

Books 'N Pieces Magazine

October 2018

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FROM THE PUBLISHER:

Welcome to the October issue, with one more issue left for this year. And as you can see, we have changed the format once again. Each issue this year has been handled differently so that we can determine the best layout for you, our readers.

We've tried normal magazine size to accommodate a standard print size, but with full-color printing costs as they are, the end result, while very attractive, only attracted those people wanting a physical copy, at a far higher cost than I would have liked. We've had an entire prior year of Online-only issues which, while fine, needed to be refined to provide a better reading experience for you.

This issue has been formatted to read as a full-color eBook, in PDF or ePub format, with the print version (6" x 9") available from Amazon.

As always, we offer interviews with bestselling authors, as well as indie authors. This issue's short stories are excellent, as are our articles.

Thank you to all writers who have submitted short stories for consideration. I hope those that were not accepted found the comments useful. As many writers will attest, I offer a lot of feedback and guidance for writers seeking publication.

Read about how my company Alt Publish, works with writers wanting to self-publish by teaching while doing, empowering authors to avoid things like royalty sharing or ridiculous contracts. I've also included an article on the aftermath of Createspace and Kindle Direct merging into Kindle's print arm and how that affects costs and royalties.

Enjoy this issue, and please let me know your favorite formats to-date. Your feedback is immensely helpful.

Best wishes,

William Gensburger
william@BooksNPieces.com

Interview

Craig DiLouie The Misunderstood Monster Author



Q: Your novel *One of Us* flips the standard scary monster fears from cerebral to gut wrenching, so that the misconceptions of our fears take us to an incorrect assumption. What prompted that turnaround and do you feel it is a more effective method of storytelling than the other way?

A: Published by Orbit, *One of Us* is a dark fantasy novel about a disease that produces a generation of monsters now coming of age in ramshackle government orphanages throughout the deep South. When a plague boy is accused of a murder he

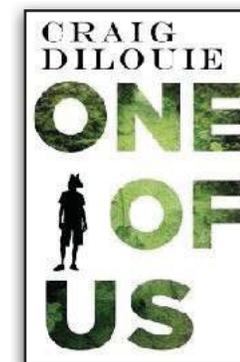
didn't commit, it might be the spark of revolt.

I was fascinated with the idea of telling a misunderstood monster like *Frankenstein* or *Conquest of the Planet of the Apes* as a Southern Gothic, a literary tradition that deals with taboo, grotesque, society in decay, and prejudice. Putting monsters in a traditional Southern Gothic worked so well that it's seamless, and both humans and monsters stand out as real flesh and blood people. Thematically, I wanted to explore prejudice as a fundamental human trait as well as the question of whether monsters are born or made.

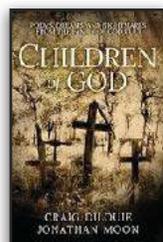
The result is a tale of human monsters and monstrous humans. We empathize with the monsters who have to suffer abuse, and when they finally push back, they become the monsters everybody feared.

Q: Your partner in life is horror writer Chris Marrs. How do two writers with similar themes live outside of writing? When you are out are you looking at people discussing "Wouldn't it be great if that one was a slasher, and that one died from XYZ...?"

A: Your question made me laugh because it reminded me that on one of our first dates, when we talked about how we'd turn a birthday party into either horror, a gross out, or terror, these things being very distinct in dark



literature. We really trashed that birthday party! Now that we're a couple, Chris and I still often talk shop—our books, other books, themes, craft. Her dark fiction is very different from mine, so it's always interesting to get her perspective on my work. When we're not going out, we often stay in and have a "write date," where we work on our projects together.



Q: You also write non-fiction as part of outside work. Could you tell us a bit about that?

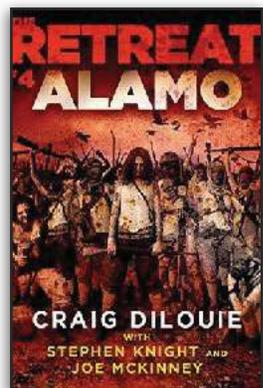
A: I'm very lucky in that I get to work from home with a "uniform" consisting of a T-shirt and pajama bottoms and a commute to the coffee maker. My time is split between fiction and nonfiction. The nonfiction is basically a continuation of a career that started in advertising and then went to magazine publishing and then to freelance journalism and education, all specializing in the lighting industry.

The two really work well together because the nonfiction is not as exciting, but it's reliable, while the fiction is not as stable financially—or emotionally—but it's far more fun. Technical writing also taught me to write as a discipline, a profession, something you just do, not in massive bursts only when the muse strikes.

Q: You like zombies. It seems everyone likes zombies. What is the appeal of zombies if you had to explain it to someone unsure about the value of zombies?

A: My first big break in fiction came with *Tooth and Nail*, which more or less started the military versus zombies sub-genre of zombie fiction. Its success led me to two more zombie books, which also did very well, and then to horror. I'm mostly focused on other genres, but every now and then I'll work up a zombie book, either as part of *The Retreat* series, which I'm doing with Joe

McKinney and Stephen Knight, or *The Front*, which I'm doing with David Moody and Timothy Long. I don't know if the appeal is so much zombies as the apocalypse. The apocalypse has fascinated humanity throughout its history. Every era seems to have its favorite way to end the world, based on popular anxieties, and interest in that type of literature goes up the more economic anxiety a society feels. In the 1950s, it was Martians, in the 70s, asteroids and environmental collapse, in the 80s, nuclear war, in the 90s, germs, and in the 00s, zombies, EMP strikes, terrorism, and economic collapse. Of these, I think zombies are so popular because you can, well, shoot



them.

While writing this stuff, I've found there are two types of zombie fiction fans, whom I call Walking Dead fans and Z-Nation fans. The Z-Nation type reads zombie books because a little part of them wishes the world would end. They wouldn't have to have a job or pay taxes or pay off the credit card, they'd be free, they would slay monsters to survive, and they'd be the last person standing. The Walking Dead type reads zombie books because deep down they're afraid something is going to come along and take away everything that's important to them. They purge existential fears by reading it. I'm more the latter type.



Q: What's your writing structure like? Set time, notepad or laptop, that sort of thing?

A: The first thing I do is come up with a big idea that's going to compel me to go through all this work. After that, I research it to death, mining for creative raw materials. Then I map out the basic plot structure and character arcs so I know my protagonist, antagonist, and how they're going to conflict and to what end.

Then I start writing. I try to write in the mornings and do the nonfiction in the afternoon, but often I get on a tear that barely breaks for eating and sleeping until I'm done. The hardest part is commitment and getting to know the book in the first third. After that, it practically writes itself, with me barely typing fast enough to keep up with the story dictating itself.

Q: Do you write through before editing or edit as you go? And after that, how many different eyes get to edit before your final version?

A: I edit as I go. I've used a lot of editing software to a point I've internalized what I need to do during the writing itself, and then I give it one or two reads to polish it up. For my self-published work, I use a freelance editor, who helps me tighten up some of the language and catch other things I didn't because I'm now so close to it. For my books for traditional publishers, it goes through several editing stages, the first usually involving a big revision. These are standalone big-idea novels, so there's a lot more going on in them, and I'm lucky to have such a great editor at Orbit, who basically says this is good, but let's take it to another level. For me, it's less editing than meeting the challenging of making it as good as it can be before it sees print.

Q: How did you get your first publisher? Difficulty?

A: I was trying to get published in the 90s, which was hell. There was this *Catch 22* where you had to get published to get an agent but you needed the agent to get published. I finally started hitting the slush pile using an assembly line process until a small press in Oregon picked up my first novel, a psychological thriller titled, *Paranoia*. From there, over a long period of time, one thing led to another, picking up the pace until I was finally agented and working with big houses and seeing my work in hardcover on a shelf at Barnes & Noble. It's been an amazing journey, gratifying and humbling.

Q: If you could go back and change one thing from your writing journey from start to now, what would you change, if anything?

A: If I could go back in time and give myself advice, I'd say two things. First, you don't have to be a hotshot with lots of credits to be welcomed and make good contacts at writing conferences. Second, when you do feel like a hotshot, don't get cocky because success comes and goes, and you still have a lot to learn.

Q: Thanks, very much, Craig. Is there anything else you would like shared with our audience.

A: Thank you! The only other thing I'd say to your readers is thank you for joining us, visit my website at www.CraigDiLouie.com to learn more about my fiction and lots of other books and movies I review there, and finally, if you like an author's work, review it and don't be shy about writing to them. More often than not, you'll make their day.

You can also find Craig's books at <https://amzn.to/2D4DWB4>

You can find Chris Marrs' books at <https://amzn.to/2D7m2xv>

Short Story

Other Bad Habits

by Sue Ellen Herring

Shaun holds the door for me, but Joey shoves ahead, pulling cigarette and lighter from somewhere. I give him a look, but he lights up anyway, maneuvering his words around his cigarette: "It's a bar."

"We have to post it." Boxcar waves a red bar towel towards a *No Smoking* sign tacked up on the dark paneled wall behind him. Leaving the rag in a small heap, he flips the lids from our beers, then leans across the bar, raising his eyebrows and lowering his voice like we're confidants: "But we won't enforce it, least 'til somebody raises a stink." Joey blows smoke at me before wandering off to find a table.

I used to stand with the smokers just outside the double doors of the English building, and then, when they pushed us off campus, on the sidewalk across the street. Now when I walk near them I inhale, remembering my reasons for quitting: the burden of accoutrement, lighter and pack; amber-stained fingers and nails, the old smoke clinging smell, and regret every night for every cigarette I had smoked during the day, and guilt in the morning because I knew I would do it again. And Shaun hates it.

But I grew up with smokers, though both parents had finally quit, sort of. My dad encouraged me: "If I can do it, anybody can!" After years of Marlboros, he stopped. "Just like *that*" he would say if you asked him about it. These days he trains habitually for a marathon he has yet to run. Last month on my way home to visit, I drove past him on an outer road as he trudged along wobbly and out of breath. "I keep expecting him to collapse; he trains all the time," my mother says, rolling her eyes like she always does. "It's his *thing* these days."

Meanwhile, she smokes clandestinely, crouched between the storage shed and the privacy fence, or next to the arborvitae near a brush pile topped off by a plastic baby pool she uses for bathing Biscuit, her glassy-eyed cocker spaniel. He sniffs the weeds or pants next to her as she inhales and exhales luxuriously. Other times he waits outside the bathroom, tail thumping, where my mother hides with the fan whirring and window open. We aren't supposed to know.

But I understand. There might as well be an old, bony, yellowed finger poking at a soft spot on my brain all the time. I still want to smoke, and *Boxcar's*, with its dim lights, dark walls, and an old hardwood floor worn smooth by decades of drunken shuffling, is the kind of place that begs you to

smoke as soon as you hit the door. So I have back-up: beige squares of nicotine gum, even though I get hiccups and mouth sores if I chew too fast.

The table Joey grabs is in the center of the bar with a view of the stage, unless the dance floor fills up, which isn't likely. As we wait for the band, Shaun twists around in his chair, shooting looks back at the door, more interested in who might show up rather than in who actually has. I catch myself digging a thumbnail into my forearm. I stop and pick at my cuticles instead.



The band wanders onto the stage so nonchalantly almost no one notices until a squatty bass player plucks a string, sending a deep, bouncy note ricocheting wall to wall just as Shaun stands up as if on cue to wave someone over. A girl with big, round eyes and a complexion like a new doll's steps up to our table. Joey sits up straight and, though he has to do some untangling, he removes his legs from the chair next to him and offers it to her, so for a minute I'm convinced Joey has a date. *Good*, I think, because he could use a girlfriend.

Joey practically lives with us these days. He left the apartment above ours and moved across town to his sister's house last month when his lease expired. Though he is leaving for Fort Hood in November, he apparently means to spend every afternoon until then with his legs slung over the side of our green recliner while he chain-smokes and watches game shows or thumbs through novels from my Southern fiction class. He quizzes me about obscure words—*transmogrification*, *indefatigable*, *moiling*—and fictional genealogies, when he isn't calling some contestant on *Wheel of Fortune* a dumbass.

I stumble regularly over Joey's big, black boots, and he refuses to take a hint when it is time for him to go. But Shaun is gone more and more often these days, so on nights when he doesn't come home at all, and muffled voices and laughter drift down through vents from the apartment upstairs, I don't actually mind Joey being around.

Back at *Boxcar's*, the girl ignores Joey and slides into the chair on the other side of Shaun. Smoke from Joey's cigarette curls in front of my face, soliciting attention like an old familiar pet, as the girl grabs Shaun's beer like she's entitled to it, wraps her pink lips around it and takes a swig. I punch my thumb nail through the foil on a square of gum.

The band begins a Velvet Underground song. The lead singer does a decent Lou Reed, sing-speaking an undulating lyric as Shaun picks up a dime and starts to scratch a word in the tabletop. I can see the letters: M-e-g. He pauses, searches the girl's face for clues, then continues: h-a-n. I dig my nails into my wrist.

"Impressive," says Meghan-with-an-'h' when Shaun finishes the etching. She finds his blue eyes with her own freakishly round ones and pins him with her stare: "No one ever gets the 'h' right."

Shaun shrugs and looks away as if Meghan's approval is no big deal. But I know him. The way he squares his shoulders, leans back in his chair, and tries not to fidget—her approval is, in fact, a big deal to him. I roll my eyes and imagine myself lighting up, dragging deeply, and then blowing smoke in Meghan's direction. Instead I sit stiffly, aware of my hands, my blunt nails and rough cuticles, as well as my awkward presence, exposed by this strange new gap in my mannerisms.

I chomp my gum, hiccup, flip my hair, and turn toward the mostly empty dance floor where a few couples sway and one awkward couple moves separately, like they aren't dancing to the slowest song ever. Another guy stands in front of the stage, clutching his beer, nodding his head in karmic agreement with each line of the song—somebody's happy; somebody's sad—blah, blah, blah. Whatever.

Last summer Shaun and I walked to *Nila's* every Sunday night. We'd sit at a sidewalk table and wait for our order while a woman with thick, white hair pulled back tight like it was being punished leaned through the take-out window under a violet-blue neon sign and smiled at us without saying a word. Beyond the window someone in the kitchen hummed along to a country song we could barely hear.

Sitting on the porch steps back at the apartment—it was always too hot inside—we shared steamy cartons of chicken korma or vindaloo and soft naan wrapped in thin aluminum foil as fat moths battered at street lamps and tobacco-brown cockroaches sought the remains of the day's heat on cracked sidewalks.

The Velvet Underground song continues. Meghan picks at the label on a beer bottle, showing off small hands and perfect, unpretentious fingernails. Shaun reaches for her hand, bringing it briefly to his lips. I look away and take a desperate swig of beer that turns metallic in my mouth. A guitar screeches on stage; the lights above the drummer flash green. Against my will, my eyes seek Shaun who is still holding the hand of a girl I suddenly despise.

I wish I could say that something clicks then—that I suddenly get it; that I stomp out, go back to the apartment, move my things to my parents' or even to Joey's sister's for the night. I imagine a scene in which I turn over a table and dramatically soak Shaun with a beer.

Instead, I sit, a lump, invisible and seething—a dangerous incarnation—until I suddenly spit my gum at the side of Meghan's head. I expect all hell to break loose, but the small blob, which does not stick in Meghan's hair, bounces off her head, rolls, and comes anticlimactically to a stop in front of Shaun. Then Joey, Meghan, and Shaun all turn, synchronized, eyes on me.

"What is *wrong* with you, Julie!" Shaun is disgusted. Meghan scoots her chair away from the table and brushes through her hair with her fingers. Joey covers his mouth with the back of his hand, hiding a broad grin from no one.

"Sorry." I'm sure no one believes me, and, honestly, I am not that sorry. I am mostly surprised. Something had welled-up, not rage exactly, but an impulse, more paroxysm than tantrum if I had to describe it; more seizure than conscious act. But I know there's no point in trying to explain.

"Wow. Nice shot. Classy," Meghan says, still brushing through her hair, but she is not really talking to me. She might as well be spouting off to the wall or a chair, or to the amber-colored ashtray in front of Joey.

Shaun takes Meghan by the hand and leads her to the dance floor. He does not look back at me. He does not look at me at all.

Joey kicks my chair with his big dumb boot and leans close. His breath covers my face like warm felt, saturated with beer and smoke:

"You do *not* know how to make friends." He is still laughing sort of. I lean away from him and tell him to shut up.

He leans in again. "Jules." He says *Jules* like it has two syllables; "Jules," he says again. His lips brush my ear, but I don't look at him.

The lights above the band splash together. I bite the inside of my cheek. Joey offers me his cigarette and kicks my chair again: "Shake it off."

"Can't you ever just shut up?"

We watch the dancers sway in shades of red, magenta, purple, and blue as the lights above the dance floor change, and the slow song plays on.

About the Author:



Sue Ellen Herring grew up in Fulton, Mo., the small town where Winston Churchill gave his *Iron Curtain* speech in 1946, and where legend says Jesse James taught Sunday school for a while in 1910. For 29 years she taught English and writing to high school students. She currently lives in Springfield, Mo. with her husband, James. Her stories and essays have appeared in *Straylight Literary Arts Magazine*, *Minerva Rising*, and *the English Journal*, among other publications.

Interview

JS Ririe

The Potential of Indie Publishing



JS Ririe is the pen name for Jan Hill, an author with a lot to say. Her first series: *Indecision's Flame* has two of the seven in the series available, self-published after a past experience with a publishing company. All seven have been written and proofed, as have many of a second series. Having managed to be released from her contract with the publishing company previously representing her, she now has the long task of obtaining new ISBN numbers, and cover art for each of the books.

Q: What are some of the difficulties you've encountered in this new direction, and what have you learned that could be of use to other writers considering self-publishing?

A: I started at ground-zero with no idea how to even begin. The desire, commitment and drive were there, but the moments of self-doubt, confusion and feeling overwhelmed were also present. I wanted to be able to control what happened to my stories, revise as necessary, reach the right target audience and have the flexibility of knowing that I was in charge of my own success or failure, but the task of becoming an Indie author filled me with more than apprehension. I had to rethink how I used my time and limited financial resources since I was now in charge of writing, publishing and marketing what to me were my children. My computer skills were limited. I knew little about how the Internet worked. It was two steps forward and three steps back all the way with the first book, but I was lucky enough to find a cover designer since I have no artistic ability.

The most important thing I learned was to be careful with who I got advice from and the direction to go since the objective was for me to also learn new skills. There were many people willing to offer help as well as support from family and friends, other writers and people I met Online and in writer forums and similar groups, but many of them were no further along the steep learning curve than I was.

One of the best things I learned was to keep lots of notes. This was extremely important for me because I'm not a detail-oriented person—unless it comes to my writing—and have trouble following more than a step or two at a time unless there are explicit instructions. Another lesson was not being afraid

to fail because everyone who's trying to learn does fail. Even best selling authors have stories of hard times and tough breaks to tell.

I had to learn how to set reasonable daily goals and step back to rethink if something didn't go as planned. I read everything I could and took lessons on how to do layouts in a word processor, fill out complicated forms, set up accounts, upload manuscripts and covers, and get ISBNs and bar codes. But mostly I learned that it's okay to ask questions – lots of them. Not only does it save time and frustration, but it also let me know that I could learn, through trial and error, how to become an Indie author.

Q: You have chosen to publish both print and eBooks unlike many self-publishers who elect eBooks only. Why was that?

