

Keynote: Donna Andrews



Donna Andrews was born in Yorktown, Virginia, the setting of *Murder with Peacocks* and *Revenge of the Wrought-Iron Flamingos*, and now lives and works in Reston, Virginia. *Probable Caws* (August 2026) and *Jay to the World* (October 2026) are the latest in her Agatha and Anthony winning Meg Langslow series. When not writing fiction, Andrews is a self-confessed nerd, rarely found away from her computer, unless she's messing in the garden.

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Keynote: Alma Katsu



Alma Katsu is the award-winning author of ten novels, her latest being *Incarnate*. She is best known for *The Hunger*, a reimagining of the story of the Donner Party, which was named by NPR as one of the 100 most loved horror stories and won the Western Heritage Award for best novel. Her story *The Wehrwolf* won the 2019 Stoker award for long fiction. She also writes spy thrillers, drawing on her career in intelligence, including *Red Widow* (nominated for the Thriller Writers award for best novel), and *The Invisible Enemy*, coming spring 2027. She has numerous works being developed for television, including *Black Vault* which is in pre-production with AMC Studios. She has a masters degree in fiction from the Johns Hopkins Writing Program and has been a contributing reviewer for *The Washington Post*.

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Traci Hunter Abramson



Traci Hunter Abramson worked for the Central Intelligence Agency for six years and credits the CIA with giving her a wealth of ideas as well as the skills needed to survive her children's teenage years. She has written more than fifty best-selling novels and is a ten-time Whitney Award winner.

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Dee Armstrong



Dee Armstrong writes twisty thrillers with heart, sass, and a paranormal edge. A former Air Force Russian linguist and national sparring champion, she believes in fierce justice and unforgettable heroines. When not writing, she's chasing her littles, sipping tea on the porch, and plotting against the weeds in her garden.

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Lonesome B. Augustine



Lonesome B. Augustine is a Black historical fiction and crime novelist whose work focuses on identity, justice, and faith. A U.S. Army veteran and speaker, he writes powerful stories like *Dark Prairie* and *ICE*, blending Black American history with cinematic storytelling.

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Peter Bacho



Peter Bacho is the author of seven books, including his critically acclaimed memoir, *Uncle Rico's Encore*. He has won an American Book Award, a Washington Governor's Writers Award, and the Murray Morgan Prize for Literature.



Sian Ann Bessey



Sian Ann Bessey was born in Cambridge, England, grew up on the island of Anglesey off the coast of North Wales, and now lives in Southeast Idaho. Americans think she has a British accent; British people think she has an American accent. She can't hear her accent at all but the name of the small Welsh village, "Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwllllantysiliogogogoch," still rolls off her tongue. Sian has published almost forty books. She's a *USA Today* best-selling author, a RONE award winner, and a finalist for Foreword Reviews Book of the Year and the Whitney Awards.

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Bill Blume



Bill Blume's love for the written word started in high school with an addiction to comic books that was hijacked by novels like *Frankenstein* and *Dragonflight*. He's worked as a 911 dispatcher for more than two decades and spent ten years as a board member for James River Writers.

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Austin S. Camacho



Austin S. Camacho is the author of eight novels about Washington DC-based private eye Hannibal Jones, five in the Stark and O'Brien international thriller series, the detective novel *Beyond Blue*, and the action thriller *True Target*. His short stories have been featured in several anthologies.

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Laura Di Franco



Laura Di Franco is the CEO of Brave Healer Productions (including Brave Business Books and Brave Kids Books), an award-winning publisher for holistic health and business experts with a mission to help the world experience what's possible. She's published 100+ book titles with over 3000 authors from 25 countries.

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Rich Follett



Rich Follett, Poet Laureate of Strasburg, VA and founder of the Shenandoah Poetry Collective, has authored *Responsorials* and *Geminations* (with Constance Stadler), *Silence*, *Inhabited*, and *Human &c.* through NeoPoesis Press, and *Photo-Ku* through NightWing Publications. Rich is featured in the ODU Virginia Poets Database at digitalcommons.odu.edu/virginiapoets.

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J.S. Furlong



J.S. Furlong is the award-winning author of books you can check out from the library: The Unimaginables series (*Hidden City*, *Tattooed Angel*, *Magick Squared*) currently being adapted for television, middle grade series, *Meredith's World*, and picture book *Mrs. Cheesely Loves Cheese*. First published work: "Antagonists", a LARP rulebook for *Vampire: The Masquerade*. Her first agent was Moses Cardona at John Hawkins & Associates.

