

July 2017



# BOOKS <sup>N</sup> PIECES

*A FREE Publication for Writers and Readers, Artists & Musicians and more!*

## Inside This Issue

- **Short Stories**
- **New Releases**
- **Tips & Tricks**
- **How To....**
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# Secrets from a Best Selling Author

*An Interview with JC Ryan*

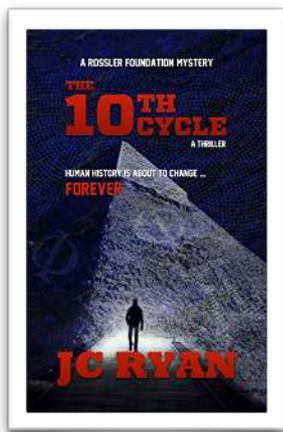
JC Ryan is a name you may not have known prior to this interview, however, as you will soon learn, this best-selling author has a library worth of published material, earning him the best-seller ranking, as well as putting other writers to shame.



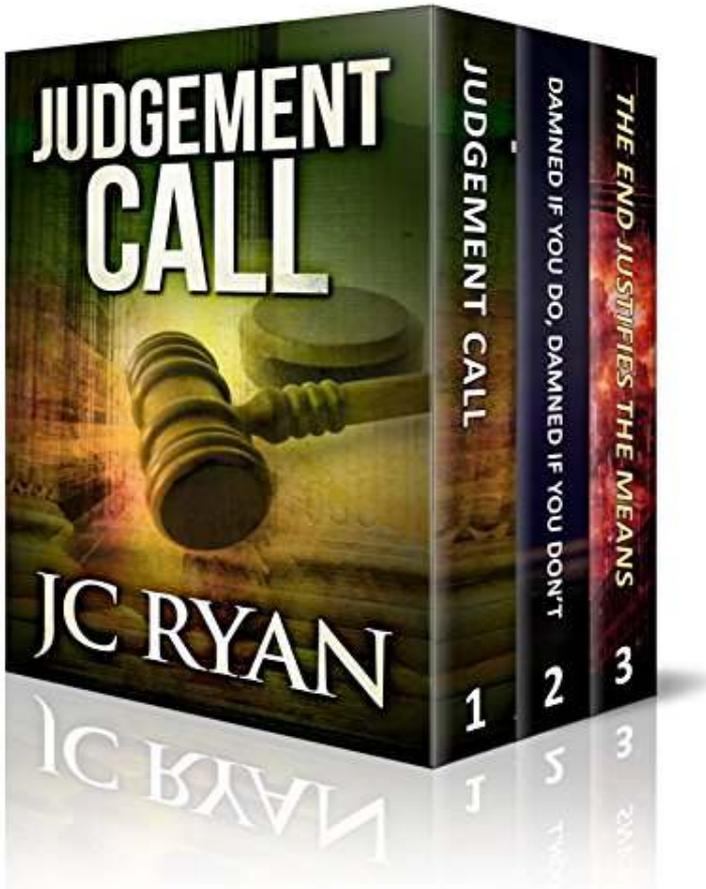
- 1) How are you so prolific? Not just prolific but geographically, historically, blending science and science-fiction with imaginative plots?

*For the past eight years, while working as an IT project Manager I found myself stuck in a daily 3-hour plus commute on a train. The first few days it was nice to sit and stare out the window at the beautiful areas I was traveling through but after a few weeks I've seen it all – twice a day, and it became a bit boring. I bought myself a tablet and started reading*

*during those commutes. That was a welcome distraction, browsing the internet, reading a book, and reading the latest news. The latter obviously not doing much to relax me before I had to start my day nor winding me down after a stressful day at work. However, working as a contractor, getting paid by the hour, it soon struck me that I am spending 15 hours per week totally unproductive – earning nothing and not doing anything that I really enjoyed. It was time which I could be using to do what I have been dreaming about for a long time – writing a book. That was in December 2013.*



*Since then I have spent my time on the train to research and write books. It amazed me to realize that my daily commutes added up to more than*

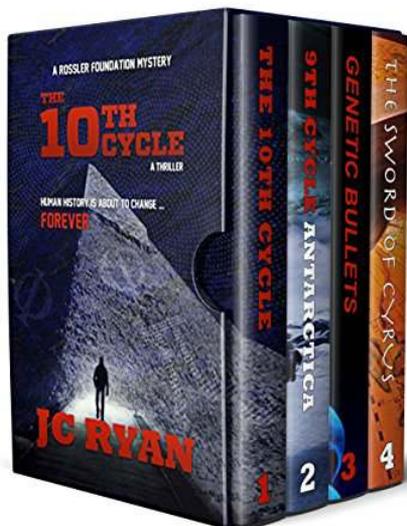


*60 hours per month – more than one and a half workweek. Obviously, those were not the only hours I've been writing, once I started writing, I enjoyed it so much I soon got lost in the stories and kept on writing at home in the evenings and over weekends.*

*But at some stage I realized I am overdoing it and had to work out a schedule so that I had time to spend with my family and enjoy life as well. As a project manager, it was not too difficult to work out a realistic schedule. I now aim for about 20,000 words per week and achieve that and sometimes a bit more every week. It might sound like a lot of writing but if you break it down to 4 hours of writing on weekdays (3 hours on the train and 1 hour at home early morning or in the evening before going to bed) plus 4 hours per day over the weekends it adds up to 28 to 30 hours which is about 700 words per hour. It's not that much. For me it's all about being persistent and disciplined.*

*As for your question about geographically, historically, blending science and science fiction with imaginative plots. I am 60 years old and have seen and experienced a lot so far. I grew up on a farm in the Kalahari Desert in Namibia in Africa. I have lived in South Africa, New Zealand, and Australia, I have travelled to the USA, UK, Germany, Switzerland, The Netherlands, Italy, Japan, Singapore, Angola, Zimbabwe, and Zambia. My first degree was a military degree and I served as an officer in the military for seven years before a crippling back injury forced me into a new direction. I returned to university, studied law, and became a lawyer, and then practiced law for more than fifteen years before my*

*family and I left South Africa and moved to New Zealand, where I became an IT project manager. We later moved across 'the ditch', as the New Zealanders and Australians like to call it, to Australia in 2008.*



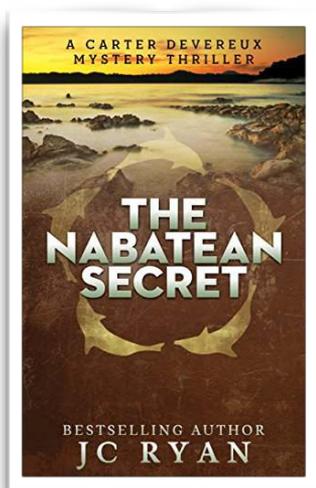
2) You incorporate a huge "What if" theme in your books, especially the Rossler series. How did this develop? What inspires you?

*I have always been interested in history, and I have learned that it is, as Winston Churchill said; "The victor gets to write the history." In other words, there is almost always another side, an untold side, to historical events. Not only is knowledge lost over time, [but] it also gets twisted over time. In the scientific community of archeology, 'conformity' has become a password. Nothing will be accepted unless it conforms to the current [way of] thinking. If anything, when 'un-conforming' is discovered, it is either ignored or twisted until it fits into the mold.*

*When I look at the writings of people like Michael A. Cremo, Erich von Däniken, Alan F. Alford, Robert Bauval, Zecharia Sitchin, Graham Hancock, and many others I am not the only one who is questioning the current account of our history. I'm not sure about the alien theory some of those authors cling to though.*



*As for my inspiration for the first book in the Rossler Foundation series, **The Tenth Cycle**, I watched a TV show on the history channel about the Great Pyramids. The program was about the fact that the pyramids could not have been built the way modern day Egyptologists want to make us believe. I did some research about it, and then the idea struck me that I could put my own spin on it and make a series out of it.*



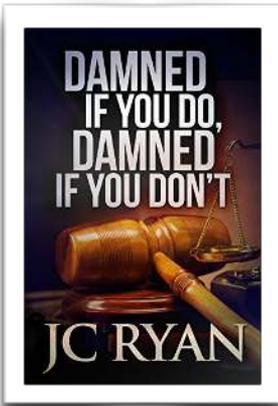
3) You come from a diverse background that includes extensive travel. Military. Legal. IT. And then writer. How has this helped you, and why did it take you so long to get into writing - you are obviously a natural?

*I am not so sure about being a natural but as you can see from my life experience above, there is a lot to draw on when I am writing. The reason why it took me so long to start writing was that I always believed that I didn't have any imagination and would never be able to write a proper story. Also,*

*English is my second language which was another thing that held me back.*

*Nevertheless, a few years ago, a good friend of mine asked me why I don't write fiction. He thought I had the ability to tell 'good' stories. It took me a while to think about it and then one day I said; "Why not? If you don't try, you always fail."*

*It was not until I wrote the first book, and was so overwhelmed by the responses I got from readers, that I realized I might just be able to do this. Over time, I have learned not to worry too much about my language skills – that was for my editors to sort out – and to concentrate on telling the story, and leave the language polishing to my editors.*



*Now I love writing. I think the saying is true; There is a book in every one of us – some of us get to write it, and some don't.*

4) If writing was no longer available, what are your other interests?

