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Betsy Kohn (left) retired at the beginning of 2025, Megan Daurer (right) has taken over as the communications director for Michigan City Area Schools. (photo by Kim Nowatzke)

MCAS's New "Biggest Cheerleader"

by Kim Nowatzke

As Betsy Kohn retires from what she considers Michigan City Area Schools' biggest cheerleader role, new Director of Communications Megan Daurer carries on, spotlighting all that's positive in the district.

Daurer moved up from her previous role as multimedia communications specialist at the beginning of the year. She began with MCAS in May 2023 after nearly six years with Peepers, filling a variety of roles in the Michigan City company. Prior to this, she received her bachelor's degree in communications from Purdue University.

"I was going to be an art teacher but at that time a lot of programs were being shut down and I got nervous about job security," she shared, explaining that she decided to pursue a minor in art and design studio instead.

Having a lot of connections with the MCAS team, when she heard about her previous role opening up, the 2012 Michigan City High School alumnus decided to go for it.

"I knew I wanted to work in MCAS. I decided to take that leap of faith," said Daurer. "I have helped spread as much positivity as I can. I just enjoy that."

Daurer's long list of responsibili-

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ties is wide and varied. There's the categories of media relations, graphics and image, school/parent communications, special projects and events, community relations, internal communications, electronic media and other miscellaneous tasks such as grant-writing, crisis communications and speech-writing.

She works closely with Anne Harbauer, who began at the end of January as the new multimedia communications specialist. Her job responsibilities focus on producing professional communications through a variety of media including generating content for MCAS' social media pages and website, writing press releases, taking photos, helping plan special events and campaigns, and assisting with special projects.

"Every day is just different," she Daurer. "I can be creative, which I love. My wheels are always turning. I want to try to promote Michigan City in a good light."

With obvious respect for her predecessor, she recognizes she has big shoes to fill.

As she turned to Kohn, she smiled, adding, "I still have so much learning with being in just a month in. I'm no Betsy yet ... I didn't expect myself to be here, but I am. I'm seeing things in a different perspective. I think Michigan City has been turning things around and taking it to the next level. We just need patience."

Though Kohn officially retired as of January 3, she is still accessible to Daurer as she takes on her new role. Kohn is actively involved with MCAS' spe-

cial projects on a consulting basis through her new business, Betsy Kohn Communications, LLC. These include the Strategic Plan, Retirement & Wall of Fame Dinner and the Summer Connections newsletter.

Kohn and Daurer shared details about one positive program the public can expect to see MCAS roll out soon. Part of the Strategic Plan, the Ambassador Program provides community members with a better behind-the-scenes look at the district, from finances to building safety to transportation and more.

"Hopefully, people will help us tell our story," commented Kohn. "People who want to take a deep dive. It will be fun and engaging."

Aiming for a diverse group of 20-25 members, including high-schoolers, the program will include seven monthly sessions, approximately two hours in length. Applications will be available late spring with a program kick-off in September 2025; a presentation is planned at the February 25 school board meeting.

The two are proud of the newly designed MCAS website, www.educatemc.net (www.mcas.k12.in.us also still works) where they explained the content is better branded together as a family. Visitors can expect a better search engine, language translation (currently in Spanish and Arabic) as well as more accessibility to individuals with disabilities. The new website is also more mobile-friendly and provides convenient parent quick links on the home page.

Rolled out last Thanksgiving break, it took a year to transform to the new platform as they "cleaned house," so to speak, on each aspect of the website.



Megan Daurer is grateful for her new leadership opportunity as Michigan City Area Schools' Communication Director.
(photo by Kim Nowatzke)

“Projects like this come up and it’s like a full-time job in itself,” explained Kohn. “This whole room (the technical training office) and Megan’s office was full of Post-it notes.”

What else does Kohn plan to do in retirement?

“Sleep in,” she answered with a laugh.

She explained that the director of communications is the staff member that gets the call – at about 3:30 a.m. – whenever there’s a district cancellation or delay and begins the communication process. This can take about 25 minutes at top speed.



Betsy Kohn, in her former role as Director of Communications, shares a smile at a MCAS City Wide Back to School Rally. (photo provided)

But, there is plenty that Betsy will miss and so many memories of her days at MCAS that she cherishes.

“Each year my favorite event was the One City One Sound concert. It is the biggest event (next to graduation) for MCAS each year and it is a magical experience to hear over 1,000 students all performing together,” she shared. “I also love to see our students in action making a positive impact in the community - the annual Better World Day each May, the TONS of food collected by schools district-wide for the Salvation Army each December, and Krueger’s annual Field Days and Living History Days are great examples of student-led learning in action.”

Looking back over her 18 years with MCAS, there’s a long list of additional events that she will fondly remember as well.

“I have fond memories of many special celebrations throughout the years, too,” Kohn continued. “Special events that come to mind are dedications of Pine and Lake Hills Elementary Schools, the

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opening of the Little Wolves Early Learning Center, the ribbon cutting for MCAS's solar installations, the unveiling of the renovated Wall of Fame, the Early College 10th Anniversary Celebration, the governor's visit to the Energy Academy at A.K. Smith, our Transportation Department's viral video about stop-arm safety, the dedication of multisensory rooms and accessible playgrounds at Joy and Pine, the unveiling of honorary street signs for Connie Bachmann and Joyce Westphal, Distinguished Graduate celebrations, and Dr. Eason-Watkins' retirement celebration. Those are just some of the many occasions I was honored to be a part of."

Moving on, Kohn can't look back on her time with MCAS and not note the impact that COVID had on her job.

"I will definitely always remember the dedication of so many administrators, teachers, and support staff during COVID. We rallied together to plan and had to adapt and problem-solve during a very challenging time. It was truly heartwarming to see how hard everyone worked to keep students learning, to ensure they had school meals, and to meet their social-emotional needs. That drive-through graduation ceremony for the Class of 2020 was truly something I will never forget!"

And, Kohn will miss the unique opportunities that her previous position afforded.



Betsy Kohn considered herself MCAS' greatest cheerleader during the 17 years she served as the district's Director of Communications. (photo provided)

"It's just fun to have been in a position to know a little bit about what is going on in every school – the positives but also the crises and challenges and how to problem solve them. I miss the variety and being in the know in that way. I like the challenge. You



Megan Daurer joins others at a MCAS booth for the 2024 Michigan City Police Department National Night Out. (photo provided)

are called to be creative in a lot of ways.”

