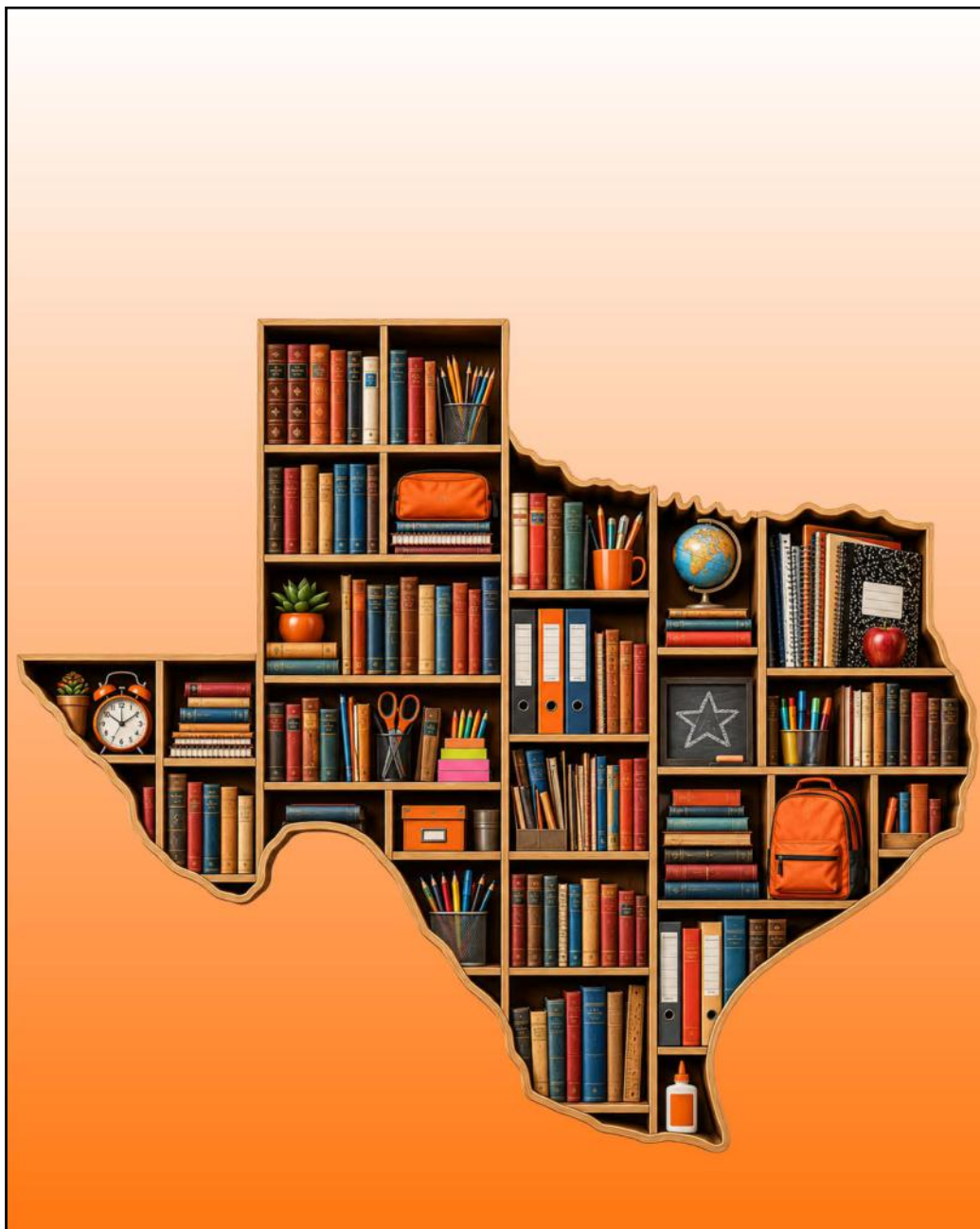


THE LONE STAR LITERARY LIFE

M A G A Z I N E



AUGUST 2026

ISSUE 23

Letter from the

Editor

Dear Reader,

My relationship with preparation is awkward; finding moderation between spontaneity and overpreparation has often felt elusive.

As a student, I relied heavily on the inspiration of procrastination. What served me well in high school and partway through my freshman year at Texas A&M quickly became problematic when I hit higher-level classes. The urgency that once felt like an impetus for creativity became panic and anxiety.

When I went to the other extreme, my experience proved

“
*Like many things
in life, being prepared
isn't a destination.
It's a practice.*

the underlying belief that last-minute pressure fueled my creativity—my overpreparation smothered my natural voice and led to overwrought, stilted work.