A: It might sound silly, but publishing in print is mostly for me. I'm a little old-fashioned and love the feel of a book in my hands when I curl up to read. Plus, it's both rewarding and fun to see them sitting on my mantel and know that I created them. I don't get that feeling of satisfaction by just looking at a cover and reading the printed word on a screen. I believe there are still a great many readers who opt for reading print books, although statistics show that number is dwindling as eBooks and audio books allow for more flexibility and ease.

My books are available on Amazon in both print and Kindle format, as well as on Smashwords. That's one of the great beauties of self-publishing, being able to utilize the same printing companies and formatting options available to most small publishing houses.

Q: What is your writing process like? How do you keep track of character actions, words, thoughts across novels?

A: I'm not sure I really have one, but the first draft is just getting the storyline down. If I try to do more than that, I lose what my characters are trying to tell me.

Brylee's journey began as a way of staying sane while I was the lead witness in a federal court case. I worked on it every spare moment during that two-year ordeal so I wouldn't have to think about being so terrified of testifying. From that point on, I just kept writing until my characters no longer had anything to say. There were very few times when I had to ask myself where the story was going because, for the most part, the ideas came so rapidly I had trouble getting them written down before they disappeared. Like many writers, the middle of the night, when I was trying to sleep, was a very productive time. It was almost as if I was merely a conduit for them telling their own story.

I watched each of my characters as they evolved and really grew to love them, even the more villainous ones. Sometimes they were strong and dependable. Sometimes they were confused, afraid and made very poor

choices—just like all the rest of humanity. They become my closest friends, and I begin to see life through their eyes. One of the greatest joys of writing is knowing that a part of me resides within each character that enters the story.

The *Indecision's Flame* series started with the first four books being written as one very lengthy manuscript. After it was divided, I was encouraged to continue the story. That led to three more books and the inclusion of what I feel is an exciting adventure. No reader who enjoys romance, tackling real-life challenges, mesmerizing characters and true family values would want to miss it. It also meant better closure for the characters, but with endless possibilities still to come if I decide to continue their journey in Australia.

Once the basic story is complete, I go back and start revisions where I check for consistency, redundancy, plot movement, accuracy and grammar. That is a tedious process and not nearly as much fun, but it helps me refine and often gives added insight into a character's true motivation and what really went on during a specific chapter or scene. The revision process usually takes from five to seven reads to complete, and is generally more time-consuming than the original draft.

Q: The romance factor is very strong, and yet you have managed to balance this with a solid story that will see readers through to the last book. How difficult is it to be able to balance passion and romance without being overtly graphic, and why was this your choice? Do you believe that there is a place for these clean romances in the mainstream marketplace?

A: While I recognize that explicit sex and violence sells, to me, writing has always been a matter of giving the reader something to think or dream about and then letting them experience those tender, romantic moments the way that best suits them—as envisioned in their own minds and without violating their personal boundaries. I grew up on the classics from authors like the Bronte Sisters, Louisa May Alcott and later, Victoria Holt and Phyllis Whitney. They all knew how to create a riveting romantic adventure without being overly graphic or assaulting a reader's tender sensitivities. I believe there are still readers who want certain things left to the imagination. That applies to unnecessary violence, degradation of the family and profanity as well. I would never want anyone to pick up something I had written and be shocked since it didn't mesh with how I try to live. Staying true to myself and writing for readers who don't want to be forced to stop reading because something offensive is included is very important to me.

Q: What are the highs and lows of being a self-published author? What can you recommend to other authors in the same position?

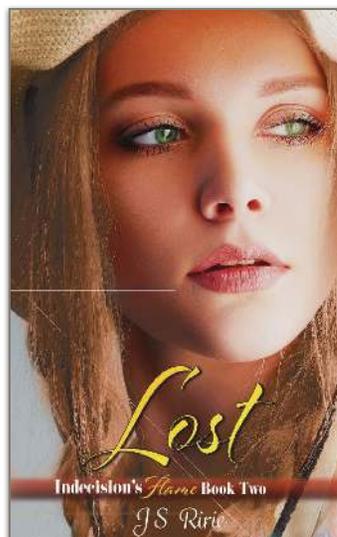
A: On a personal note, it's knowing that I've been able to share a part of me with others that might lift and strengthen them whether they want something entertaining to read or are dealing with struggles of their own.

The lows often seem more plentiful during the learning stage because most days it's hard to believe you'll ever become proficient enough to do any of it on your own. That's where having the right mentor really makes a difference. He or she can calm you down, erase doubt and help you solve very complex and irritating problems. For me, the biggest low right now is the challenge of marketing since I'm not the most outgoing person. Being able to promote oneself, as well as the book, is imperative for even minimal success. Trying to reach like-minded people who are willing to give my books a chance isn't easy since personal contacts are quickly exhausted and word-of-mouth usually moves rather slowly. That's where other writers can be a great help. I've barely begun to scratch the surface when it comes to what works and what doesn't with marketing. I have basic social media accounts with a Facebook author page <https://www.facebook.com/JS-Ririe>, a Twitter account and a Website www.JanHillBooks.com where I share what I'm doing, but the number of books available in every genre is staggering.

I suppose my best advice for a relatively new author is not to give up no matter how discouraging it becomes. Most of us write because it's part of who we are. At least I'm in control, and that isn't a bad place to be when it comes to working with something that is very much a part of me.

Q: After you have released all seven of the **Indecision's Flame** series, what's next?

A: Hopefully, by then I will have mastered enough marketing skills to allow me time to finish the last book in my new 5-book series about an FBI agent who, without any awareness of the consequences, becomes involved with the Drug Enforcement Agency in finding one of their agents missing in the jungles of Colombia. It's very different from Brylee's story and has been a real challenge since it involves more research and making sure every facet of the story is believable and as accurate as possible.



[**Editor note:** JS Ririe has agreed to allow Chapter One of the first book, **Indecision's Flame** to be printed in this issue of Books 'N Pieces Magazine. Also, be sure to enter JS Ririe's contest for a **FREE autographed print copy** of book one and book two after the book chapter in this issue.]

Short Story

The Goodbye Man

by Jay Seate

The woman was sitting on a cement step flipping ash from a cancer stick in front of the small café. Behind her was a sign in the window that read, *Now Hiring*. "You work here?" Eddie Hoak asked.

She looked at him, pulling a fleck of tobacco off her lip. "No, I just enjoy sitting in front of this greasy spoon in a uniform trying to keep my knees together."

Eddie smiled through her sarcasm. His wallet was empty so he stepped past the woman into the greasy spoon and took the job. The café's owner, Barney, tied an apron around his waist told him to start bussing. Eddie didn't mind scut work—janitor, burger flipper, etc., whatever it took to get on to where the grass might be greener.

When *Trixie* (read the embroidery on her faded yellow uniform), sauntered back inside, she said to Eddie, "Hope you can keep up. Me and June move fast and don't need a slacker-dude."

He bussed and cooked his fanny off the rest of the morning. After the lunch rush ended, he stacked a sandwich for himself and strolled out back to an alleyway. *Trixie* was leaning against a dumpster, her hip thrust out and the cigarette between two of her fingers sending up smoke-signals. She eyeballed him with curiosity as if he might suddenly unzip and expose himself. She paused between puffs long enough to say, "Hey Newbie, are you stalking me or something?"



"Not me, but after I get a paycheck, maybe I can take you to a movie."
 Trixie dropped her smoke and crushed it. "You got some nerve, busboy. You were pretty fast inside, and you're pretty fast out here too. You're good looking, but you ain't gonna make shit here. I like to be spoiled."

"I've got prospects."

"Yeah, I've heard that one a few times."

"I've also got something you might like to see. It means a lot to me, I've carried it in my trousers for years."

Trixie couldn't keep from giggling. She brushed a piece of ash from her bosom, swiveled past Eddie, and back inside to their employer's domain. "We'll see," she growled as she walked past.

Eddie carried what he considered to be a lucky silver dollar in his pants pocket he'd had for years. It meant he would never be totally broke.

Finishing his sandwich, he reached into his pocket and felt the silver piece before following Trixie. Even if this turned out to be only one or two days of work, that was okay. Some sort of opportunity always came along, eventually.

Eddie's daddy, John Hoak, had given him the coin before catching a train out of town, never to return. His mamma only lasted a few years after that. Her pack-a-day habit finally took her. After hitting the road, he'd undergone what he believed to be the customary apprenticeship to be a writer—leaving school early, washing dishes, mopping floors, even working on a fishing boat.

But Eddie's real gift was lovin'. He was good at it, maybe too good, having the equipment and stamina to keep young ladies wanting more. His interest in each was sincere, for a while, creating a string of broken hearts halfway across the country without becoming ensnared. The more he gave, it seemed, the more they wanted and he'd moved on because of it more than once.

By the end of the day at the café, Barney asked Eddie to stay on. "You're a good worker, kid."

Eddie thanked him and offered to stick around with June, Barney's other waitress, until time to close up the place.

"Don't let this lug give you a hard time, June," Barney said before leaving.

June was a doughy-eyed girl with a sweet, hopeful face and a sweeter disposition than Trixie. She had been eye-balling Eddie since she'd come on duty.

After June locked up, Eddie stood outside, pulled a cigarette pack from his pocket, and started walking. June followed him onto the street. "Hey," she called, "wait up." He turned and smiled. They had exchanged few words in the café, but June's interest was apparent. He offered a cigarette. She didn't smoke. He offered to escort her home. She accepted. His casualness and the allure of his dimpled chin proved powerful persuasion and seemed to be working its magic.

They stopped in front of June's apartment. "You don't have a place to stay, do you?"

"I've got my gear in a locker at the bus station. It's cool. I'll see you tomorrow."

"You don't have to. I mean, we don't really know each other, but I have a couch and you could stay until you get on your feet."

Eddie reached in his pocket and rubbed his lucky coin. Optimism painted June's face. Her judgement might be naive, but that was no crime. "Well," he said, "that sounds nice. A hot bath in a safe place sounds awfully tempting."

June's eyes lit up. Was she a pushover, or just making a onetime devil-may-care gesture? It didn't matter to Eddie. There was no immediate timetable for moving on. Finding an accommodating woman had become part of his bread-and-butter lifestyle.

He *did* hang around longer than planned at Barney's and with June. A woman's bed was my no means unfamiliar territory, but as so often happened, after a couple of months he was nearing a danger zone. June was falling in love and it made him restless. He also believed her to be what some called bipolar. She would awake one day soon to find him gone, thank you very much.

Trixie had given the couple a hard time at first, and reconsidering Eddie's first day comments, had even hinted to him that if he wanted a real woman, he knew where to find one. "No sweat off my fanny," she said when he proved to be a one-woman-at-a-time kind of guy.

When Eddie had saved enough to keep him going for a month or so, he was ready to move on. June sensed his restlessness. When his final day arrived, he planned to give her a night to remember.

Eddie jerked in a spasm of pleasure, then collapsed next to June with a breath of finality. When he glanced at the bedroom window and the darkness beyond where freedom awaited, June turned away from him. Sometimes silence after sex seemed appropriate as if they were two children who had torn the wings off a butterfly and had to serve quiet penance.

Eddie climbed out of bed in pursuit of his cigarette lighter. Still turned away, June could picture the sight she had enjoyed every night since he'd moved in, his tall lanky body as nonchalant and graceful as a breeze with no attempt to cover himself.

"Eddie?" June said softly.

"Yeah?"

"You were different this time, sort of like somebody else."

"I suspect we all play different parts for different reasons, June. Maybe the only time we're really ourselves is when we're alone with no one to disappoint. Don't worry your head about it."

"What's going to happen to me?"

He climbed back into bed and pecked June's ear. "You'll be fine. You knew this would be a temporary thing. I need time to figure out who I want to be."

"What if I went with you?"

"I've got to get away and write my book," he offered. "Give it a week and you'll forget I was ever here."

"You could write right here. You could quit and I could support you while you're writing."

Eddie placed his cigarette in the ashtray, took hold of June's shoulder, and turned her toward him. He gave her an honest, irrepressible smile. "That's not my style, Baby Doll. Call it the phase of the fucking moon if you want. Free and easy. That's the way life should be lived, free and easy, but the offer is appreciated."

June knew she was no beauty and lacked Trixie's sass, but she also knew she had served as a comfortable waystation. She thought about all the nights she had nibbled on Eddie's chin, her tongue darting in and out of his mouth and that irresistible dimple, doing all the things he seemed to crave and in return, feeling the rapture of his presence. He had charmed her in a way that would not wash clean nor wear off. She had opened up to him, revealed her innermost dreams. Sometimes he listened. Sometimes she knew his mind was far away. Presently, she felt little more than a captured kitten about to be abandoned. Her heart and soul were riding on a tray full of unbalanced dishes, ill-equipped to regain the balance of her pre-Eddie life.

He studied her features with what felt to her like amusement. It made her feel, if not loved, at least interesting enough to bridle his desire. His finger traced her hairline, then brushed against her nose and mouth. He was damn good at what he did. He lay siege to the breast nearest him. It would soon rekindle his need. Her mind worked its strange path through a tumult of bewildered feelings that often produced confused words.

"I think people shouldn't worry about plans and just react spontaneously," she said.

His mouth came away long enough to say, "That's exactly what I'm doing."

It was so like him to be straightforward and so like her to express herself in this vague way. She had never been more conflicted. His presence had become as essential to her as air, but tonight his words were of no use to a woman in emotional need. Her unfocused gaze returned to some infinite point in the cosmos beyond her bedroom walls. She heard Eddie's persistent murmurs, but she was inside her own thoughts now. *What's a meaningful relationship about anyway? A person comes into your life, then leaves.* She sensed his irritation when she failed to respond.

Eddie lifted his head and looked into June's brown pools. "You know, life is about decisions. Sometimes those decisions aren't what you wish them to be, they're just something you have to do."

His mouth burrowed into the space between her twin mounds of flesh before sliding down to the curve of her belly. Yes, he was wonderful at seduction.

"Let's get those good vibrations going," Eddie said like a well-rehearsed ventriloquist, his clever words revealing little emotion. "Time's getting short."

The wall separating comedy and tragedy is thin. June wondered if a not-that-pretty girl, a lonely girl, soon to be alone again, could go through with it.

Dark clouds gathered inside her. *He's right. It's about making decisions.* June's mind repeated his words as her hand dropped to the floor while thinking of her young life—a place littered with bruised and broken dreams, soon to be an empty shell once more, desperate and alone.

She would be conflicted no longer. She wouldn't cry, couldn't cry. She was beyond tears knowing at that moment the two of them would never grow old.

"You trifled with me," she whispered so softly he probably didn't hear. Just as well. His old man's lucky coin couldn't help him—it was in his jeans clear across the room. Her fingers closed around the pistol at the edge of the bed. *Of all the lies told, the cruelest is the one called love.*

Choices to be made. One road leading to another, then another, and finally to one with no return. For the final time, she questioned her decision to put a bullet into Eddie's temple before he could leave her.

"Make a decision, June," the nearby voice told her.

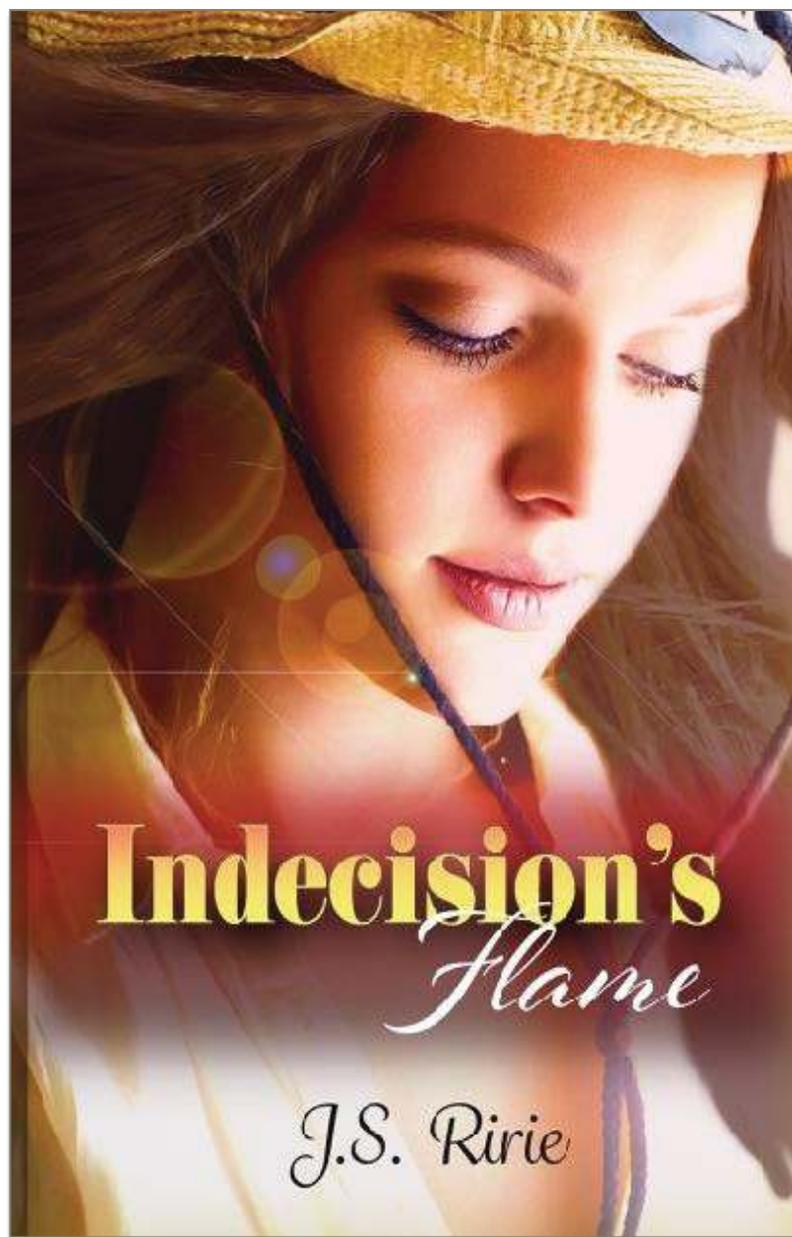
About The Author



Jay Seate is a writer who stands on the side of the literary highway and thumbs down whatever genre that comes roaring by. His storytelling runs the gamut from Horror Novel Review's Best Short Fiction Award to the Chicken Soup for the Soul series. His longer works can be found online at Amazon and B&N.

Book Chapters

Indecision's Flame



by JS Ririe

[Author's note: Where possible, Australian spelling styles have been followed. This is intentional.]

"I'm going home! I'm going home!"

The words pounded in my ears as each second in the sky brought me closer to the land and family I had not been a part of for over five years. I knew why I had to go. Scores had to be settled and hearts healed before I could move forward into the future I so much wanted, but I wasn't sure I could summon the inner courage or the strength to do it on my own. I'd spent too much time running, hiding, hating, and avoiding anything that had to do with my past.

Forcing myself to go back the place where I'd lost everything was harder than leaving, but anger and youth can be a deadly combination, even for a girl who had never been any place on her own before deciding to run away. Now, the past I had tried so hard to forget was coming back, and I wished I could find a way off the plane before it landed. I had thought of little but my reunion with my father and Uncle Ned for three months. Months I'd prayed would pass rapidly, but whose passing made it even more evident that I could hide my secret no longer.

It wasn't some awful secret that would bring any shame, and it was what had prompted this trip in the first place. But I still wasn't sure that my estranged family would ever forgive me for what I had done. If my mother was still alive I could have talked to her about how drastically my life had changed. She would have understood why I had run away, and why I'd ended up following my heart instead of my head. But she was dead, and with her passing a part of me had died as well. I'd stood over her grave and cursed God for taking away the only person who had ever understood the real me I had kept so carefully hidden from others - the girl with unspoken dreams too big to capture, and a heart that desired truth more than anything else in the world.