Kohn will also continue to keep busy through her membership on (and past chair of) the advisory board of the Michigan City Salvation Army and the Lubeznik Center for the Arts board of directors where she serves as secretary.

“I got involved with both of these as a representative for the school system,” said Kohn. “I have a passion for both of these. Lubeznik is entering an exciting phase with a new strategic plan, including capital improvements. It’s exciting to be a part of that.”

Kohn is involved in Monday Musicales and active, especially in worship planning, at St. Luke United Lutheran Church, in Michigan City. She plays on a tennis league and enjoys playing pickleball with her husband of 27 years, Rudy Kohn. In fact, she met Rudy at the former Northwest Racquetball Club when she was a novice tennis player looking for a place to play. Their daughter, Sydney Kohn, another MCHS graduate, teaches second grade at Cold Spring Elementary School, which is located on the campus of Marian University in Indianapolis. In addition, Rudy and Betsy are looking forward to more travel, including a trip to France in May where they hope to attend the French Open tennis tournament.

But, Kohn has always preferred that the spotlight focus less on her and more on the positive

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For the MCHS 2023 prom, Director of Communications Betsy Kohn and Multimedia Communications Specialist Megan Daurer pose under the entry arch made by GEM Teacher Jeff Rochowiak and students. (photo provided)

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– primarily the students and staff – at Michigan City Area Schools. This behind-the-scenes approach hasn't changed as she hands off the baton to Daurer.

"I'm excited to see people like Megan who could go anywhere coming back to MCAS and being a part of our leadership team," she said.

Daurer grew up in Michigan City and describes herself as very family oriented, especially enjoying time with her two nephews (and anticipating the birth of a third soon).

The respect and admiration for her mother is obvious.

"My mom is Cheryl Daurer, the Director of LaPorte County Meals on Wheels. I strive to be like her. She is a strong supporter of the community and a great leader who dedicates her time to helping others. Her passion for service and commitment to making a difference inspires me."

Megan Daurer shared a recent fond memory of her involvement in the Community Challenge, an amateur sand sculpting competition at the Singing Sands Sand Sculpting Festival held in Washington Park.

"Last summer, I participated in the Singing Sands sculpturing contest with Meals on Wheels, and it was a unique and enjoyable experience! Meals on Wheels had two teams, including ours, which was made up of family and friends. While our sculpture



Megan Daurer (second from left) joined family and friends on a LaPorte County Meals on Wheels team for the Community Challenge, an amateur sand sculpting competition at the Singing Sands Sand Sculpting Festival held in Washington Park. (photo provided)



One of Megan Daurer's hobbies is crocheting. She sold handmade fruits and vegetables like these at Michigan City High School's 2024 Parent Network Craft Fair. (photo provided)

didn't win, the other Meals On Wheels team did, and we had a great time working together."

Daurer is also a member of the LaPorte County YMCA Advisory Board.

And, she has a passion for broadening her world.

"I love to travel to new places and hike with my partner, Nick Pabon. Our most recent trip was to Honolulu, Hawaii, where we hiked several trails on the island. The highlight of the trip was the Wiliwilinui Ridge Trail. Our favorite hike so far has been Camelback Mountain in Phoenix, Arizona. We are still figuring out where our next trip will be."

Daurer also enjoys crocheting and participated in the Michigan City High School Parent Network Craft Fair last year. Her specialties are crocheted fruits and vegetables, baby sweaters and baby blankets.

"I just bought a sewing machine and want to learn how to sew," she shared.

Bringing the focus back to her new position as director of communications at MCAS, Daurer wants the community to know that she "is grateful for this leadership opportunity and excited to bring new energy to the role."



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Lubeznik Center for the Arts Presents First Friday Poetry Slam

Lubeznik Center for the Arts (LCA) will host its annual First Friday Poetry Slam on Friday, March 7, 2025, from 5 to 8 p.m. Central.

At this year's Poetry Slam, the family of Kathleen Marie (1955-2024) is honoring her memory and great love of poetry. "Kathi" was the mother of Samuel Lubeznik (Erika) and Jesse Lubeznik-Tunstall (DuShawn), as well as a beloved sister, grandmother, aunt, cousin and friend. Please join us as we raise a glass and toast the memory of Kathi Marie, whose favorite poets were William Shakespeare and Bob Dylan. Her family will say a few words and treat the audience to one of her poems.



The Poetry Slam will begin with an open mic inviting performers to share their original poetry or favorite poems by other authors. Next, audience members will have the chance to become a poet themselves with a fill-in-the-blank poem, themed for the occasion. The slam will conclude with the Dumb Rhyming Word Game, made famous at the Green Mill.

Marc Kelly Smith, the founder of the Poetry Slam movement, will be back to host the event. As stated in the PBS television series, *The United States of Poetry*, a "strand of new poetry began at Chicago's Green Mill Tavern in 1987 when Marc Smith found a home for the Poetry Slam." Since then, performance poetry has spread throughout the world, exported to over 1000 cities large and small.

Admission is free, and poetry readings will begin at 5 p.m. Central. All are welcome to cheer on the performers, explore LCA's art exhibitions and enjoy the cash bar and complimentary light refreshments. Poets interested in participating in LCA's Poetry Slam should prepare poems under three minutes in length and register by contacting Jessie Sexton at 219-874-4900 ext. 107 or jsexton@lubeznikcenter.org. Spots are limited, so call or email today!

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“Mad About the Boy” is Ideal “Bridget Jones’ Comfort Food

by Andrew Tallackson

In “Mad About The Boy,” the prologue to the fourth and potentially final “Bridget Jones” movie, nearly every character whose lives intersected over the course of the films makes an appearance. The actors slip back into these characters with such ease, especially Renee Zellweger and most definitely Hugh Grant, it’s like “Bridget Jones” comfort food. It feels good to be back with these people.

Having just debuted on Peacock, “Mad About the Boy” is more sentimental and melancholy than its predecessors. Maybe that is because the film is intended

close to the series. Or maybe, it is because the title character is older and slightly wiser, not prone to ditzy detours that gave earlier outings their bite. She’s grieving, trying to find her place in the world.

But in terms of exploring how the character endures, first realized on the pages of Helen Fielding’s tales, makes for a tender, often charming experience.

