

**Featuring Short Stories by  
Sarah Neubrand/Canvas  
Nights 2026 , Joshua  
Jarman/The Crocodile,  
William Gensburger/World  
of Walls, Interview with  
Publicist Micky Mikkelson,  
Book Review: A Million Steps  
by Kurt Koontz, Article: Why  
Would You Record an  
Audiobook? Words to Write  
By, Submission Guidelines,  
Writing Tips and more...**

## FROM THE PUBLISHER

Welcome to the newly updated BNP Magazine (formerly Books 'N Pieces Magazine). In my quest to offer a high quality publication, both as a digital format, and a print format, we've included some new features. We have started paying our contributors, something I feel strongly about. While I appreciate the support we have had in the past, it's only fair that writers get paid. While we are not at a level I hope to be at, it is a start, as they say, and with luck, and word of mouth, we will find an ever-growing audience.

If you'd like to submit work for consideration, please visit us online at [www.BooksNPieces.com](http://www.BooksNPieces.com) where you will find past issues, payment and submission information, as well as other information, including my blog.

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# *Short Story*

## Canvas Night (2026)

by Sarah Neubrand

In 2026, a fire broke out in downtown Manhattan, destroying almost the entire borough. In the history books they cite the cause of this fire as unknown. Nobody looks too deep into it since they are more interested in the riots it sparked all over the country and the devastating consequences it had for Manhattan's economy. Years of rebuilding in an already suffering community left few people to worry about the butterfly that caused this hurricane. Neither did I. Not out of ignorance, but because I already knew.

“Keep your head down!”

My mother was dragging me through the streets; dirty alleyways and hidden passages that seemed to defy the laws of physics by simply existing. The curfew signal was ringing in my ears. My objections were dismissed with increasingly harsh shushes which eventually managed to shut me up. I stared down at where my feet should have been but my black boots melted into the black pavement. I begged my mother to turn back; we weren't allowed outside, we were going to get arrested, but she ignored me.

We stopped at a building that looked like it should've been torn down ages ago, but in those days that would have described every building. My mother tore away some planks covering a now glassless window, squeezing first me then herself through it. After dragging me down a muggy hallway that to my child's stamina seemed miles long, my mother finally let go of my hand. I hadn't realized until

then how tightly she was holding onto it but now it was throbbing from the blood rushing back into my fingers. I dared to look up.

My gaze fell onto a grubby concrete hall hung with paintings and tapestries with even more canvases leaning on the floor. Sculptures were lining the walls, keeping watch. I was standing in a giant warehouse that was filled to the brim with nothing but glorious artwork, except for one tiny desk in the corner which seemed comically alien in this colorful place. It was the most colorful thing I had ever seen. I noticed that most of the paintings were watercolors. Later I found out that most artist these days were forced to use them since the odor of oil paint would have given them away.

Suddenly I heard a clicking noise echoing off the walls. The noise kept coming closer but my mother didn't seem to be alarmed by it. I grabbed her arm nonetheless. It turned out that the noise came from a cane being cautiously bumped into the walls by a magnificent mountain of a woman. She was all unkempt nests of grey hair and piles of colorful rags hiding any plausible shape her body might have been, topped off with a pair of oddly shaped sunglasses that covered a good half of her wrinkled face.

“Baby, this is The Yeti. Don't worry, she's a friend”

“Who is it?” said The Yeti with a voice so rough you could almost feel it scraping your ears.

“Barbarossa. I brought my daughter”

“What the hell are you doing here, we're not supposed to....”

“I got a call. Someone ratted me out. The DCR, they know all about me selling artwork to you”, my mother said, only scarcely hiding the anger in her voice. What followed could only be described as a heavily charged silence.

At that moment the DCS were only a meaningless assortment of letters to me, but I later found out that the they stood for the Department for Cultural Supervision. Headed by Ayn Rothman, the DCS was a government department of

professional bloodhounds trained to sniff out even the most subtle of political protest, thus ensuring safe and, more importantly, regulated execution of all artistic expression to avoid the ideological corruption of the upright public through so called “degenerate art”. Or something along those lines.

I couldn't possibly have seen it behind her shades but somehow I vividly recall The Yeti staring down my mother with icy daggers.

“Don't you even dare ask me if it was me. I wouldn't be so fucking stupid to ruin my own business, it's hard enough getting a job without a disability,”

“Of course I know it wasn't you.”

I didn't like The Yeti; the way she dressed, the way she spoke to my mother, and I especially didn't like the sort of business she seemed to operate. In my children's logic I concluded that something that was practiced in such an unsavory place couldn't possibly be a good thing. My mother sighed.

“Baby, go over there and...play”, she said as she halfheartedly ushered me towards a pile of bin bags that might've been a very poignant statement about the economic disenfranchisement of the working class but, from the smell of it, probably wasn't.

She took the Yeti's arm and lead her behind a stack of blank canvases. Their hushed voices echoed off the concrete walls as I continued to explore the artwork, pretending not to eavesdrop.

“Who was it then?”

“Does it matter?”

My mother struggled to keep her voice down now: “Of course it does!”

One of the paintings showed a woman in bright block colors lifting her dress to reveal a pair of slender legs They were covered in tiny braids, tied off with colorful ribbons.

“I have to know who I can trust, who....”

“Honestly, sweetheart, you gotta pick and choose your battles here.”

Next to it was one of a monochrome wall not unlike the glorified broom closet we called our home, with the exception that we didn't have a giant egg perched against the stairs. I remember wondering what might come out of an egg that size.

"No good knowing who it was if you're stuck in a cell. You have to figure out where to go, what you gonna do next"

"That's why I'm here, I thought you might know someone"

On the floor, partially wrapped in a plastic cover, was a painting of an old woman. Her dark wrinkly face gazed blankly at her visitors, with one of her bare elongated breasts peeking out from behind the blue plastic covering.

"But you must have at least an idea who it might be."

"I might know someone who can help you get out of the city"

"That's not what I asked. Surely you know, you know everything"

The Yeti uncomfortably shuffled around in her mismatching slippers, tapping her cane on the floor.

"You do know don't you?"

My eye was caught by a simple print hung on the wall. It was a portrait of the president, just like the ones we had hanging up in every classroom, except that those didn't have a giant penis drawn onto the cheek leading all the way to his unsmiling mouth.

"Rothman"

"Rothman? How would Rothman know about us, if she knew she would've shut us down ages ago"

"She's known all along, hun. She's one of our clients"

I stopped in front of a painting of a woman. She seemed to be made of fire, standing in front of a kettle, angrily staring me down. Her face seemed almost like a Halloween mask; dark red gutters forming a snarling grimace with darting eyes, burning themselves into my memory, along with my mother's desperate silence.

The Yeti was silent, too, her buggish sunglasses simply staring at my mother.

“I think I know someone”, she said finally. “Wait here, I gotta make a call”

She disappeared back into the hallway she had emerged from, leaving my mother to blankly stare into nothing, frozen as if camouflaging herself to blend in with the statues around her.

“Mum, what’s going on? Why are we here?”

My scared voice seemed to pull my mother out of her trance. She came over to me and gently took my face in her hands.

“Everything’s gonna be fine, baby. Don’t you worry”

I pulled away from her. It was all too much for me. I was so young, and I hadn’t known anything but rules and regulations all my life. All I knew was that my mother was working against the government's orders, and therefore a traitor. How could my own mother betray a country that had done nothing but protect and nurture us? I felt red hot tears streaming down my cheeks.

“Nothing’s gonna be fine. We’re gonna get arrested and they’re gonna take us away and we’re gonna die just because of you! I want to go home, I want to go!”

My mother grabbed me firmly by the shoulders, staring me down.

“Listen to me, Phoebe, listen to me. Everything you know is wrong. Everything. I know this all seems terribly wrong to you, but I promise you, one day you’ll understand why I did this. And I will explain everything to you. But now you have to be calm and you have to help me, okay?”

I had to think of this girl from school, Madelaine. I think her father was caught selling banned books in the back of his corner shop. I never saw her again after his arrest. Sometimes I would lie awake at night thinking about what happened to her and I would recite state regulations like a prayer, hoping me and my mother would be safe.

I looked around in disbelief. None of the artwork in that bunker seemed worthy of a legal transgression to me. Sure, some of them were nice, but considering the consequences I couldn’t possibly imagine a stupid picture being

worth all the trouble. I noticed a tiny oil painting showing a barefooted woman in a bathing suit riding a bike. It was no bigger than 4 by 5 inches and almost lost itself in the sea of canvases and statues..

“Why is that one illegal?”, I said, pointing at it.

My mother smiled down at me, but the smile never quite reached her eyes, which stayed fixed in a melancholy warmth. She seemed to think for a second.