"Oh, mother," I thought as I watched the white clouds mingle with the blue of the sky outside my airplane window wishing I could be floating on one of them, leisurely and without purpose. "I understand now why you were taken away from me, and I'm not angry at God any more. He's brought us back together and someday ..."

"Miss," the flight attendant was passing down the aisle. "Would you fasten your seatbelt? We'll be landing in Sydney in a few minutes."

I smiled as she hovered in the aisle to make sure I followed her instructions. She was pretty and confident, and I wondered if she always knew what to do. My own confidence was draining now that I was so close to home.

Chills rippled down my arms and legs even though it was warm enough in the plane. I watched the woman next to me try to stuff an inordinate amount of

possessions into her handbag. She'd been knitting and talking the entire way. Fortunately, it had been to the person on the other side. I'd kept my eyes on the plane's window, much too focused on self-preservation for idle conversation. I steeled myself against the 100-degree plus temperatures and humidity that would hit me the moment I stepped out of the terminal.

I hadn't told anyone I was coming home and wasn't the least bit sure if I'd be welcomed with open arms and a home cooked meal like the prodigal son in the Bible. I'd walked away from my father and hadn't looked back. I hadn't even considered his pain when he came home and found me gone. I'd just packed my suitcase and walked out the door while he was away from home checking on his herds of sheep and cattle, and the fences that were supposed to keep them safe from their only natural predator - the wild dingo.

I knew what I had done was wrong, but my own pain had stripped all sense of humanity, and I'd lashed out at the only person I knew I could hurt. I blamed my father for ruining my life and getting my mother killed so she would not be there to see me graduate from school, get married and raise a family. I'd left him a horrid note telling him how much I hated him and that I never wanted to see him again - emphasizing the fact that I hoped he would rot in that place designated for sinners.

I'd scraped together what money I could and bought a one-way plane ticket to Los Angeles, California. Visiting the land of promise and glamorous movie stars and musicians was something I'd always thought of doing, but it wasn't a panacea to my problems. So before my limited amount of money ran out, I found a place to live and a job waiting tables. Eventually, I enrolled at UCLA where I'd graduated with a degree in business management. My life had been busy, but I'd stayed mainly to myself, nursing each pain and betrayal until I met a family that changed everything.

I looked down at the ring on my finger and thought about Ben. He'd encouraged me to make peace with my past before we were married, and he'd helped me understand the importance of family even when they'd hurt me beyond belief. I'd fought him on the idea of going home for months but finally realized that I could never be happy in a new life while the old one was still causing me so much pain. I'd grown up, and I'd changed, but what if I hadn't changed enough to accept the people who had once meant everything to me?

And what would I say when I saw my father? "Hi, dad, it's your daughter. The one who's been gone for five years and who didn't let you know where she was because she was too angry. And by the way, I've joined a church where you're not allowed to smoke or drink or cuss or commit adultery or do any of the things our family is so famous for. And I'm going to get married, but you can't be there because your standards are so far beneath the ones I've now adopted as my own."

That rendition of facts sounded both cold and cruel. Here I was, a member of a church that preached tolerance and understanding, and I couldn't forgive

my own father for the part he had played in my mother's death and the destruction of my life.

"Ben, I can't do this," I thought as tears formed in my eyes and slid silently down my cheeks. I brushed them away with the back of my hand, hoping the lady next to me didn't notice and ask questions or offer sympathy. What could I say to the man I'd deserted; the man who'd helped give me life? How could I ask for his forgiveness when I couldn't even forgive myself?

The plane was starting its descent. I looked out of the small window at the gleaming skyscrapers of the business district that towered above the wharf side buildings of an earlier era before Australia became a largely urban nation. I saw the world-famous opera house with its uniquely shaped roof, and the Harbour Bridge with hundreds of cars traveling its six-lane highways. It was hard to believe that less than two million people lived outside the cities of Perth, Adelaide, Brisbane, Canberra, Melbourne, Darwin, and the city I called home, Sydney. It wasn't actually my hometown. I didn't even live in a town but on a homestead miles into the Australian Outback where the endless horizon, dusty, red clay soil, rolling sand dunes, giber plains and stunning nature were impossible to describe to anyone who had not been there.

Ben had tried to understand how lonely and yet how fascinating the outback was with its strange indigenous animals - kangaroos, koalas, wallabies, poisonous snakes and spiders, lizards and even camels, its scorching sun that dried up the rain leaving little water available for anyone, and its shimmering mirages on the horizon that had lead thousands of men to their deaths as they went searching for diamonds and gold. But that was understandable since he had spent almost his entire life in Southern California among millions of people where every convenience imaginable was available. Life in an unforgiving, inhospitable part of God's creations was as foreign to him as being in a family that lived for each other was to me.

And without ever seeing Australia, how could I really expect him to comprehend the harshness of the life I'd lived until I'd been sent to Sydney to boarding school as a teenager? I wished he'd come with me so he could see first-hand just how impossible what he had asked me to do had become. I was terrified even thinking about seeing my father again. I needed Ben's arm around me for strength as I reentered my past. I'd come to rely on him so completely. He was my knight-in-shinning armor, my voice of reason, and my permanent touch with the reality I had come to believe in. I missed him so much I didn't know how I would garner the courage to step off the plane. I just wanted to go home to the life he had promised. I hated confrontations, and the next few days would be filled with them.

I closed my eyes in prayer as the plane touched down and I felt the pull of the breaks press against my body. I was home and had no idea what my reception would be. Even reversing roles with my father in my head didn't

help. I had never really known him. He was a hard-working, hard-drinking man of few words and my mother had always served as a buffer between us.

As the plane taxied to a stop, I was hit with the worst thought imaginable. What if something had happened to my father or to Uncle Ned and his family? If they weren't where I had left them, they might never know why I had gone, or that I had finally come home. I wanted my own family to have a happy ending, but at this point, it seemed highly unlikely that would ever happen.

The ranch was nearly 300 miles from Sydney. By air it took a little more than an hour and a half to get to the closest town, Edna, by jeep it could take 6 or 7 hours, depending on traffic and the condition of the roads. The last 40 miles, once you were on the Hawkins' ranch, was hardly more than a trail, and one vehicle would have to pull to the side to let another one pass.

I had brought very little with me since I didn't know how long I would be staying. I wasn't even sure my father would let me in the house after what I'd done, but I had promised Ben I would try to repair our broken relationship so we could move forward with our wedding. I needed his support, and he needed to know that I wasn't exaggerating about how totally dysfunctional my family was, but he said this was something I had to do on my own with no outside distractions.

At first I had been angry with him for sending me into the unknown by myself, but during the long hours I'd spent in the air, I'd finally accepted that he'd been right. My past wasn't his problem. It was mine to resolve. If things worked out, he'd join me. If not, I'd go back to him alone.

It was as hot and sultry as I'd anticipated when I left the air terminal, and I had to inhale deeply to force the moist air further into my lungs making it easier to breathe. I'd forgotten how heavy the air in Sydney was. Maybe I should have waited until winter to come, but that would have meant postponing our wedding for another six months. I didn't want that. I loved Ben and wanted to be his wife.

It was ten in the morning by the time I walked to the rental lot where I was to pick up my jeep. My dark hair was matted to my forehead, sweat was glistening on my neck, and the knot that had been in my stomach during the flight from Hawaii had now settled in my throat. I wanted to turn around and rush back home to Ben, but I was half a world away and in a few hours I'd be too far into the outback to get cell phone reception.

I signed the paperwork, drove the Jeep Cherokee off the lot, and headed towards the outskirts of the city, grateful that while streets might change direction or disappear completely, famous landmarks rarely would. I rolled down the windows and drove along the beach. There were hundreds of people sunbathing near the water's edge with the usual cans of light beer in their hands. It was the country's national drink, and I remembered holidays with my own friends on these same beaches with our Styrofoam containers holding enough beer for all of us to feel a buzz. Nothing had seemed wrong

about drinking neck oil back then. How worldly I'd been until I'd learned the truth, and it had led me to Ben.

After pulling into the first Sonic diner I saw, I ordered a chicken sandwich, fries and cherry limeade. Breakfast had been served on the plane two time zones earlier, and I was hungry. While I was waiting for my order to be delivered by a cute girl on roller skates, I called Ben.

"Hi, sweetheart," I said when he answered. The tears were starting to come again, and I bit my lower lip to stop it from trembling. "I miss you so much."

"I miss you, too," he said. "How was your flight?"

"Uneventful!"

"But that's good, isn't it?"

"I guess so. I just wish you were here. You make me feel like I can do anything."

"You give me too much credit, Bry. You're the strongest woman I've ever known, but you know why you have to do this alone. If we were together, you wouldn't be able to sit down and have any heart-to-hearts. We'd be off sightseeing and having fun. This is the time for you to reconnect with your family in a positive way."

"I suppose," I replied as the waitress brought my order. "Can you hold on for a minute? My food's here."

I paid with some of the cash I'd brought along with me and then picked up the phone again. "I'm sorry for sounding so childish, but I'm scared, Ben. It's not like I'm coming home after a brief absence."

"You have nothing to be afraid of. Your father is going to be thrilled seeing you again."

"I hope so, but what if he's not there?" I asked as my thought from inside the airplane resurfaced. "Something might have happened to him during my absence. The outback isn't exactly a safe place to live. And even if he's there, he always drank too much, and we never had a real discussion about anything. What if I make everything worse?"

"He can't hurt you again unless you allow him to. Quit borrowing trouble. He'll be there, and everything will be fine."

"I wish I could be sure of that. What I did was so wrong."

"You've taken care of your mistakes, Bry. Your father's not going to hold anything against you. He's only going to be grateful that you finally came home."

I could hear the sleep in his voice. "I woke you, didn't I?"

Only a little. I was waiting for your call. I couldn't exactly sleep until I knew you'd arrived safely."

Suddenly, he seemed a more than a million miles away, even though the connection was clear. What could we talk about now that we hadn't already discussed a hundred times? This was my mess to resolve, and I didn't want to

belabour the issue until I had something new to report. That would only happen after I'd seen my father.

"I'm sorry," I said. "Go back to sleep. I'll call you again on Sunday when I'm back to civilization again. And don't worry about me. I'm sure everything will be just fine."

"It will be," he said with a yawn. "And in two weeks you'll be home so we can start planning our wedding. Did I tell you that Becky is already making a list of people to invite to your shower?"

"It will be a very short list," I responded. "I didn't exactly make a lot of friends going to college."

"That doesn't matter. I have twenty-six first cousins and the number of relatives explodes exponentially from there."

"You know the thought of meeting all that family terrifies me. I still get tongue-tied around your grandmother."

"Gram doesn't mean to make you nervous. You're the perfect girl for me, and I've made sure everyone knows it."

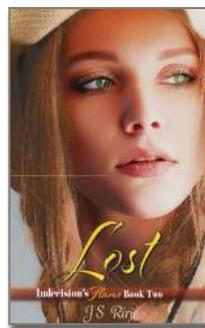
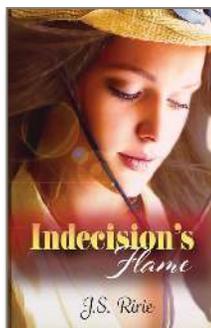
"I love you," I told him.

"I love you too," he replied. "Talk to you soon."

I closed the flip screen on my cell phone and put it on the passenger seat of the jeep. I really was on my own. There would be no Ben to talk to when I needed encouragement or someone to lean on, but my new beliefs would give me the strength necessary to confront my past, make restitution where possible, and learn how to live with everything else. It wasn't exactly what I wanted, but it was enough for now. My eyes closed as I thanked God for my safe trip, my new life with Ben and the food I was about to eat. Then I took a drink of cherry limeade before trying my burger. It was going to be an uncomfortable few days.

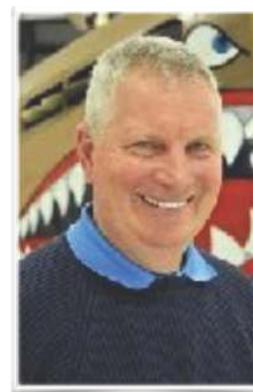
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Interview

Lance Thompson Is There A Script Doc In The House?



Lance Thompson is a self-described "fast-working" script doctor and screenwriter, award-winning motion picture advertising consultant, an actor and speaker who has been published in over 40 periodicals. I recently met with Lance at a lunch in Meridian, Idaho, to discuss his life as a screenwriter/script doctor, and whether life in Idaho affects his Hollywood work.

Q: What attracted you to screenwriting?

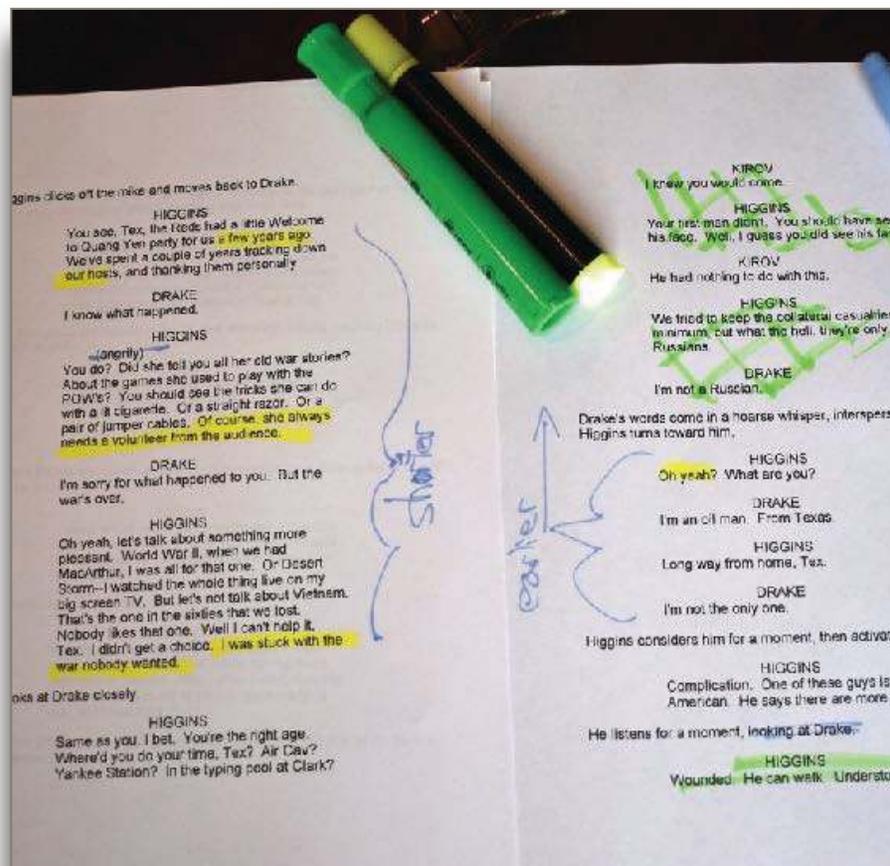
A: I had a great screenwriting professor at UCLA, Richard Walter, who really inspired me to the craft of screenwriting. Later, when I was part of the Scriptwriters Network in Los Angeles, we had a program where screen writers mentored high school students. Every screen writer in that program, including me, felt it was the best opportunity a writer could have--working with young writers to develop their talents. My screenwriting classes grew from that program, as did my work as a script doctor.

Q: You've been script doc for several films (*The Two Jakes*, one of them), as well as screenwriter for film and television shows, an ad consultant, acting for stage and film and television, as well as for a live training for law enforcement, to name some of your credits. What satisfaction do you get from each of these aspects, and if you had to pick one only, which would be your favorite?

A: Working on *The Two Jakes* was a great opportunity to work with Jack Nicholson, who was the star and the director of that film. Jack is a talented, dedicated, and smart film maker, and treated those who worked for him with respect. I wrote briefly with a partner for *Mr. Belvedere*, and that taught me that a writer has a great responsibility to the cast and crew, because they all work very hard to put the writer's words on the screen. You owe them the very best you can do. Working in motion picture advertising was fun because that was where I was first able to do some script doctoring work. Working as an actor in live training scenarios at POST (Peace Officer Standards and Training) in Meridian, I've learned a great deal about police procedure and about acting. I like script doctoring the most because it enables me to work on lots of different projects and solve problems. And I can try to follow in the

footsteps of my script doctoring hero, Ben Hecht, one of the great Hollywood writers.

Q: Screenwriting is an art form. Reading a well written script is powerful, compelling like a novel, although with a different, more visual focus, pacing and flow. Likewise, terrible screenplays just look...terrible. What makes a good screenplay work for you and where do most newer screenwriters fail in the process?



A: In the majority of cases, the weakness in a script is in story structure. There is no substitute for a solid, three-act story. If you're reading a script, the writer's craft is evident within the first page or two--are the characters interesting, does the action intrigue, is the dialogue and scene description spare and to the point? One of the best ways to make sure a story is compelling is to pitch it--to anyone who will listen. TELL your story. If the

listener is captivated, it's good. If the listener's attention strays in parts, those parts need to be fixed. A writer must be a good storyteller before anything else.

Q: There are no shortage of screenplays available Online. Do you advocate writers using them as templates/guides, or some other method?

A: You can learn a great deal by studying other screenplays. A writer I particularly admire is Walter Hill. His scripts are usually brief, entertaining, and contain not one unnecessary word. His script for *Hard Times*, a film he also directed, is one I go back to often, and I always marvel at his talent and storytelling ability.

Q: You've expressed a preference for stories based on the past rather than the present or future. Could you explain why that preference?

A: There are two reasons. First is commercial. A story based in the past will not change due to current events. The Old West, colonial America, 1960s London are all past eras that will not be altered by new technology or discoveries. But a story set in the present day may be out of date tomorrow with the next new social media site or phone app. Secondly, I'm an old guy, so I feel comfortable in the past. I've seen a lot of it.

Q: You've founded the Idaho Media Professionals. How has the state of opportunities in Idaho changed with the booming population influx, and do you see that as a good thing?

A: The state of our industry in the Treasure Valley is expanding and our product is getting better in terms of quality and reach. We have a terrific pool of creative talent--actors, writers, directors, cinematographers, and every other specialty that motion pictures need to be successful. People here are making features, short films, web series and every other format, and we're getting attention from all over the country. Combined with our terrific theater community, musical talent and other creative workers, Idaho's reputation as a creative center will continue to grow and attract new talent.

Q: Please also explain what the IMP does?

A: IMP was a group that sought to bring together people in all aspects of the creative community to encourage cooperation, sharing of information, and the raising of standards. It no longer exists, but there are many groups around town that carry on in the same tradition. JUMP has several groups that promote creative media, spearheaded by Jesse Cordtz and Brandon Freeman.

Boise Cutters is another group that focuses on film makers, and Seth Randal has done a great job with that organization.



[Publisher note: Books 'N Pieces Magazine is more than just short stories and fiction writers. I invite **screenwriters** to contact me if they would like to be interviewed, submit an article about the many facets of screenwriting, or sample scripts that may be included in this magazine. My thanks to Lance Thompson for a fun lunch.]

Short Story

Final Decision

by Charles Hitchcock

It was one of those rare quiet days when nothing important seemed to be happening. A couple of flies hummed around the office.

I had been cleaning up my desk and as I stood to loosen my tie Ed came in. In his huge hands he held what appeared to be a TWX.

"Hey Jim, you remember Burt Farley?" he asked.

"No, I can't say as I do. Why?"

"You remember, the cop killer. We picked him up in a bar down town about a year ago. He gave us a bad time."