Fielding’s 2013 book caused a bit of a stir by killing off Bridget’s beloved Mark Darcy. On film, Colin Firth played him as, well, Colin Firth. The handsome, if mumbling and insecure nerd. He ultimately became the grounded presence amid Bridget’s flighty antics, so we do feel the loss as “Mad About the Boy” begins. It’s been four years since Mark’s passing. Now the mother of two young children, Bridget is uneasy about rejoining the dating pool, despite insistence from her entire support circle.

Two suitors emerge. One is Roxster, a much-younger park ranger played with laidback appeal by Leo Woodall (Apple TV+’s “Prime Target”). The other is the stuffy, overly caffeinated science teacher at Bridget’s kids’ school, Scott Wallaker. He’s played by Chiwetel Ejiofor (the Oscar nominee for “12 Years a Slave”), cast against type from the bolder, more confident guys he tackles.

The previous movies had fun with Bridget’s self-aware defense mechanisms about her weight. That issue no longer exists, possibly because Zellweger is in great shape; more likely, our squeamishly sensitive climate put the kibosh on it. But the



Bridget Jones (Renee Zelleger) is courted by a much younger man (Leo Woddall) in “Bridget Jones: Mad About the Boy.”



“Mad About the Boy”

Running time: 124 minutes. Rated R for language and some sexual references.

actress remains a winning presence here. It’s like the actress has not skipped a beat: a performance of good cheer amid sadness. And Grant, my goodness, it’s like he has been itching to play Daniel, to say something deliciously naughty one more time. Gray around the edges, but forever a cad. That the screenplay depicts Bridget and Daniel at perfect ease with their history elevates the relationship to a refreshingly mature level.

(Ditto the great Emma Thompson, back as Bridget’s gynecologist and cruder than ever.)

And when Bridget returns to work, back as a producer for a local talk show, the movie gives her two female colleagues (Sarah Solemani, Josette Simon) who get what “Bridget Jones” movies are about: women who speak their minds, whenever and however they please.

The journey for Bridget, though, is in not finding the ideal replacement for Mark Darcy, but in permitting her to decide what she wants out of life, and who she wants to be part of it. So, we are a bit surprised by who she ends up with at the end.

Then again, that’s Bridget. Marching to her own beat. We’d expect nothing less.

Contact Andrew Tallackson at atallackson@gmail.com


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Harbor Country Hikers Plan Trip

The Harbor Country Hikers will hike Bendix Woods County Park in New Carlisle, Ind. on Saturday, March 1. Among the highlights will be a visit to the park's sugar bush (a stand of sugar maples) and a look at how maple syrup is made from the sap of those trees. Hannah Branchick, an interpretive naturalist with the county and overseer of the maple sugaring operation, will lead the hike.



The hike will also include some of the featured environments of Bendix Woods, such as a 27-acre nature preserve with wooded trails, ponds, prairies and open space. Rated moderately physically difficult, the hike gets underway at 1:00pm Eastern time in one of the park's shelters or in its parking lot, depending on the weather.

Though membership is preferred, all are welcome to explore Bendix Woods with the Hikers, and there is no charge to attend. For driving directions and advice on what to wear, visit harborcountryhikers.com or the group's Facebook page.

Berrien Community Foundation "For Good Grant" Applications

Berrien Community Foundation is now accepting applications for its For Good Grant program, which are due April 1, 2025.

"Last year we were able to fund over 40 very different projects that enhanced lives across the county through our For Good Grants program," said Berrien Community Foundation President Lisa Cripps-Downey. "BCF grants focus on the whole spectrum of what we believe makes our community a wonderful place to live, work and play – everything from the arts to education to caring for our seniors. It is so powerful to see what those gifts can do for our community."

For Good Grants come in two sizes: \$1,500 to \$15,000 or for amounts up to \$1,500. These grant opportunities are open to 501c3 nonprofit organizations, schools, religious organizations doing community work and government organizations serving residents of Berrien County.

Summer theater programming for youth, food pantries and conservation workshops for local farmers are just a few of the many ideas Berrien Community Foundation has funded in recent years. Most grant applications fall into one of the following categories: Arts, Children, Community Development and Special Needs, Education, Environment, Health, Seniors and Youth Leadership.

To apply for a For Good Grant, visit www.berriencommunity.org/ForGood. For more information, contact BCF Grants Coordinator Sharna Hudson at atsharna@berriencommunity.org.

Westchester Public Library

Westchester Public Library has curbside pickup at its Thomas and Hageman branches.

Use a library card or go online to place holds on up to 10 items, including DVDs and CDs. Once notified the items are available, park in specially-numbered spaces at each branch during pickup hours.

While parked, call the library phone number posted on the numbered space sign, tell staff your library card number and he/she will check out the items and take them to a table at the parking space and walk away. Patrons then can step out of their vehicle to retrieve them. Curbside hours are Monday-Friday (1 to 6 p.m. at Thomas and Hageman) and Saturday (11:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at Thomas and 1:30 to 4:30 p.m. at Hageman).

Hageman Library (219-926-9080) is located at 100 Francis St., Porter. Thomas Library (219-926-7696) is located at 200 W. Indiana Ave., Chesterton. Westchester Township History Museum (219-983-9715) is located at 700 W. Porter Ave., Chesterton. The Baugher Center is located at 100 W. Indiana Ave., Chesterton.

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LaPorte Little Theatre Club Presents "The Music Man"



Jacob Jackson as Harold Hill, and Danielle Bilderback as Marian Paroo



Danielle Bilderback, Christopher Jackson and Julie Phillips

The La Porte Little Theatre Club is opening their 100th season with an all time classic- The Music Man. Jacob Jackson and Danielle Bilderback lead the cast as Harold Hill and Marian Paroo. There are over 50 cast members and the stage is vibrant with beautiful costumes and exquisite choreography. A barbershop quartet, the pick-a-little ladies, and the Shapoo dance group are all ready for opening night. Christopher Jackson has his first lead as Winthrop Paroo and will blow you away with his

'Gary, Indiana' solo.

Directors Scott Lenig and Jim Snyder have been the masterminds behind this fantastic performance. There are new projections which add a lot to the stage scenery.

Come see The Music Man! Performances are February 28, March 1,2,6,7,8 & 9. Online tickets available at laportelittletheatreclub.com. Laporte Little Theatre is located at 218 'A' Street in La Porte.