“Come, I want to show you my favorite”, she said, leading me towards the small metal desk in the corner.

She opened the top drawer and pulled out a framed piece of blue construction paper. It was the first picture frame I had seen in the bunker. In the centre of the paper there was a storm of colors, layers upon layers of crayon merging into all sorts of muddy colors.

“What is this?”

“You drew it, you tell me what it is”

“Are you sure? I don’t remember”

“You were a lot younger. It was one of the first things you drew. I love it, I look at it every time I’m down and it always cheers me up”

“Alright, hurry up now, kids” The Yeti returned from the back room carrying two canisters in one hand and her cane in the other.

“I just called my contact, we gotta get to Richmond Street as quick as possible. If you’re right and they’re really onto us we won’t have much time to waste”

The Yeti beckoned me towards her and pushed one of the canisters into my arms.

“Help me with this, love”

The sloshing of the cold liquid inside made it repeatedly bump against my chest as biting garage stink hit my nose. It was gasoline.

“There’s two more in the back, we’ll need them”, she said to my mother as she cautiously found her way towards a wall. As soon as her cane found resistance,

she began to pour gasoline all over the walls and floor and after hesitating for a second I did the same. We left a healthy trail of gasoline behind us while exiting the building. The sun was beginning to rise again as we climbed out. The Yeti handed my mother a pack of matches. With a fair share of reluctance my mother took out a match, lit it, and threw it on the floor. The gasoline erupted with a pang, unleashing a fiery serpent making its way through the warehouse.

“Hurry up”, pushed the Yeti.

My mother’s complexion was lit by the faint glow of the fire eating itself through the building now. The Yeti and I rushed towards the street but my mother did not.

“Wait. Phoebe, look at it”

“We have to go. Now”, said the Yeti.

“Look”

And I looked. I looked at my mother as she watched her big act of resistance, her solitary escape from the cruel reality around her, going up in flames. I thought of the woman on fire, now engulfed in real flames with all the other women around her burning in solidarity. What did she have left now? Where would we go? I reached out to take my mother’s hand but in it was already a rolled up piece of blue construction paper. She slowly pulled away from the sight, forcing her feet to move forward.

“My name is Anna, by the way.”, said my mother.

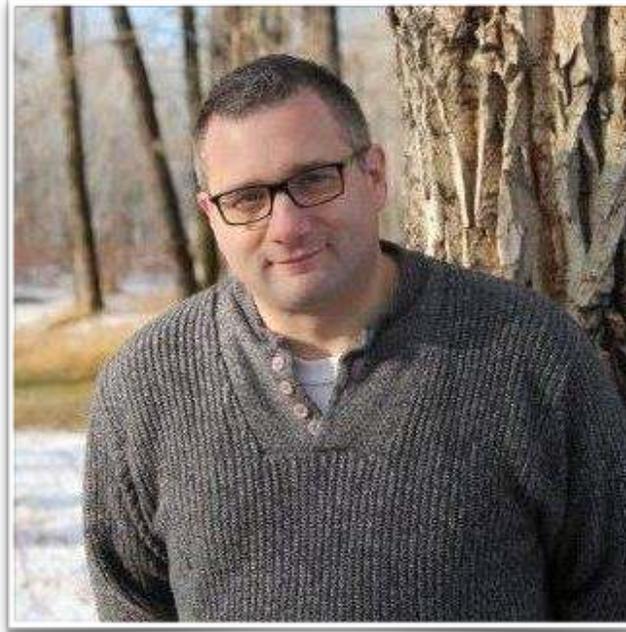
“I’m Doris,” replied The Yeti.∞



*Sarah Neubrand is a German writer currently living in England where she studies English and Drama at the University of Salford. Besides reading and writing, she loves few things more than talking about herself in the third person, so this is very much a dream come true. She also has great interest in art, crocheting and potato-based dishes. Sarah can be found under the twitter handle [@mediumsizedbang](https://twitter.com/mediumsizedbang).*

# *Interview*

## *A Man for the Writers* **Mickey Mikkelson**



Mickey Mikkelson is the Publicist/Owner at Creative Edge, a Calgary, Canada firm that specializes in getting exposure for independent writers, authors and artists of all type. While Creative Edge does not focus on being overly large; it does focus on individual needs for individual clients, many of whom boast solid credentials, such as bestselling science fiction author, Robert L. Forward.

I wanted to know how having a publicist works, what the differences are between self-servicing your need for exposure (don't read that the wrong way) versus having representation from someone with a strong working knowledge of the industry. He was kind enough to answer the following questions.

**Q1. What made you decide that being a publicist was a career that would work for you?**

I didn't really decide that this was a career to strive for. It actually fell into my lap as I was helping out a friend who had written a book. I previously worked at Chapters as an events coordinator, and the friend who had written a novel asked me to get her a couple of signings. Well, two signings turned into eight signings, and she essentially ended up conducting a full Alberta tour which resulted in her book becoming national with Indigo. News got out and the word spread, and very soon I was getting other author opportunities and I decided that there was perhaps a market for this. Lo and behold, Creative Edge was formed.

**Q2. How did Creative Edge form? How did you develop your client base? I ask because writers and others often have trouble approaching people.**

When I realized I had a passion for publicity I was able to leverage a number of those relationships as my first clients. That was when I decided to form Creative Edge, which today has over 25 clients and arrangements and contacts with media internationally including key contacts in TV, Radio, and Print Media.

My client base was built through word of mouth and networking through a variety of writing events such as When Words Collide, which is a large literary festival in Western Canada. Western Canada was definitely where everything started and we have been able to branch out from there.

**Q3. You have a nice client list that includes Robert J. Sawyer. People that do not know him from his novels, might remember a television series, "Flash**

**Forward” a few years back, based on his book of the same name. How did you and Robert connect and what were his goals in hiring a publicist? With all his successes, how much more complex are your efforts with him needing to be?**

Robert has an in house publicist at Penguin Random house and they do a lot of work with him, specifically around his book marketing. I actually met Robert for the first time when I worked at Chapters as he came for a book event, and after that I always stayed in touch with him. When I started Creative Edge, I ended up representing a number of authors that are within both my and Robert’s circles of community. Robert actually reached out to me, and in truth I wasn’t sure what I could do for him knowing that he had an in house publicist and a very reputable name both in the literary and television/film mediums.

His goals were really no different than any other author in terms of promotion, except the areas of media targeted were of a larger scale. Robert wanted in depth interviews, book reviews about his newest book ‘Quantum Night’ and his previous catalogue. In addition to that, he also wanted help promoting his brand on the television and film aspect. In terms of complexity, the press releases sent out were more strategic with further in-depth information on them. Overall, the effort was no different as I always give 100 percent but in many cases we did get more media results based on Robert’s reputation as a bestselling and award-winning author.

**Q4. Most writers tend to be introverts, not particularly good at marketing themselves. Do you offer a pre-set package for them, or coach them on what they need do, or is it a custom process where each person has a role?**

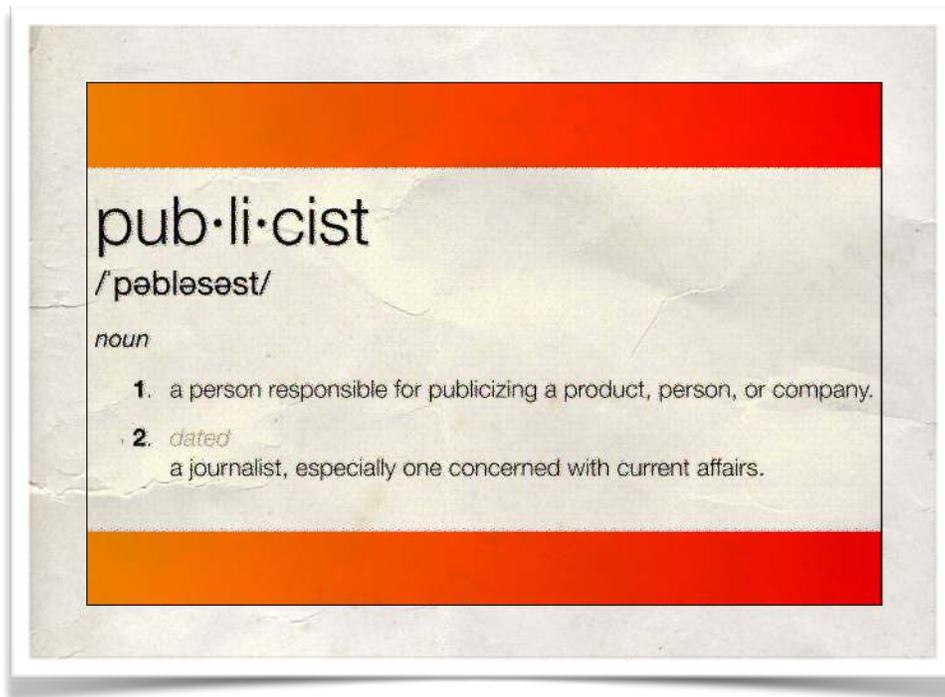
With every client, I sit down with them and have a conversation about short term and long term goals. There is not a pre-set package per se, however every author has a set contract and a maximum amount of dollars they are expected to pay each month. In most cases, the maximum amount charged works out to be less than if they were to pay for everything on an individual basis. I do coach my clients on what they should be doing but it's a collaboration. We take the best idea between us and execute that idea to its fullest. Not every author is great at book signings and others struggle with online aspects or speaking engagements. My role is to communicate with my clients and tailor all marketing aspects to what their strengths are.

