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LOCAL LITERARY HIGHLIGHTS

Whiskey Emerson's busy week demonstrates a writer at work

BY DAVID JASPER • The Bulletin

This issue of GO! Magazine's theme of "Under construction" resonated with Bend author Whiskey Emerson, 32. Tuesday will see the release of the "East of Hell," the second installment in a trilogy that began with "West of Hell," published in October 2017. A release party for the new book will be held June 3 at Velvet Lounge in Bend. Along with "East of Hell" bowing Monday, preorders will begin that same day for "Rationem," Emerson's unrelated, post-apocalyptic sci-fi tale that she describes as "Mad Max: Fury Road" meets the TV show "Jericho."

Emerson said she began writing "West of Hell" in her mid-20s. As an English major back in college, she entertained the idea of becoming a professor. But earning a doctorate and staying in one place trying to earn tenure did not sit well with Emerson, an avid motorcyclist who moved to Bend about a year and a half ago after living in such cities as St. Louis, where she grew up, as well as Atlanta, New York and Portland.

Her years of working for a remote medical billing company has given her the flexibility "to not only live in a lot of places, but also, obviously, to pursue my dream of being a writer full time, and give me a little more balance," Emerson said.

She'd had that dream of being a writer from a young age. When she "suffered a minor quarter-life crisis around 25," Emerson said, "I figured I would give my dream a shot."

The "of Hell" series was born when she alighted upon the idea of a hitman with a conscience. The word "hitman" may call to mind slick modern characters of film, but the epic series is set largely in 1880s New York, a couple of decades after the action seen in Martin Scorsese's "Gangs of New York."

"Being a history buff myself, New York in the latter part of the 19th century was one of my favorite eras in history," she said. "I kind of latched onto that and built

If You Go

What: Release party and signing for "East of Hell," by Whiskey Emerson

When: 5-8 p.m. June 3

Where: Velvet Lounge, 805 NW Wall St., downtown Bend

Cost: Free

Contact: whiskeyemerson.com

the story around it."

"It became this huge historical piece, which does essentially form a story around multiple hitmen with consciences, but it definitely morphed into a much bigger project than I ever thought it would," said Emerson, who was living in New York part of the time she was writing "West of Hell."

Whereas "West of Hell" is the series' origin story, "East of Hell" is about a war for the soul of New York.

"It's kind of like good vs. evil, and all those gray areas in between," she said. The story lines of the series' many characters, including gang members, an orphan and a brothel madam, are inexorably intertwined.

"The story has a lot of twists and turns, and each character really struggles to deal with their own personal demons," Emerson explained. "As the plot unfolds, you

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Bend author Whiskey Emerson's second novel, "East of Hell," part two of a trilogy, debuts Tuesday.

Katya Agatucci/
Submitted photo

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