



Vol. 3, No. 17, April 23, 2021

- New Releases: *The Poisonkeeper*
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From the Editor

Happy Friday to all of our historical fiction lovers!

The new releases keep rolling out. This week we're excited to see that Deborah Swift has a new title released, *The Poisonkeeper*. The paperback is available now and the Kindle version will be released on May 18th.

I was thrilled to interview Alexa Kang as our featured author this week. After her interview questions were on the way to her, I had a private message conversation with another author friend. She'd just picked up some of her short stories and raved about Alexa Kang's writing style. She'd fallen in love with her writing already, which was nice to hear.

I know, I know. I think most of us as readers face the same dilemma with a towering stack of 'TBR books' either threatening to collapse on top of us, obscuring our body forever, or as so many of my friends find – they're carrying around a Kindle or other reading device with literally *hundreds* of books in the small space. But here we are, still sharing more books and more authors with one another. Hey, it's a tough job, but someone's got to do it!

Stay tuned for future issues –In the weeks ahead we have author interviews scheduled with Rachel Zolotov, JJ Toner, Clare Flynn, Ellie Midwood, Alex Schulz, Sharon Bradshaw, and lots more!

Trisha

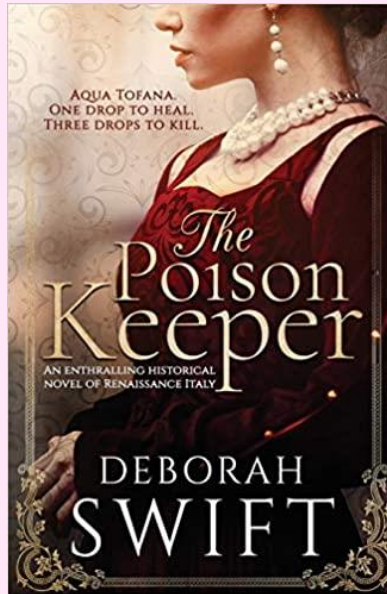
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New Releases!

The Poisonkeeper

Deborah Swift



Naples 1633

Aqua Tofana – One drop to heal. Three drops to kill.

Giulia Tofana longs for more responsibility in her mother's apothecary business, but Mamma has always been secretive and refuses to tell her the hidden keys to her success. But the day Mamma is arrested for the poisoning of the powerful Duke de Verdi, Giulia is shocked to uncover the darker side of her trade.

Giulia must run for her life, and escapes to Naples, under the shadow of Mount Vesuvius, to the home of her Aunt Isabetta, a famous courtesan. But when Giulia hears that her mother has been executed, and the cruel manner of her death, she swears she will wreak revenge on the Duke de Verdi.

The trouble is, Naples is in the grip of Domenico, the Duke's brother, who controls the city with the 'Camorra', the mafia. Worse, her Aunt Isabetta, under his thrall, insists that she should be consort to him.

Based on the legendary life of Giulia Tofana, this is a story of hidden family secrets, and how courage and love can overcome vengeance.

Author Spotlight: Alexa Kang



Hello Alexa Kang! We're excited to chat with you today about your writing. You have quite a selection of different books, in several different series, revolving around different World War 2 scenarios. What drew you to write historical fiction from this era?

Hi Trisha, thank you for having me! On why I write stories from the war era: I'm a huge fan of big, epic, tumultuous love stories, especially those set against a backdrop of earth-shattering events, or those with characters who are larger than life. This kind of story seems to have fallen out of vogue in contemporary media. I couldn't find any new book, movie, or TV show like *Wuthering Heights* and *Gone with the Wind*. The last really satisfying story of this kind for me was the movie *Titanic*. I decided that the only way I could have this kind of story was to write my own.

It so happened that I was writing fan fiction of an old, out-of-print manga series, *Candy Candy*. Most English readers won't know it, but this manga has a huge global following. The story *Candy Candy* ended in the mid-1920s. I wanted to write a love story about the children of the main cast in *Candy Candy*, set twenty years after *Candy Candy* ended. (These children did not exist in the manga but are construed by my own imagination.) Based on the *Candy Candy* timeline, my story would have to take place during WWII. A love story set during a huge event like WWII was exactly the kind of story I wanted to tell, so I went ahead with it. That story ultimately became my debut series *Rose of Anzio*.

I learned a lot about WWII history from researching for *Rose of Anzio*. During the war, there were so many real-life stories of human strengths and weaknesses, and humankind at its best and its ugliest. The history gives me so many ideas for writing, I couldn't stop.

Your *Rose of Anzio* series was the first published. Can you tell our readers a bit about the books in this series?

Yes. In *Rose of Anzio*, we watch two young people come of age just as the world enters the darkest part of WWII. The main character, Tessa, is only fourteen when the story begins. She was born and raised in London, and her parents sent her off to live with a family of distant relatives in America shortly before the Blitz. In Chicago, her new home, she has to adjust to living in a new country, among people in an upper-class social circle with whom she feels at odds and unfamiliar. All the while, she is feeling alone and worrying about the safety of her parents in England. The family she's living with has an eighteen-year-old son, Anthony, who is a student at the University of Chicago. Being the only son and the sole heir to his father's business, his life and future seem set. But all that is about to change as the war intensifies, and the country is about to draft a generation of young men to fight a global war.

So, we have two young people whose expectations of what their lives would be are completely altered by world events. In the series, they will both have a role to play in the war. We will see how they and those around them are thrust into one of the most dangerous chapters in history just as they are coming into their own. We'll see how they face the monumental challenges ahead, and still hold on to love and hope.