**Q5. Writers want sales. Writers would not object to a degree of notability (not necessarily fame). What do publicists aspire for? What is the golden prize for you?**

I didn't get into this to become a rich and famous, but I do want to run a successful business. To me, that means effectively supporting my clients in a way that sees them through to achieving their goals. I am happy knowing that I am creating a community where authors and artists share ideas and support each other. Building community is essentially the Creative Edge brand, and the golden prize.

**Q6. Describe a typical day for you? Challenges? Joys? Worst?**

As a publicist, there is never a typical day. Everything is different every single day. But things I do are usually setting up book signings for a client, issuing press releases to media, calling authors and touching base as I insist on communication with my clients at minimum bi-weekly.



There are some that I talk to every day. In terms of sending out press releases, I am typically sending out about 300 emails for one release and I try to personalize the emails based on the receiver of the information. It's a lot of work, but an effective way to develop stronger relationships.

Most writers are introverts and in a lot of cases have different personality types because they are creative. The biggest challenge is monitoring that and finding ways to connect with each personality. The most effective way I have found to do that is to set clear expectations about how the publicity process works and then gauge each individual's long term goal and develop a plan on how we are going to get there.

The joys are easy! Working with so many talented people day in and day out is so rewarding, as is getting to know key influencers in the media. Even when it's overwhelming, it's always gratifying.

Worst? There is no worst to what I do, I love it all even when it appears to be painful mentally!

**Q7. Do you have any advice for writers who believe a publicist would be a good option? What is your criteria for considering an author? Are you open to authors contacting you (if so best way)? What percentage of sales do publicists get paid, or are you flat rate/hourly?**

My belief is that writers need to be ready before seeking out a publicist. If you don't have your books available in all sectors including online and in print, then you are not ready.

If you don't have a direction that you want to go in terms of marketing, then you are also not ready. The most successful authors are the ones who have a set plan in place and can leverage a publicist to get them there.

In addition, most authors have to learn to work with a publicist and realize that by hiring one, they are no longer on their own in terms of marketing. These same authors have to learn to work and leverage the person they just hired, otherwise the partnership will not work.

I look for authors that have vision and clear expectations. I look for authors who have strong communication skills and are committed to an honest relationship. I never sign an author based only on the quality of the book. It is definitely a factor, but I am making my decision based on a personality connection and mutual respect not only for me but my other represented clients as well.

I don't take a percentage of sales unless I book my clients at a speaking engagement or an event where they are paid a fee. Then I normally take approximately 5%. All of my represented clients pay a flat monthly fee that is negotiated at time of contract, Everyone's fee is different and all contracts are independently confidential.

Mickey is always looking for new talent, and writers whose professional goals are aligned with the services he can offer. From his approachability, the numerous glowing comments on his Facebook page about how he handles clients, it's safe to say that if you are seeking a personal relationship to take you to the next level, and you have done the needed first steps, you should contact him. My thanks to Mickey for answering my questions.

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# Getaway to El Porvenir

*Magic in the New Mexico mountains*



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# *Short Story*

## The Crocodile

By Joshua Jarman

I hadn't seen David Walsh in eighteen years when I saw him in the departure lounge. He was rifling through his suitcase, looking flustered, piling everything out onto a seat.

I hadn't seen him in eighteen years, but I recognized him straight away. Over the years I'd often wondered if he would've had his nose fixed, but there it was. You hear stories about people getting their noses fixed, but his was still crooked as anything from where the bat had hit him.

I turned my head to the side and carried on walking.

“Where the bloody hell?” I heard him say.

I went through into a pub and ordered a pint. The barmaid was attractive and had dark hair and reminded me of Sue when she'd been young. I went and sat in a booth and took out my phone.

“Hi love.”

“Hey sweetheart.”

“Are you through security?”

“Yeah, I'm just in a cafe having a cup of tea.”

“What time's boarding?”

“Not for another couple of hours.”

“Well don't take too long, we miss you.”

“Aw, how are the girls?”

“They're good, they miss their daddy!”

“Tell them I miss them too.”

“Will do. I’d better get back to them.”

“Alright, see you later honey.”

“Love you.”

“Love you too.”

I put my phone in my pocket and took a sip of my pint.

A hand clapped me on the shoulder.

“Robert Crossley,” he said. “Robert Crossley as I live and breathe!”

It was David Walsh. He left his hand on my shoulder.

“How the devil are you?” he said.

“David?” I said.

He took his hand off my shoulder and sat down opposite me. He had a pint of ale in one hand and it sloshed onto the table as he sat down.

“Long time!” I said.

“Mind if I join you?” he said. “God I can't believe it. Robert Crossley! Where are you off to?”

He still spoke in the same funny way, like he had a mouthful of soup. I looked at him sat there so close. He had tried to grow a beard. He had let the hair grow out and it was thin and briery like a wire brush. Some desperate grasp for machismo I guess. His teeth were still as discolored as ever. That was one thing I'd always remembered about him, how they looked like old limestone.

“Back to Glasgow,” I said. “How about you?”

“Glasgow, eh?” he said.

He was smiling at me with wide eyes, like he didn't believe it was me.

“Out the old rat race, eh?” he said. “Can't say I blame you. Bit of a bloody nightmare all this. That's why I'm off to Cologne. Let me tell you, okay, if somebody says the paper industry is thriving, let me tell you, they're barking up the wrong tree!”

He laughed, loud, once, like the bark of a dog, looking at me expectantly.

“Yeah?” I said.

“God. He said. Absolute porkies.”

He spoke like an old aristocrat, even though he'd been one of the poorest boys in school. I remember his tattered old school jacket, stitched up at the rips.

I suddenly clocked he had already drunk half of his pint without me noticing.

“Last I heard you'd ended up shacking up with Sue Simons?” he said.

I held up my ring finger.

He laughed.

“Bloody hell.” he said. “Congrats, old boy. Little ones?”

“Two girls,” I said.

“Blimey,” he said. “The old ball and chain! Sue Simons.”

He trailed off and stared vacantly past me.

I looked at him. He was as big as ever. I thought about that awful Sports Day back in Sixth Form. I started to feel hot and uncomfortable.

“So you're in the paper game are you?” I said.

He looked at me.

“Sue Simons!” he said again. “Bloody hell. I tell you what though, you wouldn't catch me settling down. Bad for business.” He laughed. “Let me tell you,” he said.

“Yeah?” I said.

“What's your trade?” he asked.

“My trade?”

“You used to be a dab hand at the guitar I seem to remember.”

“Oh no,” I said. “Nothing like that. We run a little software business, actually.”

“Computers, eh?” he said. “Well there's certainly no money in paper anymore.”

He finished the last of his beer and stood up.

“My round,” he said, wild eyed. “What you having?”

I'd only had about a third of my pint.

“Looks like a Guinness to me.” he said.

He went over to the bar. I looked at him. His shirt was untucked at the back and hanging out like a little tail, just like back in school. I watched him at the bar, it took him ages to get served. Big guy like him and nobody noticed him. By the time he got back I had finished my pint, and he put another down on the table in front of me.

“Let me ask you,” he said, “how much would you expect to pay for a thousand sheets of A4 paper? Low GSM, just cheap plain paper.”

“God, I'm not sure,” I said.

“Rip off,” he said. “Absolute rip off, they're taking me for a ride, let me tell you.”

His nose was so broken. It was remarkable. A jagged zig-zag of cartilage. One of the nostrils was squashed to one side.

“Do you guys do printers?” he asked.

“Not exactly,” I said. “We did some printer drivers a while back.”

“Yeah,” he said, stroking his scraggly beard. “We should talk business.”

He got his wallet out and took out a business card.

“Take my card,” he said, “I'm always looking for more contacts in the industry.”

“Thanks, yeah,” I said.

I took the card from him and glanced at it.

*David Walsh*

*Paper Solutions Inc.*

*Managing Director*

I put it in my wallet.