"Oh yeah, what about him?" I asked.

"I've got a wire here from down south. It says he just broke jail and almost killed a guard. Dallas seems to think he may end up back here. They want us to keep an eye open."

"Anything happen around here yet that looks like a job he may have pulled?"

"No, not yet. Lets just hope he doesn't show up here. He's a bad one. Real bad."

"If he does we'll get him. It may take a little longer this time but let's hope if he show up we get him before he kills again."

Ed looked at his watch. The chewed up cigar shifted to the other side of his mouth. "We may as well knock off for the day. How about dropping me off at my place. My wife kept the car today and I'm too tired to grab a bus."

"Okay, I'll be ready to go in a minute as soon as I lock my desk."

The cigar shifted again as he stood up to put on his coat and hat. I locked my desk and we walked out to the car. I wished we didn't have such a long drive home. That was one of the disadvantages of my job. I had to go all the way into town to get to work.

I dropped Ed off at his place and a few minutes later I pulled into my driveway. Larry, my four year old son, ran to the car to welcome me. I grabbed him up and carried him into the kitchen.

"Mamma, Daddy's home!" he yelled. Madge came out of the kitchen. She had a crisp little apron on and was as pretty as ever. She rubbed her hands on the apron and kissed me. She seemed excited about something and I knew she had something to tell me.

"Out with it honey. Whats your secret today?" I asked.

She smiled. "Johnny Lange came by today."

"What did he want?"

"He thought you might be off today. He wanted to talk to you about going into the real estate business with him. He's doing real well. He drove up in a new Oldsmobile. He said he could have a Cadillac but it might not look right to his customers."

"Look Madge, we've been through all this before. I don't want to be a real estate agent. I like being a cop. I realize Johnny makes more money than I do but we've got our home and a fairly good car. We've got Larry, too, and we're happy."

"Are we Jim? You made sergeant last month and you still have to work at all hours of the day and night. And the salary you make isn't good either. The milkman makes almost as much as you and he doesn't take the chances. I'm not complaining about what we have so much as I am about the risk you take to get it. Everyday when you walk out that door I can't be sure you'll come back. Just one bullet, whether its from a professional or just a crazy kid with a gun, it can kill just as well. I don't know why you want to stay on the force anyway. Can you tell me?"

"No. I guess I can't. Its just a feeling that comes over a person. Something that makes a guy willing to put up with long hours and low pay. Its a feeling of satisfaction and at times of frustration. I don't know, it's something that's hard to put into words. "You've got to try to understand."

I knew she couldn't understand what I was telling her. It was difficult for me to understand myself. I had the job I liked the best and the one I could do the best. I'm not the toughest cop on the force and I'm not the best shot, but my record so far was better than average. No matter how much I liked my work I still had to consider the feelings of my family. I knew Madge worried a lot and I was able to understand her point. Neither did I want her to become a widow because some guy didn't like cops.

Money was something else to be considered. Everyone can use that. Even cops and milkmen. "I'll think it over Madge. Maybe I'll take his offer."

Madge smiled. "I hope you decide to take it. I want you to be happy on your job but it would be nice to have you at home with us every night, and on a job where your chances of getting hurt would be only by an irate customer."

I didn't eat much supper. That night I was unable to sleep. I kept thinking of my seven years on the force doing down the drain. Seven years of being a cop. It's a long time. I had earned my share of bullets dug out from my own flesh. There had been plenty of times when I had to take chances and every time you bring a killer in your chances of staying alive the next time are decreased by the law of averages. My chances should have run out a long time ago. Some of the old timers take the opposite view and maintain that each time you bring a man to justice you have gained an invaluable experience which will aid you the next time, and therefore cut down your chances of stopping a bullet. Either way it wasn't going to make much difference.

Without making a decision I knew my wife and son came first in my life and the way I made a living was secondary. After all it was like Madge said. I'd be making more money and could come home every night to be with her. Then she wouldn't have to worry so much.

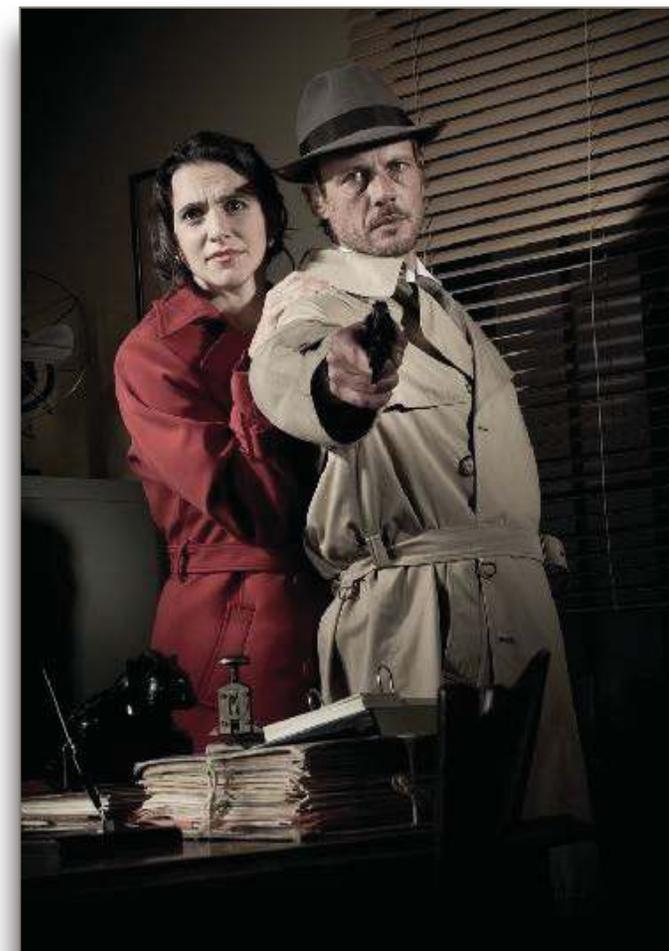
The next morning I was out of bed an hour early. The coffee was perking on the stove when I finished shaving. I didn't intend to disturb Madge but she must have heard me when I knocked a cap out of the kitchen cabinet. "Aren't you going to have breakfast this morning?"

"No, I thought I'd grab a cup of coffee and get on down to the station. After the slow day we had yesterday something is bound to happen today."

"Have you decided about accepting Johnny's offer?"

"No, not yet I'll try to do what I think is best. It isn't going to be easy to give up on seven years even though I could make more money."

"I know it isn't Jim, but you've got to. Not only for me but for Larry. Would you like him to grow up in his fathers footsteps. To risk his life behind a badge. And for what? The people don't care what happens to a police officer. They don't realize that he's human too, and he may have a family to support. That every day he is willing to expose himself to such petty things as jokes about the cops, to suspicion that he's covering up the rackets for a payoff. People ridicule the cops until the time comes when they need one. Some people are



naive enough to believe the majority of policemen are criminals themselves protecting other criminals."

I downed the last of my coffee. "You're right but someone has to protect even those insane people who think that way. Sometimes they have to be protected from people like themselves if need be."

I walked into the living room and checked my appearance in the mirror by the door. "I'd better get on down there. See you tonight honey," I said and kissed her goodbye. I closed the door behind me and stood there on the steps.

The city was blanketed by fog at this time of the morning and the silence rang in my ears. Madge opened the door. "Its going to rain today. You'd better take your topcoat with you," she said as she handed it to me. I smiled at her.

"Thanks." I was always amazed how she never missed guessing when it was going to rain. I kissed her again and walked to the driveway. I tossed my topcoat over the back of the seat and got in. I drove by Eds' to give

him a lift. He was just coming out the door when I pulled up in front of his house.

"Better get your raincoat," I told him. He winked and walked back to the house for it. He was a believer ever since the time he was drenched because he thought he knew the signs of rain better than Madge. He came back out and got in the car. He was going to have to go on a diet or I would have to get a bigger car.

"Madge says its going to rain, huh?" he asked.

"I brought my raincoat didn't I?"

He chuckled and said, "Yeah, I'm not taking a chance again either." He lit up his usual morning cigar but he must have noticed the worried look on my face. He blew a billow of smoke over the match and asked. "Whats wrong? You look worried about something."

"What makes you think that?" I asked.

"The way you are biting the inside of your cheek. It gives you away. Come on out with it "You'll know sooner or later anyway."

"I'm thinking of resigning."

He looked puzzled. "From the Force?" he asked.

"Yeah, Madge and I have talked it over before but its about to get her down, now especially. Johnny Lange, you know my old army buddy, came by and wants me to go into the real estate business with him."

He thought a minute and the cigar shifted. "Well, you could make more money and with your education it would seem foolish to turn him down. Do you think you would like the real estate business?"

"Not like I do being on the Force. Its something you can't explain to anyone except another cop."

"Yeah, I know what you mean. Its a hard decision to make."

"Madge isn't concerned so much with the money as she is with not knowing when I'll be home, and now that I'm working out of homicide, whether I'll come home at all."

"Yeah, most people underestimate the risk, but not the wives. They exaggerate it, but its always a possibility that someday a guy will be unlucky enough to stop a slug. I can't say what I would do if I were you. I haven't had the training to be anything but a cop."

"I guess its something I'll have work out for myself." I swung into the space at the curb and we got out. It was beginning to drizzle and we were both glad for Madges' advice about the raincoats. We ,-walked into the office. Jack Simmons, was the officer on night duty . He looked up.

"You guys in early today aren't you?"

Ed answered. "Yeah a little. Anything happen last night?"

Jack put his pencil down. "Quite a bit. This guy Burt Farley, the one we got a wire on yesterday from Dallas, robbed a pawn shop downtown last night. He made off with thirty-six dollars in cash, a sawed off shotgun, a thirty-eight pistol and several boxes of shells for both weapons. It looks like we'll probably have a tough time taking him. The owner of the pawnshop came down last night and picked Farley out of the mug book. Positively identified him as the man who robbed him."

"Did Farley have an assistant ?" I asked.

"Nope, he worked it alone. He came into the shop about closing time, asked the owner to show him a revolver. The owner got this thirty-eight out. Farley liked it and asked for shells to go with it. He made like he was still looking the gun over when he cracked the owner over the head with it knocking him unconscious. Farley then took what he wanted and left."

"He's sure got nerve. I guess he realized this is his last chance. If he goes he's going to try to take somebody with him," Ed commented as he relit his cigar.

Jack got up, grabbed his jacket. "See you guys tomorrow." he said.

"You bet, Take it easy, boy." Ed answered as Jack walked out the door. "What do you think?" he asked turning to me.

"I don't know. He'll be hard to take with that shotgun. I don't envy the guy that has to take him."

"Neither do I," Ed said pulling up his chair. He started going through the usual reports that were left from the night. I pulled out a chair too and spent most of the morning trying to word my resignation. It wasn't easy. I wanted the Captain to know how I felt about leaving the force. I knew he wouldn't try to talk me out of it and I didn't want him to. It would be easier that way.

I looked around the office. Flies were buzzing against the windows and Ed was almost hidden behind a cloud of smoke. I had worked with Ed for a long time. I was going to miss this place. I would miss Ed even more. We knew each other like a book, and I couldn't have asked for a better guy to work with. I kept telling myself the real estate business wouldn't be too bad. A guy like me

should do pretty well. A college education, three-years army, and I get along well with people.

I stopped complimenting myself long enough to put the finishing touches to my resignation. It was done. I placed it under the glass paper holder. I'd present it to the Captain after dinner.

Ed saw me and asked, "Whats that?"

"The same thing you think it is," I answered. "You're going through with it, huh?"

"Yeah, I guess so."

"Its probably for the best," he said, but I knew he hated to see me leave. Ed was the kind of guy that lets every man live his own life without trying to give advice. That is, every man who doesn't interfere with the rights of others. The only sign of emotion he revealed was the nervous chewing and shifting of his cigar. I could almost read his every thought through the cigar that constantly stayed in his mouth.

Ed and I went to a restaurant a few blocks down from the station for lunch. Ed didn't eat as much as usual. Neither did I. It appeared that both of us had lost our appetite. We returned to the office. It looked like it might be another one of those quiet days except that it was raining now.

I read my resignation over to make sure I had said exactly what I wanted to say. It was late afternoon when I took a deep breath and walked into Captain Holland's Office. I knew he was gone for coffee so I placed it carefully into the metal paper container marked "In". I felt like taking it out again but I didn't. Then I turned and walked out.

When I got back Ed was on the phone. He had that old expression on his face which meant only one thing. Business was picking up. Ed cradled the phone and looked up. "We've got one to roll on. An old woman who runs a hotel up on sixth spotted Farley's picture in the paper this morning. She says he took a room there last night and is still in it. Want to go with me?"

"What do you mean do I want to?"

"That was your resignation you took to the skipper's office wasn't it?"

"Yeah, but you can't get along without me. Lets go."

Twenty minutes later we pulled up in front of the hotel. It was a dingy place. It looked as though it should have been torn down long ago. There was a woman behind the counter who looked older than the hotel.

"What can I do for you gents?" she asked in a high pitched voice.

"We're police officers you sent for us?" Ed answered.

"Well, I'm glad your here. I run a respectable business establishment and I want you to get that man out of here. He's in room 314. But you had better be careful."

"What do you mean."

"He looks bad."

We took the elevator up to the third floor. We found the room numbered 314. Ed pulled his gun out of its holster. I did the same. "Don't forget he's got a shotgun," I said.

"It hasn't been out of my mind."

This was always the toughest part. I could feel my heart beginning to beat rapidly. The room had to be entered fast. It had to be a surprise and take him before he could protect himself. What if he was waiting inside with that shotgun pointed straight at the door. Maybe someone tipped him off we were coming and he was waiting for us. I was less of a target than Ed so I was the natural choice to kick in the door.

Ed put his hand on my shoulder and whispered. "It's not too late to back out. No need for you to take a chance now." I looked at Ed and his cigar shifted. My foot came up and slammed against the door. The lock broke, pieces of wood shattered and my eyes flashed in an attempt to take in the whole room at once as I rushed in.

There was an overturned chair and a half empty whiskey bottle on the dresser. An overflowing ashtray sat next to it. The room contained a strong smell of hair oil. The sink in the bathroom held the pieces of a broken hair oil bottle. Ed yelled from the bedroom. "He's going down the fire escape."

Two shots rang out and Ed jerked back through the window and fell to the floor. A bright red spot appeared up near the left shoulder.

"Get that son of a...," he said as his hand clutched at his shoulder to slow the flow of blood.

I sprang through the window and saw a shadow down the alley. I raced down the fire escape. It was wet and I slipped as I made the bottom. It was getting dark outside early because of the rain and it was difficult to see.

There was a flash and then a jarring noise against the trash can next to me. I wondered why Farley had stopped to exchange fire with me. A flash of lighting lit the sky. As it did I saw why Farley had stopped. I had chased him into an alley with a dead-end. There was a brick wall blocking him on all sides. There was only one way to get out and that was to get past me. He darted from one trash can to another so as not to make a sitting target. Farley was dangerous and I knew it. What if he was the guy who was going to be lucky? I could still back out. My resignation was in. All I had to do was walk away and no one would ever know that I had purposely let him go. No one, except me. I knew this was it. What about Ed? What about those seven years on the force. Maybe the next time it would be a rookie that would have to face Farley. He would probably have a wife and kid too. No this was my job even if it was my last.

I couldn't afford to waste shells unless I thought I could hit him. He fired two more rounds. That meant he had one left. I stood up and walked toward him. He would have to get me with one shot or I could take him before he could reload.

"Stay where you're at cop," he screamed. I moved forward. He fired. The flesh on my hand ripped away. I kept moving in. "Don't shoot—I give up. See I threw my gun away. Don't shoot," Farley kept yelling.

I was close to him now and I shoved my gun in his belly hard. His eyes turned cold like he had just died. I hit him with the back of my hand. He fell sideways knocking over the trash can that had been his protection. Sirens wailed a few blocks away as I bent down and put the cuffs on Farley.

By the time I got him up and out to the street the medics and patrolmen were there. "Theres a cop in room 314 who needs a doc. Hurry up," I yelled to the guys in the white jackets. They were dripping wet too.

I rode to the hospital in the ambulance with Ed. It looked like both of us were going to be all right. At the hospital I called Ed's wife for him, and then made a call to Madge. Thirty minutes later they entered the hospital together.

A medic took Ed's wife to see him as Madge turned to me. "Are you sure you're all right honey."

"Yes I'm sure" I said "Lets go home"

It was around a quarter to ten when Captain Holland came by my house. I was sitting there reading over my report of Farley's capture.

"Whats this about you resigning from the force?" he wanted to know.

Madge looked at me and smiled. "I've seen your report and I think I'm beginning to understand why you wants to remain a police officer. There must be a feeling of deep personal satisfaction knowing you made your city a safer place to live. A city decent enough in which to raise your children. I believe no one realizes this more than the police officer who sees to it that the law is not broken." She turned to Holland. "Besides, Jim's the boss in our family and he made his final decision tonight in that alley. It not too late is it?" she asked Holland.

Captain Holland grinned back. "Heck no. He never did sign this, anyway," he replied with a laugh, flipping my resignation papers across his hand and back at me. "Good."

About the Author



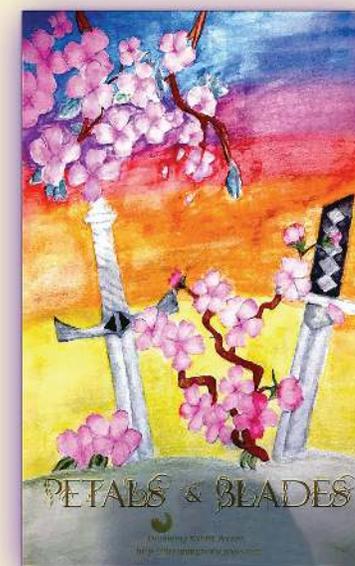
Charles (Charlie) Hitchcock was born in Hooker Oklahoma in 1931. While in the Air Force in 1952, Charlie caught the writing bug, and wrote several short stories to see if he could do as well as his favorite author, Mickey Spillane. Those who read his stories encouraged him to continue, but trying to earn a living took priority. Charlie passed away June 2006. His son, Cliff, has assembled his work for an upcoming book. This is one of the stories.

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Interview

Jill Hedgecock Writer In The Room



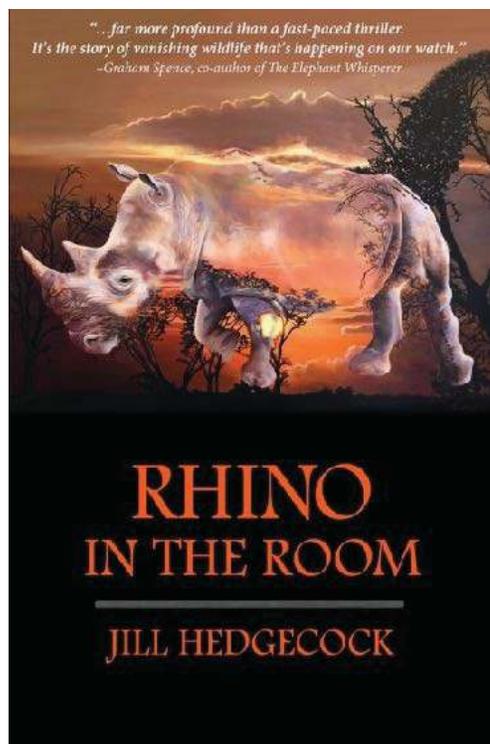
Jill Hedgecock, among many other things, writes our book review column. Her book *Rhino in the Room* has been released, a powerful story of young

woman's African safari trip and the peril she finds herself in. You can read my review at the end of the interview.