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The Middle Act is a Mess, But “The Gorge” Still Delivers Cool Action, Romance

By Andrew Tallackson



Miles Teller and Anya Taylor-Joy star as elite snipers recruited to prevent hidden creatures from emerging in “The Gorge.”

“The Gorge” is the year’s first cool movie. Well, let’s tweak that. The first of a cool movie.

The script by junk-food wholesaler Zach Dean (“The Tomorrow War,” “Fast X”) is B-movie hokum, with gaping plot holes sure to leave viewers tossing out stink eye at their smart TVs. However, Director Scott Derrickson (“The Black Phone,” “Doctor Strange”), gives this new Apple TV+ film the A-list treatment, with two stars (Miles Teller, Anya Taylor-Joy) who not only approach the material seriously, but whose instant chemistry makes this a treat. And as long as Derrickson keeps his film above ground, before its schlocky horror roots emerge, the action and storytelling are terrific.

The movie’s first hour works best, toying with genres through elements of mystery, adventure, action and romance.

Teller (“Top Gun: Maverick”) and Taylor-Joy (“Furiosa: A Mad Max Story”) star as Levi and Drasa, snipers recruited to the same assignment. Each will staff outposts on opposite sides of a gorge in some undisclosed country. What’s down there? The guy Levi replaces is vague, referencing entities referred to as “Hollow Men.” Levi and Susan’s job is to make sure nothing escapes.

Why only two snipers, and why at only one location? If, indeed, something sinister waits below, they could arise anywhere along the gorge. But give the movie this: It is a tantalizing setup. What is down there and why?

Had “The Gorge” been made on the cheap, its B-movie intentions would be clearer. But Derrickson treats the first half as an engaging character study. Teller and Taylor-Joy both play burouts: people who love what they do, but are wrestling with a world of hurt. At the tital chasm, their courtship yield’s

★ ★ ★

“The Gorge”

Rated PG-13 for intense sequences of violence and action, brief strong language, some suggestive material

some of the best scenes. The two view each other through high-powered binoculars, communicating by writing down their thoughts on paper. If you didn’t know any better, you’d think “The Gorge” is an offbeat rom-com, with the actors cranking up the charm. There’s even a sly reference to Taylor-Joy’s Netflix smash “The Queen’s Gambit,” complete with the actress slipping into her iconic coy poise.

The gorge outposts are a triumph of setting and production design. The structures date back decades, but with enough firepower to take out a sizable army. The expanse between them is covered by a fine layer of mist. Cinematographer Dan Laustsen (the “John Wick” series) gives the space a natural look so it feels uncomfortably real. That something terrifying could pop up at any time.

As long as we don’t see what’s below that mist, the idea of the unknown is palpable, with the actors making you care about these two people. When the evil presence finally emerges, Derrickson stages one whopper of a spectacle: Levi and Drasa swing into action, proving their worth with all the weaponry and firepower zipping back and forth.

A better script, however, would provide Levi and Drasa with the crucial next scene, where they react with shock, confusion and horror as to what they’ve witnessed. Nope. For the most part, they accept the attack as part of the job, staging that moment without proper awe and fear.

Bad writing, folks. And it gets worse. “The Gorge”

sends Levi and Drasa below the surface...and everything fun and fresh about the story disintegrates. It may be no mistake that Derrickson used Laustsen on the project, because the murky visuals recall the 2006 video-game adaptation "Silent Hill," which he shot. Dreamlike, but cruddy, with beings that unfortunately resemble a certain "Guardians of the Galaxy" character. The reason for their existence is so lazy and unoriginal, the basis for so much horror garbage before it, it's like Dean, in crafting his script, never bothered to be creative.

Right when you're about to give up, though, Derrickson stages one doozy of an escape: Levi and Drasa, clinging to a jeep pulled sideways up the gorge. With Derrickson's camera swooping around the vehicle, the sequence ablaze with killer stunt work, the movie gets its mojo back. It is top-rate moviemaking. From there, it is back to the surface, where the greatest threat are monsters of the human variety.

Having begun his career in low-budget horror ("The Exorcism of Emily Rose," "Sinister"), Der-



rickson graduated to stories on a grander scale with "Doctor Marvel." He has the Hollywood clout now where he should have forced Dean to dream bigger, rethink the movie's middle act. Because what exists now are dynamite bookends to crap.

Rating: 3 stars

Contact Andrew Tallackson at atallackson@gmail.com

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And the Oscar Goes To...

by Andrew Tallackson

I have zero confidence in my picks.

That might be a first for me. In any other year, certain Oscar categories are givens. Performers or films that swept through award season with unbeatable momentum.

This year is fraught with controversy, much of it signified by the cancel-culture feeding frenzy over “Emilia Pérez.” Prior to January’s Golden Globes, the divisive trans/drug cartel musical was award-season indestructible. Then came resurfaced tweets by Best Actress nominee Karla Sofía Gascón on everything from Muslims to George Floyd to Oscars diversity...and the Oscar campaign for “Emilia Pérez” imploded. And with Gascón unapologetic for the controversial tweets, Netflix, the distributor, socially distanced itself from the film like it had COVID. Zoe Saldaña is still faring well on the awards circuit, but the rest of the film?

Crickets...

If it were me, every Oscar imaginable would go to “Wicked” for resurrecting the joy of going to the movies. That does not seem likely. So, that turns to my second choice, “Conclave,” which late last year appeared unbeatable. Then came Catholic Church opposition arguing the big twist is a colossal cheap shot at Catholic tradition.

“The Brutalist” is boiler-plate Oscar bait, and it may triumph, with Adrien Brody likely picking up his second Best Actor trophy. But again, controversy, that director Brady Corbet used AI to spiff up his Hungarian accent and that of Best Supporting Actress nominee Felicity Jones.

“Anora,” in the past two weeks, generated considerable awards traction...but I only lasted 40 minutes. It felt like I was watching porn, with Best Supporting Actor nominee Yura Borisov the equivalent of fingernails on a chalkboard.

So what does that leave for this year’s “Beat the Editor” contest? Good question. At the very least, readers with better Oscar instincts than me should fare well. That’s OK. Part of the fun is reading your ballots, glimpsing the insight you bring. A special thanks, as always, to Swingbelly’s for sponsoring our contest. It is an honor and a privilege having the restaurant be part of this annual tradition.