“Sue Simons,” he said. “Robert Crossley.”

“That's right,” I said.

“Do you remember that day we all bunked off chemistry together?” he asked.  
“We went to the Southbank and got ice-creams.”

“And Sue got caught outside the canteen,” I said.

“God yeah,” he said, “Stinky old Stenker! He always had it in for Sue, the old rotter.”

“She still blames that on me you know,” I said.

“Women, right?” He laughed. “Listen,” he said, “how about we Irish things up a bit?”

He took a bottle of scotch out of his bag.

“Duty free,” he said.

He unscrewed the top and poured a hefty slug into his beer. He moved the bottle over towards mine, but I covered the top of the glass with my hand.

“No thanks,” I said, “better not.”

“Ha! Suit yourself.”

He poured a little more into his beer, then put the bottle away.

“God, funny thinking back to all that. Long time again now, of course. How old were we then?”

I thought for a moment. “I think that was Year 8,” I said.

He nodded and stared at the chest pocket of my shirt vacantly.

“I suppose we didn't really hang out much after that,” he mumbled.

I looked over at the bar, then back at David.

He looked up at me, like a wounded wild animal. One of his eyes was bloodshot as anything. Somehow I had only just noticed.

“Bloody good lark wasn't it, school?” he said.

I nodded. He looked back down at my pocket, his eyes glazing over.

“Shame about all that Sports Day nonsense,” he mumbled.

I didn't say anything.

“Shame,” He said.

I noticed how lined his face had become. I had only stayed in touch with a couple of the guys from school, but they hadn't aged half as much as David. His ginger hair was two-thirds white, and his jawline had all but disappeared into his face. I'd always wondered what that sort of treatment would do to a guy. He never stood a chance.

I checked my watch. I still had the best part of an hour until boarding.

David sniffed. He looked up and opened his mouth to speak.

"Anyway," I said, making an exaggerated point of looking at my watch, standing up, "I'd better get to my gate, but really a pleasure to bump into you mate."

He said something but just sort of tripped over his own tongue.

"Yeah, a real pleasure old boy," he finally said.

I picked up my bag and put my hand out to shake. He squeezed it vigorously, looking into my eyes.

"You will drop me an email," he said. "You've got my card."

"Absolutely," I said. "I'll drop you a line next time I'm back in London."

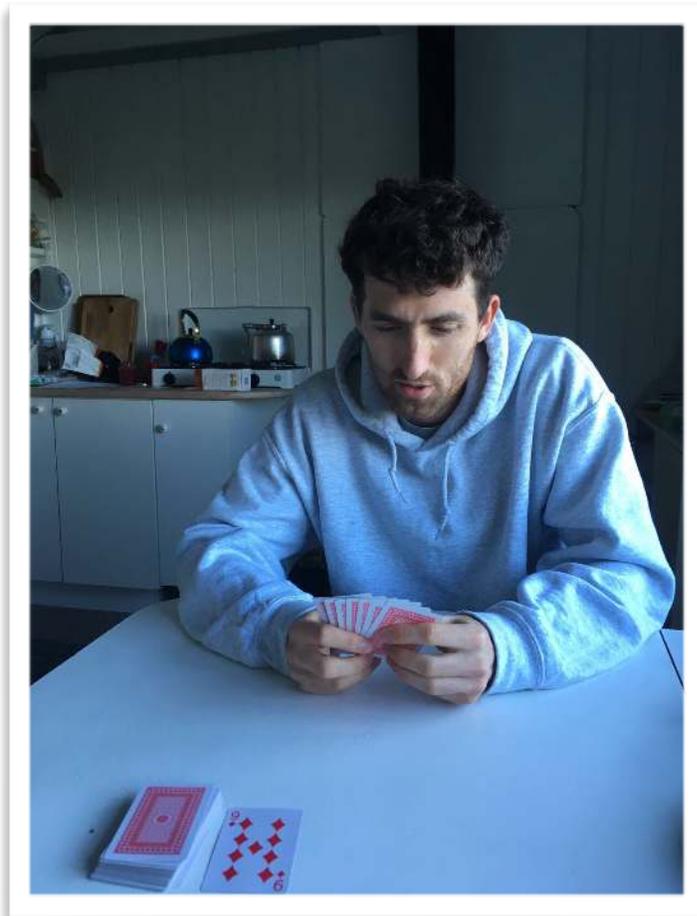
"Ta-ra, old bean," he said.

I walked towards my gate, my hands felt clammy and my heart was pounding away. I felt awful. I went into a toilet and locked myself in a cubicle. I hung my jacket on the peg on the back of the door. I put the lid down and sat on it and put my head in my hands. I hadn't thought about all that Sports Day shit for such a long time. I felt awful.

I could still hear the sound of the bat against his nose.

I sat locked in there for forty-five minutes waiting for my flight. I thought about Panthalassa, all big and blue. I imagined David as some tough old crocodile, swimming around, a rare and powerful freak; surviving everything life threw at him. He was stronger than me, that was for sure. He was Jurassic.

When the time came, I took some tissue from the dispenser and wiped away my tears. I lifted the lid and flushed away the tissue, took my jacket from the peg on the door, put it on, took my suitcase and went back out into the terminal and made my way towards my gate for boarding. ∞



*J.J. Jarman was born in 1991 in an English city built on seven hills and two rivers. He writes stories, songs and screenplays, and works as a copywriter. Outside of writing his main hobbies are drumming, swimming, drinking coffee and eating carbonara.*

# All That Remains, by Robin Melhuish

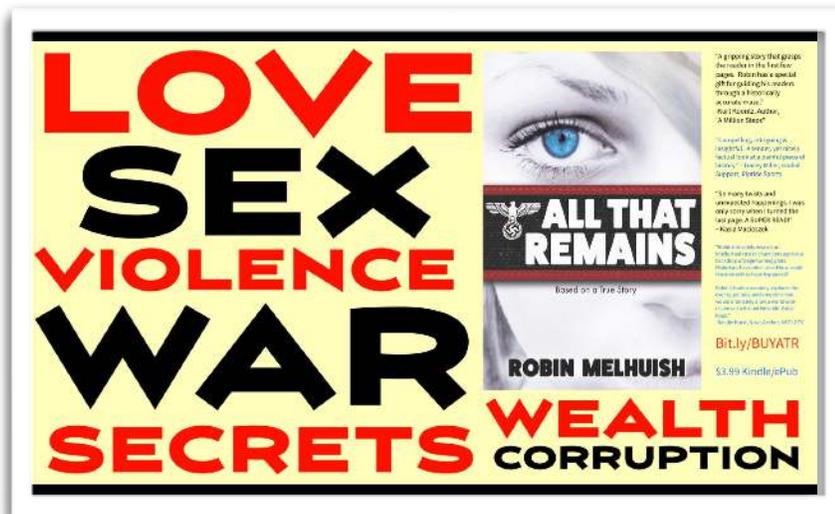
Published by AltPublish

Deep in the Soviet Occupation Zone of defeated Germany, in 1945, a baby girl is born and abandoned. From the shards of war she discovers the uncomfortable truth. The uncovering of the official lies about the capture of Himmler's Nazi fortress, leads to a hunt for the proceeds of the biggest undetected robbery in history.

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## Testimonial:

*"At first I thought it was a history lesson, everything in it I checked and it was fact. Then I got so engrossed in the story I forgot to check. So many twist and unexpected happening. I was only sorry when I turned the last page. Thanks, a super read." ~ Kasia Macioszek [Beta Reader]*



# *Short Story*

## World of Walls

by William Gensburger

There was no Satori, which, for the Japanese, meant that there was no enlightenment. From his cubicle, five up from the central walkway, Robert Yamato considered this fact. He had been a faithful employee since exiting school, trained by the corporation to suit their standards.

He was surrounded by walls, sixty feet in height, seventy feet in width, and endless in length, pock-marked with cubicles—what they called Ansich, a word derived from German that meant in-itself.

Ansich was made of duro-plastic, stronger than concrete, yet lightweight and modular. Each cubicle extended the length of the human body, with many compartments built around the surface for storage of all necessities of the human living within. This included the sleeping mat—rolled up during the day—small desk, toilet seat that swung out—and what few precious possessions of the resident. A bioluminescent panel above provided the lighting, and a thin roll down cover sealed off the entrance hatch, the cliff-edge that overlooked the central walkway.

This was the world of Japanshu, a self-contained city, and there was none other quite like it. Robert Yamato was Japanshu born and raised, as his parents and grandparents had been before him, none of whom he had met. Once school age,

along with all the other children, he attended residential school; ten hour school days and life in packed dormitories. Everyone worked. That was the way.