*If I can't write I would like to travel and see more. There is so much that I would still like to see and experience. I have just recently returned from a trip to Italy. It was an amazing experience visiting Rome and Sorrento and*

*places like Paestum, a major ancient Greek city on the coast of the Tyrrhenian Sea in Magna Graecia. The ruins of Paestum are famous for their three ancient Greek temples in the Doric order, dating from about*

**“My books are on average about 130,000 words and it takes me on average about 6 to 7 weeks to write the first draft.”**

*600 to 450 BC. Visiting Matera, a city in the Basilicata region of Southern Italy was probably the highlight of the trip for my wife and me. A city occupied by humans for more than 10,000 years, one of the three oldest cities in the world, the other two being, Jericho (mentioned in the Bible) and Aleppo in Syria. I can keep on going, there is just so much of these places I still want to see.*

5) You wrote your first novel *The Tenth Cycle* in 2014 – a seven book series. Since then you've added *The Exonerated Series* and then *The Carter Devereaux Mysteries*, a series with Book 4 just released in May 2017. How have you managed to write ALL these books in under 3 years?

*Actually, the 8th Rossler Foundation Mystery is in progress. There is really no magic trick to it. For me, the formula is simple – a realistic schedule, which I created, and which I adhere to, writing 20,000 words per week. Being persistent and disciplined, making sure I put in 20-30 hours per week to achieve my goals.*

6) What is your writing day like? How long does it take you to plot out your novels and then write them? I ask because they are not fluff - most are quite detailed with interesting nooks and crannies for the story to weave through, and characters that the reader comes to know?

*These days, now that I am in a position to do it full-time, my writing day consists of 4 hours in the morning and another 3-4 hours in the afternoon. In other words, I spend 7-8 hours a day writing, and naturally my daily word count has gone up as well. I also spend more time reading books in my genre, and try to finish a book every 10 days or so.*

*I keep a file of book ideas, and whenever an idea comes up, I write it down there, and when I happen across some information related to it, I also file it in the 'Ideas' folder. That way I don't get distracted by the 'next shiny object'.*

*Once I am ready to move on to the next book, I spend a lot of time thinking through the theme and storyline, and write a very high-level outline. Then I think through the flow of the story, and start to write a detailed outline. By detailed, I mean some of my outlines are 150 pages or more. The longest outline I wrote so far was a little over 230 pages. In this process of creating the detailed outline, I do my research on the various topics, finalize my characters, timelines and story flow.*

*By the time I am done with my detailed outline and I start writing, I pretty much just finish the book. It's almost like 'copy typing' or 'filling in the blanks'. I am so into the story by then, I usually struggle to keep my fingers moving along quickly enough. During this time, I work closely with an editor to edit the book, which they do overnight, also making developmental suggestions. I know that's not how most "how to write" books advocate it, but that's what works for me.*

7) You have a very large number of reviews, matching many, popular, mainstream writers. Your positive rating is 4.3 out of 5, most of the 322 reviews on *The Tenth Cycle* are totally positive, a few wishing you had less romance. That is an excellent bestselling author status. How did you manage to reach so many people? What was the secret to getting so many reviews? (Unless it is a trade secret of course!)

*There are no trade secrets here; I am more than happy to share what I do.*

*In the beginning, I got hung up on the idea that reviews are the be-all and end-all of successful writing – it's not. Well, at least not for me. I found that it's much more important to write a good story and let the reviews come naturally. I also found that my time is better spend on writing than chasing reviews. So those reviews you see came from genuine readers, naturally. Yes, I did a few give-aways in exchange for a review, but most of the times those didn't make a dent; they probably account for no more than 20 of the total. I found that people who like or disliked the books go online and say what they think.*

*I have to say though, lately, I got the impression that Amazon is helping me in the back end. It seems that they email readers a few days after they have bought or borrowed a book and ask them what they think, and if they would write a review. I am not sure though if they do this for all authors, but it has certainly helped me get 95% plus of my reviews.*

I also have an invitation at the beginning and end of all my books for people to join my email list and with that I give them a free book – **Mysteries From The Ancients** <http://jcryanbooks.com/get-your-free-book/> and this has proven to be a big winner with them. It's an 80-page e-Book covering some very interesting and through-provoking, unsolved archaeological mysteries. I get a lot of readers emailing me about this book, how much they enjoyed reading it. Whenever I get such an email from readers, I always use the opportunity to ask them to post an honest review of any of the books they have read on Amazon. Also, whenever I send out an email about a new book or a promotion, I ask them to post an honest review of any of the books they have read.

*That's it. That's my 'secret strategy' to get reviews.*

8) How much of your time goes into research?

*The short answer is; a lot. My books are on average about 130,000 words and it takes me on average about 6 to 7 weeks to write the first draft. But before I start writing I put in about 10 to 20 hours of background research and when I write the detailed outline, I would spend about half the time on research. So, I would say about 40% of my total time goes into research, and the rest into writing the first draft, before it goes to the final editing process.*

9) You have now started releasing your novels as audiobooks through Amazon, with **The Tenth Cycle** soon to be released. What made you decide to include Audiobooks? Do you plan on releasing all your books in audio format?

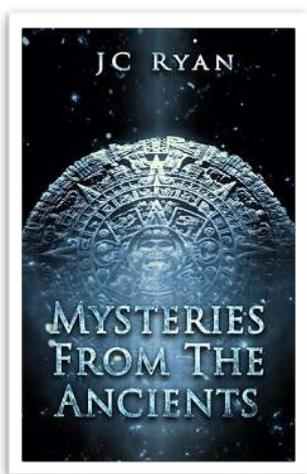
*Audiobooks have become a big thing. When commuting on the train, I met so many people listening to audiobooks, I know people driving to work and other places often listen to audiobooks. With the advent of smartphones, tablets, and all sorts of electronic devices, all having audio capability, it has become necessary for authors to cater to that market.*

*I am really excited about the release of **The Tenth Cycle** in audio format and yes, I intend to turn all my books into audio format. Many of my readers have asked me to do so, already.*

10) What can we expect for the remainder of 2017? New book series or more from the popular series?

*There is another, the eighth book in the Rossler Series, in progress at the moment. I have done the planning and outlining, and I am almost ready to start writing.*

*There is also another series in the making. This time not against an archaeological backdrop, but more to do with modern science and the dangers it holds. It's going to be about how science fiction is becoming reality. In other words, scientific breakthroughs are destroying science fiction stories; they are no longer figments of imagination. I don't want to give away too much about it at this stage, but be ready to be surprised to learn how much of what we thought is sci-fi has actually become reality. It's going to be a real mind bender, I believe.*



*The first book in this new series **The Sigma Wave**, will be the next one I publish. If you'd like a free book of mine – "Mysteries from the Ancients" – visit my Website at [www.JCRyanBooks.com](http://www.JCRyanBooks.com), and you can download it immediately.*

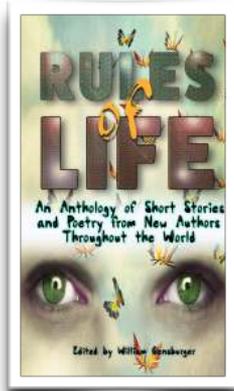
*[Editor's note: JC Ryan and I enjoyed an extensive two-hour Skype session where we spoke of all manner of things, especially his ranking as an author. The visibility of an author is often at the hands of readers. If you look at JC's ratings, each book enjoys several hundred or more four and five star reviews, enough to make him notable, and on par with mainstream novelists. I encourage you to read one of his books, or listen to his audiobooks, now in production. You'll be hooked. Let us know what you think.]*

# Just Saying!

"I don't care what they say; it is irrelevant how many fountain pens I have. What is relevant is whether I use them all, and I do."  
~William Gensburger



# UPDATE: Rules of Life Anthology

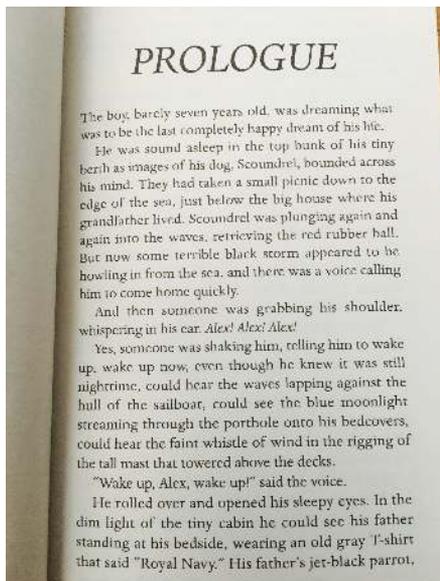
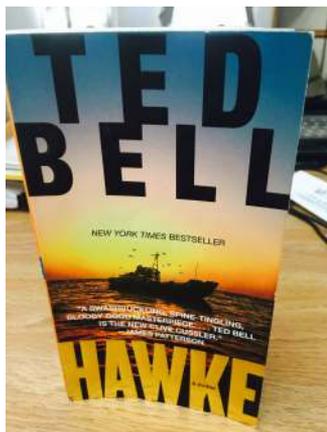


Needless to say, publication of the global anthology “Rules of Life” has been delayed. For the most part, the delay is due to editing issues and formatting issues, not unusual when you deal with a collection of material from a large group of people, in this case, spread out through the world.