The Oscar telecast is Sunday, March 2, on ABC and Hulu. Our first- and second-place winners will be announced in the March 13 edition. So, without further ado, here are my predictions for this year’s Academy Awards:

Best Picture



A Scene from “Anora”

“Anora”; “The Brutalist”; “A Complete Unknown”; “Conclave”; “Dune: Part Two”; “Emilia Pérez”; “I’m Still Here”; “Nickel Boys”; “The Substance”; “Wicked.”

Academy voters have a way of celebrating the quirky flavor of the moment. Movies critics go gaga over, rack up trophies along the awards circuit, but lack the staying power of true classics. Case in point: “Birdman” (2014) and “The Shape of Water” (2017), which may have been hot right then and there, but these days are castaways to the Criterion Closet.

“Anora” is this year’s quirky hit. With “Emilia Pérez” out of the running, “Anora” has built the type of Oscar momentum that becomes unbeatable come Oscar night. Having quit the movie 45 minutes in, I cannot speak to the power of its second act. An interesting statistic worth sharing: Each time Ralph Fiennes is nominated for a Best Actor Oscar, he loses, but the film itself wins Best Picture (“Schindler’s List,” “The English Patient”). If history repeats itself, then that means “Conclave” takes the top prize. But with no director nod for Edward Berger, that complicates matters. Still, “Conclave,” which just won the BAFTA award for Best Film, would be the ideal upset.

Director

Jacques Audiard, “Emilia Pérez”; Sean Baker, “Anora”; Brady Corbet, “The Brutalist”; Coralie Fargeat, “The Substance”; James Mangold, “A Complete Unknown.”

If the Best Screenplay winner aligns with whichever film sweeps the night, then expect that film’s director to claim the prize. This could be a two-horse race between Baker and Corbet, but **Baker** is nabbing honor after prize, so he may claim the prize.

Actor

Adrien Brody, “The Brutalist”; Timothée Chalamet, “A Complete Unknown”; Colman Domingo, “Sing Sing”; Ralph Fiennes, “Conclave”; Sebastian Stan, “The Apprentice.”

Common sense dictates that **Adrien Brody** wins. Yes, there’s controversy over Corbet using AI to fine-tune the actor’s Hungarian accent, but the performance is so much more than his manner of speaking. Brody disappears body and soul into the role. He is the movie’s driving force from start to finish. A perfectly acceptable upset is Chalamet who, like Brody, does his trademark disappearing act to

bring Bob Dylan to life. And there is Fiennes for delivering a career high...but again, that statistic.

Actress

Cynthia Erivo, “Wicked”; Karla Sofía Gascón, “Emilia Pérez”; Mikey Madison, “Anora”; Demi Moore, “The Substance”; Fernanda Torres, “I’m Still Here.”

Here, it hangs on the mood of Academy voters. They like to reward ingenues (Jennifer Lawrence, Brie Larson), but also enjoy celebrating actresses who’ve paid their dues. Madison, as the title sex worker, was the surprising upset at the BAFTAs, but **Moore** has steadily earned her share of accolades. I’m betting it’s “paid their dues” night. Moore, after decades of being dismissed as a “popcorn actress,” threw everything she’s got into “The Substance.” A brave, wickedly funny performance whose final scene earns one shockingly big laugh. The best possible upset: Erivo for claiming Elphaba as her own, and breaking our hearts in the process.

Supporting Actor

Yura Borisov, “Anora”; Kieran Culkin, “A Real Pain”; Edward Norton, “A Complete Unknown”; Guy Pearce, “The Brutalist”; Jeremy Strong, “The Apprentice”

This is **Culkin’s** race to lose. It has been from the start. The performance feels so real, it’s made some viewers uncomfortable, that they know people like the one he plays. But isn’t the point of truly great acting? Where we never see the performance, but a person of flesh and blood? Culkin teeters between powerful moments of truth and undiagnosed mental illness. It’s a fascinating journey to experience.

Supporting Actress

Monica Barbaro, “A Complete Unknown”; Ariana Grande, “Wicked”; Felicity Jones, “The Brutalist”; Isabella Rossellini, “Conclave”; Zoe Saldaña, “Emilia Pérez.”

The only constant in the “Emilia Pérez” debacle is **Saldana**, who has claimed statue after statue along the awards circuit. And she deserves it. The performance is tough, emotional and unexpected. The ideal upsets: the comedic charms of Grande in “Wicked” and the scene-stealing power of Rossellini in “Conclave.”

Contact Andrew Tallackson at atallackson@gmail.com

Walkin' the Windows

Why have Indiana and Michigan towns like Michigan City, Three Oaks, Buchanan, Bridgman, Sawyer, LaPorte, and Dowagiac become so popular, particularly on weekends?

I posit that, with their charming mixes of eye-catching storefronts, they satisfy a deep yearning in our souls to do some satisfying window shopping. Tough times or not, window shopping is always a bargain.

Best of all, you have to do it on foot, not with your thumbs on some tiny screen.

Sure, you can get anything you want at singer Arlo Guthrie's "Alice's Restaurant;" and at that sprawling, 24/7, online shopping center; but you don't get the satisfaction of strolling along a downtown sidewalk and seeing what delights merchants have put before us.

Case in point:

When Natalie scheduled a last-minute doctor's appointment in Bridgman, Mich. in January of 2025, I volunteered to accompany her. I was anxious to hear the doctor's opinion and suggestions, but I also saw an opportunity to *walk* some errands and do a spot of window shopping.

So when Natalie was all checked in, I took off on foot to tend to business. First to the nearby credit union to deposit money for an organization I serve as treasurer. And then a dash across Lake Street to the Bridgman Public Library to seek professional assistance in making copies, for friends and relatives, of a Christmas story I had just written. (Friendly hint to aspiring writers: the best time to write a Christmas story is after the Yuletide Season when the holiday glow is still bright. Just sayin'.)

I received all the help I needed at the library, and then I walked east along Lake

Street to the post office. The sidewalk, like the street, was freshly plowed following more than a bit of lake-effect snow the night before. So I had sure footing as I passed some shops I had only glanced at on the many times I passed in the car. (Warning to motorists: DO NOT WINDOW SHOP WHILE DRIVING. That amounts to distracted driving, in my book at least.)

Two shops in particular caught my eye, and I stopped in front of one of them and said to myself: "There's some cool stuff here. I'm coming back for sure."

And then on to the post office where I mailed my Christmas story to friends and family, bought some stamps, and checked out some way-cool greeting

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Charles McKelvy



cards for all occasions.

