodes of any Vella story are free, after which they can use “tokens” that are purchased in bundles to access the rest. Tokens keep the reading experience smooth, rather than interrupting after every chapter with a request for payment.

Can this form of reading “serialization” catch on? The jury is still out. Kindle Vella likely faces an uphill battle resetting reader expectations toward stories with no set ending and no fixed price. Among the first 70-plus reader reviews of *The Marriage Auction*, about half complain about Vella. While readers got hooked by the writing—Carlan is a bestselling author of erotic contemporary romance—the frustration of not knowing how far along they were in the story nor how much it would cost to finish it got in the way for some readers. “My kids say it's the ‘trend’ but I'm not a fan,” opines one reader review. “I lived thru the days of *Reader's Digest* serials and wasn't a fan then, not a fan now.”

But what about those “kids”? For Gen Z readers, serialization is enormously popular, as evidenced by the staggering numbers of readers around the world engaging with webtoons and web novels. Webtoon North America CEO Ken Kim recently told Rob Salkowitz at *ICv2* that there are currently more than 72 million monthly active Webtoon users globally, and growing—with the U.S. market representing “nearly 20%” of that total. Webtoons and web novels might seem adjacent to the U.S. book publishing business at the moment, but they are in fact the fastest-growing form of reading.

Another challenge for Kindle Vella: you can't stack up the spines of a Vella product, flutter its pages, nor stick a decorated bookmark in Vella's product for social media. The BookTok community—Gen Z book marketing darlings of the moment—often film themselves with printed books, using stop-motion to create cinematic cuts and transitions. Can Kindle Vella find a way to give TikTok fans ways to engage with Vella stories on social media? It is still early days, but if so, Kindle Vella could very well break through with Gen Z and greatly boost the future of serialized reading.

—KATHI INMAN BERENS



*Kindle Vella, Amazon's reading app for serial fiction, launched last July. Can it find the Gen Z audience powering growth in serialized web novels?*



## PLA & Pacific Northwest Spotlight

continued from p. 36

That book was *Viral Murals: Seattle Artists, Storefront Murals, and the Power of Art During Crisis*. “Because we have our own color printing presses, we were able to produce it here,” Bevis says. “But even producing it in-house, a 224-page color art book is an expensive undertaking.”

The risk proved worthwhile. “People across the city recognized us for trying to do something positive in a dark time, and their response—whether they purchased it or not—provided the energy we needed to keep going when things were so dismal,” Bevis says.

Speaking of adapting, Chatwin Books staff have adapted to remote work and the challenges to produce a string of successes. In addition to *Viral Murals*, teams produced the tribal-health-related publications *Plant Teachings for Growing Social-Emotional Skills and Feeding 7 Generations: A Salish Cookbook*; Charles and Elisheba Johnson’s *The Tomorrow No One Wanted*, book three in the Emery Jones series; and Rebecca Brown’s forthcoming essay cycle, *You Tell the Stories You Need to Believe*, which Bevis says is seeing “outstanding” preorders.

“Because we are in a corner of the country, supply chain problems have presented issues,” Bevis acknowledges. “But we’ve been lucky to have our own production facility, and we have shifted more work in-house to avoid delays. We are also doing more work for other Pacific Northwest publishers. We’re so

thankful that we have been able to survive, and in fact grow and expand, during this challenging time.”

### Dark Horse Comics

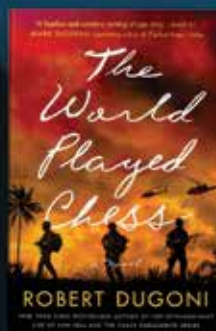
Nationwide, graphic novel sales were up 65% in 2021, with manga up 76% and comics up 49%. And the Pacific Northwest is home to a number of major comics publishers, including Portland-based Dark Horse Comics. Known for works like *Hellboy* and its comics of hit film franchises (*Alien*, *Predator*, *Star Wars*, etc.), Dark Horse, which was recently acquired by Swedish video game company Embracer Group, reported a strong year in 2021, thanks in large part to the vibrant comics community. “Local comics shops have really kept the whole community going,” says Dark Horse associate editor Jenny Blenk. “Their owners’ creativity and entrepreneurship on top of their usual hard work has been invaluable.”