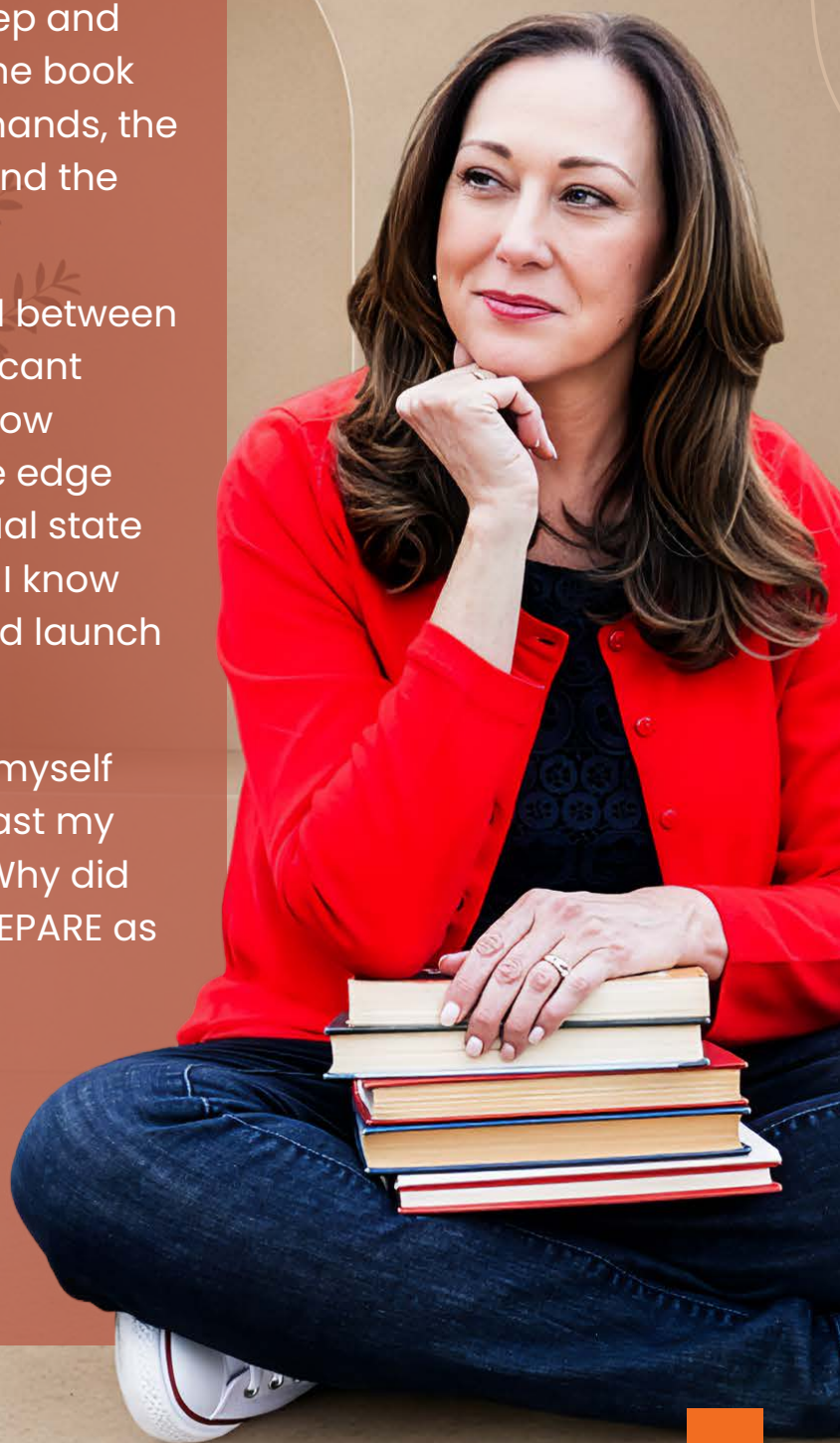
As an adult, I found another facet: preparing as procrastination. I outline the book, create the curriculum, and

plan the social media campaign. Then I keep tweaking and fussing without taking the next step and implementing the plan. The book doesn't get into readers' hands, the course has no students, and the posts never go online.

Striving for middle ground between the two has been a significant part of my life's journey. How can I hold on to a creative edge without living in a perpetual state of dysregulation? How do I know when it's time to let go and launch the thing?

It's something I'm asking myself even as I write this, well past my self-imposed deadline. (Why did my team and I choose PREPARE as a theme, anyway?)

What follows is what I've learned in my lifelong dance between procrastination and preparation.