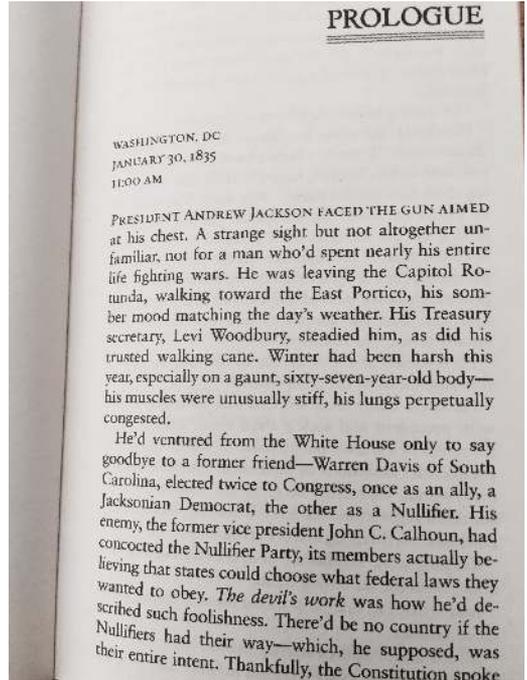
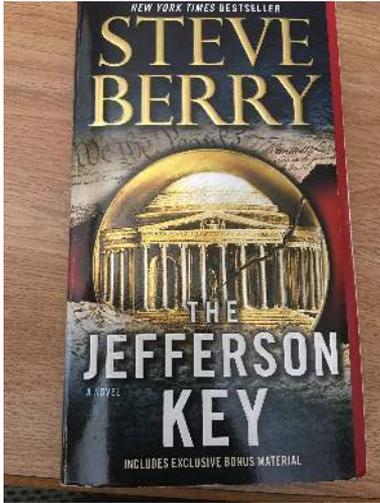
It is my hope that we will have the book published before the next edition of this magazine. Thank you for your patience.

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## FIRST PAGES: A Learning Tool



One of the useful tools available to any writer, is to study other writers. I enjoy opening first pages and looking how each writer has chosen to present their story, of course bearing in mind that unless they grab me quickly, I may browse on. In both cases, you



can see that the set up of the story comes at a solid pace. We are immediately introduced to the characters, get a distinctive setting of where we are, and in the second books are pulled into action immediately.

Libraries, bookstores, thrift stores and colleges, all have a vast collection of books that you can use for this purpose. After you study these first pages, pull out your on manuscript and compare how they read. Remember that an experienced writer with a sales record, has the luxury of not rushing. A new writer trying to build an audience, must grab hold and not let go.

# Creative Marketing

I met Andrew Hood (@andrewhoodtwt) on Twitter. He's from Sydney, Australia. As a publisher, I always try to find clever ways of reaching people. It is common to receive an auto-Tweet after you follow someone. Most are benign messages, some plug book links, others ask question to try and get you to respond. In Andrew's case, as you will read below, the message was somewhat more compelling. And the results... I'll let Andrew explain:

## The Anatomy of An Awesome Direct Message

by Andrew Hood

### First, My Twitter Auto Direct Message



Hey, thanks for the follow.

You have arrived just in time! The very lives of some of my greatest characters from my upcoming book are on the line. We need your vote for their stories to be told.

Simply click on the link below and vote to save them from obscurity. Their stories deserve to be told.

[soopl1c.com/blog/book-ideas/man-corrupted-heaven-andrew-hood/](http://soopl1c.com/blog/book-ideas/man-corrupted-heaven-andrew-hood/)

And if there is anything that I can do for you in return just say it and I will do my best.

Go ahead and vote. You can tell your friends that you saved a life [today!](#)

Warmest regards new twitter friend,  
Andrew

## **The Direct Message Backstory**

Three hours before this DM was written I walked into a local doctor complaining of chest pains, and left thirty minutes later in an ambulance!

Don't get me wrong I'm in great shape, but when a slightly younger than middle age man – okay, I'm 43 years old – complains of chest pains, doctors take note. Sometimes they even panic. On this occasion that's exactly what the staff did, but hey, I'm not complaining; better to overreact than suffer a heart attack through neglect.

I arrived at the emergency department, and my bed was wheeled right in to my assigned waiting dock within minutes. I am lucky enough to live in a country with great healthcare, and have just enough money to afford a visit to test it out every ten years or so, when something goes wrong.

I was hooked up to ECG machines which took all my readings.

"I'm sure it's nothing," the first nurse told me before visibly gulping and quickly moving away.

I had a chest X-ray.

"I'm sure it's nothing," the next nurse told me before turning away just a little too quickly for comfort.

I had a blood sample taken – twice.

"I'm sure you'll be fine in no time," the third nurse told me. I applaud the variety.

It's funny but when one nurse tells you, "I'm sure it's nothing," it doesn't have a lot of impact. But, when eight different nurses tell you, "I'm sure it's nothing," you start to panic. What are they not telling me, you ask yourself?

Approximately two hours later, without having had a heart attack, things started to get a little boring, and the nurses were losing interest in me.

"We need to free up the space, so we are going to move you out of emergency and up into one of the wards."

"You pretender," I imagine them saying under their breath.

Once there, I needed to relieve my oldest friend who had dropped everything to meet me at hospital. My wife had been unable to get there in time. It would only be another thirty minutes before she would arrive, and he had already been with me for hours. I thanked him and sent him on his way.

By myself now, I started to consider what might have happened if I really had a heart attack or stroke. It's frightening to think that way. I have a beautiful wife and three children to think about. How could I take care of them if I wasn't around?

And then, there's that damned book which is still not finished.

This is supposed to be my breakout book. ***The Man Who Corrupted Heaven*** - I had written the title first, then took it one word at a time from there. It's actually my second novel, but the first was never meant to be released to the public.

In the hospital ward, I consider that this book needs to be amazing; imagine if I never get a chance to write another. And then I realize I need to build an audience like a life depended on it. My life.

I had only just discovered Twitter and had not yet created a automated welcome message so I thought I would give it a try from my hospital

bed. I had given so much blood for testing that I was exhausted, but I was too scared to sleep. I needed to work on something to take my mind off that.

## **The Anatomy of a Great Twitter Direct Message**

I took out my phone.

### **1. Hook them into a story before they get distracted**

"Hey, thanks for the follow. You arrived just in time."

### **2. Now to raise the stakes.**

"The lives of some of my greatest characters from an upcoming book are on the line."

### **3. Next the call to action**

"We need your vote for their stories to be told".

### **4.What's in it for them?**

"And if there is anything that I can do for you in return, just say it and I will do my best." By the way, I'm usually just asked to re-tweet their pinned tweets or like their Facebook page.

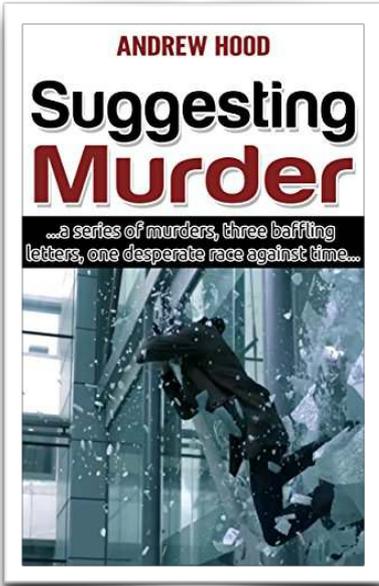
### **5.A final call to action with a feel good takeaway**

"Go ahead and vote. You can tell your friends that you saved a life today!"

When I started using this message I only had 13 followers. I now have over 5,400 followers, and every one of those new followers from the last 6 months, has seen this message. The overall feedback has been extremely positive, and with each new vote I collect, a new email address where I can market my upcoming book on launch day. Even if

they don't vote it gets our relationship off to a great start, and many people are liking or re-tweeting my tweets.

The platform I use to collect these votes is through a publisher called SOOP.com (Something Or Other Publishing). However you could use this same technique to collect emails on your own site if you wish. The compelling structure of the message is still the same.



Go forth fellow writers, and if you have found this article helpful perhaps you might like to give my book a vote also.  
<http://amzn.to/2s752NX>

Go ahead and vote. You can tell your friends that you saved a life today!

Warmest regards, new friend.

Andrew Hood  
@andrewhoodtwtp

**P.S.** It took the doctors 3 days to find out what was wrong with me. They called it Pneumonia (with complications). I hadn't been sick before but I sure was for a few days after!

"TOMORROW WILL BE THE BEST  
YESTERDAY TODAY EVER HAD!"

- WILLIAM GENSBURGER

## SHORT STORY:

# Pressure

by Gary Hoffman

He knew hoping wasn't going to save him, but he was doing it anyway. He thought of the cliché 'hoping against hope,' but it didn't make any more sense to him before or now. He was still hanging by his parachute lines where his chute got tangled in the trees. Of course, their training had included what to do in situations like this. They had a large knife strapped to their waist that they would use to cut the lines, and they could drop to the ground. In his case, he was only about three feet from the ground, so even the fall wouldn't be dangerous.

Then the unthinkable happened. As he was cutting the first line, his hand was shaking so much from all the adrenalin cursing through his system, he dropped the knife. His entire existence now was three feet away from him.

He tried to move quickly up and down thinking maybe a jolt would help loosen the lines from the strong branches of the white oak. That only got him some extra bruises in his groin.

He tried to get his body swinging from side to side thinking maybe he could grab hold of the tree trunk and use it as leverage to pull on the ropes. He could not swing in a large enough arc,

and there were no smaller trees close to him. The large white oak had smothered anything else out from growing near it.

The clips holding his harness on had jammed. He couldn't release from it.

There was a hank of rope in his backpack and a small grappling hook. He thought he might be able to grab onto the knife and pull it up to him, but he couldn't reach the backpack and it was being held right up against his back due to pressure from the parachute lines.

So he dangled there.