Now, at age thirty-five, he was perched at the entrance hatch of his Ansich, work completed for the day, gazing out at the lines of the wall diminishing into the distance. There it was, he considered, perfection in architecture; certainly in accordance with the Tao.

Beneath him a line of people were passing. That line, too, stretched into infinity, a perpetual single-file of humanity on their way to the feeding area, or simply out for exercise. There was no other reason to leave Ansich. With a surplus of living beings, the need for social contact was limited strictly to the vid-screens in each cubicle. Even then, it was strictly for business purposes. There was no romance. There was no sex unless mandated by the corporation as the need for workers increased.

He remembered a verse from Zen history:

*The body is like unto the Bodhi-tree  
The mind is like the stand of a bright mirror  
Carefully we cleanse it hour by hour  
Lest dust should fall upon it.*

He allowed himself a controlled breath, felt his agitation calmed for a moment. Beneath, he spotted a familiar face; his business associate from Tashami Electronics. She passed by without looking up; just one of many in that row.

You were in my dreams last night, Miss Tashami, he thought, as his eyes followed her into the distance. But it was a lie because he had barely managed to sleep at all; the steady shuffling of feet through the shift changes, keeping him

awake despite the slip cover sealing his entrance hatch. And it was a lie because such desires could not be acted upon, certainly not by choice. Urges of a sexual kind were handled alone, in the privacy of the Ansieh, and never spoken of. A terrible surge of loneliness washed over him for the first time in his life.

"World of walls," he said to himself, "you offer no compassion and no love."

In his right hand he held three coins. He tossed them onto his sleeping mat and marked the first line of the hexagram. Then again, until the six lines of the hexagram were complete. Ko. He had looked it up in the I Ching, the historic record of all truths that he might find.

Ko was the hexagram of changes. Line one denoted change at an early period. Line two signified brightness, intelligence. That was hopeful. Let the subject take action in the way of change. Line three disposes the subject toward reckless and violent changing; this would be a bad omen unless caution was exercised. The next line vitiates any action, requires the opportunity for repentance. But other conditions determine the opposite effect. Line five showed the Lord of the Hexagram. The action will be beneficial.

It was line six that truly caught his attention; he read it aloud: "The sixth, six, divided, shows the superior man as the leopard changes, while small men change their faces. To go ahead would lead to evil; but there be good fortune in abiding firm."

Yamato considered this reading. He was unsure what a leopard was having never seen one, and quickly tapped the definition on the keyboard. The vid-screen gave him the answer: Tiger-like. A member of the cat family. Spotted. Dangerous.

He shut the book and tossed it aside. Change had been on his mind for some time. He had inadvertently found his mind drifting, even during the work shift,

questioning the purpose of his life. He wanted more. But more than that, he wanted someone with whom to be close. He wanted sex. He wanted love. He recalled a dream where a man and a woman would make love and a baby would be born to them. They would raise the child. Yamato could not imagine how that would work in Ansich, unless there were larger modules elsewhere in Japanshu. He had no idea. His world had extended to the food hall, the bathing hall, and then to the elevators that would take him to his work level. It was all quite straightforward. There were no maps to show you the way. You were told where to go on the first day of advancement and you just remembered.

Pride dictated that you worked on a level that reflected your advancement and dedication to Tashami Electronics. He was now working on level 5 which offered window views of the desolate, urban landscape outside. There was little to see except for the freighters and transports delivering materials throughout the world. Considering that when he first started to work he was at sub-level 50, windowless and dark, processing ores that would end up as components in Tashami Electronic products. He had advanced quickly. If he lived long enough and continued his rate of advancement, he could expect to reach the 200th level within a decade. At that level his accommodations would change; he would become a decision maker, and he would have a larger cubicle. He had heard of the perks for the level 200 employees; better food, special amenities like soft massage sessions.

So it was only fitting that the hexagram would match his thoughts of change. But change to what degree? Should he speak with Miss Tashami? There was no indication that she would listen. And then there was the matter of her affiliation with the corporation itself, assuming her surname reflected that association.

Rolling up his sleeping mat, he placed it within the cabinet by the head. His desk was only half inserted into the wall cavity, papers strewn across the surface. The vid-screen flashed the day's agenda which he had not yet begun to tackle.

There was no point in waiting for Miss Tashami's return since the central pathway extended only with one direction of motion. To return one would have to follow the pathway behind his wall which would eventually connect back to the central pathway. She would return to her cubicle unnoticed by him. And that was probably just as well.

For a time he continued to watch the moving line of humanity, a steady, hypnotic flow in the same direction. He found his eye tracking one head until it was far off, then back to one that was just below. He had come to accept this as a way to calm himself, this separation from the self, the removal of his own identity as he passively observed the motion of those he had no desire to meet. There was an order to this, and he was serene within the framework of the architecture, for he had known no other.

Another time and place, he told himself, and it could have been a fountain within a stone garden providing that inner tranquility.

Returning to his desk, he carefully stacked the papers into a neat pile. Here was where order stopped. His inability to sleep had hurt his ability to work. The business no longer mattered to him. And then, as if to further wound himself, he considered that he had never met his employers, never seen any of the products which his company made, or really known the progress in any form other than sales figures.

He punched up the number for Tashami Electronics, then sat in front of the vid-screen waiting for his call to be answered. Presently the face of a young woman filled the screen.

"Miss Tashami," he said. She closed her eyes and bowed slightly, enough for the movement to be well pronounced over a video connection.

"May I be of service, Mister Yamato?" she asked.

He smiled. "Please, I request that you call me Robert."

"May I be of service...Robert?"

"It is not business that I wish to discuss, Miss Tashami," he said. "I thought that I would merely inquire into your health, today."

"I am well," she said, her eyes looking away for a moment, avoiding his. "If I may be so direct...Robert...it is an unusual question to ask from a business associate, is it not?"

Now he looked away, not sure, for a moment, just how to reply. "I beg forgiveness if I have cast insult to you, Miss Tashami," he finally said.

"No insult was taken, Robert," she said. "I was merely curious why you had asked. Forgive my boldness." She smiled at him.

"There is nothing to forgive," he told her, smiling back, feeling more confident now. "The fault was mine. I have been feeling quite distracted these past few days. I confess to admiring your inner beauty and your spiritual calm, Miss Tashami."

He looked directly at her and their eyes touched. Now, he told himself. I must know. "May I call you Alice? I feel we have been acquainted sufficiently for first names."

She paused for a moment, then smiled. "Please," she told him.

Robert Yamato inhaled deeply. "I am lonely, Alice."

The revelation changed him. His mind now flooded with images, foreign images. He thought of the two of them. Together. Change? Yet it was just the images, the strength of which was based on purity, sensations created not of the body; but from the mind.

The sin of weakness if the failing of the human heart, he told himself. Surely I have sinned. And yet the next words he had uttered after the revelation had been far worse, enough for Alice Tashami to quickly decline and sever their communication: He had asked her to visit him so that they might meet face to face for the first time.

Now he lay sprawled across his sleeping mat, ashamed and yet feeling better for having at least spoken his mind. It was a foolish thing to have done. And he was a fool for even having considered it. It was the book's fault for filling his head with ideas of change and chance.

From his mat he could see the cubicles on the adjacent wall, and at least twenty with open hatches. He watched these other people, fulfilling their destiny, oblivious to the perils of non-conformity. Where would it lead? he wondered.

And silently he prayed for guidance. He could hear a chime in the background. His monitor flashed a message. Turning to read it, he felt a wave of nausea sweep over him.

**Robert Yamato**

**Level 5**

**Efficiency rating=0**

**Report to Hall of Greatness**

He sighed.

Calmly, he descended onto the central walkway, followed it to the main elevator shafts, and summoned a module to take him up. The line continued on without him, and he suddenly felt vulnerable.

When the module arrived, he entered and pressed for the uppermost level, where the Hall was. There were two-hundred above-ground levels of Japanshu, and he realized that he had never passed level 5. There had been no reason. In fact, he had never been summoned upstairs before, either. As the module ascended and the lines of symmetry from the walls and people converged, he wondered whether he would be allowed to return.

Through the clear plastic he could see each level as he passed. Each, the same design, identical in every way except for the inhabitants. Passing the 100th level, he realized that there were no people; empty hallways with pathway lights along the floors. Devoid of people it felt cold and lifeless. At some point, he knew, people would fill those levels, promotions from within, as always, working your way up the ranks to the levels of more importance.

He could only dream of such a thing inasmuch as he could only dream about love. Love. Miss Tashami. Was that love? He knew so little of such things; inexperienced and kept that way. Japanshu was control and loyalty was obedience.

There was no Tao.

The module stopped. Ahead he saw a massive doorway. There were no walls and nothing to see. The answer was behind the door.