Q: What prompted you to go on safari and was your interest in the plight of the rhino as result, or something that predated the trip?

A: Elephants, giraffes, lions, rhinos... I love animals and I've always dreamed of going on an African safari. When it became a reality in 2015, the experience exceeded my high expectations. I marveled at the wonders of a round, copper orb highlighted by an orange-red sky at the end of the day. My heart races as an elephant blocking my game vehicle's path, not out of fear, but out of sheer joy. Watching the majestic arc of a giraffe's neck as it silently grazed on treetops, I had to pinch myself to remind myself that this really happening.

While I was well aware of the poaching of elephants for ivory, it was during a game drive in Kruger National Park when I learned that three rhinos are killed every day for their horns. I had no idea that rhinos were being slaughtered and that these amazing creatures may be wiped off the planet in my children's lifetime. I knew before the trip that I wanted to write a novel that would bring the experience of an African safari alive for people that are not as



fortunate as me to have this experience, but when I learned about the plight of rhinos an idea for a different kind of story started to unfold.

Q: You've managed to take a valid, current, important cause, and wrap an interesting story around it. How difficult was it to find the balance in the telling to do justice to both aspects?



A: It was not difficult at all. In some ways I can attribute having this skill from my background in the sciences—a discipline where looking for logic in seemingly unrelated facts is commonplace. But I also wonder if the way I think is a result of early childhood. When I was a kid, I loved doing jigsaw puzzles with my sister. We both found them easy and loved a challenge, so we started dumping multiple puzzles together, mixing them up (usually by throwing the pieces high in the air) and then solving them simultaneously (we dubbed the game "toss the salad.") I think this playtime activity helped my brain

develop in a way that the thought processes necessary to intertwine stories together isn't hard for me.

Q: What is your writing process like? Rigid, fluidic? Notebook, computer? Coffee, tea, Hemingway cocktails? Solitary, public cafe, etc?

A: I gravitate toward being what writer's call a "pantser." This may seem surprising given my scientific background. But I find that characters tend to have their own idea about what the story is and I like to let them do their magic. That said, for *Rhino in the Room*, I knew that time was of the essence and I wanted to fast track the novel, so I created a muse board before I wrote a single word. I used these images as a guide not only to keep details to

No notebook for me. I have to easily be able to move sentences and paragraphs around.

I prefer a quiet setting, so I don't write in coffee houses. However, I do attend a Shush and Write event every week where a small group of 4 to 6 writers declare their writing goal for the evening, sit together and write for two hours, then reconvene to report our progress.

Q: You've written many articles, book reviews and more for different publications (including this one). What got you interested in writing in the first place and how did you start?

A: I am not one of those writers that started writing stories at the age of five or ten or even in college. I only took one English class when I studied

biology at U.C. Davis. After I graduated and entered the working world, I even had a boss that told me during a performance review that I needed to learn how to write. I was completely shocked by this because I'd always excelled in writing assignments during my school years.

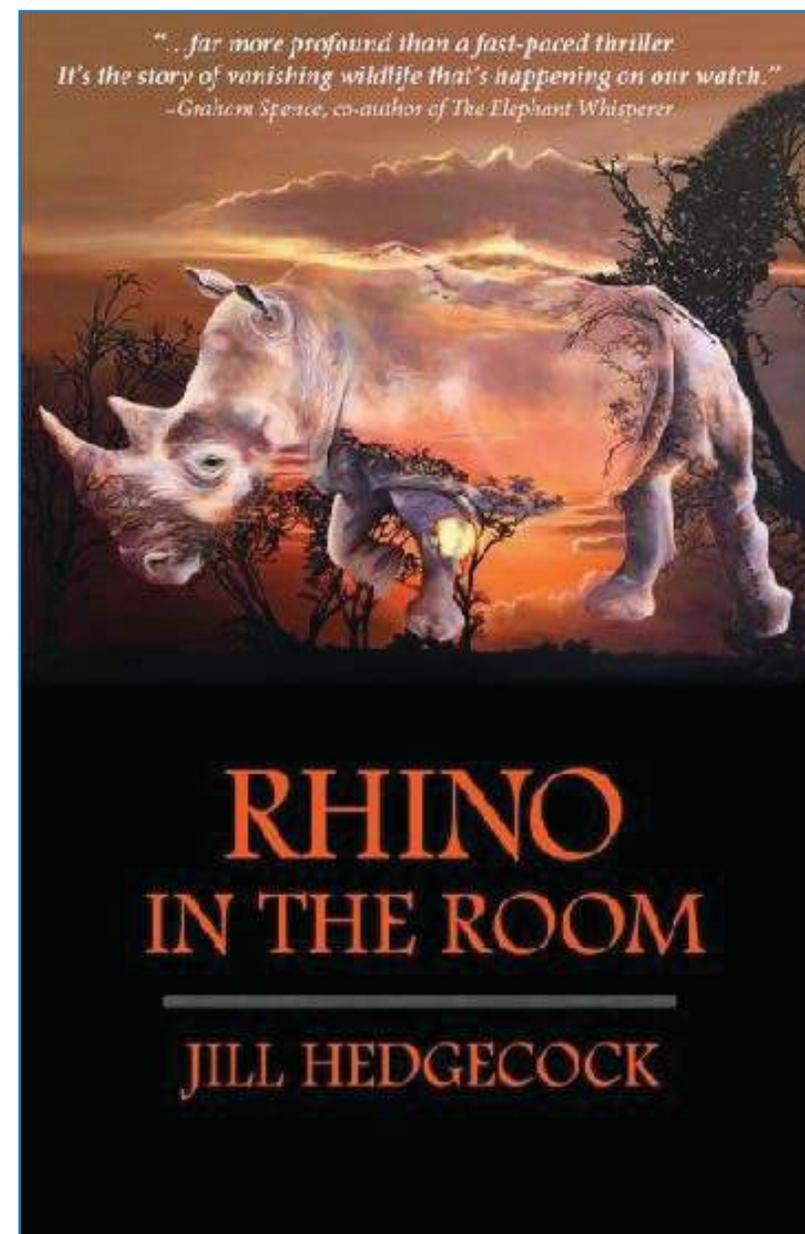


Q: What would you like to share about your discoveries for this novel that readers should know, and what resources can you guide readers to for more information?

A: Oh, where to start! I have actually written five novels that are in various stages of completion. One novel was actually agented, but it never sold. So **Rhino in the Room** is actually my fifth novel and my biggest discovery has been the marketing phase. I also went all in and wrote a script for a book trailer.

[Publisher' review: Hedgecock has a mastery of evocative language and seamlessly guides the reader through the details of both an African safari adventure, as well as the poaching that takes place. The reader experiences everything in such detail that the experience becomes real.

The plight of the rhinos is made quite clear and it is difficult not to feel helpless as the novel develops. **Rhino** eases you slowly into the action, but then holds you tight until the highly charged finish, leaving the reader exhausted and satisfied.]



Be sure to watch the trailer for the book at <https://vimeo.com/287911864>

You can buy the book from Amazon and other retailers: <https://amzn.to/2D5KjUQ>

Book Review:

The Elephant Whisperer

My Life with the Herd in the African Wild



Reviewed by Jill Hedgecock | www.jillhedgecock.com

The Elephant Whisperer by Lawrence Anthony with Graham Spence (2012, St. Martin's Griffin, paperback, reprint edition, 384 pages, \$10.76) is the fascinating true account of Lawrence Anthony's experiences after introducing a small herd of rogue elephants into his Thula Thula game reserve, an approximately 5,000 acres of pristine bush in South Africa. The relocation does not start well when the elephants break out of their enclosure. Anthony jumps in a helicopter to track them down while his wife, Francois, takes to the road. As Francois desperately questions the locals on whether they've seen these giant animals, the tribes people have no idea what she's asking because elephants had been extirpated from this area before they were born. The runaways are eventually rounded up but remain in imminent danger of being killed if they break out again, so Anthony, whose original intention was to discourage human-elephant interaction, is forced to befriend the herd.

In addition to heart-rendering and occasionally terrifying accounts of Lawrence's encounters with his three-ton beasts, the book explores the politics of running a game reserve, the delightful yet idiosyncratic aspects of Zulu culture, the darkest consequences of trophy hunting and poaching practices, and the mysterious beliefs surrounding native witchcraft. Along the way, readers experience the hazards of South African weather, snakes, and crocodiles.

Anthony's absolute respect and love for the animals of Thula Thula, both wild and domestic, shines through the pages.

Throughout the narrative, Anthony's absolute respect and love for the animals of Thula Thula, both wild and domestic, shines through the pages. But it is the elephants that captivate. The adaptable nature of these sensitive and tactile creatures is revealed throughout the narrative. His intention and the sound of his voice magically transform these intelligent giant animals from an emotional state of malevolence to a condition of utter gentleness.

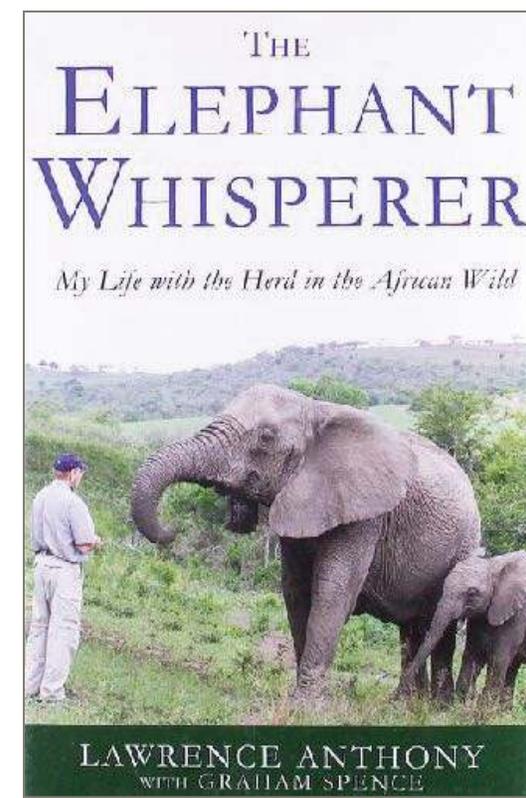
The book depicts with absolute conviction that to be a true advocate for the wildlife in Africa is to commit acts of heroism again and again. In 2003, Anthony founded The Earth Organization, a non-profit group with a mission to reverse the dwindling spiral of decimation of our plant and animal kingdoms through education and action. To learn more and to see a video of Anthony interacting with an elephant, visit www.earthorganization.org.

Lawrence's last novel also co-authored with Spence, **The Last Rhinos: My Battle to Save One of the World's Greatest Creatures** (2013), was published after his untimely death from heart failure on March 2, 2012.

Co-author and journalist, Graham Spence grew up in Mozambique and lived in South Africa. His works include Graham Spence is, who grew up in Mozambique and lived in South Africa. His other works include **The Apocalypse Chase** and **Bloodhorn** (Chris Stone series Books 1 and 2, respectively).

The Elephant Whisperer is one of those books that takes hold and leaves behind lasting vivid memories. The audio version of this book was an Audie Award Winner in the Biography/Memoir category in 2014.

You can buy **The Elephant Whisperer** at <https://amzn.to/2xqolqv>



Short Story

The Monsters of Eden

by Salvatore Difalco

Wulfstan followed Margot into the misted atrium. Ferns and leafy plants made a rain forest impression. Hidden speakers pumped out soothing atonal music. A few goldfinches fluttered about, lovely little birds that almost looked fake.

This is where people went to refresh themselves after a long spell in the sun. Wulfstan loved the feeling of the atrium mist on his skin, particularly his face, which had developed the dark green buboes often seen on pubescent males. His complexion, a cucumber green that contrasted sharply with Margot's delicate aphid hue, had been ravaged of late by these unsightly blemishes, which besides marring his appearance did not trouble him otherwise.

"Do you ever get tired?" he asked Margot.

All cheekbones and emerald eyes, Margot never liked to express negativity, even when appropriate, or necessary.

"I mean do you ever get tired of loafing around and misting, then loafing around some more? We don't do much else. I mean, I just get tired of it. Don't you?"

"Why would I ever get tired of it?" Margot asked, her voice breathy and frail. "We sunbathe all day, get completely refreshed, and do whatever we want in the off hours. We pay no taxes, live disease-free and face no competition at any level. Our lives are blissful compared to those of the past."

"You're sure about that now?"

"Our lives are the culmination of generations of relentless scientific study, experiment and hope. We were on our way out, Wulfstan. We were finished as a species. But because some of us never stopped believing in ourselves, and in science, we have managed to rid the world of malnutrition, pollution, and aggression. Why cast aspersions?"

Wulfstan touched the plump bubo under his right eye. The things would pop if you squeezed them, but the green goo that squirted out smelled awful, and draining them left scars. Margot was right, to a point. Their untrammelled, ostensibly utopian lives rested on the shoulders of many scientists and visionaries who refused a repeat of the calamities that befell the latter 21st century, when almost 5 billion perished. The genetics and technology that had bestowed homo sapiens with chloroplasts, the tiny engines in plants and algae that allow for photosynthesis, ensured that, during the life of the sun, no human would ever starve to death again, and no plant or animal would ever

die again to nourish a human.

Nevertheless, despite all the wonderful facets of his reality, and the understanding that humans had lived brutish lives in the past, Wulfstan felt bored and vaguely dissatisfied with the status quo, though he couldn't put his finger on why exactly. This was a condition shared by an ever growing number of young males—an indeterminate

dissatisfaction. It had led to acts of barbarism, including rape, murder and even cannibalism. Geneticists despaired that despite all their crisping and splicing, some essentially reckless and aggressive genes were still in play, surfacing primarily in young males.

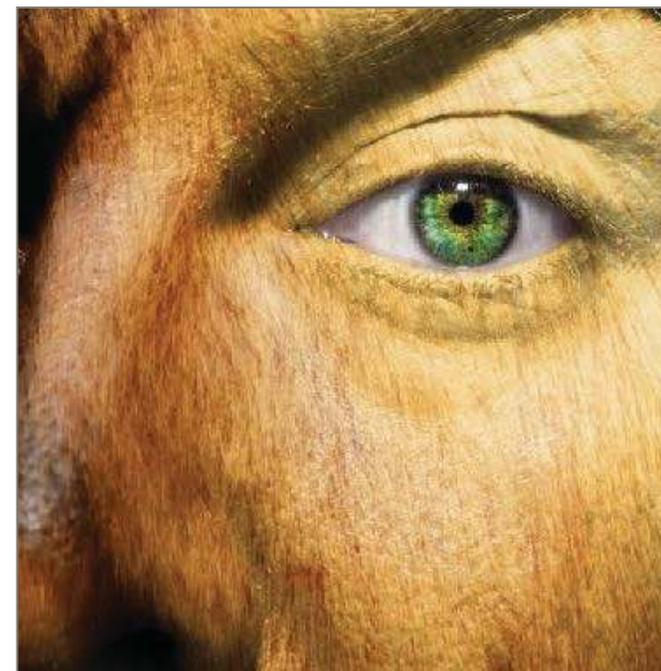
For instance, like so many of peers, Wulfstan wondered what it was like to eat, something considered primitive in the extreme. As human digestive systems had atrophied and lost functionality—residual teeth extracted for cosmetic reasons, toothlessness in vogue—eating food not only was nearly impossible, but extremely unpleasant. Wulfstan had tried to eat a zucchini flower one day last summer as he had heard they were in ancient times considered a tasty delicacy. But the orange petals of the flower clogged his windpipe and his mother had to help dislodge them. As for taste, he had never imagined such bitterness. It reminded him of grog, the concoction his Uncle Louis made from fermented tubers. The men of the times liked to drink it and dance. It made them loose and uninhibited. Wulfstan had tried it a few times, and had danced well, but when the euphoric effects wore off he felt shattered.

"Refreshed?" Margot asked, spreading her arms and thrusting up her pale green breasts.

"Tell me something," he said. "Do you look down on me for my darker hue?"

Margot fluttered her grassy eyelashes. "Of course not," she said. "I rather like your hue. It's stimulating."

"But my buboes—don't they repulse you?"



"All boys go through that stage. It's natural. Just don't pop one on me ha."

Wulfstan smiled. He was still getting used to smiling with efficacy and confidence. All of his teeth, none bigger than a pea, had been extracted last autumn. Not that he felt the need to impress Margot. She was like a sister. He could never imagine grafting with her. Grafting was the term they used for the new sexual practice of the species, which differed from the old only insofar as orgasm had been virtually bioengineered out of the equation. That is to say, with a number of egregious exceptions, sexual congress was no longer seen as an act of pleasure or lust, but solely as a means of reproduction. Grafting often led to offspring. Care of offspring had been greatly simplified and streamlined. Since children no longer needed feeding—four hours in a sunny hammock a day sufficed—parents could focus on more important things than nourishment and the often laborious quest to secure that nourishment.

Willowy and lithe, Margot draped herself with a diaphanous white scarf. Wulfstan slapped on his bollocks-guards. Men were required to wear these in case primitive urges reared their ugly heads, which, as mentioned, they did with increasing frequency among adolescent males. The bollocks-guards nipped that in the bud, as it were. Wulfstan had felt some of these urges, or tickles, but the bollocks-guards had worked wonders. Margot entwined her arm with his as they exited the atrium and walked along a softly-lit path blanketed with leaves. It was a fine evening, the stars out, a half-moon smiling down on a healing Earth.

As Wulfstan and Margot turned a corner, two young males, chlorotic in aspect, neither wearing bollocks-guards, stopped and asked them directions to the atrium. They reeked of grog and carried metal objects in their hands.

"It's just around there," Wulfstan said, eyeing their puffy genitals warily.

"Is it now?" said the bigger of the pair, showing rows of green-tinged teeth.

"Look at his face," said his mate, also toothed.

"Mmm. Dark. He's a darky."

"You're not being neighborly," Margot said.

"Hey, baby," said the first male, "I'd like to graft with you."

"That's wrong of you," Wulfstan said. "And illegal."

"Listen here, broccolini. If I wanted your opinion I'd ask for it."

"Yeah, shut the hell up," chimed his mate, "before we turn you into crudites."

Both thugs enjoyed a hearty laugh. Buboos studded their broad faces; they were as immature as Wulfstan despite their assertiveness. Clearly, they had succumbed to dormant drives. The penalties for such lapses were severe. They could be mulched.

Margot grabbed Wulfstan's arm and said, "Let's go."

"Hey, girl," said the bigger thug, grabbing her arm, "Not so fast."

"Not so fast," echoed his mate.

"We're hungry," said the first. "We haven't eaten in days."

"That's right. We're famished."

"What are you talking about?" Wulfstan said.

The big thug shrugged. "We've gone vegan, man."

"What does that mean?"

"Like, we hate the sun."

"That's insane, Wulfstan said. "What are you implying?"

"We're not implying anything."

The smaller thug jabbed Wulfstan with a knife. Wulfstan felt it penetrate his side. Green fluid leaked from his body. The thug jabbed him again, in the throat, opening a large wound. Wulfstan grabbed his throat and waltzed around the others, who watched him collapse a few metres away with gaping mouths. He collapsed a few metres away. Margot covered hands with her hands and screeched. The larger thug silenced her with a clubbing blow across the nose. She fell to the ground, insensate. The little thug hunched over and grabbed her feet.

"Let's eat first," said the bigger thug, holding up a knife and fork. The smaller thug nodded. They wasted no time.

As they carved into Wulfstan and ate, the little thug remarked on a slight bitterness.

"Supposed to be good for you," said the bigger thug.

"Damn, some salt would have helped."

"Bring it along next time."