David Barkley, a twenty year old college student, made money in the summer by fighting fires. He was a smoke jumper. He had parachuted into seven fires before this one, but never had this kind of trouble. First of all, his chute didn't open right when he pulled the rip cord. He went to the emergency pull, and it worked. Second, as soon as his chute deployed, he felt a huge draft of wind. Parachutist called it a wind sheer. Somehow at the level his chute opened, the air currents were different. He drifted toward the earth while watching the other smoke jumpers from his troop land miles away from where he was going to settle in. He was sure someone had seen him, but right now their commitment was to fight a major forest fire. He had no idea how long before they would come looking for him.

And tonight temperatures were going to drop below zero up in these mountains. He laughed to himself when he thought about how much he would like to be able to build a fire right now. At least his buddies would be warm.

He could feel his legs going numb. His circulation was being cut off by the parachute harness.

Then he heard a noise coming from behind him. It was faint and a long ways away, but it didn't sound like something created by the wind or other parts of Mother Nature.

Then he thought about bears.

They were supposed to be hibernating now, weren't they? It was winter. Just my luck, I'd run into one who hadn't hit the sack for the winter yet.

He tried to twist around to see behind him, but that didn't work. It only made his legs hurt more.

There was another faint sound. Closer.

A fox squirrel came out on a branch fifty feet in front of him and started clucking at him, telling him in no uncertain terms he was not welcome there.

Even in his situation, David had to smile. He'd hunted a lot of those guys while growing up in Kentucky. His mama's squirrel and dumplings were sure good eatin'. Then having home-churned vanilla ice-cream topped with fresh peaches for dessert. His dad and older brother playing their banjos on the front porch after supper. All was right with the world.

And now I'm gonna freeze to death in Montana with a squirrel as a witness. He laughed out loud.

"Sure doesn't look like you got much to laugh about," a female voice from behind him said.

Could it possibly be? A rescuer so fast? A woman? There were no women in his troop, although there were women in other troops around the country.

"God, am I glad to hear a human voice."

"Better not be thinkin' so just yet. I might not cut you down." She snickered.

He was struggling to turn around, but still couldn't see who the voice was coming from. Then he heard her walking, and she got in front of him. She picked up the knife. "You'll have to cut the lines yourself. I can't reach them," she said as she handed him the knife. "Looks like you at least keep it good and sharp. Too many people get hurt by dull knives."

He started to cut the lines. He was hanging sideways as he finally got to the last two lines. She got behind him and put her arms around his waist. "Maybe I can keep you from making a complete fool of yourself."

With the last line cut, David fell softly to the ground. She was strong, stronger than most women he knew.

"You don't know how happy I am to see you."

"Well, I'd be pretty happy if someone kept me from becoming a hanging frozen pop-cycle."

He looked down to hide the blush he knew was coming to his face. He could feel the warmth.

When he stood, his legs felt weak from the lack of circulation. He leaned against the trunk of the white oak. "I'm David," he finally said. He looked at the woman, but couldn't tell what she looked like because of the ski mask she was wearing.

"Marsha. Gonna get dark in an hour or so. Take us that long to get back to my place. How long you been hangin' there?"

"We jumped at eleven this morning."

"'Bout five hours then. That's about the time I saw you were in trouble. Those wind sheers can be dangerous. I was up in the ridge trying to find a coyote that's been coming in after my chickens. Had a good view of the whole operation." She offered him a drink from a canteen hanging on her belt. The water was sweet and tasted like spring water from Kentucky.

He wiped his mouth on the back of his hand. "You live out here?"

"Yep. Soon as you can walk, we need to get started. Could whip up a snow tonight."

"We didn't have any reports of that."

"Not surprising, but I know this country. Winds are telling me a snow storm might be blowin' in. Help put out that fire. Don't need it coming my way."

"Well, I think I can walk now. Let's get going. I got saved from freezing once. Don't need to try for another time."

"Good idea."

The walk to where Marsha lived took all of an hour, and she was setting a fast pace even though she limped slightly and seemed to drag her right foot just a little. David struggled to keep up with her, especially at first, but when his legs got to feeling normal, it was easier. He was glad for all the training his commanding officer had put him through.

The forest was thick in places, but opened up into long meadows in other places. Streams and small waterfalls dotted the landscape. They crossed two small creeks by walking on logs. There was ice close to the shore, but in the center, the current kept the water from freezing. Even in the rushing water he saw many large fish he figured were trout.

The wind died, and David realized they had entered a canyon that blocked the wind. About half a mile into the canyon was a large rock overhang with a log cabin and two outbuildings built under it. Smoke eased its way around the rock shelf and dissipated before going very high. Not much of it was visible as

it made its way to the top of the huge trees growing on top of the rock cliff. Even fire spotters would probably not see smoke from this fire.

Smoke also meant heat in this case, and he was ready. The cold was slipping around any folds or openings in his clothing to find his skin. Heat from a fireplace or wood stove was going to feel welcome.

When he entered the cabin, the first thing he saw was a pot belly stove, one of the old ones with lots of nickel chrome work on it. It stood about four feet tall and was vented through a stove pipe into the wall. On the floor behind the stove was a large pillow that may have been yellow at one time. Wallowed down in a nest in the pillow was a large, grey and white, shaggy dog. He raised his head to look at David, wagged his tail three or four times, and put his head back down.

Marsha saw him looking at the dog. "He's harmless. Even if he bit you, all you'd feel are his gums. He's lost most of his teeth. I figure he's about fifteen years old. He's part Russian Wolf Hound, I think, so I named him Czar." The dog raised his head when he heard his name. Marsha laughed. "That's about all he can hear. His name. That usually means food, so he's always on the lookout for that."

David backed up to the stove and put his hands behind him.

"Better get out of those heavy clothes. Let the heat get to your body," Marsha said as she started peeling off outer layers of her clothing.

When her ski mask came off, he got his first look at her face. There were a few lines, but they appeared to him to be lines of wisdom. Things people acquire by working hard in the outdoors. There was something behind her deep set brown eyes that she

tried not to have there. Her graying hair was braided and twisted around her head in a crown. David figured she could be anywhere from thirty to forty years old. He would guess her to weigh a hundred and twenty pounds and was tall for a woman, probably five ten or a little more. Her hands were well worn and used to work. She hung her heavy coat on a peg by the only door in the cabin.

David looked around as he stood by the stove. The cabin was probably twenty foot square. There were two windows in the front and one on each side. He knew the back faced into the rock ledge. Most of the wall space was taken up with bookshelves that were overloaded with books. A cooking stove that burned wood was against the back wall. It was vented by another stove pipe. A bucket sat on a shelf beside it. Cabinets were under the shelf and on the wall above it. He guessed that was the kitchen. A double bed was against the left wall.

A table and two chairs took up the middle of the cabin floor. It held salt and pepper shakers, a sugar bowl, a jar of coffee creamer, and a kerosene lamp.

"Looks like you've got all the comforts of home," David said.

"It is home. Has been for a long time." She lifted the globe on the kerosene lamp and lit the wick with a long wooden match. He got a better look at her face.

"Seems like I've seen you somewhere before. Not recently. From some time back."

She laughed. "Doubt that. I've probably been living up here when you were still in diapers."

He chuckled with her, but tried to place where he had seen that face before.

"You hungry?"

“Always.”

“Soon as you warm up a little more, go out to the west side of the cabin and get me some small kindling wood. Got a basket there you can fill.’ She pointed to the cook stove. “ I’ll get old Mabel there fired up and get us some grub for supper.”

“Mabel?”

“Good a name as any, Don’t you think?”

He shook his head. “Probably.” He put his coat back on, picked up the kindling basket, and headed out. It was then he noticed what he was sure was an outhouse off further to his left. When he returned with the basket, Marsha was working some flour on top of the kitchen shelf. “Hope you like biscuits and gravy.”

“Who doesn’t.”

She laughed. “Never found one yet. There’s always that chance.”

“Not from me or anyone I know.”

“Good. Put your body down in a chair and tell me about yourself. We might be here for a long time before they find you, if they ever do.”

That kind of startled him, but he started on a quick sketch of himself. “My name’s Davis Barkley. I grew up in the hills of Kentucky. Got two brothers and three sisters. My mom and dad still live in the house I grew up in. I’m going into my senior year at U. of K..”

“Oh, what are you majoring in?” She put a coffee pot on the stove.

“Wildlife management.”

“And what will you do after you graduate?”

"I'm gonna try and work for the state conservation commission. Maybe as a game warden or field officer of some kind. You've got the perfect place out here to observe wildlife."

"Plenty of that around here," she said as she slid a pan of biscuits into the oven of the cook stove. "You stay here now while I go out to the cache I got hanging in a tree a little ways down the canyon. Got some pork sausage in there. Keep an eye on the coffee. If I'm not back get it off the stove just after it starts perking. That'll be strong enough."

"Yeah. Sure."

Maybe she'll tell me about herself when she comes back.

He shivered as she opened the door and went out. He rubbed his hands together, and went over to one of the book shelves. He always liked to see what kinds of things people read. He thought you could tell a lot about a person by what books they kept, not just the ones they read.

There were a lot of classic novels, many books on nature subjects, and sports. On another wall there were dictionaries, some almanacs, and history books. Then he noticed a stack of folded newspapers. He took the top one from the pile. It was The Daily Chronicle published out of Bozeman, Montana. It was dated two months ago.

Well, she's got some way to get out to get these papers. And she sure doesn't grow her own coffee beans around this part of the country.

