

DARKUS

2022 ISSUE 1

MUSIC - FASHION & BEAUTY - LIFESTYLE



HARRY COLLETT

+ THE WOMBATS - OF MICE & MEN - VIN + OMI - TWENTY4SEVENTRENDS - VALIANT LADY

Editors Note

A huge welcome to all of our readers



The start of our 2022 got off to a slow start, but it was nevertheless a truly cathartic experience as we used the time to really focus on our growth and vision. A number of you have heard me say on numerous occasions that DARKUS is much more than just a magazine, and with 2022 also being our anniversary year, we have embraced that concept even more.

The heart of DARKUS is to celebrate and elevate voices, to give safe-spaces for creativity to grow, and most of all to create a platform where emerging names can have their passions in life acknowledged and heard. Myself and my team have had our own milestones over the years, and as a family of creatives ourselves, we are constantly learning and pushing ourselves.

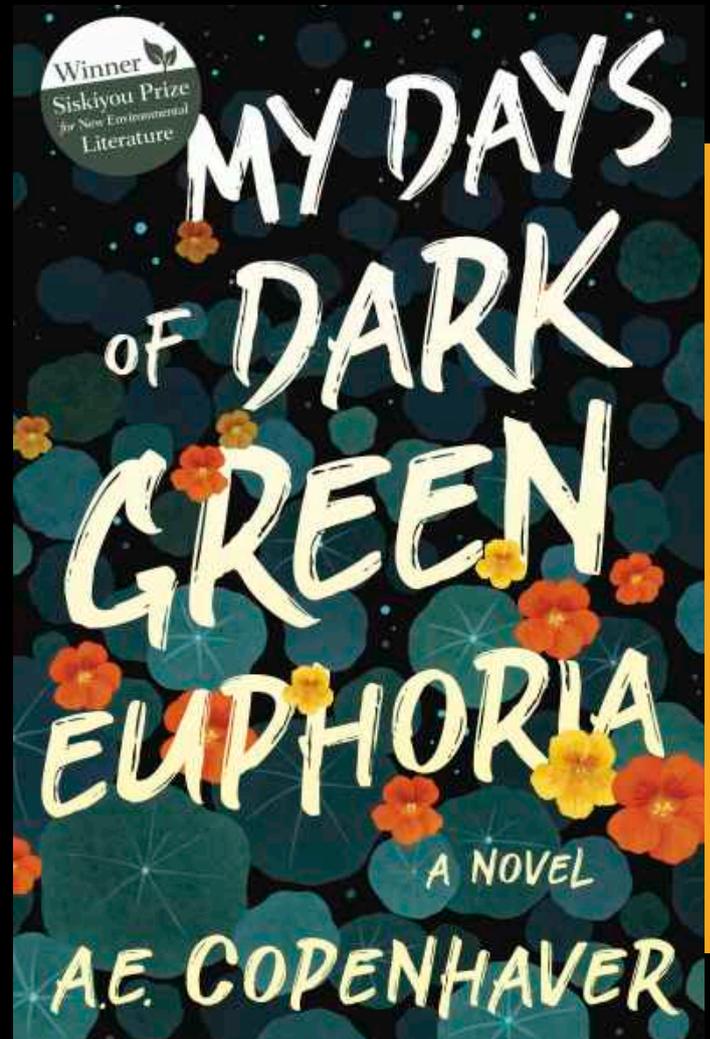
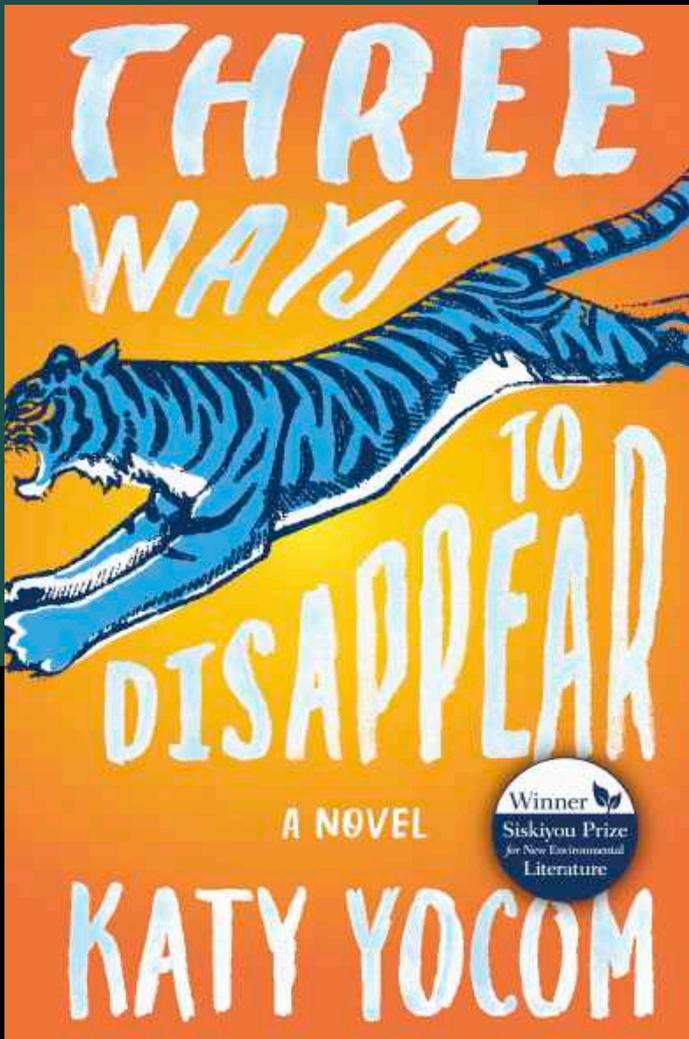
Many of you will know that when it comes to our interviews and chats, we have some rather deep and meaningful conversations, as our guests open up their heart and their soul and take us through the footsteps of their lives, because ultimately as a magazine we are invested in the people's lived experiences. As humans we all have our own personal journeys and it is what makes us, us. So as we stepped into 2022, we wanted to ensure this remained at the very core of what DARKUS represents.