"Enter," a voice boomed out. It surrounded him and filled him with fear.

Cautiously he pushed open the doors and was struck by the vastness that stretched to an apparent infinity. White, barren. He could hear his heart beating feverishly.

"Come forward," the same voice commanded. Silently he obeyed, his pace the same as it would have been on the main level, amidst the flow of human bodies all moving as one.

Minutes passed, or perhaps longer, he considered. It was cold and the chill sliced through him. White. Purity. I have found Shinto—the way of the gods.

"More," the voice instructed. "Closer."

He looked back and could no longer see the great doors. Even the ceiling and walls blended into a white haze. A spasm shook his lower jaw and he clenched his teeth to silence the chattering.

Stopping for a moment, he buried his face into his hands, avoiding a wash of nausea and dizziness. "What have I done?" he muttered.

"Continue," the voice told him, and he stumbled to his feet and lunged forward, faster, barely able to control his movements until he was running, or more appropriately, falling forward, feeling the pull of an invisible gravity; falling but never hitting the floor, like the dreams of his shattered sleep.

And then appeared a kneeling pad, small, distinct, all that was visible. It rushes to me, he told himself, or I to it.

With a sigh he fell onto it, panting uncontrollably. He wiped his eyes to clear the haze and felt wetness. And he waited for what was to come next.

For minutes there was only silence.

"Our ancestors lived in honor," the voice said calmly. "Our ancestors did not live in shame."

Yamato nodded in a short bow.

"You have dishonored yourself, Yamato-san. You are aware of what I speak?"

"I have dishonored myself," Yamato repeated.

"The pride in work and in spirit of us all has been dishonored," the voice told him. "You have chosen to discard our values and our honor. Now there can only be disgrace and dishonor."

"Please," he shouted, then lowered his voice. "The shame and dishonor is mine to bear. It was not my intention to bring shame to Japanshu or to my employer. I must clear the shame."

"Honor and obedience. The way of truth. These are the values of a well-lived life. The one is the sum of the totality."

And Robert Yamato heard himself say, "I will forfeit my life. I will repair the honor."

Beside him a wakizashi, a short sword, appeared. Nine and a half inches in length it reached to a point, with an edge that he knew to be razor-sharp. It was an instrument of surgical precision.

Slowly he reached for it and brought it to him, raising it reverently to eye level with both hands before placing it before him again. The wooden handle was wrapped in cloth, tightly wound to facilitate a solid grip.

"I alone accept the dishonor I have caused," he said. "For this I remove the shame of Japanshu, and I beg of you, who are here with me, to do me the honor of bearing witness to my act."

"All Japanshu will witness restoration of honor," the voice said.

Yamato did not know that this was being broadcast throughout the city. Alice would be seeing his death. I will perish thinking of her, he thought. The pain will be brief and I will find freedom. I will have found satori.

He opened his shirt, exposing bare skin, then picked up the blade and turned it to lightly touch his exposed stomach. He gripped the handle with both hands firmly, overlaying the fingers of one hand over the top of the other hand for better grip. He looked blankly ahead, clearing his mind of fear. Miss Tashami, he thought, seeing her face in his memory, then, with a sudden jolt, snapped the blade toward him.

In the instant of searing pain, which his mind had told him would come first, he felt only his hand brushing against his belly as he twisted the blade hard to both sides and then, with another hard twist, straight up before withdrawing it from his body. It will be over in a moment, he thought.

He heard the blade hit the floor and his eyes looked at it with surprise. There was no blood on it. He glanced down to his wound and, touched it with both hands. Again no blood on his hands. He looked down at his bare skin. No wound. Nothing. His mind reeled. He looked again at the blade where it had fallen, but it was gone.

"Honor is restored," the voice said calmly. "The total harmony of the world has been reborn, and the sins have been removed. Return to life, Yamato-san."

Robert Yamato bowed, barely able to control the trembling in his limbs or the rushing of blood to his brain. He gingerly stood, lost his balance and fell. Then he stood again, turning back from where he had come.

The tears flowed easily now, no longer in shame or fear; rather from the rebirth he had just experienced.

"Follow me," the voice, now soothing, told him. "I will tell you the Tale of Harmony as you walk." Yamato nodded.

"The humble ant has crossed the path where many tread, unaware of the danger of its passage. Like you, it must understand the possibility that life may be fleeting, yet still it proceeds. No caution can be taken since the speed at which the ant travels is slow compared to those of the people passing. Still, the ant continues, immovable to its destiny."

The great door was just ahead.

"In this Hall, you are the ant, passing through the unknown. This is the mystery of life which you have now received."

The great doors opened before him and he stepped into the waiting module. The levels slipped passed, no longer his concern and, in the next instant, he was again on the central pathway.

There was work to be done.

As he stepped from the ladder into his cubicle, he had the rest of the day divided into a series of tasks. First, he would straighten the mess. He removed his shirt and put it aside, then withdrew a fresh shirt from one of the cabinets.

The vid-screen flashed his messages. Miss Tashami had called. He stared at the screen for a moment, buttoning his shirt, and then pressed for a return call. Her face filled the screen.

"I am returning your call, Miss Tashami. I apologize for my absence," he said calmly.

She stared at him, silent for a few seconds. "You do not look well, Robert," she said. "Is there a problem?"

He shook his head. "No. May I assist you in some matter?"

She looked away, uncertain if she should continue. "I regret my previous reaction. If you are still willing, I would very much like to see you."

"I am afraid that is not possible," he told her. "I have much work to do."

"Forgive me," she said quickly. "I have made an error of judgement." She bowed and the connection was broken.

Childish whims, he thought to himself, yet he could still see her face from a previous call when she had smiled at him. He had enjoyed, very much, making her smile.

Ko was the hexagram of changes. He remembered that it was line six that truly caught his attention. He recited it from memory: "The sixth, six, divided, shows the superior man as the leopard changes, while small men change their faces. To go ahead would lead to evil; but there be good fortune in abiding firm."

He considered what the voice had told him; he was just the ant oblivious to the path of the larger world, the ant passing through the unknown.

"There is no room," he told himself. "It defies the way." Again, images of her face formed in his mind. Her smile. How she looked at him. He knew that it meant something, even if he was uncertain the extent.

And then he remembered that he had almost died upstairs, had committed himself to restore lost honor which he falsely believed was due to his interest in her.

And even then, as the blade sliced into him, it was her face that he held onto, the last image he wished to see—the last feeling he wished to experience.

Quickly, he dialed her number.

"Please," he said the moment her face appeared. "Come now." ∞

*[Author's note: This short story was conceived back in the 80's, just before Blade Runner was released, and before author Philip K. Dick, who wrote the novel "Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep," upon which the movie was based, passed away. It was a seemingly simpler time, both morally and intellectually, and there is an innocence reflected in the story that is absent in today's total dystopic writings. I hope you enjoy it. Let me know your thoughts.~WG]*



# Article

## Why On Earth Would You Record an Audiobook? And Why Wouldn't You?

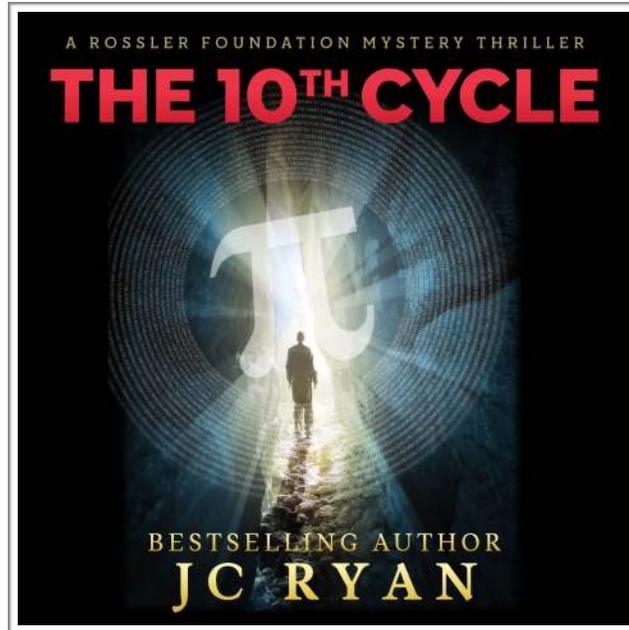
by William Gensburger



I'm a firm believer in the power of the audiobook. While I have always been involved in voice-over work for videos, radio, audio-only projects, as well as that time I over-dubbed English onto a Chinese film (an interesting, yet crazy experience in itself), I became involved with audiobooks at the suggestion of a few author friends.