"I will do that."

About the Author



Salvatore Difalco is the author of two books of stories including *The Mountie At Niagara Falls* (Anvil Press) an illustrated collection of flash fiction. His short fiction has appeared in print and online journals worldwide. He currently lives in Toronto, Canada. You can find him on Amazon: <https://amzn.to/2xrhV9L>

Book Chapter

Practice

by Kurt Koontz

Author Kurt Koontz freely admits that he is not wholly guided by his spirit when he first begins to dabble in yoga. An outdoor adventurer, he enjoys the challenging physicality of the exercise, which leads him to try several different types of yoga, seeking both fitness and female company. However, when a friend from afar encourages Kurt to seek new adventures in Rishikesh, India, the self-professed "Yoga Capital of the World," Kurt feels called to the city and its yoga studios. In **Practice**, his newest memoir, Kurt guides readers through his three journeys to India in vivid, poignant detail. With unfailing honesty and humor, Kurt treats his readers to the visual and cultural richness of Rishikesh. Aware of his great fortune in visiting such a beautiful city, Kurt shares his unbound admiration for his new surroundings, and not only for the lush foothills of the Himalayas and the sacred River Ganges, but also for the many families who welcome him. Soon, that welcome extends into the yoga world, where Kurt finds a studio and teacher who will entirely transform his conception of yoga. **Practice** is a spiritual exploration grounded in the modern world that speaks not just to yogis and travelers, but to all adventurers, to all who strive to expand their own wisdom and compassion through soul-deep introspection.

HOW DID I END UP HERE?

After 36 hours of travel, including a 9-hour layover in Delhi, I finally reached my final airport in Dehradun, India. My friend Laurie had arranged for a car to meet me. I scrunched my 6' 5" frame into the backseat of a tiny Tata Motors Indica car. The driver handed me some chocolate wafers, a bottle of water, and a magazine with stories about my destination, the Parmarth Niketan Ashram in Rishikesh, India.

Everything was fine as we slowly drove to the security gate at the airport. The exit arm rose to mid-windshield level, and.... the driver slammed the throttle to full force! My left hand found the grab handle and my right tightly grasped the cracked vinyl seat. We were quickly on the right bumper of a truck with "BLOW HORN" painted in big red letters across an enormous green and blue rear. Random chunks of wood filled the payload section while

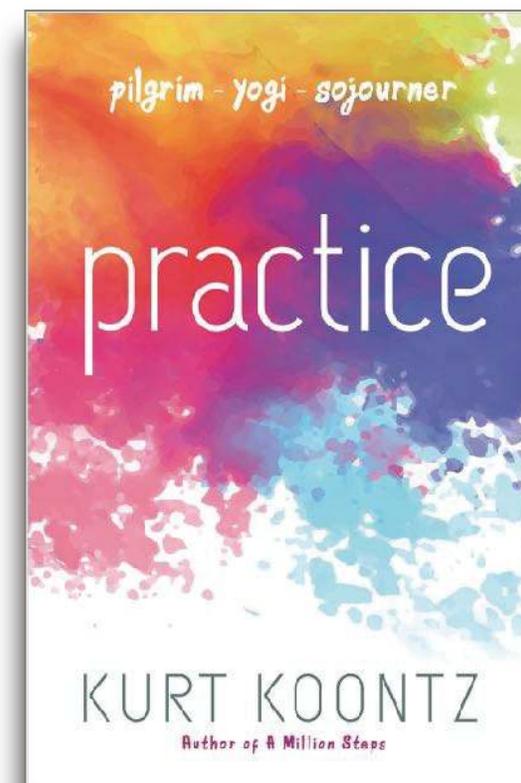
garlands of marigolds swayed alongside metal chains that held the tailgate in place.

Our horn complied with a loud "beep-beep" as we edged into the right lane to pass. Halfway into the maneuver, I saw a lonely scooter with three riders in our sights and was sure we were going to shatter the bike. The scooter driver calmly responded with his own "meep-meep" as he edged to his left. My driver threaded the needle between the oncoming cycle and the cargo truck.

For a moment, clarity returned to my head until I saw something furry running across the road. Two more scampered across the road. This time I noticed a tail. The next one lunged across on all fours, and I caught a glimpse of a bright red ass as it disappeared into the foliage. In addition to all the honking traffic, this place was crawling with rhesus macaque monkeys.

After about five more minutes of Hollywood stunt-driving techniques, including three wide on a two-lane road, and passing on blind corners, I decided it was time to let go. To preserve my sanity, I divorced fear and assumed that the driver valued his life as much as I valued mine. Since I could not mind-drive the car from the backseat, my options were limited to exiting the vehicle or just letting go and enjoying the ride. Thirty minutes of enjoyment later, the car descended a one-lane road to the pinkish stucco walls that surround the ashram.

My assigned room in the Ganga Block was one of a thousand rooms in the complex. Its 200 square feet included two twin beds, five lights, a fan, and a chronically dripping sink. The walls were pale yellow except for an oddly shaped area of about two square feet exposing the original mauve wall. Good thing I packed light, as the "closet" was four shelves in a rectangular metal cabinet that wobbled on the slate floor. One hanger draped from the window lock. The bathroom was a small room with a toilet, sink, and a shower head sticking out of the wall. It was so small that toilet paper had to be removed from the holder to prevent drenching during the cleansing process.



I wondered, not for the first or the last time, what I was doing here at an Abode Dedicated to the Welfare of All, lying on the holy banks of Mother Ganga in the lap of the lush Himalayas?" I thought this was just one of my fun solo adventures from my home in Boise, Idaho. I figured that I could probably do some yoga as well.

On arrival, it appeared my expectations were far too narrow for the reality of India. This was a lesson I relearned annually on three trips to this country.

About the Author

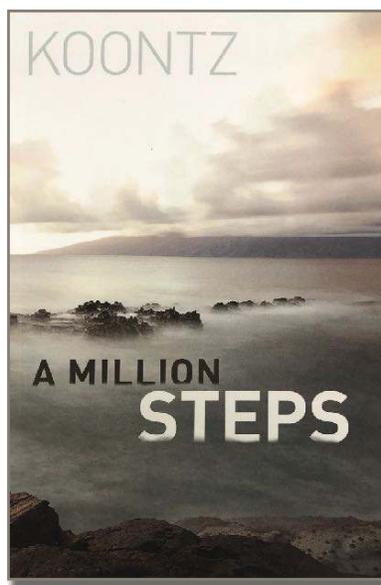


Kurt Koontz has always been an adventurer. He learned to love the outdoors growing up in Boise, Idaho. After a successful career in sales, he retired early to seek new meaning in life. 2012, found him on El Camino de Santiago

de Compostela in Spain. This long, transformative journey on foot inspired Kurt to write his first book, **A Million Steps**, a memoir that enabled Kurt to forge friends and connections around the world. One of those friends led Kurt to Rishikesh, India, where he then embarked upon a serious study of yoga as a physical and spiritual practice. In *Practice*, Kurt recounts his most recent adventures.

Kurt Koontz is also available for select lectures and presentations. You can contact him at k@kurtkoontz.com. www.kurtkoontz.com

You can buy **Practice** by Kurt Koontz at <https://amzn.to/2NjmpK1>



Interview

The Many Lives of Edward Willett

Triple Author, Journalist, Playwright, Singer, Actor....



Edward Willett is the author of more than 50 books of science fiction, fantasy, and non-fiction for adults, young adults, and children. **Marseguro** (DAW Books) won the **Aurora Award** for Best Long-Form Work in English in 2009, and the second book in **The Double Helix** duology, **Terra Insegura**, was short-listed the following year. His young adult fantasy **Spirit Singer** (Tyche Books) won the Regina Book Award at the 2002 Saskatchewan Book

Awards, and several other of his novels have been shortlisted for Saskatchewan Book Awards.

For two decades Ed wrote a weekly science column that appeared in the Regina **Leader Post** and assorted other newspapers; an audio version also ran weekly on CBC Radio's **Afternoon Edition** in Regina for 17 of those years. He continues to live in Regina with his wife, Margaret Anne Hodges, P. Eng., a past president of the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Saskatchewan, and their teenaged daughter, Alice.

Q: You have **THREE** names, yours and two pen names that you have used in your expansive career. What made you decide to use the two other names and are they still active?

A: It wasn't exactly my choice—my publisher asked me to use the pen names. My first three books for DAW Books were science fiction: **Lost in Translation**, **Marseguro**, and **Terra Insegura**. My editor/publisher at DAW, Sheila E. Gilbert, suggested I write a fantasy. I changed names because Edward Willett wasn't known as a fantasy writer, and became Lee Arthur Chane for **Magebane**. But my next fantasy after that, **Masks**, was very different from **Magebane**: functionally, a YA book, featuring a young female character, Mara Holdfast. Because it was so different from **Magebane**, I changed names again, to E.C. Blake, which could (at first glance) potentially be a female author using initials (although anyone who read the author bio on the book flap would know it wasn't). I remained E.C. Blake for the **Masks of Aygrima** trilogy (**Masks**, **Shadows**, and **Faces**), but then my next book, **The Cityborn**, was science fiction again—so I went back to Edward Willett. My newest one, **Worldshaper**, reads like fantasy but has a science fiction backstory...but I'm staying as Edward Willett.

Lee Arthur Chane is quiescent at the moment, but E.C. Blake could make another appearance, either through DAW or elsewhere. Nothing coming out from either of them right now, though.

Q: What was your decision to transition from science columnist for a newspaper for two decades, to a fiction writer? What were the easy and difficult moments in this change of pace?

A: It wasn't really like that. The transition was from a full-time job to freelancing, of which the science column was one part, and writing fiction was another. I started my career as a reporter/photographer for my hometown newspaper here in Saskatchewan, the weekly *Weyburn Review* (my university degree, from Harding University in Searcy, Arkansas, is in journalism). From there, I moved to Regina (where I still live) as communications officer for the Saskatchewan Science Centre. I started writing the science column while I was there, as part of our mandate to promote science; when I left the Science Centre to become a full-time freelance writer, twenty-five years ago, I took the column with me. I wrote it for some two decades, and was continuing to write it long after I started selling novels.

I only quit writing it because I no longer had a newspaper publishing it. I'd start it up again in a minute if someone asked me to and wanted to pay for it! (Hint, hint.)

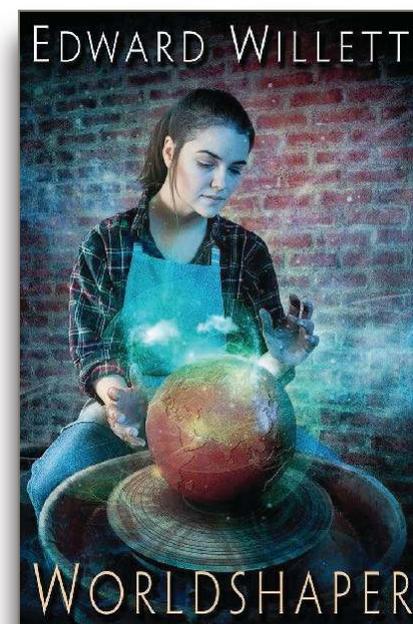
I still mix writing fiction and non-fiction. Of my sixty-plus published books, about a third are fiction: the rest are non-fiction, ranging from science books for both children and adults to local histories (for example, *Historic Walks of Regina and Moose Jaw*), to biographies of people as diverse as Andy Warhol, the Ayatollah Khomeini, and J.R.R. Tolkien. Writing is writing, and I'm a freelancer—basically I'll write anything for a buck! (Honestly. Email me. We'll talk.)

That said, fiction writing is my first love, and I'm glad it has become a much larger part of my writing over the years. I would write nothing but fiction if I could afford it, and I still hope to achieve that some day. If enough people buy my new book *Worldshaper*... (That would be another hint!)

Q: If you had to kill one of your aliases, which would go and how would you do it?

A: I'd probably kill Lee Arthur Chane, if I had to choose. And since *Magebane* features an airship, I think I'd kill him by pushing him out of the basket of a hot-air balloon, in lieu of dropping ballast.

Q: The line between science fiction and fantasy is getting quite blurred with many die-hard sci-fi writers (and fans) annoyed at the blending of the two. What are your thoughts given that you do write both genres?



A: I love them both, and as long as I'm not blindsided by a sudden change in genre midway through a novel, the blending doesn't annoy me. What would annoy me would be reading a hard science fiction novel based on the finer points of, say, orbital mechanics, only to have the spaceship about to plunge to a fiery doom in the atmosphere of a gas giant suddenly rescued by a wizard who happens to be among the passengers—UNLESS it was clear from the beginning, or even the blurb, of the book that this was a mixture of science fiction and fantasy. It's all about making sure that the reader knows what kind of book he or she is getting into, which means a well-written cover blurb and appropriate cover art.

My new book, *Worldshaper*, reads like a fantasy (and DAW is calling it a fantasy), but in fact it has a science fiction backstory. So it's possible I'm about to annoy a few of the aforementioned fans...but if they give it a chance, I'll think they'll find it, as Booklist calls it, "highly enjoyable."

Q: Does the public performer side of your experience, including being a singer, help in the creation and reality of your fictional characters? Has there been other life experiences that have also fulfilled that role?

A: Acting and writing have this in common: in both instances, you are attempting to inhabit the mind and body of someone who is not yourself. Actors take words written by someone else and try to bring them to life as a believable character; writers take their own words and try to bring them to life as a believable character, although they don't get to actually act things out in front of their readers. I believe that the work I've done as an actor has benefited me as a writer, and vice-versa, for that reason.

The other thing I've noted, from being a stage actor and sometimes director, is that I always have a very clear idea in my head of the physical parameters of any scene I'm writing: I know where the characters are in relation to each other, where the furniture is, the limits of the space, etc. This may seem obvious, but something I see a lot in working with neophyte writers is a tendency for things to happen in a kind of a grey fog, with characters not precisely located and the reader thus confused as to the parameters of the

scene. While the writer may have a clear image in his or her head, it isn't being conveyed to the reader. Since, as an actor, and especially as a director, you must always be aware of where everyone is and are constantly working to make the action work within the very defined space of the stage, I think I have a leg up on avoiding that kind of "grey fog" problem.

Q: *Worldshaper* is your latest work, the start of a new series, and also the title of a podcast series featuring other authors that you host. Could you tell us a little about both the novel and the intent behind the podcast?

A: *Worldshaper* is the story of Shawna Keys, who has what seems an idyllic life as the book begins: she's just opened her pottery studio in a small Montana city, she has a boyfriend and a best friend, she's looking forward to the rest of her life—and then, suddenly, everything changes. What appear to be terrorists attack the coffee shop where she's gone with her friend Aesha. Aesha and many others are killed. The leader of the attackers touches her, calls her by name, and then points a gun at her head. She refuses to believe this is happening...and just like that, it isn't. The attackers are gone, the coffee shop is intact...and Aesha and everyone else who was killed has not only vanished, no one else even remembers they existed.

A stranger, Karl Yatsar, shows up and explains to Shawna that the world she thinks is the only world there is is, in fact, a construct: a world she Shaped to be the way it is. Not only that, there is an entire Labyrinth of Shaped Worlds, and all are in danger from the Adversary who has invaded her world and will, inevitably, steal it away from her. He tells her she cannot save her own world, but has the power to save all these other worlds, by traveling through them, absorbing the knowledge of how each has been Shaped from the Shapers living within each one, and transporting that knowledge to Ygrair, the woman at the centre of the Labyrinth, and the one who, though Shawna inexplicably doesn't remember it, gave her this world to Shape in the first place.

In the first book, Karl and Shawna flee through a world changing around them, sometimes at Shawna's behest, sometimes at the Adversary's, to escape through a Portal into the next world, which Shawna must try to save before the Adversary captures it, too. The series will take Shawna from world to world, each unique--they may be steampunk worlds, worlds plagued by vampires and werewolves, film noir worlds, epic fantasy worlds, etc.-- as she tries to save as many worlds as she can from the Adversary.

Worldshapers the series, then, is about a character traveling into fictional worlds and encountering the individuals who shaped those worlds: essentially, a metaphor for readers traveling into fictional worlds of books and encountering the authors of those books. That made it logical to launch something I've thought about doing for a long time, a podcast where I talk to my fellow science fiction and fantasy authors about how they shape their fictional worlds. Each episode focuses on a specific book or books chosen by

the featured author. We talk about how the author became interested in science fiction and fantasy and how he or she began writing it, and then talk about the creating of that particular book or books, from inspiration through first draft through revisions through editing, and finish with some philosophical discussion of why that author writes, and why he or she thinks any of us write.

I've had great fun with it so far. Guests have included, in the first month, Robert J. Sawyer, Tanya Huff, John Scalzi, Julie Czerneda, and Arthur Slade. Confirmed guests going forward include Gareth L. Powell, Orson Scott Card, Joe Haldeman, Seanan McGuire, David Brin, Peter V. Brett, Kim Harrison, Tosca Lee, Lee Modesitt Jr...and several others. It comes out every two weeks. I can't wait to talk to all these terrific writers, and read their books. Check it out at www.theworldshapers.com

Q. Anything else that you wish to share, projects, links, things you wish readers to know.

A: Coming up next for me will be Book 2 of *Worldshapers* (tentatively title *Master of the World*, it takes place in a steampunkish Jules Verne-inspired world). I've also got a middle-grade fantasy with my agent I hope will find a home before long, and a dark fantasy/horror-ish YA novel I'm just waiting for contract finalization to announce. Oh, and I'm writing a play-with-music for Regina Lyric Musical Theatre, which I'll be directing in the spring: it's called *The Music Shoppe*, and has a fantastical element, as did my previous play-with-music for Lyric, which was called *As Time Goes By: A Love Story with Music and Ghosts*.

Where to find Edward Willett.

Amazon: <https://amzn.to/2DdWtLA>

Website: www.edwardwillett.com

Edward's latest: *Worldshaper*, Book 1 in the *Worldshapers* series from [DAW Books](#)

"Rollicking secondary-world contemporary fantasy." - [Publishers Weekly](#) (starred review).

"Fun, quirky, and highly enjoyable." - [Booklist](#)

The Cityborn, science fiction from [DAW Books](#)

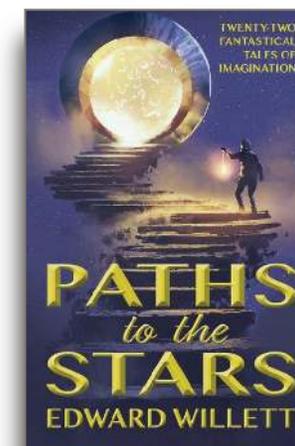
Paths to the Stars, short-story collection from [Shadowpaw Press](#)

I Tumble Through the Diamond Dust, illustrated SF/fantasy poetry from [YNWP](#)

The Shards of Excalibur, five-book YA fantasy series from [Coteau Books](#)

Host of [The Worldshapers](#) podcast.

Twitter: [@ewillett](#)



Column:

by Jeri Walker

Age vs. Experience

An older wine isn't necessarily a better wine, but it's easy to get attached to such romantic notions. Around 90% of bottles are meant to be consumed within a year, another 9% within five years, and only 1% actually get better with prolonged aging. The best time to drink most wines is now.

As with wine, an older writer isn't necessarily a better writer. Someday is a lie many writers tell themselves. Someday, they will join a critique group. Someday they will submit for publication. All those someday can result in ignoring the importance of developing a regular writing habit.