I walked back to the clinic where Natalie was still with the doctor, and started writing this story with good old pen and paper.

I was most pleased with my walkin' the windows in Bridgman, and I fondly recall a recent visit Natalie and I made to Dowagiac, Mich. to have lunch with our friend Hilary Mancik at a restaurant on South Front Street. Hilary had to get right back to work after lunch at a nearby hospital, so we decided to walk off our Chinese feast by strolling up and down Front Street, from south to north.

Been there, done that a zillion times, and we certainly have our favorite windows to shop, but a store I had but paid scant notice to on previous visits jumped out at me with its lovely window display of home furnishings and such.

"How did I not notice this before?" I asked Natalie.

"I'm surprised," Natalie said, "because these are just the kinds of things you like."

And so we went in and browsed a bit. Lo and behold, I happened upon a display of loose-leaf teas

with a literary bent. I bent over and examined the four “Literary Tea” offerings from Simpson & Vail® (svtea.com.) For starters I selected the “William Shakespeare” blend which consisted of Congo black tea, lavender petals, rose petals, rosemary, and bergamot oil. I brewed up a pot as soon as we got home, and I enjoyed it from the first sip to the last. Yes, I could order more online, but what’s the fun of that when I can buy it from the merchant next time we visit Dowagiac? And, yes, I will try the other three blends, which, if memory serves, included Beatrix Potter’s Organic Herbal Tisane Blend. (All right, I cheated and went to the company’s website and saw that they have an entire novel’s worth of literary teas including black-tea blends in honor of both Charles Dickens and Edgar Allan Poe. So, so tempting just to order online, but that would deprive me of the pleasure of purchasing my next purchase in person at that shop in Dowagiac with the lovely window display.)

The takeaway from all this: window shopping opens the world to us. We discover treasured eye-candy we didn’t know existed. And, we keep the blood circulating as we walk the sidewalks of our favorite downtowns.

Window shoppers are a friendly lot, and we greet one another with genuine warmth. Hey, we’re out and about, and the talk of the town is don’t frown. Enjoy what’s in that next window.

Maybe we can’t live without it, and maybe we can, but it’s so much fun searching for treasures in the company of other window shoppers. And it sure beat sitting home alone in front of a flickering screen, idly thumbing from one “order now” option to another. What’s the fun in that?

So, yes, walkin’ the windows is a group effort. It is best done with loved ones. Like that day in Dowagiac when Natalie nudged me into the shop with the exotic tea by saying, “this is just the kind of stuff

you like.”

And, of course, it was.

So thank you, Natalie, for our endless walks up and down small-town sidewalks. We even enjoy window shopping in really big cities, like the Big Apple itself. I could tell quite the tale of the delightful day in December 1985 we spent doing just that in the Big Apple—New York City. Who knew that a button shop in the Garment District could be such a treasure trove? The elderly couple who owned the shop were utterly charming and sold Natalie every kind of handmade button she could ever want. And she wanted fanciful buttons for her friend back in Chicago who designed clothes for her. (Yes, that’s a story for another time.)

While we were exploring the wonderful world of buttons, the proprietress saw that I was under the weather, with some flu bug or whatever. She took one look at my runny nose and said, “You go straight from here to the diner next door and have yourself a big bowl of chicken noodle soup. You’ll be good as new.”

And I was. So much so that Natalie and I were able to shop the rest of the day away in lower Manhattan. And, yes, we did catch a glimpse of Woody Allen playing some wicked jazz licks on his licorice stick at a way-cool club for hip cats and satin dolls. Alas, Natalie said we could catch his act next time we were in Manhattan, but you know how that turned out. Or didn’t.

And now, if you’ll excuse me, we find ourselves in downtown Niles, Mich. where some serious window shopping is always in order, especially when there before my wondering eyes I behold a tea room beyond all tea rooms. You know we went in and—well, that’s a story for next time.

###

Bet there are some way-cool windows to behold in these funky old buildings.

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Kennedy's Kitchen Brings Toe-Tapping Irish Tunes to the Box Factory



What better way to get ready for the upcoming St. Patrick's Day celebration than with pub songs, sing-alongs and ripping dance tunes from the Celtic tradition? That's the fare that will be presented by Kennedy's Kitchen on Saturday, March 8, 7-9 p.m., at the Box Factory for the Arts, 1101 Broad St.

Make sure to reserve your seats for this popular Irish-music band from South Bend. Tickets are \$25 for cabaret seating in front or \$15 general admission if purchased in advance at ticketstripe.com/kennedys-kitchen. Tickets at the door are \$20. Free admission for children 12 and under. A cash bar will be available.

Register Now for March Gardening School

A two-day Gardening School, open to the public, hosted by the River Valley Garden Club, will be held at Harbert Community Church, 6444 Sawyer Road, Sawyer on March 28 and March 29.

The topics covered will be basic botany, soils, growing outdoor flowers, propagation, a propagation workshop and composting. Presenters are from MSU Extension, Western Michigan University, and Berrien Co. Conservation District.

Sponsored by Michigan Garden Clubs, the registration fees for the two days is \$60 for garden club members and \$75 for nonmembers. The sessions include a continental breakfast and lunch each day.

To attend, please register and pay in advance at migardenclubs.org. Registration is limited to 60 and closes March 1.

For more information regarding registration, visit migardenclubs.org. Questions: Elizabeth Palulis evpalulis@yahoo.com.

Anyone with an interest in gardening is always welcome at the River Valley Garden Club. The club has field trips, guest speakers, a member's plant auction, and hands-on workshops in addition to the annual plant sale and monthly meetings. The club is also involved in service projects throughout the year. Members come from Indiana and throughout southwest Michigan. rivervalleygardenclub.org

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(GIFT VIII) initiative. This is one of 30 implementation grants being awarded through GIFT VIII, a statewide Lilly Endowment initiative designed to support the efforts of community foundations and their partners to strengthen quality of life for the people in the towns, cities, counties, and regions they serve.