He looked at the next one, and it was dated a week before the first paper. He heard her coming back just outside the door. He smelled the coffee perking and went over to take it off the stove just as she opened the door. .

“Good timing on my part. I’m ready for a hot cup. How about you?”

“Absolutely. Smells fantastic.”

“That and bacon are just hard not to smell, aren’t they.”

She got two mugs from one of the cabinets. David noticed one had a name on it, but it was hard to read because it had worn down from usage. It looked like it said Walter at one time. She set them on the table, kept the Walter mug for herself, and added creamer and sugar to hers. “I’m a pansy. Got to doctor mine up.”

“Black for me.”

She blew on the steaming liquid and tried to take a sip. It didn’t take her long to figure out it was still too hot to drink.

“Well, I told you about myself. How about you?”

She finally got a small sip into her mouth. “Not really much to tell. My name’s Marsha Kingston. I grew up in San Francisco. Decided after college and teaching for three years that wasn’t what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. I saved up some money, found this place, and bought it. Been livin’ like this for some time now. Wouldn’t trade it for anything.”

“Ever been married?”

“Nope. And not many serious boyfriends. And no, I’m not gay. Be pretty stupid to move up here if I was. You’ve probably noticed a lack of other females in the area.”

“Or anyone else.” He paused. “Can I ask a question?”

“Do I have to answer?”

“I guess not if you don’t want to.”

“Okay. What?”

“That mug you’re using looks like it said Walter on it at one time. Who’s he?”

She ran her finger around the lip of the mug. "Let's just say he was someone who was at one time. He's out of my life forever now."

"He why you moved up here?"

"This is going in the wrong direction for me. I better get supper on the table."

The biscuits reminded him of his mother's. The gravy was unumpy and tasty.

Afterwards, she washed dishes, and he dried.

"I read for an hour or two now. How long depends on how long my eyes decide to stay open and how my brain is comprehending what I'm reading. You really have a choice, read or sit there until you fall sleep. And by the way, we're going to have to share a bed. It will be for sleeping purposes only. Only. Do I make myself clear?"

"Very."

"Good. It'll work if we make it work. If I decide you are thinking of using the bed for more than sleeping, you and Czar can share." The dog looked up again, and David heard his tail hit the wall a couple of times. "He does go out right before I go to bed, so that's how almost all of my evenings go. Might sound boring to most people, but it works for me."

"When in Rome."

You're not one of those people who going to use clichés a lot, are you?"

"No not really. Don't know where that came from."

"Well, keep it there with any others you might have stored. Okay?"

"Yes, ma'am."

“And don’t ma’am me. I ain’t that old. Maybe to you, but not to me.”

“Yes. ... er ...Marsha.”

“Very good. Now find something to read.”

He smiled. “Yes, mother.”

“Oh, that could get you in a lot of trouble.”

“I’m done.”

“Good.”

“Care if I read one of those newspapers? I follow sports a lot.”

“Have at it, but it’s old news and not very exciting unless you want to find out who attended Miss Porky’s tea party for her birthday.”

“So why do you get them?”

“They do have some stuff in there worth reading. Got some good crossword puzzles and other things to do.”

“I can probably get some of the old news about my favorite teams in them. Won’t bother me that they’re out of date.” He paused. “Mind if I ask you how you get them?”

“Actually, yes.” She cleared her throat. “You may find out in a day or two anyway. Depends on how soon your people come looking for you and if they find you back here.”

David got a newspaper. She was right – most of it was local news and gossip. The crosswords had all been worked. About nine thirty, they decided to go to bed.

“Okay, I been thinking about this,” she said. “I’m gonna hang up an extra blanket so we can change clothes behind. I don’t suppose you got any extra clothes in your backpack?”

“No.”

“I’ve got a couple pair of old sweatpants that might work for you to sleep in. They might be a little large, but they’ll work. Okay?”

“Yeah. Fine. Did they belong to Walter?”

“Too many questions. You go change clothes first.” He was still trying to figure out where he had seen her picture. He had finally figured out he had never met her, but he had seen her picture somewhere.

She tied a rope from one side of the cabin to the other and hung a blanket over it. “That should work. Neither one of us got anything the other one hasn’t seen anyway. I’m gonna take Czar out to do his business now. Be in bed when I get back.” It wasn’t a question.

“Will do.”

“I’ve got a bucket I use to pee in during the night or first thing in the morning. You probably saw the outhouse. One thing about this kind of weather, you won’t waste any time in there.”

David woke once during the night and used the bucket. He had to wrestle her arm from across his chest to get out of bed.

While drinking coffee the next morning, Marsha went to a calendar hanging by the cook stove and put an ‘X’ through yesterday’s date. She then brought a small two-way radio to the table. “This is one of the few things I use electricity for. I’ve got an antenna and small wind generator on top of the bluff and storage batteries out behind the cabin. I make this call on the third of the month in the even numbered months. Yesterday when I said something about you being here a while, I forgot

what the date was. Normally, I don't pay much attention to a calendar, except to mark it off every day."

She strung three wires from one of the cabinets. They had clips on the ends that she hooked to the radio, two for the electric and one for the antenna. After a short warm-up, she got some static. "You on Steinbeck?"

A voice came back after about ten seconds. "Yep. Tomorrow morning about eleven. Anything special you need?"

"Nothin' I can think of right now. Probably will by the time you get here. Thanks, buddy. See you tomorrow. Got a passenger you might take back with you. I'll explain when you get here."

"Not a problem. See you tomorrow. Don't forget your trade books."

"Try not to. Out."

"Out here."

She unhooked the radio and got everything stored away again for another two months. "Well, tomorrow you're gonna meet Steinbeck and Charlie."

"I hope to hell you're gonna explain this. I know where those two names came from."

She laughed. "A guy whose real name I can't tell you because I forgot it delivers things to me. He rides an old mule named Charlie, so I started calling him Steinbeck. He likes it, so it stuck."

"How in the heck did you make contact with a guy like that?"

She cocked her head sideways and looked at him. "How seriously do you follow sports?"

He snapped his fingers. "That's it. Sports. I knew I'd seen you somewhere, but it's been a while." He studied her face for almost a full minute. "You're not Marsha Kingston. Your name is Maria

Kutter. You ran track in the Olympics. You were slated to maybe sweep all the individual women's track running events." He stopped. "But you disappeared. The story was you went out for a practice run and was never heard from again. It was assumed that you'd been abducted. There was a lot of speculation as to whether some nut might have gotten you or maybe even people from another country who wanted their team to have a better chance. It was also thought maybe some animal got to you."

"Not even close. It was a knot on a tree root."

"Pardon me?"

"I was out for a practice run. I stepped sideways on a tree root and turned my ankle. Actually not only turned it but broke a couple small bones in it, I think. I know I couldn't even walk on it. I was out there for four hours before Steinbeck came along and found me. Fortunately, his mind-set is much the same as mine. He chooses to live like he does even though he could live much better, according to most people. But he's not most people. .

"All the time I was laying out there in the forest, I was thinking this would end my career. Then it dawned on me this would be a perfect way to get out of the Olympics and away from any spotlights all together."

"Why?"

"You probably don't have any idea what it's like to be rated best in the world. The pressure that puts on a person? You only live to run. I had to be faster than any other woman on this planet. This planet. Think about that.

"I actually started running competitively when I was ten, in elementary school. Once someone figured out I was good at it, my whole life changed.

“The only people I associated with were my coaches and sponsors. You asked if I’d been married. There wasn’t time. No time to do what most of the rest of the world was doing and enjoying. I didn’t get to read books. There was no time. Any time I had was spent running. I ate what was prescribed for me, not what I wanted. If I went to some organization for an award or to give a speech, I had a chaperone go with me to make sure they had prepared special food for me.

“I was sick of it. I couldn’t handle it. You not only have a few friends rooting for you, you’ve got an entire nation. And many other nations rooting against you. I convinced Steinbeck to let me stay with him until I could at least walk again. I didn’t want to go to a hospital or doctor and be recognized. It took sixteen weeks. Sixteen glorious weeks. I found another whole side of life, one I really enjoyed. I read like a mad person, everything I could get my hands on. I watched some television shows I didn’t even know existed. Steinbeck brought me fantastic greasy cheeseburgers loaded down with cooked onions. And pizza. My God how I found out I loved pizza. I think I could live on it for a long time.

“All that time I was looking for someplace I could live and be out of the spotlight. I know I deceived a lot of people, but my parents were both dead, and I had no brothers or sisters, so it was mainly my coaching *friends* involved.

“Steinbeck knew about this place. We contacted the owner and bought it from him. My father left me very well off. Money wasn’t a problem then and hasn’t been since. Steinbeck then agreed to be my supply line.”

“Wow. Do you know what would happen if this story got out?”

“David, I’ve got to ask you to swear you will tell no one.”

“And if I don’t?”

“We’ll cross that log bridge when we come to it. I don’t think you’re the kind of person who would spread the story about me. You appreciate nature and solitude.

“Don’t you worry. I wouldn’t tell a soul.”

She patted his hand. “Thanks. I didn’t think you would. Steinbeck will take you out of here tomorrow. He rides Charlie and brings a pack mule for my supplies. You can ride the pack mule out. I doubt you’d ever be able to find this place again.”

“You’re right about that. So does he come right to your door?”

“Nope. We’ll go meet him up on the ridge. I have a small hand-pulled cart I take to bring my stuff back. Sometimes it takes two trips, but it’s worth it. I just have to make sure not to leave any foodstuffs up there waiting for my second trip. That ole coyote would love to get into that.”