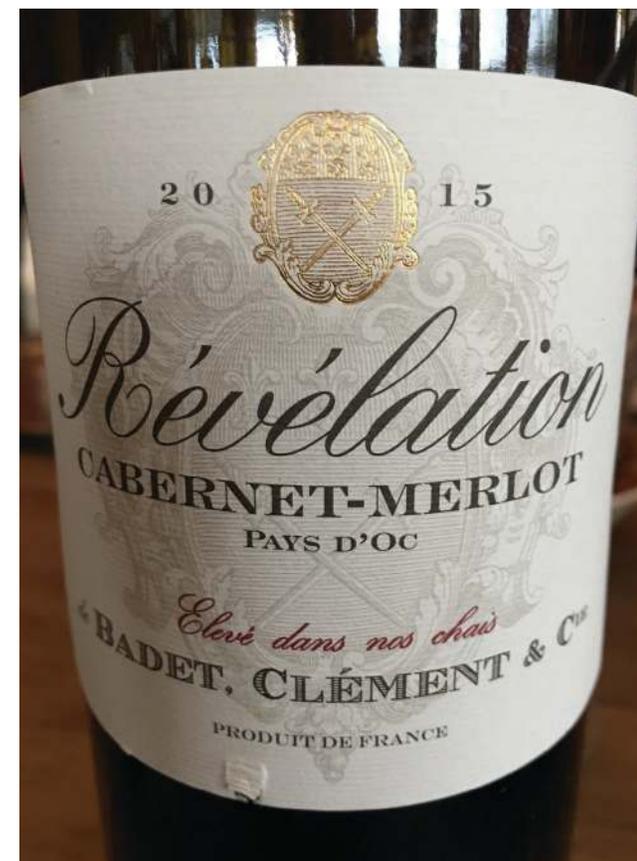
Properly aged wine is finicky. Tannins impart flavor over time and also act as a natural preservative, so too does wine's low PH and natural acidity. The role of a consistent temperature between 50-55 degrees matters as well, which is far below today's room temperature. Proper humidity levels can also keep a cork from drying out and oxidization taking place.

What notions of good writing are you attached to? Unlike winemaking, writing is more art than science. The writing process is only as finicky as a writer's brain chooses to make it, and brains can be such raging brats at times. Maybe you get bogged down with self-editing, wanting to mold perfection from unripe material. Alas, as Donald Murray once said, "Writing is the way to get the writing done."

Most of us just want to know enough about wine to get more enjoyment out of it, not master the making of it. If you've stuck with Cabernet for years, maybe it's time to shake things up with a nice Zin. If you've been tweaking the same novel for five years, set it aside long enough to write a shorter piece. Besides, completing that first novel is the best teacher when it comes to completing the second.

Let's be honest. Gaining experience in the realm of wine and writing is not for the weary, but growth always comes with effort. Literary perfection is a lofty goal. Aiming to reach an engaged and targeted audience of readers is much more immediate. As with most endeavors, diving in is often the best choice.

What are you waiting for? Deterioration in going to inevitably set in. Start popping more corks and bashing out more words. Experience can bring refinement much faster than age. Every process is at once simple and complex.

**About Jeri Walker**

Jeri Walker provides manuscript critiques and copyedits for authors who value the intersection of the literary and the commercial. She also forges nonfiction ghostwriting partnerships where her expertise results in prose reflective of the client's voice, experience, and authority. Authenticity is her core guiding value. You can connect with her via Word Bank Writing & Editing at JeriWB.com.

Interview

Richard Paolinelli Breaking New Ground



Richard Paolinelli has been writing in one form or another since 1983. He started out as a freelance writer in Texas before enjoying an over-20 year career as a sportswriter. In 2015 Richard began releasing novels and sports non-fiction books via Tuscan Bay Books. His latest novel *When the Gods Fell* is now available.

Q: Is it difficult for you to stick to one genre given the vast scope of writing related work you've done?

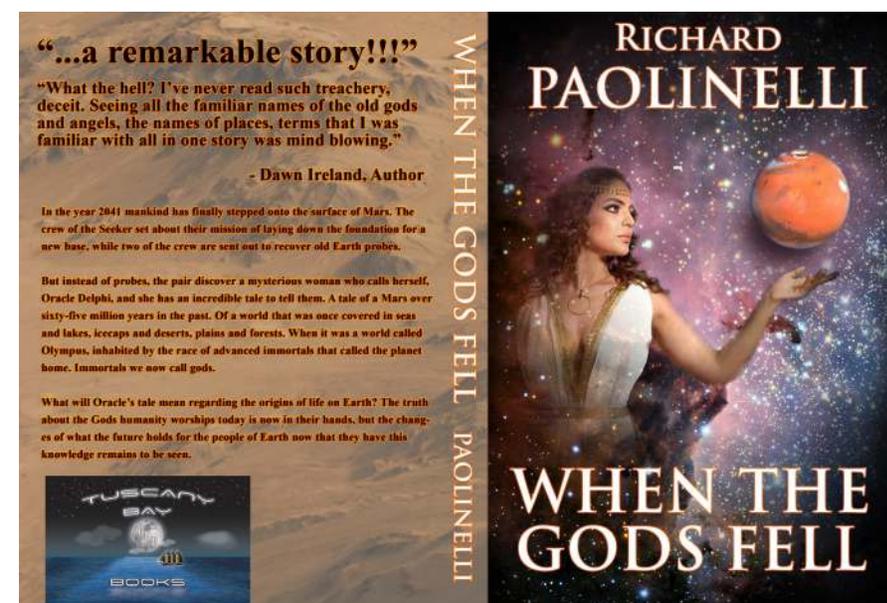
A: No, not really. I really enjoy stretching myself as a writer, which is why I do write across so many genres. But I don't find it difficult to move back and forth between them for extended periods of time. For example, I'm working on a steampunk series of six novellas aimed at middle-grade readers. After that, my next three projects are sci-fi/fantasy, including a short story for an upcoming H.G. Wells-based anthology by Belanger Books. After that I'm planning on going back into a couple of mystery/thrillers.

Q: Your latest novel, *When The Gods Fell* is available. Can you tell us a bit about it?

A: It's a sci-fi/fantasy hybrid that I originally wrote to be a standalone work with an outside chance to write a sequel. But the reactions I have been getting from readers have convinced me that there is in fact a series to be written here.

The premise is the first manned mission to Mars landing on the Red Planet in the year 2041. Once there they are greeted by a mysterious woman who claims to have been waiting millions of years for the "Children of Olympus" to return home.

The story she has to tell will change our understanding of the origins of the human race on Earth as well as everything we thought we knew about the gods and goddesses of ancient mythology.



Q: How did you enjoy your Sherlock Holmes/HG Wells stories and was it easier to develop your stories from these existing characters/author or when you do your own?

A: I enjoyed writing all three of them. Two of the first "mature" authors I discovered as a young reader was Arthur Conan Doyle and H.G. Wells. I never thought I would find myself in a position to write original Sherlock Holmes stories. And to have an opportunity to write a story that involved Holmes, Wells and Edgar Allan Poe together was pure joy. I'm submitting an original short story based on *War of the Worlds* for a planned H.G. Wells-based anthology next year.

It seems to be easier for me to develop my stories when the characters are original creations of my own. Part of it stems from needing to write the Holmes stories in the style of Doyle and remain true to established Holmes canon. That required a lot of extra research and re-reading of Doyle stories to make sure I remained true to the world Doyle created.

One of the best reviews I have ever received as a writer came from *The Woman Returns* in the *Holmes Away From Home* anthology. It was from a very well established Holmes writer who told me that had he not read my byline on the story he would have thought that the publisher had discovered a previously unpublished Doyle original story. I doubt my feet touched the ground for a month after that.

Q: Tell us a bit about your early freelance days? Side jobs? First publication, and how well that stood the test of time?

A: Typical of any young writer trying to get started as a freelance writer at the time. Small articles in publications that no longer exist and never got uploaded to the internet. I think my first "assignment" was a story on a small meteor crater in West Texas. I covered a Pro-Am golf tournament back-to-back years. Small things like that worked around a full-time job in the oilfields.

One of the few things that have survived the years are the first two issues of the Elite Comics comic book series, *Seadragon*, from 1986. I was the lead writer for those two issues and you can still find them floating about on EBay.

Oddly enough, I met up with *Seadragon's* creator, Tom Floyd, recently. I moved to Nebraska – he's lived here for years – and we both attended a Comic Book Convention in Omaha in June. He gave me the green light to write a novelization of *Seadragon* which I hope to finish next year.

Q: You founded the Science Fiction and Fantasy Creators Guild (SFFCG) in reaction to what you saw as overly politicization from the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers (SFWA) and the World Science Fiction Society that you described as "blackballing" authors with opposing political views. How difficult was it to establish the SFFCG, what has been the reaction from the writing community, and also from the above two organizations mentioned?

A: Well, I think the wounds from the spears, knives and bullets are healing up nicely. Needless to say, there has been a mixture of support and extreme pushback. Some on one side feel threatened by it. That's mostly those within the SFWA who have spent the last decade or so purging the so-called "wrong-thinkers" from their organization.

What surprised me was those on the other end of the extreme that became angry we decided not to go full throttle and be an exact polar opposite of those other organizations. In my mind, going that far would defeat the true purpose of the Guild before we ever got started.

I want an organization that will focus on supporting creators of sci-fi and fantasy and check the real-world political battles at the door. As I often say, the tent for fans and creators of sci-fi/fantasy is enormous. There is plenty of room for all us within and no need to shut anyone out – especially for such a silly reason as they don't share your political views.

Q: You have structured the SFFCG very fairly with varying membership levels based solely on professional levels of writing attained. These range from Associate Level for newbies, Pro Level for published writers, and Emeritus Level for former professionals who can act as mentors. How's the membership drive going, and what do you see developing for the remainder of this year and next?

A: Have I mentioned the wounds are healing nicely? Sadly, there are quite a few paper cuts from the red tape we're having to hack through. It has slowed down getting the Guild officially launched so that we can open up applications for official membership. Once we get the paperwork hacked down and make sure we have all of our t's crossed and l's dotted, we'll start accepting applications. I hope we have that going before the end of the year, but given the tenacity of the paper-pushers, I don't have an official date yet.

Q: Finally, what are your writing habits like? Fixed schedule, flexible? Coffee, tea, Hemingway beverages? Pencil and notepad, laptop? Office, home, café?

A: I have a very flexible schedule, but most of my writing seems to happen between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. It is fueled by way too much Dr. Pepper. I have a nice office setup and a desktop computer that occasionally behaves itself.

Visit Richard's social media links at:

Website: www.scifiscribe.com

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/TuscanyBayBooks>

Twitter: [@TuscanyBayBooks](https://twitter.com/TuscanyBayBooks)

Synopsis of *When the Gods Fell*
by Richard Paolinelli

"A game of thrones on ancient Mars!"

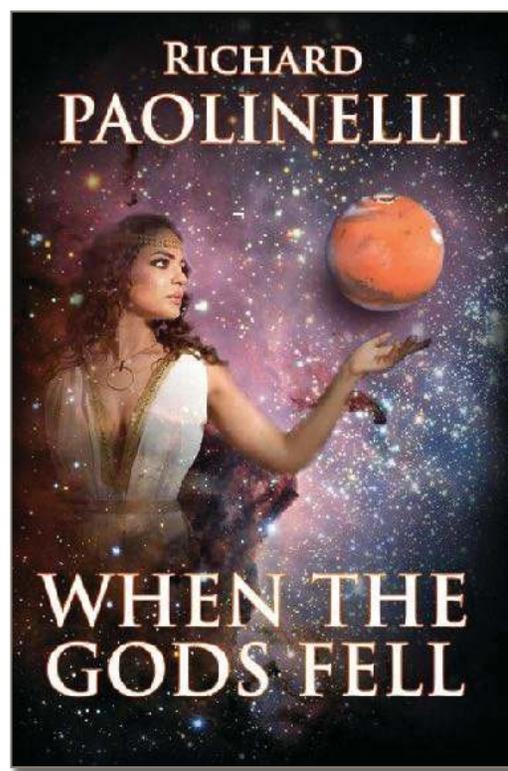
Oracle Veritas of the House of Delphi has waited for over 65 million years to tell her story to the children of Olympus. Now, in the year 2041, the first humans from Earth have stepped onto the surface of Mars. But instead of a barren world littered with long-dead probes and rovers, the crew of the Seeker will encounter Oracle and hear of a world that was once covered in seas and lakes, icecaps and deserts, plains and forests. When it was a world called Olympus, inhabited by the race of advanced immortals that called the planet home.

How Lord Zeus, head of the ruling family of Caste Olympus, was ruler of the world. But other Castes chaff under the Olympian rule. Lord Odin, of Caste Norse, and Lord Anu, of Caste Paga, have set their eyes upon the throne of Olympus. Even as the jubilee celebration of Zeus' rule draws near, Odin and Anu recruit the leaders of the other Castes – Dine, Asiac, Afrikans and Hindi – to their cause against the mighty Zeus.

Only Caste Zion, led by Lord Yahweh, remains loyal to the throne. A loyalty proven two centuries before when Yahweh exiled his own son, Lucifer, after a failed coup attempt. But Lucifer's treachery will not die. He waits for the rebellious Castes to strike against his father and set him free from his prison on Gaia, the third planet in Olympus' solar system.

As the plotters move against the throne, Zeus sees the extinction of all life on Olympus as the only possible result of the looming civil war. He is left with only one terrible solution. Zeus turns to the only person he can trust to carry out his last order as ruler of Olympus.

Learn more about *When the Gods Fell* at <https://amzn.to/2xqrOUY>



Book Chapter

The Lost Child

by Danielle Calloway

Synopsis:

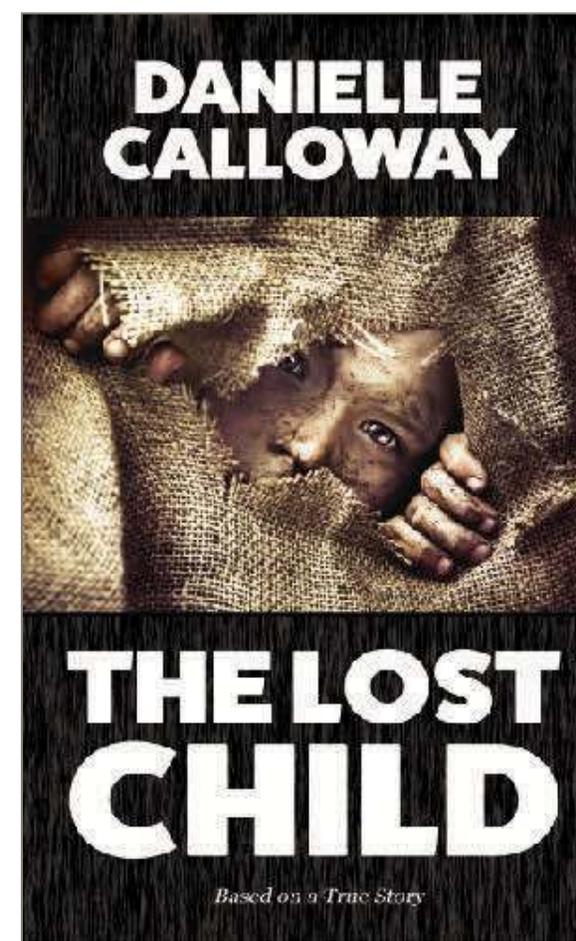
The Lost Child is based on a true story of a boy, Nicolas, who was born deaf, deep in the rainforest of Ecuador, South America. Unwanted, unloved, and abused by his family, he was sold into child slavery when he was eight years old. Escaping, he lived on the dangerous streets and traveled the country in search of a family who would take him in and love him as their own.

For five years he fled abuse on the streets, sleeping where he could,

always being hungry, yet struggling to stay alive all-the-while longing to be loved.

Searching for him Officer Morales and Lily, a caring social worker who, despite her crippling health issues, desperately tries to find a way to win Nicolas' trust so he can open up and tell his story?

The lives of Nicolas, Lily, and Officer Morales cross paths, unfolding the story of this deaf boy's incredible journey.



Twelve years earlier, in Esperanza, Ecuador, a young mother lovingly cradled her baby boy. Outside the mud had thickened as the heavy rains fell, forming puddles where the donkeys and cows had just walked down

the streets. The children quickly threw their soccer ball aside and grabbed sticks, leaves and rocks and started to play in the mud, dirtying their bare legs, tattered shorts, and bare chests. Their contagious laughter filled the air and the adults stopped their labors for a moment to watch the children and remember happier times as the sound of rain pattered on.

Nicolás' mother listened to the children's laughter outside and the rain falling on the leaky tin roof of her small, dirt floor, bamboo house. Holding the tiny boy in her arms she whispered softly to him, "I hope your life is better than mine, I'll try my best to make you happy and you'll finish school and get a good job. You'll marry a nice señorita and have a beautiful family of your own. Your life will not be like mine!" His large dark eyes fixed on hers each time she spoke to him, but it would be two years before she realized that he was deaf. When she found out all her hopes and dreams for him vanished. She was devastated.

Looking for hope, she took him to the priest of the local church, even though it had been a long time since she had entered a church. Timidly she tiptoed into the dark interior with Nicolás balancing on her hip; the priest was at the pulpit, practicing his lecture for Sunday's mass. Shyly glancing at her surroundings, she felt small and insignificant. Embarrassed, she turned around to leave.

The priest, a slightly balding middle-aged man, raised his hands in the air and took a deep breath to deliver a damning message, his white collar squeezed his expanding neck as the buttons of his black shirt strained. Glaring down at his imaginary audience he said in a deep voice, "God sees all, he sees what you do in the dark, he sees what you do behind closed doors...."

A shadow moved, breaking his concentration. Quickly putting on his glasses he saw woman with a child timidly trying to leave unnoticed. Thinking she might want to have him bless the child, he called out to her in a much softer voice, "Please, stay for a moment." Walking up to her he gently took her elbow and led her to a wooden bench, "Please, have a seat. What is your name and what brings you here?"

She placed Nicolás on the floor to play and looked down, embarrassed. Then, looking up into his soft brown eyes and seeing concern and warmth, she explained, "This is my son, Nicolás, and I just found out he is deaf."

The priest looked down at the boy, who looked back up at him with a smile and held one slobbery hand up to him. Looking at him, the priest couldn't tell he was deaf. He looked like a normal toddler. He was a little too thin and had olive skin, straight black hair, and a wide mouth with a smile that seemed to invite friendship. The priest could tell, though, that something about those eyes were different. Set wide apart, those black eyes looked intensely at him, intelligent, sincere, and observing.

He remembered a saying, "The eyes are the windows to our soul," and saw through Nicolás' eyes that he was a gentle boy, full of love and kindness.

However, he thought to himself, he is deaf, and I've been taught that he is the product of sin.

Seeing the priest look tenderly at her child, she started to have a glimmer of hope. Then, she saw his face suddenly harden, and fear gripped at her heart. Tears slipping down her cheek, she raised her big black eyes to the priest and asked, "Why? Why is he deaf? Why did God do this to me? And what can I do? How do I raise him? What kind of life will he have?"

The warmth had disappeared from the priest's eyes. He coldly crossed his arms and frowned. Taking a deep breath, he sternly told her, "When a child is born deaf, blind, retarded, or deformed, it is because God is punishing the parents for their sins. Tell me now, what did you do to bring on this punishment?"

Instead of answering, she hung her head in shame. She knew there was no way she could tell the priest that she was a prostitute. "So, it is my fault? Everyone will know I am a sinner?"

"Yes. Many people place their defective children in orphanages or institutions or hand them off to other family members to get a fresh start. Whether you keep him or give him away, that is your choice. If you would like to confess, change your ways, and beg for God's forgiveness, I can help you with that."

