

Drought, arson figure into Grand Ledge author's novel



Books

Ray Walsh
Guest columnist

"Prometheus Scorned" by Grand Ledge author R.J. Erskine (Stray Voltage Press, \$12.99) is an unusual, enjoyable tale that's set in the late 1980s in Central Pennsylvania.

It's a sequel to his 2017 novel, "Casting Demons into Swine," again focusing on Malcolm Cromarty, who's facing many challenges as a large animal veterinarian in the heart of Pennsylvania Amish country.

But this is not just a nice simple story about a kindly DVM who takes care of ailing cows and horses - it deals considerably with significantly troubled humans as well.

One of Erskine's friends aptly dubbed the author as a "Dark James Herriot," referring to the exceptionally popular British veterinarian.

Cromarty is helping the area's farmers in the tranquil valley survive a blistering dry spell that's affecting crops and critters alike.

When a series of barn fires break out, no one is suspicious at first - with authorities blaming it on natural causes and bad luck.

A deviant arsonist is on the loose - with clever plans for greater destruction.

The area's community support grows; volunteer firefighters join in combating the increasingly destructive blazes. Erskine deftly contrasts differences between various Amish sects.

A talented local youth that Cromarty has befriended becomes a suspect; a pretty insurance investigator adds some spark to the novel's carefully crafted plot.

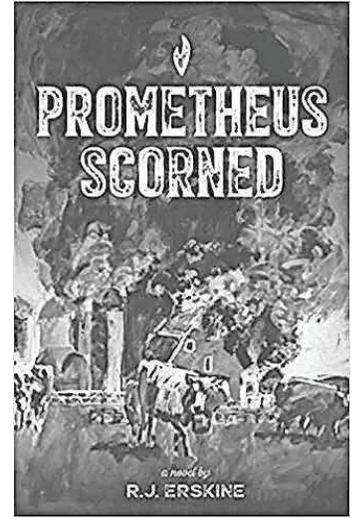
Cromarty's overworked but beloved Jeep "Lucille" and his mixed-breed dog "Precious" play important roles; other scenes are based on major real arson cases that occurred in Michigan and Pennsylvania.

A full page map is provided that will help readers figure out where various farms and barns are located.

The author, who recently retired from MSU's College of Veterinary Medicine, is working on the third book in his trilogy, which will deal with Amish witchcraft.

"Prometheus Scorned" by R.J. Erskine is a well-designed, self-published, 327-page trade paperback that can be ordered from strayvoltagepress@gmail.com.

Ray Walsh, owner of East Lansing's Curious Book Shop, has reviewed crime novels and Michigan books regularly since 1987. His email address is raywalsh@voyager.net.



"Prometheus Scorned" by R.J. Erskine