Your second series, the books in the 'Shanghai Story' series, revolves around the events in Shanghai leading up to WWII and the history of Jews and Jewish refugees in China. How did that topic evolve from an idea to your series?

It's always my goal to bring something different to readers. In *Rose of Anzio*, I told a fictionalized story of the Battle of Anzio in Italy. Anzio is not as well-known as battles such as Normandy and the Bulge. Currently in the WWII fiction genre, there are very few books about China. I'm bilingual and fluent in Chinese, and I've lived as an American expat in Shanghai. I have the unique advantage of being able to research both Chinese and English historical sources and write about Chinese people and culture from personal experience. I decided to apply my knowledge and add a different landscape to the current offering of WWII fiction out there.

Furthermore, the few current novels about WWII China I could find were all stories focusing on the trials and tribulations of a powerless Chinese woman. They were stories of a smaller scale. I like writing big, epic novels. I wanted my lead character to be in the epicenter of all the political storms, among powerful people, and in the middle of all the action. My main character, Clark, gave me the chance to do that.

There is also love and romance in my story. One of the most alluring types of romance is forbidden love. In the 1930s, interracial romance was not common. Society frowned upon women who were romantically involved with men outside of their race. I thought it would make a compelling plot to have Clark fall in love with a woman who is neither Chinese nor Asian. When I was living in Shanghai, I learned that China was one of the few countries that accepted Jewish refugees from Europe, and Shanghai had a thriving Jewish community until the war ended. So many people did not know this, including me. I wanted to incorporate the Jewish experience in Shanghai into my story. This led to the creation of my other main character, Eden, a Jewish refugee from Munich, and her love story with Clark.

Tell us about one of your favorite characters from one of your books.

A character I can never truly leave behind is Jesse Garland in my *Rose of Anzio* series. He's a handsome grifter from New York City, and a big part of the story. In Italy, he is a medic and a junior officer who serves alongside Anthony and Tessa. All his life, he had been groomed to cheat and con people. With his good looks, stylish appearance, and slick talks, he succeeded spectacularly. The war and the draft throw him for a loop when he finds himself in a war zone, saving lives. And for the first time, he falls in love. He falls hard for Tessa, who is already in love with Anthony. All this puts him at a crossroad, where he has to choose what kind of man he will become.

What do you love most about writing historical fiction?

I really enjoy going back in time and momentarily leaving behind the world today. Historical fiction is a very good escape, even though people in the past had to deal with their own problems and circumstances. I love learning about the past. When I see how much worse the world was during WWII, and how courageous and resilient people were in that time, it puts a lot of things into perspective.

I also enjoy coming across funny or curious anecdotes when I research. For example, it seems that Madame Chiang Kai-shek, the first lady of China during WWII, had an affair with U.S. Republican presidential nominee Wendell Willkie. Her husband, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, even barged into her room one morning looking under the bed to see if Willkie was hiding there.

For my current WIP, I've been researching the U.S. Women's Army Corps. I learned that when the U.S. military began its recruitment, an opposition had waged a slander campaign against the recruits in the army, accusing the women of having questionable moral characters. Incidentally, the army also employed the unfortunate slogan, "Release a man for combat". Of course, that slogan was meant to encourage women to step up for administrative roles so the men could go fight. But the slogan implied something salacious and fed even more into the negative perception about women in service. I find anecdotes like these funny and interesting.

Your newest book, *Last Night with Tokyo*, was released a few months ago. It's the first book in your 'Nisei War Series.' Can you tell us about this series and what led you to write these stories?

As I said earlier, I'm always looking for a new angle to bring something different to my readers and the genre. In WWII fiction, the Japanese side of the story hasn't been told very often. Even from an antagonist standpoint, they hardly have any coverage comparing to Nazi Germany. This is despite the fact that Japan was the country that pulled the United States into the war, was hit by two atomic bombs. Another aspect of the Japanese experience in WWII is the Japanese immigrants in the United States and their American-born children (Nisei). There are some novels about Japanese Americans during WWII. The most recent ones are about the Japanese internment. But American Nisei made great contributions during the war. I want to take my readers beyond the subject of the internment. The Nisei War Series will be a collection of standalone novels about American Nisei at war and in battles, as well as the consequences of Hiroshima.

Is there anything you'd like to share with us that I didn't ask you about?

I hope readers who don't read historical fiction will give it a chance. It's really an amazing experience of stepping back in time. Before I started writing novels, I didn't know much about WWII. Now I'm a huge

fan of movies, TV shows, and books of that era. My foray into writing historical fiction has gotten me interested in other historical periods too. I listen to a podcast called “History Unplugged”. The host, Scott Rank, did a 10-part series on the American Revolutionary War. It was so fascinating. I wondered why I didn’t find it as interesting when I learned about it in school as a kid. After that, I watched the TV series “Turn: Washington’s Spies”, and it was wonderful. I was in awe of how they could make it so suspenseful, even though we already know the outcome of the history. The cast was fantastic.



You can find Alexa Kang’s books here:

Rose of Anzio Series: <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B074CDRHH5>

Shanghai Story Trilogy: <https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B07JDL5N6J/>

Last Night with Tokyo Rose (Nisei War Series): <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B08S36L6FL/>

You can find Alexa Kang here:

website: <http://alexakang.com>

Facebook: <https://www.bookbub.com/profile/alex-a-kang>

Sign up for Alexa’s Newsletter: <https://alexakang.com/nlsubscribe/websitesignup/>

BIO: Alexa grew up in New York City and is a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania. She has traveled to more than 150 cities, and she loves to explore new places and different cultures. She loves writing larger-than-life love stories and 20th century historical fiction and hopes to bring you many more.

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