

*Combining adventure, humor, romance and suspense, and rich with observations about life, DEPTH PERCEPTION is a thoughtful, lyrical and often exhilarating exploration of the world of oil painting and of a Scottish artist's creative journey.*

## **Depth Perception: A Novel**

By Eric E. Wallace

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# DEPTH PERCEPTION

*A Novel*



Eric E. Wallace

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Print ISBN: 978-1-959623-40-3

Ebook ISBN: 979-8-88532-027-6

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Trenton, Georgia, U.S.A.

Cover design: Todd Engle, [www.toddengle-engelcreative.com](http://www.toddengle-engelcreative.com)

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Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data  
Wallace, Eric E.

*Depth Perception* by Eric E. Wallace

Library of Congress Control Number: 2025905784

BookLocker.com, Inc.  
2025

First Edition



Also by Eric E. Wallace

*UNDERTOW*

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*STONERISE*

*EMPEROR'S REACH*

*THE IMPROVISER*

*MIND AFTER MIND*

*HOVER POINT*

## Prolog

**I**t was early on a cool Tuesday August morning, not that either the hour or the day or the temperature mattered much, as the flow of tourists on the streets of the fine old Scottish city of Edinburgh tends to be relentless.

However, this morning, on a small stretch of busy Princes Street, the flow was being diverted by a group of gawkers who had stopped—not to gaze up at the dark peculiarity of the looming Scott Monument or to admire Edinburgh Castle, high and craggy above the soft expanse of the Princes Street Gardens, or even to take the predictable selfies in front of two stoic street bagpipers—but to look down at the pavement itself.

In the middle of a gathering semi-circle of onlookers, crouching over the dirty stone surface, was a tallish older man in extremely grubby, loose-fitting tweeds, a paint-splattered ragbag of a fellow with explosions of wild white hair which were trying either to dislodge the grimy Scots flat cap or to grip it possessively.

Most often you'd have called this person disreputable and quickly looked away, except that what he was creating was mesmerizing.

He was drawing with chalk—*screeving*, as one fat man told a companion loudly and proudly enough to earn respect from others—but what was emerging was no ordinary sidewalk scrawl. Somehow—his long, thin hands working with a blur of deft rapidity—the artist was making ordinary sticks of chalk turn a small rectangle of time-trodden pavement into an impossible seascape, moody and beautiful. Clouds, whitecapped waves, cliffs, a wind-pressed gull in flight: how could that all be?

What was also strange was that there was no extra hat, no tin cup, no plate lying nearby to collect coins. The chalk artist either had forgotten those receptacles or was not doing this for money.

“It’s illegal,” whispered the screeving expert. “You canna chalk here, beggin’ or no. An’ it’s a pity. Used to be a braw thing to see chaps chalking on the streets. We can expect the polis to show up any moment.”

The pavement artist looked up abruptly, not at the speaker, but toward the section of iron fence to the garden side of the gathering. With an ascending growl, and with unexpected speed and agility, he leapt to his feet and sprang at a skinny young man who was about to make off with a battered bicycle which had been leaning against the palings.

“Not my Raleigh, you don’t, you manky bastard!” The artist’s accent was surprising too, a soft, educated Scots.

He wrenched the bicycle from the would-be thief, wrapped one strong arm around the younger man’s neck and spiraled him toward the crowd. People quickly parted, letting the thief stagger past them to narrowly miss colliding with the startled bagpipers before scampering away.

The grubby man gathered his chalks, shook water from his daubing tray, crammed everything in a filthy rucksack, tightened his cap, mounted the bicycle and pushed off, muttering to himself.

“Critics I can tolerate. Bicycle thieves, never.”

Most of the crowd dispersed, but a few lingered to look at the chalk seascape.

“Reminds me of Maine.”

“Wish we could cut it out and frame it.”

“It’s sad the rain’s gonna wash it away.”

“You suppose he ever bathes?”

“They have a homeless problem here too, I reckon.”

Several tourists leaned over and took photographs.

“Talent hides in the strangest places,” one woman murmured, reframing her shot.

“Hell,” her companion sniggered, “you can train an elephant to paint. Hey, is that a Burger King over there?”

Of those who’d watched the man work magic with the chalk, some thought he probably had mental health issues. Some guessed this was a promotional stunt, maybe for the travel agency across the street.

A few presumed it was a kind of digital trick, maybe even one of those new AI inventions showing up right here on the streets of Edinburgh. At the very least, many thought, surely the man was some kind of illusionist.

But not a single tourist—and not any of the locals who’d been watching—realized or even remotely guessed that the scruffy chalk artist was wealthy, titled, perfectly sane and one of Great Britain’s most famous, most-honored painters.

## About the Author

Eric E. Wallace writes fiction, poetry, plays and humor.

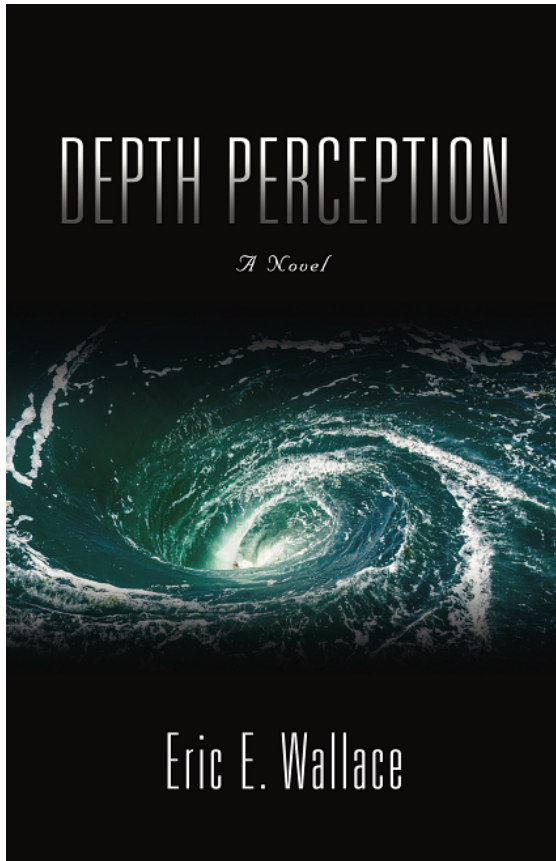
His work has been published in many literary journals and periodicals, including *Alaska Magazine*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *The First Line*, *Rosebud* and *Writer's Digest*, in more than a dozen print anthologies and online at *Writers Weekly*, *Idaho Magazine*, *Toasted Cheese Literary Journal* and elsewhere.

*Depth Perception* is Eric's eighth book. His previous books, all published by BookLocker, are *Undertow*, a collection of eighteen of his short stories; *Hoar Frost*, containing seven stories; *Stonerise*, with nine stories; and four novels, *Emperor's Reach*, *The Improviser*, *Mind After Mind* and *Hover Point*.

Eric was born in Glasgow, Scotland and educated there, in Victoria, B.C., Canada and in Northern California. For over 35 years he was a TV and radio broadcaster, working primarily in Florida and Alaska. He now lives on five acres in Eagle, Idaho, with his partner Kathy McGowan, two horses, four sheep, seven chickens and a border collie.

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