Put it into practice

Like many things in life, being prepared isn't a destination. It's a practice.

Finding ways to integrate preparation into my daily life cuts down on decision fatigue and makes preparing a habit. I don't have to recreate a plan for every project when I have "Project" time blocked off during my day or week.



Gamify things

Whether it's the Pomodoro method, a marble jar, or a points system, finding ways to make preparing a game can create a sense of urgency. I've found that gamifying things makes routine work feel more engaging, and it's increased my productivity. Check out one of the ways I use it at the end of this article.



Shift your mindset

For many of us, the everyday discipline of practicing preparedness is challenging. Staying in a routine that fosters it takes energy and attention that sometimes don't come with an immediate reward. I find it useful to focus on what it means to

prepare: to equip and build confidence; to compose oneself.

When I look at preparing as a practice in becoming who I want to be—confident and composed—rather than a task to complete, it sustains my motivation.

Don't go it alone

Accountability and advice are gold. Having a critique group that helps me recognize when a book is polished enough, listening to an industry friend who encourages me to stop building the digital course machine and run people through it, using tools to schedule social media. These are all ways to incorporate something it can be hard to admit we need: help.



Know yourself

Recognize your patterns around preparation. I'm very familiar with the red flags that signal my avoidance and the signs to stop editing and start integrating. Self-awareness is the first step toward creating better habits.

It's coming back to me: the reason we chose PREPARE for this month. As a former teacher with two children who only recently completed their higher education, my body still lives by the rhythm of the academic year. August has always signified preparation, whether setting up a classroom, buying school supplies, or choosing a first-day-of-school outfit.

This month, as summer comes to a close and we prepare for a new season, we invite you to reflect with us on this question: What small practice could help you feel ready without keeping you from beginning?

Warmly,



Amy Kelly and the Lone Star Literary Life Team



I learned this game from Dani Donovan's *The Anti-Planner*, and it's adjacent to the Pomodoro Technique. When several of my projects are equally important, I use the following game to decide what to work on and for how long.



Gamifying Your Day

Needed:

- ✓ Paper
- ✓ Pen
- ✓ 2 dice of different colors

Instructions:

- 1 Write a list of tasks.
- 2 Choose six tasks to work on today, and assign each a number from 1-6.
- 3 Assign a time block to each number on the die. I use the following intervals: 1-2 = 10 minutes, 3-4 = 20 minutes, and 5-6 = 30 minutes.
- 4 Decide which die represents the tasks and which represents the time.
- 5 Roll both dice.
- 6 Work on the selected task for the amount of time indicated by the dice.
- 7 Rinse and repeat.

For example, I use a green die for the task and a blue one for the time. A roll of three on the green die and four on the blue die means that I spend 20 minutes working on the magazine. Once the time is up, I roll again.

Video from the EDITOR

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NOW YOU CAN LISTEN TO

Lone Star Literary Life!



We are excited to introduce a brand new way to experience *The Lone Star Literary Life Magazine*. Many of our articles are now available in audio format, so you can listen to the stories, interviews, and insights you love wherever your day takes you. Whether you are commuting, walking the dog, or simply prefer listening, you can now enjoy Lone Star Literary Life on the go.

On each article page, you will find a link to listen to the audio version of that piece. We have also created this dedicated page where you can easily find all the month's articles with audio and listen to them in one convenient spot.

As you explore the recordings, you may notice that some links include an asterisk (*). This simply means the article is read by an AI voice rather than a human narrator. Our goal is to make the magazine more accessible and enjoyable in multiple formats, and we are thrilled to offer another way for readers and listeners to connect with the vibrant Texas literary community. ★



Letter from the Editor



Now You Can Listen to Lone Star Literary Life!*



The Man Who Lets His Characters Drive by Reavis Wortham*



My Love/Hate Relationship with Technology By T.D. Motley*



Word by Word: Preparation in the Age of Information By Cassie Garza*



Texas Literary Podcast Highlight*



Texas Books Preview*



Marketing Moment*



Awards Roundup*



Texas Reads*



What to Read Next in Young Adult*



Texas Writes*

The Lone Star Literary Life SECRET

Shelf

Remember searching for hidden pictures in magazines when you were younger?