Timidly she asked, "If I do all of that, will God take my punishment away and cure the child?"

"No. Nicolás will always be a reminder of your sins, of your imperfections."

"Everyone will always know that I am a sinner, that I did horrible things!"

"You can't change the past. You are a sinner."

"You don't understand!" she yelled, eyes blazing, "What else was I to do? How else was I to survive? You're comfortable in your nice house, you have a job and a paycheck, so how can you judge me? You don't know what it is like to be a single woman without money!"

"There are always choices," he coldly told her.

"What! What are my choices? You tell me if I had choices! No one wants me to wash their clothes, no one wants to hire me to work in their little stores. The oil company doesn't want me. If I want to eat, if I want to live, there was only one thing I could do," she choked down a sob, "Only the men want me. No one else!"

"This," said the priest, pointing at Nicolás, "is the consequence of your sins. You will always have that as a reminder, as a mark against you. Change what you are, and God won't punish you again."

"How? What will I do? What else can I do?" she desperately asked. Then, seeing he had no answers, she hoarsely cried out, "I have no choice!" With tears streaming down her face she grabbed Nicolás and fled the church, the priest, and her shame. She couldn't erase his words from her memory:

"This is God's punishment for your sins. Nicolás is a mark against you. Everyone will know you are a sinner when they see that deaf child."

She hung her head in disgrace as she hurried home. She had heard others say the same to her; her boy was deaf because of her sins. "Should I give him away?" she asked herself. "But I love him!"

The Lost Child by Danielle Calloway is scheduled to be released November 1, 2018 by AltPublish.com

For news and special advance offers, please sign up for Danielle's newsletter at <http://eepurl.com/dGTgwn>

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Alt Publish, the publisher of **Books 'N Pieces Magazine**, also helps writers with quality stories to get self-published. Unlike other publishing companies or publish-assist companies, Alt Publish works with you to teach you how to be independent. We also provide mentor services for writers wishing to refine their work into something marketable.

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Our strategy is three-fold: **Editing, Publishing & Marketing**. The latter is the reason books succeed or fail to generate sufficient sales. Most companies will market through social media alone, a mistake given the sheer volume of poor quality material peddled this way.

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If you'd like to learn more, contact me and I am happy to discuss your options, review your work, make suggestions *before* you decide whether we are a good fit. No pressure. No obligation. If you decide to proceed, ALL costs will be included in the contract along with agreed upon payment methods. You will not be locked into long-term contracts, no royalty sharing, no giving up rights, no obligations to buy copies, and all the things that are the pitfalls of vanity press outfits and inadequate small publishers. And while you will be instructed along the way, you are under no obligation to do it yourself if you choose not to. The main point is that YOU have a CHOICE!

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~William Gensburger, Publisher

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Books 'N Pieces Magazine has been publishing since 2017, and features interviews with bestselling and indie authors, short stories, interesting articles and writing tips, book reviews and previews, book chapters, and more.

Some of our **interviews** include **Robert J. Sawyer, Eileen Cook, Peter James, Steena Holmes, Miranda Oh, JC Ryan, Mike Wells, Devika Fernando, Jas T. Ward, Fiona Ingram/Arabella Sheraton, Kelly Charron, Joanne Pence, Tony Phillips, Alan Brennart, Stuart Horwitz, Marc Rainer, Ellis Knox, Laura Lefkowitz, A.C. Salter, Robin Melhuish, Sarah L. Johnson, Lance Thompson** and more.

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Article

A Writer Challenge from Bestselling Author **Mike Wells**

Bestselling Indie author, **Mike Wells**, has a challenge for authors who have completed a novel in any genre (as long as it has a strong suspense element – romantic suspense, sci-fi suspense, espionage, international crime, mysteries/detective, etc.)

The challenge is finding an author compatible with Mike's style, someone who would like to co-author their work with Mike, using Mike's branding; massive exposure, high-selling, and his bestselling status.

"It's very difficult to find a good match and we (my wife, who's a fantastic story editor) wind up having to say no to about 95% of the writers who show interest," Mike says. "The book you submit should already be written, and it should also be the start of a possible series, with common characters who appear in each new book."

James Paterson, as well as other bestselling authors, use this co-author branding to provide more content for their reader base, faster than they are able to write it. Patterson's latest is a book co-authored with former President Bill Clinton.

Mike has co-authored in the past and found the experience to be satisfying for both him and the other author.

"Speaking of co-authoring, readers gave such an enthusiastic response to the **Forbidden** romantic suspense series that Devika Fernando and I wrote that we decided to add three more books," he says. You can read Devika's thoughts on the process at <http://booksnpieces.com/A/?p=2142>

As for working with another author: "The author has to be willing to have my name at the top of the cover, and his/hers at the bottom," Mike says. "This is a publishing model that James Patterson championed."

Of course, for many authors, their ego may prevent sharing their initial creation with Mike, only to have his name more prominent. Mike, and his editor) rework the story, amplifying strengths, minimizing weak spots. Even though he is not creating the story from scratch, a lot of work goes into the process of publishing.

For the author who does not have the bestselling status, or market list for strong sales, this is a solid proposal. Getting on the bestselling list with Mike allows for future solo works to also ride that wave of success. Consider it a springboard to success. Of course, if your stomach cannot handle the thought

of being tied down to another author, regardless of the outcomes, then this challenge is not for you.

"I offer a 50/50 royalty split on all ebooks sold, paid quarterly," Mike says.

"I have no written contract – I work with other authors on a good faith basis. Any agreements are made with a simple email agreement that says as long as the arrangement working for both of us, we continue, but that either party can cancel at any time. If the co-author cancels, he/she can't publish anything but the original book as it was submitted to me, and same goes if I cancel, of course.

My experience is that if a business arrangement isn't working for one or the other party, no written contract helps, they just cause everyone grief and frustration, better to part amicably and go separate ways."

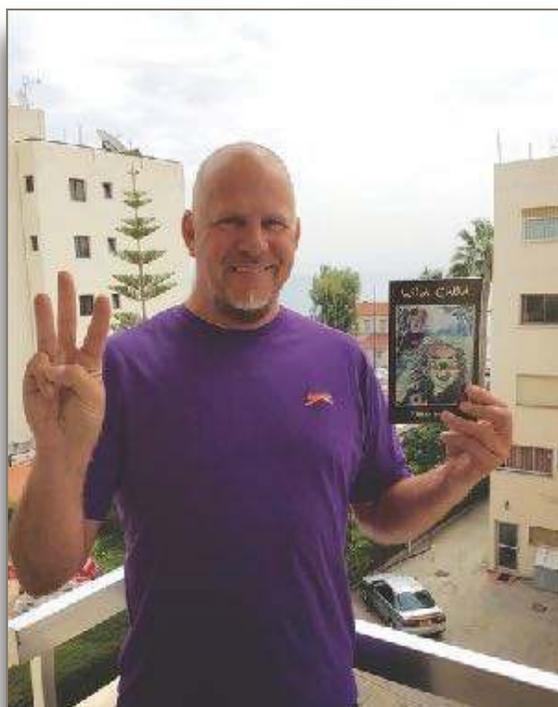
If you have not seen Mike Wells' Website, you should: <http://mikewellsblog.blogspot.com/> You can usually get the first books in his series FREE from the site. Mike also posts a wealth of advice for writers: <https://mikewellsblog.blogspot.com/p/advice-for-writers.html>

If you are interested in Mike's challenge, you need to know the requirements. First, your book must be completed, published or not. Second, submit the first 3 chapters (PDF) along with a synopsis and any links you may already have.

Email this directly to Mike: mike@MikeWellsBooks.com
Subject line: **Challenge.**

Allow him roughly 4-6 weeks to thoroughly review it before expecting a reply. If you have other questions, you may also ask them.

This is a terrific opportunity for new writers with an exceptional story and struggling with sales and exposure, to find a surefire way to reach a lot of people with potentially life-changing results.



Article

Amazon's Createspace and Kindle Have Merged Printing Operations

How Does That Affect Your Bottom Line?

by William Gensburger



Createspace has started phasing out of the self-publishing business, shifting to the **Kindle Direct** arm of the business, and in the process, changing up the costs and royalties involved.

With some variations for book sizing, the calculations for deciding how to price and what you will get as a royalty are based on a formula.

The royalty rate is a fixed 60% for standard, and 40% for expanded distribution. But that is, of course, not including deducting for the cost.

Calculating the cost is straightforward: A flat \$0.85 fixed cost is added to (page count x \$0.012).

- For a 350 page book the calculation would be $\$0.85 + (350 \times 0.012) =$ Cost of \$5.05.
- The minimum list price for this book would be the cost divided by the royalty. In this case $\$5.05/60\% = \8.41
- Your Royalty is your (List price x 60%) minus Cost. In this case, if I choose to list my book at \$12.99 my royalty would be $(\$12.99 \times 60\%) - \$5.05 = \$2.74$ Royalty

In some cases this is slightly higher or lower than the old Createspace royalties.

Using the same process for calculating Expanded Distribution you get the following:

- Cost = \$5.05
- Royalty is $(\$12.99 \times 40\%) - \$5.05 = \$0.15$

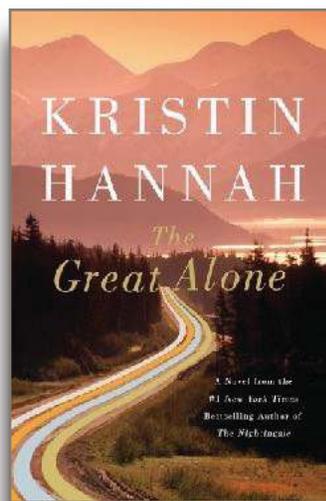
So clearly the pricing must be higher in order to reap a decent royalty.

According to some industry sources, most average-sized trade paperback novels fall into the \$13.95 to \$17.95 price range.

Interestingly, a look at Amazon shows list pricing in this range, however, one of the perks of Amazon was that they could elect to reprice your book to enhance sales, while still paying you from the list price royalty.

Bearing that in mind, it makes more sense to overprice your book on the premise that the royalty is higher and that Amazon may, in its infinite wisdom, elect to lower the selling price (and still pay you royalty based on list price).

Similarly, you should note that the average Kindle book list price has been increasing, often close to the selling price of the paperback novels. Since the statistics show that eBook sales are still the mainstay, despite a slight resurgence in paperback books, it makes sense to maximize the royalties from that.



For example: Kristen Hannah's "The Great Unknown" is listed at \$17.69 for paperback and \$14.99 for Kindle. It is a 435 page novel, so let's see what that reaps based on the above calculations.

- Paperback cost: $\$0.85 + (435 \times 0.012) = \6.07
- Royalty: $(17.69 \times 60\%) - 6.07 = \4.54
- Kindle Royalty is $70\% \times \$14.99 = \10.49

It's clear which route works best here.

Some interesting articles suggest that there is a huge market for print sales out there; one even suggests the sales ratio of 70% print (combined print markets) to 30% (digital); however this does not account for the royalty discrepancies that the author receives for a print sale versus the increased workload to produce a print book.

But what goes into a print book, aside from an extra back cover and spine, an ISBN number (\$295 for 10 unless you are fine using Amazon's freebie marking you an amateur), layout of pages, stylistic elements, and that's not including hardbacks with dust-jackets. From the numbers above from Kristin Hannah's novel, you can see the profit from paperback is close to the profit from the Kindle edition.

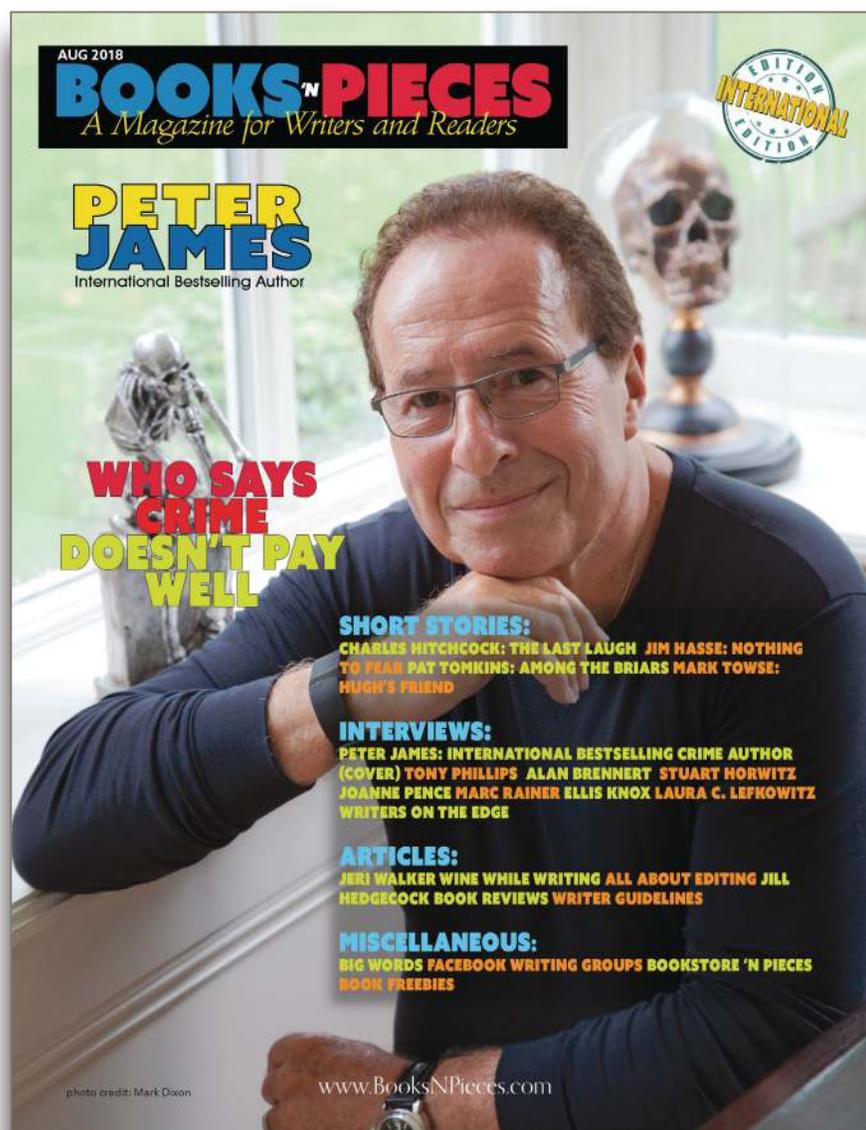
Many authors swear off print editions. My personal opinion is that there is a place for print, especially as a tangible product that can be used at book signings and placement locally, if you wish to add an extra layer to your workload. And there is still a print audience, as the statistics show, so why lose that added revenue?

I would, however, focus on the digital format first, then work toward a print edition just so that one is out there, so that you have copies for your own promotion, so that the authenticity a physical book brings is available when needed, perhaps more so than worrying about any sales that may result. And don't forget that mom and dad want to proudly send copies to your relatives, family friends and childhood teachers who thought you'd never amount to much.

So with the changeover to Kindle Directs' printing process, I hope this offers a clearer view of how much it will cost and how much you will get paid when the royalties come in.

And finally, let's not forget the third layer: Audiobooks account for some 40% of sales from some reports. The money is out there.





Have you read the August 2018 issue with Peter James, international bestselling crime author? Why not? <http://bit.ly/BPAug18Free>

Bookstore 'N Pieces

Here are some book selections for you to consider reading. Please be sure to leave a review for the book, regardless how short. Authors need your feedback. Thanks for reading this magazine. Please share with your friends.

Brotherhood of Secrets: Victorian psychological suspense by **Christie Stratos**

"Brothers in the art of keeping secrets." This is the mantra Mr. Locke's carefully chosen five employees must repeat together every day before starting work. Day by day, each of these young, single, alone-in-the-world workers is being molded into the family they crave. A family in which each member has his use toward an end he doesn't even know exists. How do the brotherhood and the town's secrets interlock? Only Mr. Locke holds the key. Buy now: <https://amzn.to/2ptmSeF>



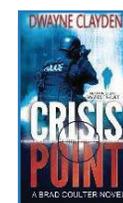
Petals and Blades Anthology: A Collection of Tragic Fantasy Stories

by **Dreaming Rabbit Press**

Join us in reading these five beautifully tragic fantasy stories and poems, by various authors, that lead you down a path of emotions, accompanied by dragons, Kings and Queens, Knights, and betrayal. With a vibrant cover by Kiley Bishop! Buy now: <https://amzn.to/2NrOI9q>

When The Gods Fell: Lost Civilizations Book 1 by **Richard Paolinelli**

Oracle Veritas of the House of Delphi has waited for over 65 million years to tell her story to the children of Olympus. Now, in the year 2041, the first humans from Earth have stepped onto the surface of Mars. When it was a world called Olympus, inhabited by the race of advanced immortals that called the planet home. Buy now: <https://amzn.to/2xyF1LE>



Crisis Point: (A Brad Coulter Novel Book 1)

by **Dwayne Clayden**

1976. Life couldn't be better for Brad Coulter, a Calgary cop. Partnered with his best friend, paid to keep the streets safe from the riff raff. Until a gun battle after an armed robbery leaves him without his partner and grappling with the sudden burst of

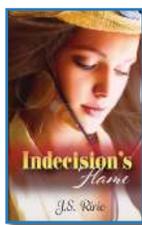
criminal activity in his otherwise quiet city. Cops are losing their lives, and Coulter is determined to catch the thugs. Buy now: <https://amzn.to/2plHKnZ>

The 30% Solution

by **Lewena Bayer**

How Civility at Work Increases Retention, Engagement and Profitability, provides essential information, facts, insights from the field, and practical tips related to the business of civility. The book represents a ready-to-use tool kit with practical applications for: all manner of business people, and individuals, who want to build a better workplace.

Buy now: <https://amzn.to/2MMq4v0>



Indecision's Flame (Book 1)

by **JS Ririe**

Brylee Hawkins was going home, but it wasn't for a happy reunion. She was there to confront her father so she could return to the man of her dreams. But the Australian Outback wasn't the place she remembered, and the truth behind her mother's unexpected death wasn't the only reality that would toss her into a quagmire of doubt, suspicion and self-doubt.

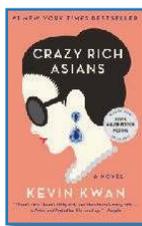
Buy now: <https://amzn.to/2QKS6KG>

Lost (Book 2 of Indecision's Flame)

by **JS Ririe**

Torn between her family and the obligations of a promise made to her father, Brylee longs to return to the United States and to her fiancé who is patiently waiting for her, but fate has other plans. Unable to make a decision about leaving, she is left to wonder if the outback will consume her before the next blow comes.

Buy now: <https://amzn.to/2Ns6YPR>



Crazy Rich Asians (Crazy Rich Asians Trilogy)

by **Kevin Kwan**

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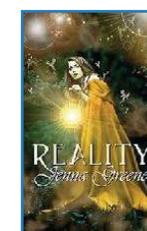
happening--and just like that, it isn't. It hasn't. No one else remembers the attack, or her friend. To everyone else, Shawna's friend never existed...Everyone, that is, except the mysterious stranger who shows up in Shawna's shop. Buy now: <https://amzn.to/2NrfXAI>

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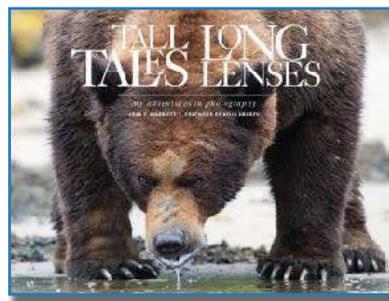
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