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Deborah Hawkins



Deborah Hawkins is an editor with over a decade of experience strengthening authors' authentic voices. She provides a collaborative experience that empowers writers to strengthen and clarify their writing. Deborah is also a proud wife and mother who loves fitness, farming, reading across genres, and homeschooling.

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Jeffrey James Higgins



Jeffrey James Higgins is a retired supervisory special agent who writes thrillers, short stories, creative nonfiction, and essays. He has wrestled a suicide bomber, fought the Taliban in combat, and chased terrorists across five continents. He's published by Black Rose Writing and Severn River Publishing. He owns Elaine's Literary Salon.

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David Holtzman



David H. Holtzman is a writer, technologist, former military codebreaker, author, and futurist who is interested in global societal impacts brought about by ubiquitous access to unvetted information. He lives in Washington, D.C., and, when he's not working with tech companies, writes thriller novels.

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Judy Kelly



Judy Kelly is the author of three (soon four) award-winning novels. She writes Christian literary fiction with themes and characters relatable to everyone. Her novels are moving with strong plots, and her characters have depth. She has a style that captures the readers' attention immediately and once you start reading, you can't put her novels down.

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Blake Lynch



Blake Lynch is a poet, editor, and game developer based in Virginia. He holds a BFA from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts and a JD from the University of Pittsburgh School of Law. *Hanging the Angels* is his first full-length, poetry collection. His work is published in Chelsea, The Southampton Review, 2River, and elsewhere.

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S.C. Megale



S.C. Megale is a humanitarian, adventurer, and award-winning author first traditionally published by Macmillan at the age of twenty-three. Writing across multiple genres—fantasy, science fiction, romance, and young adult chief among them—Megale specializes in creating high-emotion stories set in unforgettable worlds. Megale is an IPPY Award gold medalist and is agented by Jessica Sinsheimer.

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Marilynn Deane Mendell



A noted national public speaker, author of hundreds of articles and two books, award-winning poet, former adjunct professor at Georgetown University, and a successful entrepreneur with three Woman of the Year awards, Mendell's forty-year career provides audiences with a real-life path towards publication.

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Adam Meyer



Adam Meyer is a screenwriter and fiction writer whose work has been selected for Best American Mystery and Suspense Stories, won the Derringer Award and been nominated for the Shamus Award. He is co-editor of the short story anthology *Hollywood Kills*, which won the Derringer Award for Best Anthology and was nominated for the Anthony Award. His screenwriting credits include more than two hundred hours of television, including the Emmy Award-winning PBS series, *Made With Love*.

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Brian Paone



Brian Paone—a Salem, Massachusetts native displaced to northern Virginia—has been a published novelist since 2007. Brian is primarily a speculative fiction author who doesn't know how to stay in his lane. His novels feature an array of subgenres for those readers who dare to venture just outside of realism.

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Katherine Pecka



Katherine Pecka's writing career spans work as a broadcast journalist, jobs in corporate public relations and communications, government consulting, military public affairs, and most recently as a Pentagon speechwriter. Kathy has degrees in Communicative Arts and Electronic Media. She lives in downtown Fredericksburg with two crazy dogs.

Isha M. Renta López



Isha M. Renta López is a Puerto Rico–born children's book author, founder of Semilla Cultural, a nonprofit promoting the Afro-Puerto Rican tradition of Bomba, and a meteorologist. Her children's book, *Sofía y su Tambor de Bomba*, celebrates culture, music, and storytelling, and directly connects to her nonprofit's programs.

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Ksenya Swinton



Ksenya Swinton is a fanfiction aficionado, having spent several years reading and publishing in the community. She is currently pursuing a degree in clinical counseling. She enjoys writing, art, cooking, and consuming and over-analyzing movies and TV shows.

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Steve Watkins



Steve Watkins is the author of 16 books, both fiction and nonfiction, adult, young adult, and middle grade--two from academic presses, one from a regional press, and the others from commercial publishers, including Scholastic, Candlewick, and Bloomsbury.

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Ellie Whitney



After earning a master's degree in teaching, Ellie spent over ten years as an English instructor and writing tutor. She has published in local, state, and national publications and won multiple writing contests. Currently, Ellie teaches adult education writing classes and freelances as a line editor for several award-winning authors.

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