ASA JAMES

JODI LEW-SMITH

DESCRIPTION

1875 Vermont. Asa James hasn't exactly sucked on a silver spoon. No one chooses to grow up on a rural poor farm, but a mixed-race orphan with Asa's scarred face has little choice. Determined to be a naturalist and scientific thinker in the vein of Charles Darwin, he finds himself thrust alone into the wider world, taking a tutor's position at a mountaintop mansion. There, the widow Caro Rockwell is glossy and sardonic, someone so far outside Asa's experience that she could well be another species. But soon he glimpses the broken woman inside the shell. Amid a series of eerie events, they form a friendship that grows into a sweet and tender sort of love. His heart has what it wants. But then, from within the many dark recesses of Mansfield Hall, a shameful secret is discovered that will force Asa into making a terrible choice.

FICTION PRIZES

- **Winner of the 2026 PenCraft Book Awards: Historical Fiction**
- **Winner of the 2025 American Legacy Book Awards: Historical Fiction**
- **Winner of the 2026 National Indie Excellence Awards: Northeast Fiction**
- **Winner of the 2026 Independent Publisher Book Awards: Northeast Fiction**
- **Winner of the 2025 Feathered Quill Book Awards: Historical Fiction**

TESTIMONIAL

Jodi Lew-Smith's atmospheric retelling of a beloved classic novel has found a home on several of our staff picks shelves at The Galaxy Bookshop! Jodi's background as a scientist shows in the lovingly detailed descriptions of plant and animal life encountered by Asa James in the course of his own pursuit of natural science. That the majority of the novel takes place in Vermont will give it extra appeal for visitors who want to pick up a novel that includes elements of the state's history and landscape.

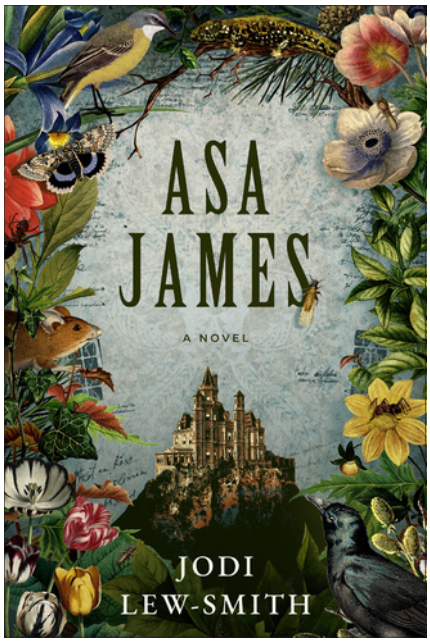
Personally, my favorite part of reading this book was watching the progression of a familiar story playing out with completely new characters, wondering at the ways in which the author might hold to or veer away from the novel she was inspired by.

Sandy Scott, The Galaxy Bookshop - Hardwick, VT

AUTHOR BIO



Jodi Lew-Smith lives on a hill farm in the rural "Northeast Kingdom" of Vermont with her husband, dog, chickens, and 250 apple trees. Her grown children come and go, staying long enough to make her laugh. She has always been a writer, but also enjoys biology, which comes out in her fiction. She holds a bachelor's in English literature, a master's in botany, and a doctorate in molecular genetics, now working as a biocurator for a genomic database. Her stories and essays have appeared in various journals, including a story in The Wax Paper that was nominated for a 2019 Pushcart Prize. Her novel *The Clever Mill Horse* won the 2014 James River Writers Indie Novel Contest, the 2014 Feathered Quill Book Awards prize for historical fiction, and the 2015 Benjamin Franklin Awards prize for historical fiction.



Publisher: Koehler Books
Distributor: Ingram
PUB DATE: 12/16/2025
SOFT COVER: $19.95, 979-8-88824-930-7
HARD COVER: $28.95, 979-8-88824-932-1
EBOOK: $9.99, 979-8-88824-931-4
TRIM: 6"x 9", pages 306
FICTION / Gothic

AUDIENCE

- Historical fiction readers who like unusual settings and embedded mysteries
- NPR listeners
- Those drawn to stories addressing class and inequity in America
- Fans of Sarah Waters and Jessie Burton

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