

# Author's debut novel laced with romance, intrigue, magical realism

Let's begin with the alluring title of this week's book: "The Bookstore of Other Languages." Author Victoria Josslin, who splits her time between Bainbridge Island and New Mexico, weaves together romance, international intrigue and a dash of magical realism in this uneven but entertaining debut novel.

The eponymous Seattle bookstore not only stocks books in scores of different languages, it also sells the ability to read and/or speak those languages.

Bryce Hanford is the single, 38-year-old, owner of a computer business up in the San Juan Islands. He has to go into Seattle one day for a medical procedure and stops in at the bookstore. Although he's mildly interested in taking on the challenge of reading a book in a foreign language, he is nonplussed by the store employee's description of transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS), a procedure that ostensibly transmits language skills to clients on a temporary basis.

Bryce flees the premises to find a bookstore that sells more conventional offerings. But only a short while after returning to his home and



Author Victoria Josslin

customary routine in the San Juan Islands, he gets a frantic call from his uncle. Bryce's thoroughly unpleasant cousin Brenda has gotten herself into yet another fix of some sort — this time in Albania. Uncle Mel asks Bryce to go extricate his cousin from the mess she's in — and he will pay for all of his nephew's expenses.

Reluctantly, Bryce agrees, and he realizes that the only way he can do this expediently is to stop in at the Bookstore of Other

freewheeling tale about Bryce and his forays into foreign realms, tossing in additional misadventures with international thieves, domestic healthcare and — most treacherously — affairs of the heart.

Josslin's descriptive powers are top-notch. The hospital rooms, restaurants, family birthday parties and street scenes are detailed with authority and imagination.

Likewise, the character development is multifaceted and adept. That's true for the main players, at least. Some of the secondary characters — Brenda, for example — tend to be more cartoonish. But taken altogether, the interplay seems to work pretty well.

The connectivity of the hybrid storyline is less assured. Josslin tosses together elements of science fiction, romance, conspiracy, cozy mystery, philosophy and family drama. Moving from one scenario to the next, there are tonal differences that can be rather jarring.



The cover of Victoria Josslin's 'The Bookstore of Other Languages.'

There are a couple of coincidences that seem to be too good to be true. And a business deal that concludes one of the story threads seems implausibly tidy.

While not flawless, "The Bookstore of Other Languages" is the kind of story you'll be eager to get back to every time you set it down. Its underlying affirmation of the value of human relationships is beguiling.

*The Bookmonger is Barbara Lloyd McMichael, who writes this weekly column focusing on the books, authors and publishers of the Pacific Northwest. Contact her at [bkmonger@nwlink.com](mailto:bkmonger@nwlink.com)*

**"The Bookstore of Other Languages"**  
By Victoria Josslin  
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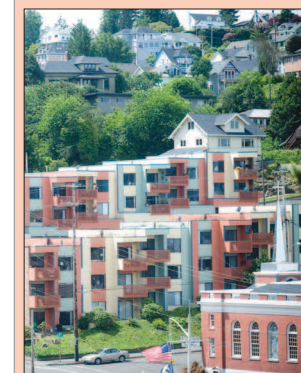
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