Cara O’Neill, director of marketing communications at Dark Horse, says the company found new ways to connect with readers and retailers during the pandemic, providing more virtual and livestreamed content and sharing activities that people could enjoy safely from home. Like many publishers, Dark Horse also shifted to hybrid work options during the Covid-19



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## ★ Eating Again: The Recipes That Healed Me

**Alice Carbone Tench.**  
Heliotrope, \$38 (250p)  
ISBN 978-1-94276-279-



Food provides a tasty balm for the soul in this stellar debut, a blend of personal stories and heartwarming recipes. When Tench's therapists "suggested food as a means of getting back in touch" with herself after struggles with bulimia and alcoholism, she turned to her roots and began cooking. Here, she shares the formative dishes of her past, the "one[s] that made me the... woman I finally love and respect" and that eventually inspired her to start her own cooking show, *Instagram to Table*, in 2019. In luscious prose, Tench recounts discovering her late Italian grandmother's diaries of "what she ate, what she cooked"—a memory that gives way to a section of traditional Italian recipes, including a simple onion frittata, and pumpkin soup with rice and milk (one of her "Madri's" many "magical" dishes). Revisiting her recovery from bulimia, she shares the creamy butternut squash bucatini recipe that saw her through it, while breaded meatballs evoke memories of her father's childhood in Puglia. Other tempting dishes include Orecchiette with broccoli rabe; smoked paprika kale chips that Tench's daughter, Catherine, eats by the bunches; and a grilled zucchini parmigiana that pays homage to her mother's fondness for the versatile veggie. This sincere and delicious chronicle is one to savor. (Feb.)

— *Publishers Weekly*  
January 24, 2022

[heliotropebooks.com](http://heliotropebooks.com)

## PLA & Pacific Northwest Spotlight

crisis, with many staff continuing to work remotely. It also started an innovative new online-only internship program, led by Blenk. The program offers students an opportunity for comics publishing exposure, even during uncertain pandemic times.

"The industry is strong," Blenk says, "and we want to be here for a long time, making awesome content."

### entre ríos books

## Entre Ríos Books

Publishing is hard work in the best of times. And Knox Gardner, publisher and one-man show at Seattle independent poetry press Entre Ríos Books, which publishes two or three titles a year, many of which include audio and other hybrid elements, doesn't sugarcoat it when asked how the pandemic has impacted his work. "We dropped two new books in the first weeks of the lockdowns—a complete disaster," he says. "Early March 2020? OMG, the worst time to drop a poetry title ever."

Gardner expresses gratitude for the support of the Pacific Northwest literary community. But it is clear the pandemic has given him much to think about. "While I have been amazed at how organizations and bookstores, like Seattle's literary space Hugo House, have pivoted to continue programming online, none of it takes the place of live events for the actual sales that a small press truly depends on," he says. "Heck, being in your pajamas eating snacks while half listening is fantastic. Like, no shame. And also not having to pretend to be engaged with something dull. But the reality is, people are not buying books in the same way from Zoom readings, and it feels a bit like publishing into the void."

## Hazy Dell Press

Hazy Dell Press—a Portland-based children's book publisher well-known for its particular illustration style and high-quality board books, picture books, and chapter books—says delays and increased costs from Covid-19 have impacted it. But Hazy Dell owner Renee Yama says the press has benefited from the dedication of a strong team of partners, artists, authors, printers, and its distributor, Consortium.



**HAZY DELL PRESS**

"Portland isn't considered a mecca for book publishing," Yama says. "We don't bump elbows with national book reviewers or media outlets. However, Portland punches far above its weight when it comes to creative talent."

Yama says that with remote work, it's easier than ever for publishers across the country to tap the Pacific Northwest's robust talent pool. "With a community as relatively small as Portland's," she explains, "it's all the more important for our local organizations, like PubWest and the Oregon-based Literary Arts, to nurture a tight-knit and supportive community of small and midsize independent publishers like us."

Yama also expresses gratitude for the larger book publishing community. "Small independent publishers like us wouldn't stand a chance without librarians, teachers, booksellers and publications like *Publishers Weekly*, who make the effort to seek out books from independent presses and provide that critical platform for small businesses like ours," she says.

## IT Revolution

IT Revolution is a nonfiction publisher that publishes multimedia content in the information technology business genre, everything from books, to white papers, articles, event presentations, podcasts, and courses. But because IT Revolution has always sold best in physical print format, the closing of bookstores and the cancellations of in-person events has taken a toll on the company. Likewise, IT Revolution's audiobook business was hit by the lack of commuters listening to books as they travel.

But there is "camaraderie in the craziness," says editorial director Anna Noak, citing how the press has worked together with its freelance editors, designers, and printers to



## PLA & Pacific Northwest Spotlight

get through Covid-19. “Overall, IT Revolution has been able to pivot and meet the challenges produced by Covid-19 in part because of an early decision to think of the disruption as an opportunity to try new things.”