“What did he mean about the trade books?”

“That bag of paper back books by the door. He’ll bring me another bag tomorrow. I’ll give those back to him, and he sells them when he has a yard sale or sells at the local flea market. Besides supplying me, that’s how he makes most of his money. He too lives frugally.’

The next morning, a dusting of snow covered the ground.

“Got a story made up for the people who are looking for you?” Maria asked.

“Sure do. It’ll be a good one, too. You might even believe it.”

“Well, good luck, David. It has been nice knowing you.”

Steinbeck was right on time. The supplies were taken from a pack mule named Brutus and packed in Maria's cart. They all fit for her to make one trip.

Steinbeck started back to his place where he had a phone. David turned to wave at Maria.

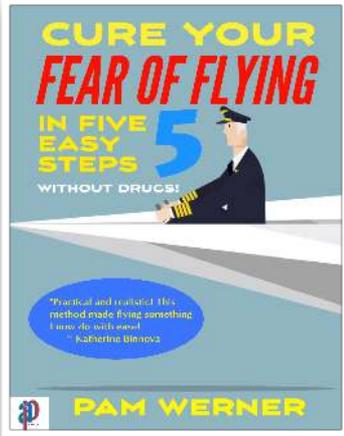
"By the way," she said. "Walter was my father."



*Gary R. Hoffman was born at an early age. Five years later, when he was five, he started school, which lasted a long time. A college education supposedly taught him how to teach, but the only thing he really learned was that no one can teach a person how to teach. The teaching gig lasted twenty-five years, until he got tired of the federal government thinking they had the answer on how everyone should teach. He quit and went into business for himself. Later, like all good mid-westerners, when he retired, he moved to snowless Florida and started writing. He has had over four hundred short stories, essays, or poems published or*

*placed in contests. So far, so good.*

[Editor's Note: Gary is one of the stories published in the upcoming anthology "Rules of Life." which is expected out shortly.]



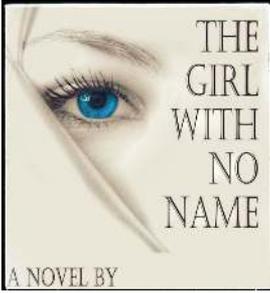
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let you know when it is available and even give you a discount code. Take the worry out of flying.

**"I write because I  
must keep  
breathing!"**

— William S. Burroughs

# What Kinds of Books Sell?



According to the 2017 Smashwords Survey ([www.Smashwords.com](http://www.Smashwords.com)), the romance market is the leader in sales at a whopping 73% of the top 200 bestsellers. Fantasy comes in a pale second place at 9%, Young Adult at 5%, Sci-fi at 3%, on par with Non-Fiction, followed by Literary Fiction and Historical fiction at 2%, Mystery trails at 1%.

Romance dominates the market with 8 out of the top 10 bestsellers, 36 of the top 50 and is the category where you find the frequent “book-a-day” readers. In addition, Smashwords found that romance writers were better at marketing, more organized with conferences and interactive elements.

Does that mean we should all be writing romance and give up on our loftier goals? Hardly.

A look at the New York Times Bestseller list (as of July 9 ) shows the following (combined print and e-book rankings):

1. Camino Island by John Grisham
2. Dangerous Minds by Janet Evanovich
3. The Silent Corner by Dean Koontz
4. The Identicals by Elia Hilderbrand
5. The Handmaid’s Tale by Margaret Atwood

It doesn’t appear that romance dominates this list, however, this is a snippet, rather than a year’s worth of sales.

Romance is a billion dollar industry, selling as much as science fiction, fantasy and mystery books combined. According to the Huffington Post ([www.huffingtonpost.ca](http://www.huffingtonpost.ca)) over 70 million people in the United States read at least one book a year, although many books are translated into other languages and sold worldwide. In addition, there are so many sub-categories of romance novels that there is “something for everyone.”

According to Smashwords, Romance breaks down into the following categories (in order of sales): Contemporary, Paranormal, Erotic, New Adult, YA Romance, Historical, Suspense, Fantasy, Sci-fi, Adult, Regency, Western, General, Action adventure, Time travel, Clean/wholesome, Christian, Story collections and Gothic. And that is just for Romance.

In other words, if you are writing a romance novel, you should have far more success in the field than an author looking at a mainstream fiction entry. Or will you?

Like all things, success is a metric that requires many ingredients. Success is a misnomer. Familiarity with your subject matter, proficiency in plotting out a compelling story sequence, interesting plot and characters, strong conflict and resolutions, all play into the success of a book. And then there is luck. Getting noticed is three-quarters of the battle. It's all in the marketing!

Don't be discouraged by statistics of any kind. The true test lies in the strength of your work. Write a strong story and you'll find a market for your work.

- William Gensburger

**Life is a sandcastle at low tide.**

# EDITORIAL:

## WRITING, EDITING & THE PERILS OF PUBLISHING

by Robin Melhuish

If you've ever written anything, then you'll know where this is coming from.

I made my first attempt at a historical novel, no, correction – I started my first attempt at a historical novel way back in the days of Windows for Workgroups and 5 1/4 " floppy discs. After weeks of hacking the keyboards with my express, two-finger typing, I waited impatiently, as the printer spent the best part of the day printing the 200 or so pages.

I'd done it, I'd written a book. Happily, I sat back and started to read it. In retrospect, the silly quote 'Autospell is my worst enema' comes to mind, except the mistakes weren't autocorrect, they were all mine. The story line was disjointed and the formatting non-existent, but, undaunted, I was proud and convinced this masterpiece would bring me fame and wealth.

By the time I had read it all through and run out of red ink, the manuscript was unreadable. I gave my father the opportunity to read it, expecting paternal praise. My very first review:

'Interesting, needs rewriting it doesn't make sense.'

I thought it was just spelling and formatting, you know, 'little things'. Totally despondent, I binned it and went back to my day job pretending that it had never happened. My brief outing into the world of historical fiction was over.

The experience of writing however, and now not writing, left me with a void in life. Always an early riser, I would daydream over my morning coffee, and the core of my binned novel

wouldn't leave me alone. Even though I wasn't actively rewriting it, I was already doing that in my head. It was on the back-burner though as I had a challenging job, and being self-employed meant there was little time for esotericism. Until the day I got a contract from a large government agency which involved me doing a great deal of research into fields of knowledge that I hadn't touched on before. The more I got into the job, the more I started to question the reasons behind the contract. There was a much easier way to solve the problem. My idea was fiction, but the basis was fact; pure hard fact. Thus I came to write my 'second' book; a thriller, an opus of over 600 pages, and for me, something that would be 'unputdownable.'

My then partner wasn't the slightest bit interested in reading, or science, so it was a no-no asking her to give an opinion. My father, bless him, had passed on, and my mother was going blind and couldn't read. So who to trust with this gem?

Ah, I thought, the Internet has the answers to everything. Well it does, doesn't it? You just have to ask the right questions. However, I didn't even know the questions. I got conned by vanity publishers, who'd tell me the work was good, even if you sent them the local telephone directory. 'Yeah, it's magic, send us some money and we'll publish for you. A definite bestseller.'

Then some where I read writers needed an editor. What on earth for I couldn't imagine, after all my work was perfect. Spell checker and grammar checker had done their very best on this one. Nonetheless, I found a retired English literature teacher who agreed to edit and proof the story for me. It took him over a year; a year of bitter fights and quarrels about the relevance of bits of the story, and the deletion of side stories, the assassination of surplus characters and, yes, typos and spelling mistakes.

Okay, job done. Now I had to find an agent or a publisher, after all I was wiser now. Equipped with the knowledge that any 'publisher' who asks money for proof reading/editing, and then insists you buy 5,000 copies to distribute yourself, while they offer to implement some nebulous marketing campaign, is a no-no. I submitted my book to over 200 agents and publishers, taking immaculate care that my pitch was grammatically perfect. The spelling and punctuation was spot on and the excerpt of text was exactly what they were asking for. Well, all I can say is these guys must be pretty busy. Even after you've filtered out the ones who are no longer accepting submissions because they are already earning a shit-load of money and can't cope any more, the response rate was staggeringly poor.

If I got responses they were slapdash, poor English, spelling and typos the norm, and, depressingly, all the 'not for us' variant. On some internet forum or other I expressed my frustration and was advised by members that traditional publishing was dead anyway, and that the Indie route was the future. I researched the way forward. Low and behold there were platforms out there where you can create your own book and even get it into the open - on Amazon.

If you think writing a book is the hard part, think again. The hard part just started. Your book on Amazon, or Smashwords, or Lulu, or whatever, is one of a billion books that are appearing out of nowhere. I'm sorry to say that the majority are worse than my first effort, which if you read that far, you'll remember that I binned. I could be nasty and give quotes of stuff that's out there, but I expect you've all seen it. It puts perspective on why agents seemingly don't give submissions a chance. They must see so much literary manure that they can't be bothered, they only take

on stuff that has been recommended. So, the route has to be, to find someone who knows an agent, and get them to read it and recommend it to their agent friend. Ever tried find friends of agents in Google?

I self-published, I convinced, coerced, blackmailed all my friends, relations, and neighbors to buy the book. I got my first royalty check from Amazon and I was ecstatic until the next month when nothing came. The month after that also had no check, and since then more nothing.

I tried review swaps on Facebook, getting likes on Facebook. Do you know what 1,000 likes on Facebook brings you? You may have guessed, 'Nothing.'