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HIGH INDIVIDUAL GAMES

	SCORE
1. Dottie Brinckman	186
1. Mary Lou McFadden	186
2. June Salmon	159
3. Pat Collado	158
4. Lisa Albers	155
5. Kathy Staninger	150

SPLITS

Nancy Klausner 2-7-8

Mary Clohessy 5-8-10

Mary McDonald 7-10

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Kathy Staninger, Dottie Brinckman

New Buffalo Township Library March Events

Adult Programs

Chess Club

Every Thursday 6:00 – 8:00 pm

Team Puzzle Tournament

Tuesday, March 4th 5:30 pm

Harbor Country Film Group with Eve Moran

Saturday, March 8th 1:00 pm

For Pete's Sake - Acoustic Live Show

Monday, March 10th 6:30 pm

Library Board Meeting

Tuesday, March 11th 4:15 pm

Lakefront Wonders of Berrien County

Monday, March 17th 6:00 pm

Jerry DeCaire, Marvel-Comics Artist

Saturday, March 22nd 11:00 am

NBTL Book Club

Tuesday, March 25th 10:00 am

Youth Programs

Story Time

Every Monday 10:00 am

Read to a Dog

Every Tuesday 10:30 am

Craft Time

Every Wednesday 9:00 am – 4:30 pm

Read to a Dog

Every Wednesday 4:00 – 4:45 pm

Tween Maker Space – Walk-in

Every Thursday 3:30 – 5:30 pm

Teen Maker Space – Walk-in

Every Thursday 5:30 – 7:30 pm

Spanish Story Time

Every Friday 10:00 am

Lego Club

Every Saturday 9:00 am – 1:30 pm

Team Puzzle Tournament

Tuesday, March 4th 5:30 pm

Coastline Children's Film Festival - Young Filmmaker's Competition Film Screening

Saturday, March 15th 1:00 pm

Coastline Children's Film Festival - The Wild Robot Screening

Saturday, March 15th 2:30 pm

Jerry DeCaire, Marvel-Comics Artist

Saturday, March 22nd 11:00 am

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On February 27, 1807, poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was born in Portland, ME.

On February 27, 1900, the Union of South Africa was created after British troops defeated the Boers in the “Battle of Paardeberg.”

On February 27, 1922, in a unanimous decision, the United States Supreme Court guaranteed women the right to vote.

On February 27, 1942, during World War II, the Japanese sank 13 United States warships (while losing 2 of their own) in the “Battle of the Java Sea.”

On February 27, 1960, the U.S. Olympic hockey team defeated the Soviets, 3-2, at the Winter Games in Squaw Valley, CA.

On February 27, 1982, an Atlanta jury found Wayne Williams guilty of the slaying, over a two year period, of 28 young blacks.

On February 27, 1997, divorce became legal in Ireland.

On February 28, 1849, the ship California arrived at San Francisco, carrying the first gold seekers.

On February 28, 1917, it was reported that the United States had intercepted the “Zimmermann Telegraph,” reputed to be a proposal for a Mexican-German alliance should the U.S. enter World War I.

On February 28, 1975, 41 people were killed when a London subway train crashed into the end of a tunnel.

On February 28, 1983, the final episode of “M*A*S*H” aired on CBS television.

On February 28, 2001, John Painter, World War I doughboy, and the nation’s oldest veteran, died, in Hermitage, TN, at the age of 112.

On February 29, 1968, the discovery of the first “pulsar,” a star that emits regular radio waves, was announced by Dr. Jocelyn Bell Burnell in Cambridge, England.

On March 1, 1781, the American Colonies adopted the “Articles of Confederation,” a prelude to the formation of the federal union.

On March 1, 1864, Rebecca Lee received a medical degree from Boston’s “New England Female Medical College,” becoming the first black woman to be licensed to practice medicine in America.

On March 1, 1872, Congress authorized the creation of Yellowstone National Park.

On March 1, 1932, the infant son of Colonel and Mrs. Charles A. Lindberg was kidnapped from his Hopewell, NJ, bedroom.

On March 1, 1962, in Garden City, MI, the first K-Mart store opened for business.

On March 2, 1776, the Navy and Marines fought their first battle of the Revolutionary War, capturing a British fort on the Bahamas' New Providence Island.

On March 2, 1793, American political leader Samuel Houston, who served as the first president of the Republic of Texas, was born in Virginia.

On March 2, 1836, Texas declared itself to be a free and independent nation, no longer bound by the laws of the Republic of Mexico.

On March 2, 1917, Puerto Ricans were granted United States citizenship.

On March 2, 1933, the motion picture "King Kong," starring Fay Wray, premiered in New York.

On March 2, 1962, Wilt Chamberlain, playing for Philadelphia, scored 100 points against the New York Knicks.

On March 2, 1973, Arab gunmen, holding the Saudi Arabian Embassy in Sudan, killed the United States ambassador and his charge d'affaires.

On March 3, 1791, the District of Columbia was organized as the seat of the federal government.

On March 3, 1791, Congress passed the nation's first tax law, which imposed a levy on spirits, distilled in the United States.

On March 3, 1831, Chicago railroad-car magnate George Pullman was born in Brocton, NY.

On March 3, 1851, Congress appropriated \$250 for President Millard Fillmore to buy books to start a library in the White House.

On March 3, 1875, Carmen, Bizet's world famous opera, premiered in Paris.

On March 3, 1887, Anne Sullivan arrived at the home of Captain and Mrs. Arthur Keller to become the teacher of their blind and deaf 6-year-old daughter, Helen.

On March 3, 1966, 58 were killed as a series of tornadoes struck Mississippi and western Alabama.

On March 4, 1747, Casimir Pulaski, the nobleman who became a hero of the American Revolution, was born in Winiary, Poland.

On March 4, 1801, Thomas Jefferson became the first president to be inaugurated in Washington, the nation's new capital.

On March 4, 1865, Abraham Lincoln, in his inaugural address, uttered these famous words, "With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right..."

On March 4, 1978, under the banner headline, "So Long, Chicago," the 103-year-old Chicago Daily News, published its last issue.

On March 5, 1770, in what came to be known as the "Boston Massacre," British soldiers opened fire on a taunting crowd, killing an undisclosed number of people.

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The Girlfriend Sale presents a "Winter Warm Up Sale" Saturday, March 1, 10 a.m.-2 p.m., and Sunday, March 2, Noon-4 p.m. One room, two days, three ways to save big on new 2025 boutique merchandise, red hot orange dot markdowns and a curated collection of consignment items. Check out our Facebook page "the girlfriend sale" for sale updates and sneak peeks the week of the sale. Bonus: we have our Spring Girlfriend Sale dates set and will be scheduling early participation appointments at this sale!

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MCAS Wall of Fame Nominations

Michigan City Area Schools seeks nominations for the 2025 Wall of Fame through Friday, March 28.