For IT Revolution, that meant pivoting to larger print runs, virtual events, a video library subscription service, a podcast, and offering courses. “Our goal wasn’t just to survive the turmoil,” Noak says. “but rather to see how we could grow and thrive in it.”

### Latah Books

“The Pacific Northwest literary community is tight-knit and supportive,” says Jon Gosch, publisher of Latah Books. “Some of our recent publications have had great reviews and publicity and sales. But I’ve been most surprised and delighted by the large crowds at our launch parties. An outdoor launch event for Kacy Tellessen’s *Freaks of a Feather: A Marine Grunt’s Memoir* drew 200 folks to the tiny town of Spangle on a smoky, 102-degree afternoon. That’s supporting the arts!”

Latah (pronounced LAY-taw) is a Nez Perce word and the name of a local tributary of the Spokane River. Latah Books, per its regional identity, works to represent rural, small-town, and BIPOC authors and historically marginalized voices. For example, C. Matthew Smith’s thriller *Twentymile* “features an

investigator of Cherokee descent,” Gosch says, and “Spokane Arts recently awarded us a grant that has enabled us to take on a couple important memoirs that we otherwise might have had to pass on”—a work by Leslie Absher, a queer writer from Oakland, Calif., and another by Paul Luu, a Vietnamese American surgeon living in Seattle.

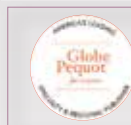
Gosch acknowledges, however, that more challenges lie ahead. “The printing and distribution sectors of this industry are in turmoil, partly due to Covid-19 but also due to factors that predate the pandemic.” But he says the press will fight through, adding that he feels “determined to sustain the strength and fortitude to keep doing the difficult things that we know we must do.”

### Lost Horse Press

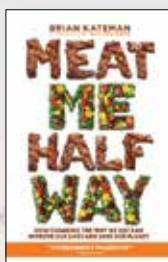
Established in 1998, the nonprofit, independent Lost Horse Press in Sandpoint, Idaho, offers poetry and contemporary literature. Its categories include a New Poets series, Human Rights series, and Native American series—and, especially timely, a Contemporary Ukrainian Poetry series garnering particular attention: Serhiy Zhadan’s *A New Orthography*, translated by John Hennessy and Ostap Kin, won the 2021 Derek Walcott Poetry Prize and was shortlisted for a



## Connecting TO YOUR COMMUNITY



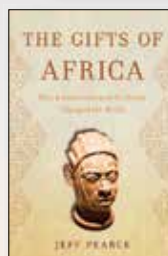
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BY BRIAN KATEMAN,  
FOREWORD BY BILL MCKIBBEN

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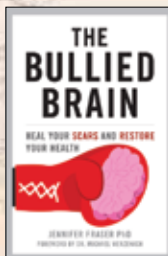
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## PLA & Pacific Northwest Spotlight

PEN Translation Award.

With Russia attacking Ukraine, people are eager to read more about Ukraine—including Ukrainian poetry, says Christine Holbert, publisher at Lost Horse. “Many of our titles deal with the war with Russia in Donbas and eastern Ukraine, so our books have been popular,” she says. “I pray things de-escalate soon.”

For technical and financial assistance during the pandemic, Holbert reached out to the Community of Literary Magazines and Presses (CLMP). “They were extremely helpful in getting us through Covid-19 by offering tutorials for Zoom, as well as other suggestions for getting through the pandemic financially,” she says. In addition, CLMP helped guide the press through the application process for a grant from the Literary Arts Emergency Fund, aimed at keeping nonprofit literary arts organizations and publishers afloat.

### Microcosm Publishing

In 2021, Portland-based Microcosm Publishing released Danny Caine’s *How to Resist Amazon and Why: The Fight for Local Economics, Data Privacy, Fair Labor, Independent Bookstores, and a People-Powered Future!* But what many people don’t know is that Microcosm founder Joe Biel himself “broke up” with Amazon and his trade distributor in 2018, to focus on self-distribution.



Three years later the move has paid off. Microcosm’s \$3.4 million in earnings in 2021 was more than double its 2019 earnings. Microcosm has since added thousands of books from other small presses to its distribution roster, and Biel purchased a warehouse in Cincinnati to accommodate the increased demand. He also managed to double his staff during the Great Walkout, without losing a single employee.

Microcosm operates at a break-even basis, reinvesting profits into worker wage increases (33% in 2019; \$3 per hour for each employee in 2021). After five years with the company, employees can join an employee ownership program. Microcosm welcomed its seventh employee/owner in 2021.