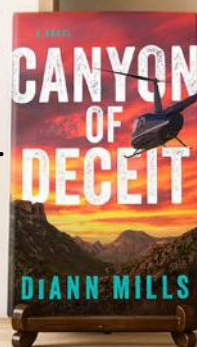
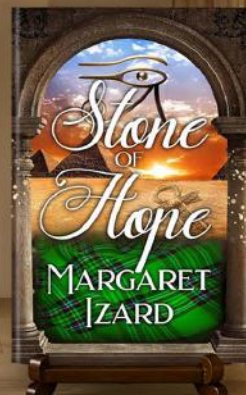
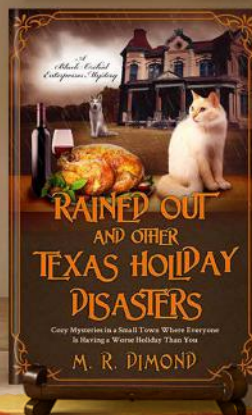
This month, we've packed a little literary scavenger hunt into the pages of the magazine to help you prepare for your next great read.

Five previously published books are hidden throughout this issue, waiting to be discovered. Your mission is simple:

Find each cover tucked away somewhere in the magazine.

It's a fun way to explore every page, and you might just uncover a book that's perfect for your future reading list.

Share your discoveries with us on Instagram and tag **@LoneStarLit**



Here are the books hiding on this month's
SECRET SHELF

Happy searching!



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Art House Dallas is a local non-profit that exists to create community and empower local artists. Each year we host over 100 events and programs for writers, musicians, visual artists, and performing artists. There's something for everyone!

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JUST FOR WRITERS

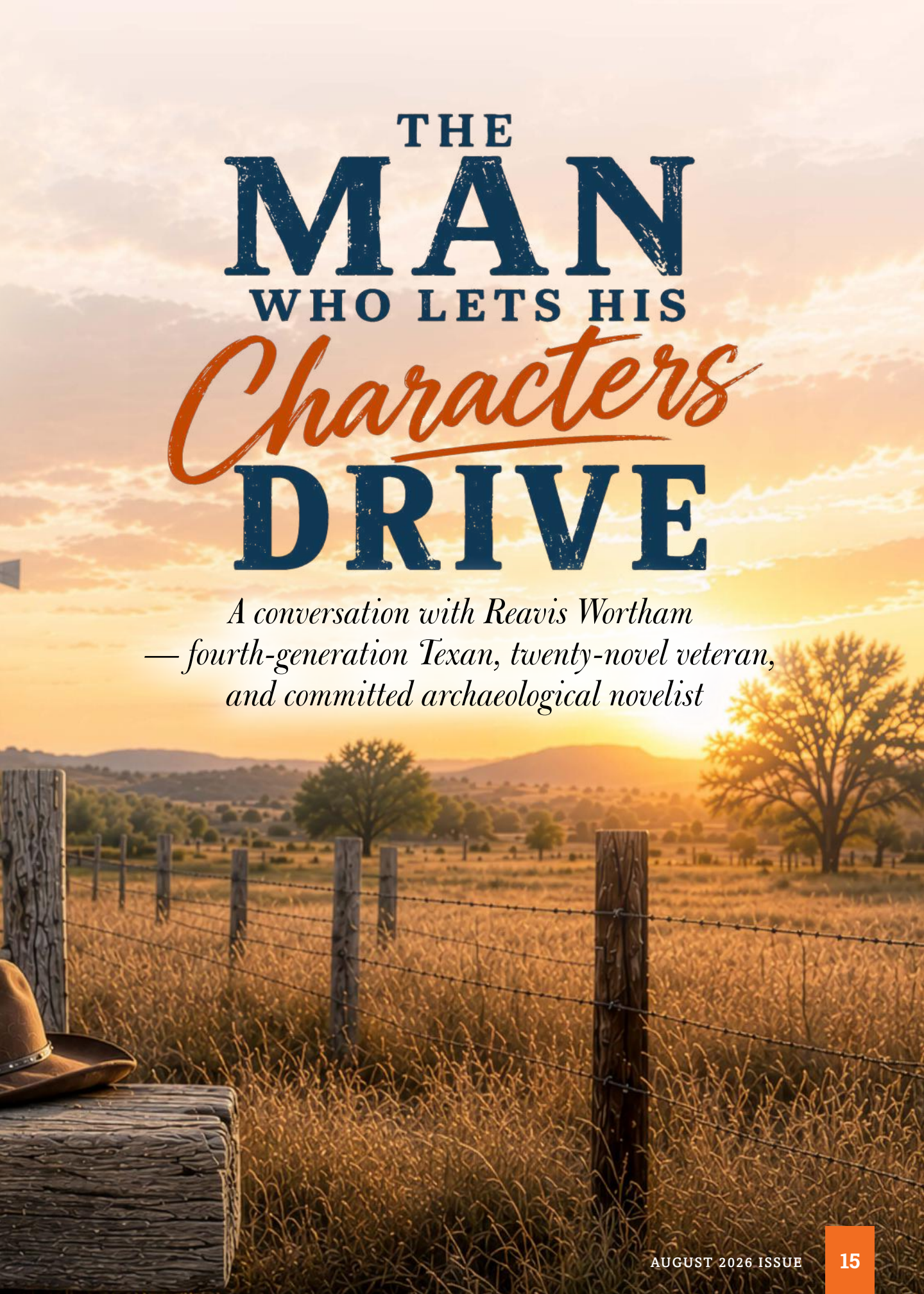
You can apply to be in a monthly writing group, attend a feedback for writers, and meet writers and creatives at one of our upcoming virtual or in-person events.