The annual award, first presented in 1976, honors former school employees who made outstanding contributions to MCAS children. Employees from every area are eligible: administrators; custodians; food-service personnel; instructional assistants; maintenance personnel; paraprofessionals, teachers; transportation staff; and secretarial staff.

To qualify, MCAS must have employed the candidate for at least 15 years. Special circumstances may be considered for those not meeting the requirement due to hardship or death. Candidates must have been retired or separated from the school system for at least five years. Because retirees occasionally are called back to service, the date of separation is considered the official retirement date, not including subsequent employment by MCAS. Employees from schools independent before school reorganization, or schools no longer in existence, are eligible. Death does not make a person ineligible.

All applications remain on file for three years. At the end of that time, candidates must be renominated. Forms and a complete list of past recipients are available at <http://EducateMC.net/WOF>.

Contact Betsy Kohn at (219) 877-7770 or email bkohn@educateMC.net for more details.

Duneland Photography Club

Duneland Photography Club's "Winter Wonders" exhibit runs through Thursday, Feb. 27, at Art Barn School of Art, 695 N. County Road 400 East, Valparaiso.

The exhibit highlights works by club members. Call (219) 462-9009 or visit www.artbarnschool.org for more details.

Along Came a Spider by James Patterson
(available in hardcover or paperback, in bookstores and online. Also available as an eBook or an audiobook. 449 pages.)

James Patterson is listed as the world's No. 1 best-selling writer. With 380 million books sold, that's a pretty hard fact to dispute. And with Alex Cross being one of his most enduring characters, it was time to discover where this series began and why.

The author has a crisp writing style, short chapters and a no-nonsense way of keeping your attention. He plays his characters like a well-oiled machine, complete with a mystery that begs to be solved.

Along Came a Spider, published in 1993, opens with the kidnapping and murder of the Lindbergh baby back in 1932. The smooth manner of the crime, the question to this day as to whether Bruno Hauptmann really was the kidnapper, is fodder for the mind of one man many years later, a man who makes Alex Cross doubt his own abilities as a cop and psychologist.

In present day, two black women, a mother and her 14-year-old daughter, and 3 year-old son, are stabbed numerous times. The mother and daughter are known prostitutes, but did that make their murders any less horrendous or less important?

We meet Cross, a Washington, D.C, police detective with a doctorate in psychology. His children are taken out of school by Mr. Soneji, a beloved teacher no less, and never seen again.

So-o-o-o, where were the agents watching the children? Keeping this information from the media is impossible, and soon it is all over the TV, internet and newspapers. Arriving on the scene in record time is Jessie Flanagan, first female head of the Secret Service. Is she more interested in the missing children? Or that her job and reputation are now on the line?

Cross. He's a black man, still living in the same slums of the city he grew up in with his two children and grandmother. His wife, Marie, was killed in a drive-by shooting. He's a big man with a big heart,

Off the Book Shelf

by Sally Carpenter



and the ability to sniff out lies and con artists. His best friend is another black man and detective, John Sampson, who understands Alex and his almost obsessive need to uncover crooks and murderers.

Flanagan is tall, blond and beautiful, and the first woman who attracts Alex Cross' attention since his wife was killed. Is working together and dating a good idea? Patterson does a good job giving us a look at that possibility plus, of course, the inevitable look at a black man's and white woman's relationship, especially the two being such high profile individuals. And with two Type A personalities, who knows how that will affect the investigation.

Alex and Sampson also face the "who's more important" question when they are told to back off the killing of the black family and devote all their time to finding the now-missing Maggie Rose and "Shrimpie" Goldberg. Alex is angry the police don't consider the black family as important as the rich white kids.

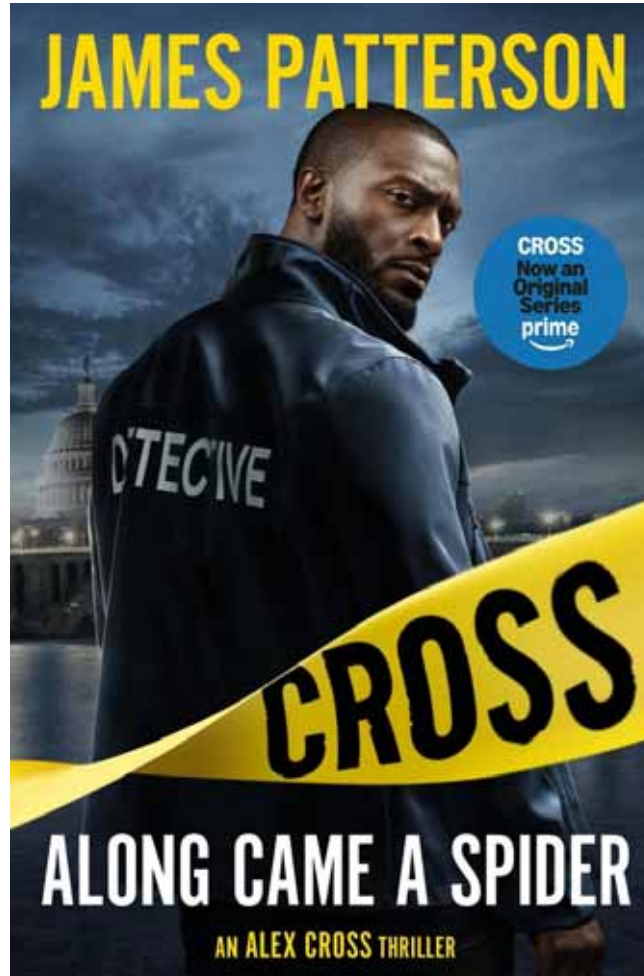
Alex also discovers Mr. Soneji really is Mr. Murphy, a quiet, unassuming family man. He gives all the indication of being a dual personality, but he's so good, Soneji/Murphy may be giving an

Academy Award performance.

The final word: This may seem like a long book at more than 400 pages, but the whole multiple personality line and political aspects are fascinating. Also, can one case be more important than another simply because of the size of the bank account? That keeps you reading and wondering how this plays out. Because, in the long run, there are two kidnapped children, as well as two adults and one child dead who all deserve justice. And who knows? Could there be a connection between the two incidents?

On a plot twist note, I was really surprised at the resolution of the Alex/Jezzie affair.

Till next time, happy reading!



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