Among his publishing successes, Biel acquired and developed what would become the press’s runaway success: *Unf\*ck Your Brain: Using Science to Get Over Anxiety, Depression, Anger, Freak-Outs, and Triggers*. The book has outsold the other 19 books in Microcosm’s top 20 combined for three years running, spawning dozens of workbooks, superpacks, and sequels in Microcosm’s product line.

Looking ahead, Biel is close to launching WorkingLit, a subscription cloud service designed by Biel and built with Nellie McKesson, CEO of cloud-based book production and design platform Hederis, to help indie publishers manage their workflows. “As the industry continues to conglomerate,” Biel says, “we want to give our fellow indie publishers the freedom to market and sell books, understand their business, and painlessly pay royalties.”

### Mountaineers Books

With a staff of 23 and 650 titles in print, Mountaineers Books, the nation’s leading independent publisher of outdoor recreation, lifestyle, and conservation books, is a Seattle force to be reckoned with. “We are something of a glorious anachronism, in that our editorial and marketing offices share a building with our full-service wholesale and retail distribution center,” says publisher Tom Helleberg. “This is a great advantage when we need to rush an order to a local bookstore. But it also means we have directly experienced the effects of Covid-19 at every link of the chain.”



Tom Helleberg, publisher,  
Mountaineers Books, Seattle

Most Mountaineers Books staffers shifted nimbly to remote work during the pandemic, but the distribution center remained open sometimes with “a single staffer on-site

## PLA & Pacific Northwest Spotlight

to fill critical orders,” Helleberg says. “We have furloughed staff. Staff missed time due to Covid-19 symptoms or because they were taking care of family or waiting on a test. We’ve had a forklift broken down for three months with no parts to be found. We’ve seen shipping costs quintuple, and we’ve had new titles and reprints delayed by months due to supply chain breakdowns.”

But in spite of all these obstacles, against all odds, and “both expected and totally out of the blue,” Helleberg says Mountaineers Books sales grew by 40% from 2020 to 2021. “We took a leap together with our new authors, releasing their books into an unknown market with many bookstores shuttered and many publishers delaying or canceling seasons,” he notes. “It was a situation that was ripe for dissatisfaction and second-guessing. But mutual trust prevailed.”

Among Mountaineers’s successful publications are David Guterson’s *Turn Around Time: A Walking Poem for the Pacific Northwest* and Seth Kantner’s *A Thousand Trails Home: Living with Caribou*.

For Helleberg, Mountaineers Books’ biggest success is that the press has come through the pandemic so far with all staff safe and employed. “After that, I think our biggest achievement was releasing all titles as announced, even when facing longer production schedules and when bookstores were closed and there were no venues for readings or signings,” he says.

But Helleberg refuses to get comfortable. “Purely as a business concern, I worry about how long the sales trends will continue,” he concedes. “When people start to feel safe, will that lead to a decline in reading and outdoor recreation? It’s a total unknown, but the outcome I’m hoping for is that when we get back our prior freedom to roam, there’ll be more outdoor enthusiasts and they’ll be happy, healthy, and well-read.”

### Oni Press

Demand for kids’ comics is surging nationwide, and publishers like Portland-based Oni Press—possibly best known for publishing the Scott Pilgrim graphic novel series—has done well given its strong list of comics and graphic novels for early, middle grade, and YA readers. Also driving the publisher’s success: the explosive growth of webcomics. “It’s a welcome trend,” a rep for Oni Press says of the surge in webcomics, pointing to the “innovative talent and stories” enabled by digital publishing.

But even with its wide national reach and connections, the press remains firmly rooted in the Pacific Northwest community, which Oni reps say was key to getting through the challenges of the pandemic. “As a long-standing member of the Portland comics community, we offered support throughout the city, and received it in return.”

### Sasquatch Books

Acquired by Penguin Random House in 2017, Sasquatch Books in many ways reflects the spirit of the Pacific Northwest publishing community, exhibiting a regional sensibility that appeals to a national audience. Comprised of three imprints—Sasquatch Adult, Little Bigfoot (for kids), and Spruce Books, which the company describes as “giftable, highly visual books”—Sasquatch focuses on works that “nurture reading culture, from independent bookstores to organizations that provide books and learning opportunities to the underserved,” says publisher Jennifer Worick.

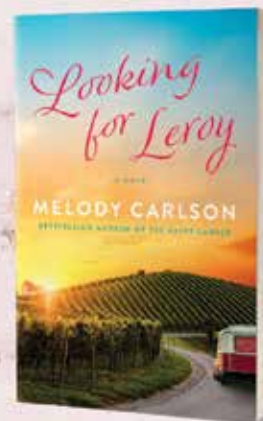
Sasquatch strives to amplify diverse voices, both in the subject matter of its books and in the authors, illustrators, and designers it hires to create them. For example, *Where’s Halmoni?* by Julie Kim was recently extolled in the *New York Times* for reflecting the nuances of growing up in a Korean American family. And the publisher’s nature and outdoors titles—a long-standing specialty—sold briskly as families looked for inventive ways to get outside during the pandemic. Its classic evergreen backlist title



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*The Encyclopedia of Country Living* is now available in a 50th anniversary edition.