## ACX

Like most things, the path of power lies in the arms of Amazon; in this case with their ACX: Audiobook Creation Exchange, the production arm of Audible, Inc. I have a



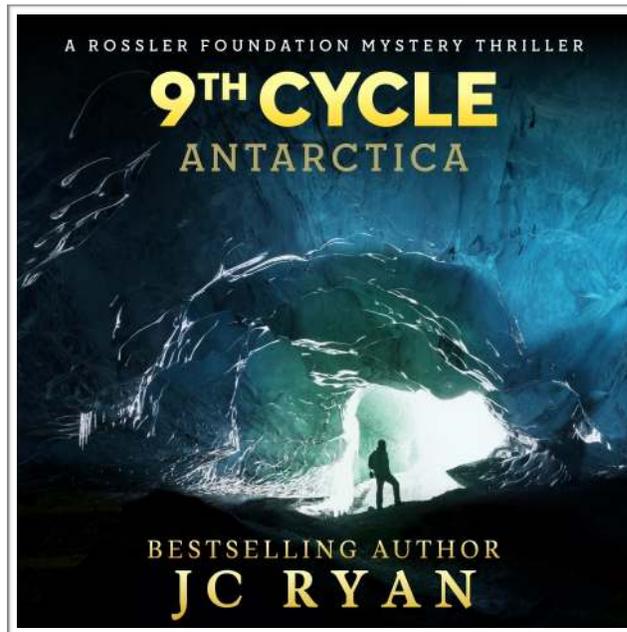
professional (small) microphone, and across my i-devices, editing software such as Audacity (free), and Twisted Wave (for the iPad), although these days I use Adobe's Audition software, part of the Adobe Creative Suite. Add a pair of decent headphones, a muted, somewhat soundproofed room - which can be many places, including your walk-in closet (the clothes act as a sound barrier), and a large warning sign for the rest of the family, and you are in business.

## AUDITION

Unless you have contacts begging you to record, you can peruse the books seeking narration. ACX calls you the producer, and the person handling the book, the rights holder. Most have an audition script for you to record and submit. After a reasonable time, you will either be accepted or rejected.

## PAYMENTS

You can elect to royalty share in the book profits, or ask for a flat-rate fee based upon the finished hours of product. Finished hours means what the person buying the audiobook will hear, not how long it took you to record it and edit it, usually two to three times the

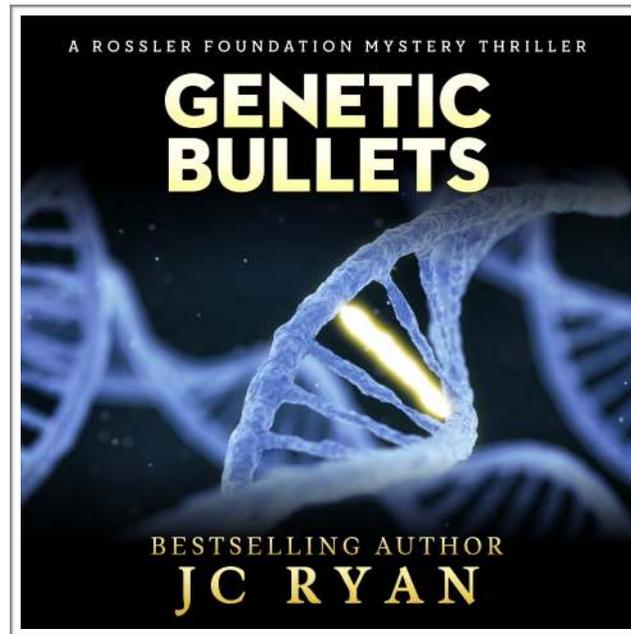


finished length. In addition, there are stringent quality requirements. Certain levels of frequency ranges, pre-recording settings, post-recording editing, to eliminate the sound of you panting, or mouth pops, as well as other incidental sounds (you may touch the mic by accident, as an example.) ACX helps you out with lessons and you can always find YouTube videos to walk you through the process.

Generally, ACX reports that there are three hours that go into each finished hour of product. So a novel that ends up at ten finished hours, means you'll be busy for 30 hours or so, getting it right. Make no mistake, it is time consuming, and also sore on the throat if you are not used to talking for long periods. Add in the occasional cold, cough, flu, or other distraction, and the audiobook you thought would be whipped out quickly, has become a slow, laborious process.

It is broken into chapters, so you can stop whenever you need, edit, convert and upload the chapters to ACX. Upon completion the rights holder will sign off on the product, then the ACX team will review it for any errors or corrections they need you to make, before finally releasing it to the world.

I am on my third audio narration at the time of this printing, all for the same bestselling author, JR Ryan. Each day I assign a few hours to production, first recording a few chapters, and then editing them. In my home-office I blocked off a section dedicated to recording. I set up sound barriers around the microphone, to form a box of sorts, and then surrounded that with sound dampening blankets and foam. I have a wind shield on



the microphone, and also a pop filter—a round disk with fine meshing within—attached at a distance from the microphone, to catch the pop and mouth sounds.

## EDITING

Editing is often an exercise in patience. I know that as I record, the tone of my voice may be off or, in the case of JC Ryan’s books, a vocabulary word that I am unfamiliar with, resulting in stopping, finding the word online and hearing how it should be pronounced, continuing the recording, often without a retake, and editing the incorrect version out afterwards. Here, you listen for the breathing sounds that are unavoidable, but easily identified and erased. In addition, I like to tighten the pace so that I don’t put anyone to sleep with my rendition.

## COMMUNICATION

Communication is vital with the rights holder. If you have an issue, a delay, a question, you need to make sure to communicate to the rights holder. This is a business of trust that you can deliver the product and your ability to communicate. You are only as good as your word (literally)!

# AUDIOBOOKS I HAVE COMPLETED

The Tenth Cycle: A Rossler Foundation Mystery, Book 1, by bestselling author JC Ryan  
The Ninth Cycle: A Rossler Foundation Mystery, Book 2, by bestselling author JC Ryan  
Genetic Bullets: A Rossler Foundation Mystery, Book 3, by bestselling author JC Ryan (in production, to be finished by October 10)

## SHOULD YOU RECORD YOUR OWN BOOK?

The jury is out on whether authors should narrate their own books. If you have experience narrating, then my opinion is that there is a better value having the author narrate, especially if you have any kind of following. Readers like to get a sense of the person making the words on page, and what better way than to hear the sound of their voice. On the other hand, your voice may not be suited to the project. Perhaps your book is from a feminine point of view; it might be better read by a woman than a man.

ACX discourages sounds, music, anything that distracts from the quality of the spoken word itself. However, as in the case of the books I have narrated, challenges have been in handling female characters, as well as those with foreign accents. Luckily, having grown up abroad, I have been exposed to many different accents, and many have had free range in the narration for the books. American, British, French, German, Indian, Scottish, Australian, to name but a few. And as fun as that can be, it is also more time consuming because long paragraphs in an accent you tend to not usually use, poses problems as the accent drifts from one to another. Even worse, if multi-national characters are speaking to each other. You have to stop, gather the next accent in your head, then test it, then continue. And you always run the risk that your accent is not really for the nationality portrayed. Mostly, though, making the narration interesting will keep readers listening, and keep you employed.

I have two of my own fiction books coming out this year, and I plan to narrate one of them. The other focuses on a female character and I have a voice in my head, so will seek auditions for the role when the time comes.

## SALES

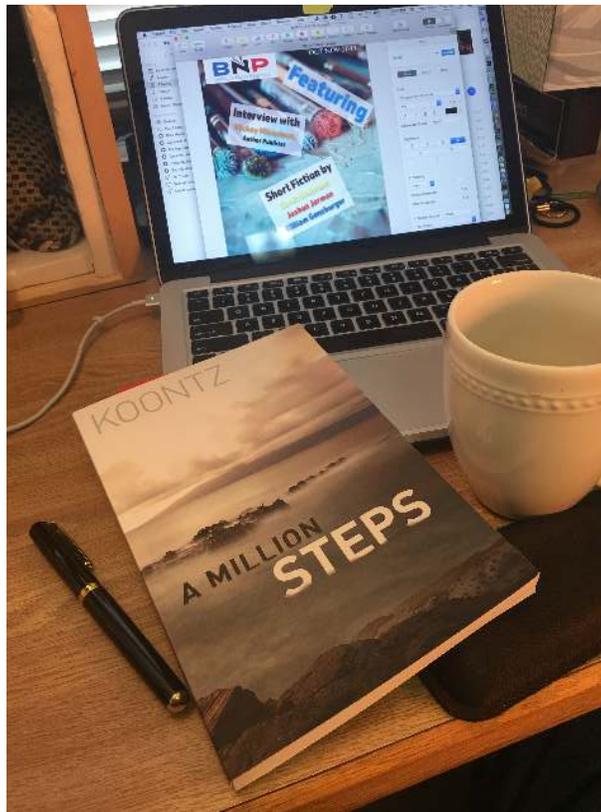
Audiobooks are a growing marketshare. The marketshare for print books has declined 25% over the past three years, although a recent revival is taking place. E-book sales were down 12.5%. Audiobook sales have increased 38% during the same period, in part due to Amazon's Audible, which has shown a 40% membership growth with about 1.6 billion hours of audiobooks listened to.