Everything you see in this edition of the magazine has been carefully selected and curated, with the primary purpose of introducing you to a multitude of names which will leave you inspired, as they give us all an insight into their remarkable and colourful lives.

I have never called myself a journalist, but instead a storyteller who has a genuine interest in the lives of others, so as you read on I hope the guests we introduce you resonate with you like they did with me.

*With love and kindness,
Thushara*
Editor In Chief & Founder DARKUS

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Ashland Creek Press:

*Changing The World
One Book At A Time*

Article | Hattie Alders Interview | Midge Raymond & John Yunker

For over a decade Ashland Creek Press has had a vast impact on the publishing industry. A vegan boutique publishers started by Midge Raymond and John Yunker, they have created a different type of publishing; choosing to create books for vegans who wouldn't typically read about plant-based characters in their fiction. The books they publish are those which focus on the environment and the animal kingdom such as *Among Animals*, a collection of stories about the lives of animals in contemporary short fiction. This new branch of publishing has introduced an opening for veganism within the world of literature, bringing forward another way for individuals to learn about this lifestyle and consider it as an option for themselves. This interview gave an insight...

What kind of impact has Ashland Creek Press had?

We've survived for ten years as a small, independent press—so that's something in today's publishing world! And as the only vegan publisher of fiction, we're unique even among vegan publishers (which tend to publish cookbooks and other lifestyle books).

We've heard from many vegan readers who are happy to see vegan protagonists in our books who are not portrayed as mad activists but rather as regular people who are compassionate toward animals—this is rare in most fiction. We've also been happy to see several of our non-vegan authors adopt a vegan life over the years. And many of our books have been adopted at colleges and universities, whether for animal-studies or writing programs, or for "one read" programs for incoming freshmen. We're thankful to all of them for supporting a small press!

Our most significant contribution of late is probably our Writing for Animals program. Based on our book *Writing for Animals*, a collection of articles and essays about how to write more accurately and empathetically about animals, we've held several live Zoom classes and now have a self-paced online program as well. The live classes have drawn students from all around the world—many of them getting up before dawn or staying up late to be in class—and now the self-paced program makes it possible for all of those for whom the time zones are a challenge.

The writers who graduate from this program have had wonderful feedback for us, not only about the content of the class but especially about being part of a writing community that aims to make the world better for animals. We've had open mic readings and plan to do many more events in 2022 for our alumni community and beyond.

What was the inspiration to start Ashland Creek Press?/How did it start?

Back in the late 2000s, John wrote a novel, *The Tourist Trail*, and during that time his agent wasn't able to sell it to a mainstream publisher. This was in part due to the recession, but also because publishers didn't see how it would fit in—such categories as "climate fiction" or "eco-thriller" were not on the radar of mainstream publishers. So, we decided that there was a need in the publishing world that needed to be filled.

In 2011, we published John's book and opened up for submissions, and we were thrilled and amazed to receive so many incredible submissions that fell under our description "books with a world view." We've published more than thirty books now, and while we're still eager to publish environmental

books, the larger publishers are beginning to publish more climate-themed fiction, so we've begun to focus much more on animal-themed work.

What has been the most fulfilling part of it so far?

There are so many rewarding aspects to publishing great books about animals and the environment. It's incredible to see readers look at animals in a different way, or go vegetarian or vegan when they learn something that hadn't known before. It's thrilling to publish debut novelists—as writers ourselves, we know how much fun it is to launch a book into the world. We've seen our Siskiyou Prize grow, and have worked with some terrific judges, like Carol Adams and Jonathan Balcombe, who are amazing writers and vegan advocates.

Lately we've especially loved bringing writers together for the Writing for Animals program. Being a writer isn't for the faint of heart—and neither is being an animal advocate—so being both can be exhausting at times. Creating this community where writers can come together and share not only their writing but their vision for a better world has been wonderful.

What are the eventual goals for Ashland Creek Press?

We hope to keep publishing great writing, to grow our reputation for environmental and animal books, and to see our books on bestseller lists! Many of our authors have won awards and have received great recognition, but we look forward to breaking through to more and more readers in the future. We also look forward to building and growing our Writing for Animals community.

How does climate change tie in with publishing (and literature as a whole)?

Books reflect society—not only what we are but what we may become. There's been plenty of dystopian fiction out there, but we prefer books that are more hopeful—dystopian work is usually very bleak, based on the mistakes we've made, and we'd rather our books focus on the here and now, and on changing the world for the better (before it becomes dystopian).

How has it been over the pandemic?

As with most publishers, it was tough on book sales at first, but then, the longer people stayed home, the more they began to read, and this has been good for many of our authors who have seen a lovely uptick in sales.

Despite the struggles we share with most small businesses, the Writing for Animals class has been an enormously positive outcome of the pandemic. We've thought of doing such a program for years, perhaps as a conference, but it wasn't until Zoom became such a prominent platform that we realized we could get started and offer a program online. The program's popularity led to the self-paced program, and we're thinking of new ways to grow and engage this community of literary activists.

Despite the setback of the pandemic, Ashland Creek Press has been incredibly successful and has created a new sphere for conversations in publishing and literature around animal rights and environmentalism. All of their books and classes can be found online at EcoLit Books.



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