Whilst waiting for all this success, I found my old floppy discs with my original 'historical novel' on it; the unedited, uncorrected version. It was not only terrible, it was embarrassing; my research at the time had been negligent.

My experience with an editor had taught me the rudiments of self-editing and I went through the text like someone possessed, cutting huge lumps of it out and rearranging the plot line. I beefed up the history bit so that anyone caring to Google the events would sit back and conclude, 'Wow, that actually happened. I never knew that.' I passed the story to two good friends who were very kind and pointed out some glaring errors in the plot line, but who were otherwise encouraging. I corrected and tweaked the story, put another twist to it, and finally told myself that this is as good as it gets. After 30 years in the development stage, it couldn't get better.

Then I came across Alt Publish who were open for submissions - anything and everything wanted as long as it was good. Initially I was skeptical. The 'no such thing as a free lunch'

mantra being foremost in my mind after the vanity publishing experience of the past. But Alt Publish was not a vanity press. There were no hidden charges, no required copies to buy, and no vanity. In fact, there were no costs at all. Alt Publish handles all the costs, including marketing, and banks on making money from sales. Royalties are split evenly (without their costs taken out.)

Communication was fast and frequent, multiple times a day, not bad considering that I am in Cyprus and Alt Publish is in the US. The feedback I got was detailed and invigorating, and after all the rejections, this was an acceptance. A real publisher interested in my story. And no catch!

Okay, we had our 'discussions' and changes were made, but this time I think I'd done my homework, and the publisher had certainly done his. I couldn't believe how fast he'd managed to read and analyze my book. After about six months of production work, the book is now available worldwide.

Up to now I had been totally responsible for this book appearing under my name on Amazon; now there's a professional at work. Am I nervous about the result? That's an understatement. If it flops, if people don't like it, those possibilities still give me indigestion. The initial reviews have been amazing, and I have confidence now to continue writing. It's a great feeling.

*[Editor's note: Thank you, Robin, for the glowing endorsement. We believe your book is solid. The reviews have been stellar. But, more importantly, as jaded as I am, I kept reading through to the end, and enjoyed a laugh as I closed the cover. Whichever publisher an author chooses should be based upon some investigation. Look at the contract, not the Website. Costs are often left out of the site and included in the*

contract. It is very common for "FREE" publishers to require your editing, proofing and cover completed before they get involved. Those costs can be quite steep. A few such companies are advertising on national television, and one even has a religious slant, yet both those have hidden costs. New authors cannot afford this.

Robin's excellent book, **All That Remains** is available in print and digital editions worldwide (Europe has a different cover due to restrictions with certain imagery.) You can learn more at [bit.ly/BUYATR](https://bit.ly/BUYATR)]

### Reviews of **All That Remains** by Robin Melhuish

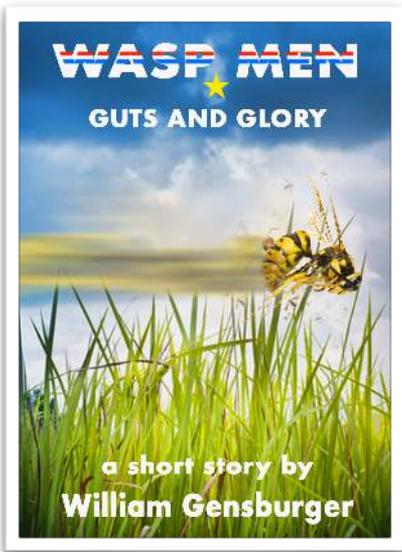
"So many twists and unexpected happenings. I was only sorry when I turned the last page. A SUPER READ!" ~ Kasia Macioszek

"Robin intricately weaves an intellectual cast of characters against a backdrop of page-turning plots. Historians have often asked how could these atrocities have happened? Robin's book accurately explores the events, politics, and emotions that would ultimately draw a worldwide response to the unthinkable. Great book." ~Natalie Hurst, News Anchor, KBOI-2 TV

"A gripping story that grasps the reader in the first few pages. Robin has a special gift for guiding his readers through a historically accurate maze."  
~Kurt Koontz, Author, "A Million Steps"

"This book pulls you right into the story without getting trampled with backstory before telling the tale. And what's more, it doesn't stop throughout the entire book. A fun roller-coaster ride that will keep you spellbound, I guarantee it." ~Cliff Hitchcock, Award-winning Insurance agent & musician.

"Compelling, intriguing & insightful. A tender, yet nicely factual look at a painful piece of history." ~Tracey Miller, Global Support, Riptide Sports



## SHORT STORY:

# Wasp Men: Guts and Glory

by William Gensburger

*"A soldier will fight long and hard for a bit of colored ribbon." ~ Napoleon Bonaparte*

I watch the wasp flit around the back yard, checking out the nooks and crannies to be found under the overhang before zipping off. Like a fighter jet coming on for carrier landing, it flies, a yellow blur with its carriage hanging low, dark stinger, black as ink, like the hook of a fighter that grabs the deck wire stopping it from going off the edge of the carrier. This fighter won't be stopped.

Back again it passes my head, menacing because I have been taught that it is territorial and does not care about mine. As spring slipped into summer heat and the onslaught of the wasps proved insurmountable, I was beginning to feel like the lone soldier holding the post after the platoon bugged out, always on the lookout for the attack that would be aimed my way, but never knowing where it would come from.

I fixated on its zigs and zags, my improvised weapon fully loaded, oozing excess toxins out of the nozzles that I had adapted for this hunt. I caught it in the gun sights, lightly moving, trying for that Mister Miyagi ballet of movements that would allow me to zen in on the kill; the thing had to land sometime.

Pulling hard on its ailerons it suddenly snapped upward in an illegitimate movement from Top Gun - you know the one where crazy Tom Cruise pulls on the speed flaps and goes from hunted to hunter in under a second. The wasp should be screaming its own kudos by now, I consider, as it zips past my head for a return maneuver, testing out my reflexes. I am reeling from the disorientation of tracking it around the trim and focusing in through bad prescription glasses that leaves me wobbly as I snap around. "I am human, bug," I hiss at it.

And then it stops dead, flattened on an empty and open space of stucco wall for some stupid reason that only wasps understand. Does it know that I know? It waits and I zoom in for the shot that will end it all. My heart is pounding. I can taste the adrenalin priming my instincts for fight or flight. Perhaps both.

Careful. Careful. I ignore the ooze falling onto my open toed flip-flops. It is a toxic vinegar, baking powder, salt, creation of my own design; I am ready to kill it without affecting my children's health, my wife's flowers or the daycare kids as they cascade outside to destroy the backyard later in the day.

The enemy waits, wings flat, no movement at all, and I aim, pump, load, pump, load, pump, load - trained for hours with this lightweight weapon of mass destruction that my kid loves. I can feel the pressure is now primed in the gun barrel, and that it could not eject any faster or any stronger than at this moment.

This is *the* moment.

I also know that after I pull the trigger I will need to keep holding it as I rapid-pump this baby to spurt its lethal contents out until the territorial terrorist is soaked and down on the ground where my shoe will formally finish it off.

Across the street my neighbor uses a power hose, shooting directly at the spots where the wasps land and, like me, missing. Even when a direct hit takes place, the water does nothing. A few wing vibrations and they are good for flight again, conspiring to track the source of attack. You have to keep moving, never standing stationary, so as to escape detection. They can tell where the shooter is. They can target and lock on while executing a multi-g lift and turn.

"Any luck?" the neighbor yells out. He's a lump of a man, profusely sweating despite doing nothing more than holding a hose.

"Almost," I tell him. "I have one pinned down."

"Good luck," he says, wiping the sweat from his face with his fat hands. I turn away.

I'm ready. I suck in one final breath and pull the trigger, watch as a strong jet of foamy fluid shoots at my prey, missing by less than one wasp hair – an eternity of a distance – that allows the thing to launch off the wall at hypersonic speed toward its attacker. I dodge, flail, stinky fluid shooting off in all directions and splashing on my head as I trip my way backwards to safety.

I push forward again, pumping even more furiously, vile vinegary foam firing like laser beams, then cutting out in spurts as I wave it around for maximum coverage, missing at every shot. My arm hurts from the repetitive motion.

The wasp detours like Tom Cruise in pursuit, aiming at me, determined to make a kill of its own. I back up a few more steps, still furiously pumping away, the wasp dodging each barrage. I am running low on toxin, knowing that one false move and the wasp will be upon me seeking vengeance for the hives I have already obliterated from my yard and overhangs; seeking

vengeance like a Jihad in progress in revenge of its brethren lost in the battle.

It does not look promising for me and yet I am unable to give up. I've come too far, too embroiled in this war to surrender what little territory I have left. At the worst, I could always swing the weapon like a bat, I remind myself. I need a backup plan with just a few squirts left.



Finally, one of the squirts smacks the thing square on, and I can see it coated in my homemade ooze. It falters, tries to shake off the goo, forcing itself to fly at me, but fails as gravity drags it to the ground by my feet. I expect to hear the sound of dying engines in its death spiral, but the end is silent and it smacks head first into the concrete by my flip-flop. Without hesitation I raise my foot and smear it across the ground.

"Game over. You - are - done." I let the weapon fall to my side, still in my grasp.

"Well done, you got it," the neighbor says peering over our common fence. "I've yet to make my first kill."

"You will," I mutter. "It takes training. You have to think like the enemy or you'll never survive." But I already know he will never survive. Despite my exhaustion, he is too out of shape for such a fight.