As an author, you want to cover all bases. I love print books—the feel of a book in your hand is different than anything else. I also read eBooks, convenient for all locations whether traveling, or waiting at a doctor's office, or even at home. And with a variety of devices from dedicated e-readers to apps on smartphones, all of which pick up where you left off, it can't get any easier to promote reading. Audiobooks add another layer. You can learn more about what's involved by visiting the [ACX site](#). You can also check out [7 Reasons Why Your Book Should Be An Audiobook](#) that also includes a podcast, a taste of listening versus reading.

I'm also happy to answer any questions you have. [Contact me](#).

# *Book Review*

## “A Million Steps” by Kurt Koontz



When you first meet Kurt Koontz, you realize that he is a tall man, leanly built; the image of a man who doesn't hold an office job, instead choosing something related to the outdoors in order to define both himself, and life.

So it was with the writing of his true-to-life story walking the million steps of 490-mile trek on the historic Camino de Santiago, Spain, now some years in the

past, although the trip, the memories, the lessons and the attitude remain quite rooted in the present.

Wouldn't you like to just pack up and get away from it all? A chance to see what life really has to offer, a chance to meet humble people, from whom you learn humility, adventurous souls, from whom you better appreciate what adventure really means, beyond the shoot-em-ups of modern movies.

And before you think that this book is some huge, life changing, how-to book, Kurt clearly lets you know that this was a trip of discovery in the process of the journey—the walking—and not some religious experience.

“A Million Steps” is an accounting of each segment along the way, a virtual experience for those readers who would love to undertake such a journey, but, encumbered by life's responsibilities, find that they cannot. Through the book, you walk with Kurt, get a sense of the sights, the sounds, an education in the background of the place and the cultural mindset, as well as his thoughts about every aspect of the trek. You learn that he thought he was well-prepared, both physically and mentally, along with a new pair of walking shoes that would also endure the test of the adventure—and amusing postscript about them can be found at the end. With planning, he had access to the hostels along the way which would offer shelter as he traverses the Pyrenees meadows, experiences the haunting winds of the Meseta all while following the yellow arrow markers left for pilgrims to follow.

Mixed into the journey, we learn deeply personal revelations of Kurt's life, his struggles and successes, all of which makes sense of this journey to the Cathedral de Santiago, the shrine of the Apostle Saint James the Great.

In the end, best summed up by Kurt himself, he states: “The only thing we ultimately control is our reaction to events in our lives.” Surely, this serves as a lesson in our lives as pilgrims of our own history.

As a journey of discovery, “A Million Steps” is an easy read. Kurt has broken down his experience into one you can share. It’s worth the read. 👍



The book is available [here](#) at Amazon, in print and e-book formats. You can visit Kurt’s [Webpage](#). Tell him BNP Magazine sent you.

# *Words to Write By*

Vocabulary can make or break a novel. And while there is no standard way it should be utilized, the greater your available vocabulary, the stronger the choices you have in the construction of your work. That said, Ernest Hemingway used a simple, straight-forward vocabulary, whereas other writers use words that often make the reader take pause, note the word for further evaluation.

As a writer, words are playthings, each potent in character, full in length, weighty in use, and assembled like musical notation, can project a solid imagery that enhances the plot. Used poorly, however, can have the opposite effect. Often, characters have their own vocabulary, extending a sense of their identity to the reader.

Here are some words you should know:

- Pragmatic: concerned with practical matters

I am pragmatic about the outcome of the election.

- Decimate: killing in large numbers

The fishing trawlers decimated the dolphin population

- Demarcate: used as boundaries to identify locations

The bridge was the point of demarcation between France and Switzerland

- Audacious: large, disposed of to take risks, grand in scope

It was an audacious plan to build an elevator to an orbiting space station.

- Affect: To have an influence upon; a demonstrative posture taken on oneself (affectation). Not to be confused with •Effect: the reaction of one thing upon another.

Some thought him odd, his swagger an affectation he had copied from his favorite celebrity. The overall effect on his friends was less than positive.

- Ascertain: to be certain of something as fact.

We need to ascertain that the meteor will impact the planet.

- Entreat: to ask for something pleadingly in earnest.

“Won’t you take me back?” He entreated.

- Usurp: to take without authority.

By instructing the crew, Jacob usurped the Captain.

- Wanton: an action unprovoked, or without motivation or justification.

The bombs left a wanton path of devastation.

- Tarry: to depart slowly and hesitantly, to drag out a departure.

You can tarry if you like; however I am in a rush.

- Diffident: lacking confidence.

With his pants too loose and his jacket wrinkled, he appeared as a diffident leader.

# *Submission Guidelines*

So you'd like to submit your short story to BNP Magazine? We'd love to see it. Our guidelines are simple: tell a great story. Don't tell a sliver of a story, don't tease a story (especially if you are using the short story to promote a novel), no excerpts (unless otherwise approved), and no stolen work.

Your story **MUST HAVE** a beginning, middle and end, to what you are trying to convey; the character must **CHANGE** throughout the story.

Show **DON'T** tell. Narration is all well and good if it serves a purpose. Readers want to **SEE** the story, not be told it.

Don't get creative with post dialog attributes—he said, she said, is just fine. You don't need "This stinks," he spat. Unless he really spat, don't say it. "I don't like the curtains," she said leisurely. Unless it took her a very long and comfortable time, do not use that word.

Avoid stupid words that do not exist. "Disenfranchised." This would mean that you owned an "en" franchise and suddenly lost it. "Irregardless." Regardless means an aside to what was stated. Irregardless would mean that it isn't an aside, which would make it a redundancy. Just use "Regardless" or nothing.

And while "he said," and "she said," are all fine, when you have two people talking, you can quickly figure out who is talking. Just use that the first time and intermittently, but not after every sentence."

Proper dialog format is as follows: "I really like the curtains," he said. It is not, "I really like the curtains!" He said. By the way, exclamation marks are for exclaiming—you know, vibrantly emphatic!!!!

Please proof-proof your work before you submit it. If you care that little about your work to submit it without having gone through it, what response are you expecting from me? Excellent proofing methods include reading it aloud, having someone read it to you, record it and play it back. You will be amazed at the mistakes you find.

Please avoid ALL CAPS. IT LOOKS LIKE YOU ARE SCREAMING AND EVEN IF YOUR CHARACTER IS SCREAMING IT SHOULD BE IN lower case.

Please make sure that any quotations, citations, selections from other materials you use, are not copyrighted. While you are allowed to use “fair use” selections, you need to be familiar with the laws that protect these works. When in doubt, ask.

Please do not submit formatted work. Text is best. Your fancy font that made you feel good, will only irritate me as I have to strip it back to text before I use it.

Should your work be accepted for publication, it will pass through an editing process. While we endeavor to retain your work as closely as possible, editing may require us to adjust your work for reader clarity, in addition to grammatical corrections. We may elect to change the title of your work, however we will contact you and work with you.

Deadlines are the first of the month preceding publication. We cannot guarantee in which issue your story will appear, however we will notify you when it does.

Submissions should be made from our Website at [www.AltPublish.com](http://www.AltPublish.com) from the SUBMIT selection. There is a consent to read form that you must complete. You can then upload your work. Maximum story length is 2000 words, however, if your work is longer and warrants extra space, we will discuss this with you.

Our payment rates are posted on the Website. Payment is made upon publication, by check/cheque, PayPal, or some other method that works for us both.

If your work is accepted, you will be asked for a headshot photo, and a brief biography that will appear at the end of the story. These can be sent by email with a publication contract you will be sent.

If you have other questions, please contact [info@AltPublish.com](mailto:info@AltPublish.com) and include BNP in the subject line. ∞

# Have You Ever Written On a Train?



*Why do writers find the train such a fruitful work environment? In the wake of Chee's interview, Evan Smith Rakoff tweeted, "I've been on Amtrak a lot lately & love writing while traveling—a set, uninterrupted deadline." The writer Anne Korkeakivi described train travel as "suspended impregnable time," combined with "dreamy" forward motion: "like a mantra, it greases the brain."*

Read an interesting article from the [Paris Review](#). There is something quaint about being aboard a train, for a time, unfettered, free from the meanderings of the world outside. If you haven't tried writing on a train, I highly recommend it.

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