Like many Pacific Northwest-based organizations, Sasquatch includes a land acknowledgment on its website's about page, and it invites readers to think about Native Peoples' land stewardship and present-day Indigenous cultures by linking to a map where people can learn more about the Indigenous communities in their own region. "We've strived to surface and tell these important stories," Worick says.

### Scablands Books

Spokane-based Scablands books is a "very tiny boutique publisher" that "is an enormous labor of love," says managing editor Sharma Shields. "We publish, and are inspired by, people within both the Pacific and Inland Northwest writing communities. It is our lifeblood."

Shields says support from arts organizations is key to the press's work. Among its supporters, Spokane Arts, a local nonprofit, "has been tremendous," she notes, providing a grant to help publish Native author Emma Noyes's graphic narrative *Baby Speaks Salish: A Language Manual Inspired by One Family's Effort to Raise a Salish Speaker*.

Artist Trust, another nonprofit that supports working artists, was instrumental in the Scablands anthology *Evergreen: Grim Tales and Verses from the Gloomy Northwest*, coedited by Shields and poetry editor Maya Jewell Zeller.

Shields also cites strong support from the indie bookstore community and local press. "We could not do what we do without local independent bookstores, including Auntie's, Wishing Tree Books, Atticus, and From Here," she says. "They are our direct contact with the public."

### Timber Press

Timber Press, an imprint of Workman Publishing (recently acquired by Hachette), publishes books in gardening, science, and natural history to share the natural world with readers. And with increased interest these subjects during the pandemic, the press has seen sales grow over the past two years. "The Pacific Northwest has always been a region filled with natural wonders, and we are inspired by it in every aspect of our publishing program," says associate publisher Kathryn Juergens.

Among Timber's recent successes and accomplishments are the *New York Times* bestseller *Nature's Best Hope* by Doug Tallamy, and its rebranded Field Guide series. The flexibility of the press has been key during the pandemic. "We have become more nimble and expanded both the categories that we publish in and the markets we sell to," Juergens notes.

### Tin House

One of the region's best-known indie publishers, Portland-based Tin House has garnered significant acclaim over the years, including major national and international literary





## PLA & Pacific Northwest Spotlight

award winners like Morgan Parker's *Magical Negro*, which won the 2019 National Book Critics Circle Award. Publisher Craig Popelars credits his "collaborative, adaptable, tenacious, dynamic" staff for creating great books—even under Covid duress.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion have long been core acquisition values, evident in Tin House's deep backlist of titles by BIPOC, queer, and other marginalized authors. Tin House was also very early to podcasting, and its *Between the Covers* podcast, hosted by David Naimon, has been hailed by *Book Riot*, *BuzzFeed*, the *Financial Times*, and the *Guardian*. And Tin House's coveted workshops and residencies emphasize craft and the building of great conversations. It's a lot to keep track of.

"I typically wake up at 3 a.m. to email myself a list of tasks, from the mundane—throw out that old yogurt in the office fridge—to ideas, inspiration, new writers I've seen in magazines and journals, marketing ideas, and just anything and everything to do the best by our program," Popelars says. "Some of it can get you down—printer backups, delayed shipments, paper shortages, rising costs. But at the end of the day, I love what we do at Tin House and feel fortunate to be part of something pretty damn special."

### Univ. of Washington Press

The largest publisher of scholarly and general interest books in the region, the University of Washington Press has seen "a large increase in both print and e-book sales" in recent years, says director Nicole Mitchell. "We're fortunate to be at the center of a vibrant regional book culture that supports and values our books and authors."

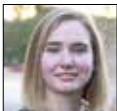
Like many presses, virtual author events drew audiences to UW Press, which not only saw an increase in local attendance but garnered a national and even international appeal, Mitchell says. "Our authors connected with readers to help make sense of the current moment and changing context, especially following the racial reckoning and uprisings of the summer of 2020."

Native and Indigenous studies is a burgeoning specialty area for UW Press. "While Native and Indigenous communities were hit hard by the pandemic, it was also clear that intergenerational learning and traditional knowledge about how to survive and thrive during times of crisis has been especially valuable," says editorial director Larin McLaughlin. ■

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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