Out of breath, now, and out of ammunition, I stand limp, my pumping arm throbbing at the joints, despite the victory at hand. I look down at the remnants of wasp and know that I have succeeded. But at what cost? One enemy out of millions that will spend their lives in this war.

From the corner of my eye I see another figure flip by, and then another, their bodies hanging low as they scout my house in unison for a landing spot. Then even more of them as the first morning rays of the sun splinter over the backyard fence. From the light I see more closing in, just a few of the million wasps that will sooner or later succeed in making a hive that I will fail to find despite all the technology at my disposal, and all the effort at their destruction.

A sudden blast of water from the neighbor's hose scatters their formation as they take shelter away from the spray. I stare at him and begin to wonder whether he started this war with his amateur weapon used carelessly at the hives infesting his home. Did he send them all my way? Is this how I became embroiled in this war?

I think back to when it began but cannot remember the day when I first started; it seemed as though I have always been fighting this fight.

Will I be defeated by a numbers game played by an enemy that cares little of my race, beliefs or even my right to exist? And is the neighbor an agent, enhancing the wasp squadron's ability to infiltrate my home? After all, every crevice in my home is ripe for insertion; every opening, every eave a prime location. And all it took was a neighbor with a hose and a penchant for starting a war that I was determined to finish but couldn't.

"We should team up," the neighbor suggests. "We might be able to kill more of them."

I look at him incredulously. "You idiot," I want to say to him. You created this mess. Somewhere there is a queen and a super-hive and you have no idea the destruction that will follow. I

hoped that it was in his house and not my own; but there was no way I could know. Regardless, I would not join forces with him.

In the distance, through the stilled Spring air I could just barely detect the fervent buzzing of a million gossamer wings vibrating furiously; wasp engines readying for the day's mission. The kill was just the dress rehearsal; the scout party, if you will. The mother ship was coming in and there was no stopping it.

Perhaps my time was at hand. I had fought the good fight, done more than I needed, faced the enemy squarely, and, for a time, prevailed.

I dropped onto the nearest deck chair in defeat, allowed the weapon to slip from my hand and onto the floor in the hope that the encroaching force would not make an association with me and pass me by. It was a long shot, I knew, and I waited like a real man would wait, feigning sleep, as the buzzing toward me grew louder and louder until I was engulfed.

Cover image © 2013 Eti Swinford

There are only two types of people in the world: those who believe they are important and those who believe they are not. And, of those believing they are important, they find importance is an illusion, for like all things on Earth, time erodes it away. Consequently it is a safe assumption that there are no people of importance—merely people with attitudes.

—William Gensburger

THE BIGGEST QUESTION  
YOU SHOULD ASK YOURSELF  
ABOUT YOUR NOVEL IS...



Why would anyone read this? Why does this justify a novel length rather than a short-story or novelette? Why will the reader care about my characters? Why does the story matter? If you do not know why, then how can you expect your readers to know? Ask why!

# WINNER

## BOOK GIVEAWAY:

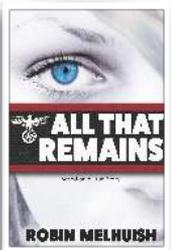
Would you like to receive a new, autographed copy of **Kim Stanley Robinson's** novel, *New York 2140*?



**Summary:** *As the sea levels rose, every street became a canal. Every skyscraper an island. For the residents of one apartment building in Madison Square, however, New York in the year 2140 is far from a drowned*

In the last issue we held a drawing for a signed, hard cover copy of Kim Stanley Robinson's new novel: *New York:2140*. The winner of the copy was Tamika Garuda from New York (ironically,) and the book was mailed to her. Congratulations Tamika.

Do you like our contests? Have you entered? Sign up for our mailing list and stay ahead of everyone else. Sign up at [bit.ly/Subscribe2BNP](http://bit.ly/Subscribe2BNP) - we have lots of giveaways planned, which reminds me...

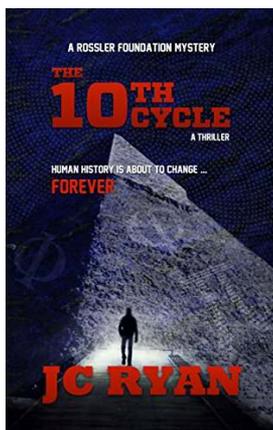


**WIN A SIGNED COPY of ALL THAT**

**REMAINS** by Robin Melhuish. Visit [bit.ly/BUYATR](http://bit.ly/BUYATR) to read about the book and email [info@altpublish.com](mailto:info@altpublish.com) with WIN ATR in the subject line. One entry will be picked at random by the next issue.

# BOOKS WE LIKE

## The Tenth Cycle by JC Ryan



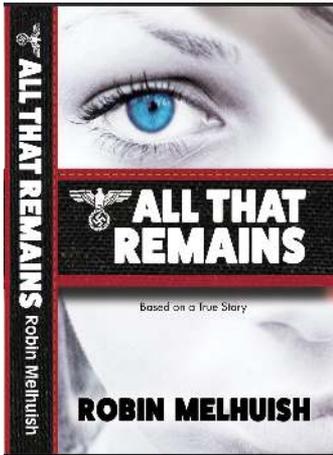
**The truth about human history is about to be revealed. . . But will we be allowed to know it?**

For thousands of years the truth about human history has intentionally been suppressed and exploited.

For decades scholars have been saying that the truth about human history will be found inside the Great Pyramid of Giza, but up till now no one has ever been able to find it. Those who tried have been ridiculed and persecuted.

Will Daniel Rossler and Dr. Sarah Clarke be allowed to uncover the real and true message? As they come closer to the truth, skepticism out of the academic community is replaced by evil and malicious adversaries, dumping them into a very hostile world where violence, deceit and duplicity become their daily companions. The mysterious Orion Society with its deranged and psychopathic members, the CIA, the Marines, the Mossad and even the President of the United States become involved. Not all of them have good intentions.

*The Tenth Cycle* is a full-length novel, a provocative techno-thriller about human history, conspiracies and an ancient society with power and money that will stop at nothing to reach their sinister goals. This fast-paced thriller adventure is the first book in J C Ryan's Rossler Foundation Mystery Series. Buy it today at <http://amzn.to/2tsTTuR> in both print and Kindle formats. Audiobook edition will be released soon.



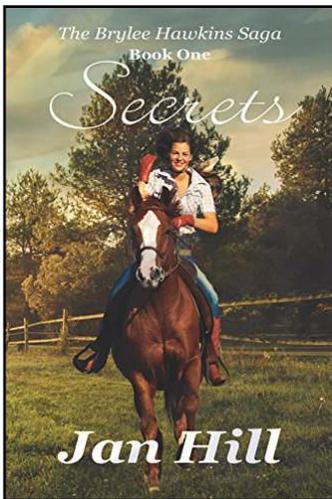
# All That Remains

by Robin Melhuish

- Deep in the Soviet Occupation Zone of defeated Germany, 1945, a baby girl is born and abandoned. From the shards of the war, she discovers an uncomfortable truth.

- The uncovering of the official lies about the capture of Himmler's Nazi fortress, leads to a hunt for the proceeds of the biggest, undetected robbery in history.

Buy it today at <http://amzn.to/2sapZI4> in both print and Kindle formats, An Audiobook edition is under development.



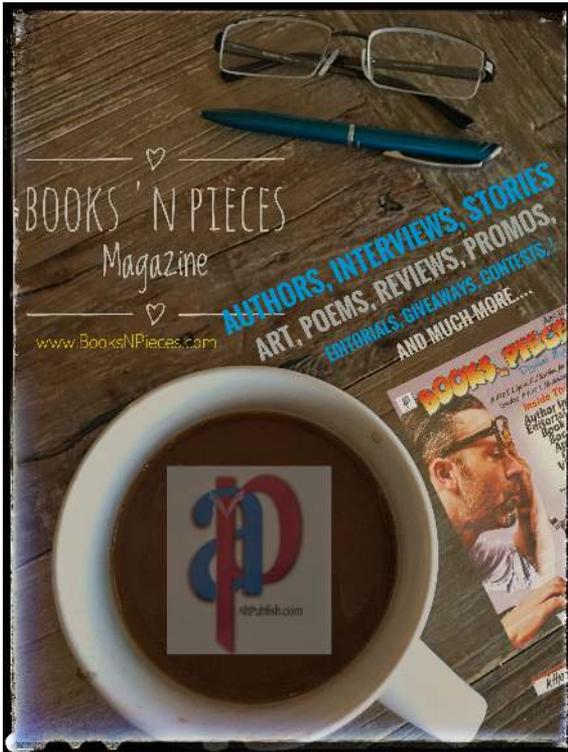
# Secrets:

Book 1, The Brylee Hawkins  
Saga by Jan Hill

Fulfilling a promise to her fiancé, Brylee Hawkins, must travel back to where she was born, the Australian outback, and forgive her father for what she knows as an unforgivable sin.

Yet when she arrives, as memories flood back, she begins to learn the truth about what really happened, exposing old secrets, including the family she never knew. Buy it today at <http://amzn.to/2sv7du0> in print and Kindle editions.

# Thank you for reading Books 'N Pieces Magazine



We'd love to hear your feedback, what you liked, didn't like and what you would like to see in the next issue. We listen to your input. Email: [info@altpublish.com](mailto:info@altpublish.com) and add BNP in the subject line. If you wish to submit material, please visit our Website at [www.BooksNPieces.com](http://www.BooksNPieces.com).