Find out information, group applications, and registration at arthousedallas.com

*“I’m just here to put
my fingers on the
keyboard and bring
the story up.”*

– Reavis Wortham



The background of the page is a photograph of a Texas landscape at sunset. In the foreground, a wooden fence with three strands of barbed wire runs across the frame. A brown cowboy hat sits on a wooden post on the left. The middle ground shows a field of tall, dry grass with several trees. In the distance, rolling hills are visible under a sky with soft, orange and yellow clouds from the setting sun.

THE MAN WHO LETS HIS *Characters* DRIVE

*A conversation with Reavis Wortham
— fourth-generation Texan, twenty-novel veteran,
and committed archaeological novelist*



Reavis Wortham does not outline his novels. He will tell you this the way another man might confess he doesn't floss — not with guilt, exactly, but with a cheerful certainty that the alternative never really worked for him anyway.

"I hated outlining when I was a kid in school," he said. "I tried it one time. I did about a four-page outline, thought that was pretty. By the second page of the

manuscript, I threw the outline away — because my characters took me in an entirely different direction."

That wasn't false modesty, and it wasn't a writing-workshop pose. Over the course of our conversation, it became clear that Wortham doesn't think of himself as someone who invents stories. He thinks of himself as someone who uncovers them.

"It's archaeology," he said. "You just have to dig down and find what you're looking for."

By his count, he's been digging since 1988, when something shifted during a meeting at the Garland ISD — where he was, at the time, a decade into a 35-year career as an educator. "I was sitting in a meeting at work, and all of a sudden, I saw the story. My writing voice came to me. I don't know where it came from or how it came about." He went home and wrote a newspaper column for a paper he wasn't yet writing for. Mailed it cold to the Paris News in Northeast Texas. The editor called, said he liked it, and offered him a column on the spot. That was thirty-eight years ago. He still writes for them every week — and for *Country World*, a rural Texas agricultural paper, which he's been writing for about thirty-five years.

Twenty novels later — mysteries, thrillers, Westerns, and now a "weird Western" called *Comancheria* — he still describes

himself as a transcriptionist more than an author.

"I'm just here to put my fingers on the keyboard and bring the story up."

★ ★ ★

Comancheria began with a dream. Not a vague, symbolic dream that required interpretation, but what Wortham describes as a movie — complete with dialogue, characters, twists, and scenes — that arrived fully formed during the Covid lockdown.

"I had this dream one night. It was like watching a movie — it came complete with dialogue, characters, twists, scenes. When I woke up, I went into my office about three or four in the morning and started writing what I had seen. The entire concept came from my subconscious. I was just transcribing."

The result is genuinely difficult to classify. Wortham has tried on several labels — horror Western, paranormal Western,

weird Western — and settled on the last one, though he'll acknowledge it breaks several genre rules at once. "It's something different than I have seen in the past and read from other authors that have gone in a similar direction." His own shorthand for it: Stephen King meets Larry McMurtry.

At its center is Buck Dallas, a Texas Ranger cursed by a medicine man to never die. He collapses at night. Good people, encountering a body-shaped thing on the Texas plains, do what you'd expect: they bury him. He wakes, claws himself out of the grave, and rides on.

"I had some readers that were resistant at first — said they

didn't want to read horror. But once they read it, they came back and said: I kind of forgot Buck wasn't dead, unless you pointed it out to me later on. It reads just like a great Western. There's just a twist to it. And that's what I wanted."

He didn't want a vampire. He didn't want a zombie. "Anne Rice has written the vampire novels. I don't want to get in the middle of all that. I wanted something a little bit different." And so, in the way of Wortham's fiction generally, other elements began attaching themselves. Buck Dallas, it eventually emerged, can communicate telepathically with reptiles. That detail wasn't in the dream. "It popped up



one day when he was riding and passed a tortoise in the narrative. And the tortoise said something to him. I thought, well, now that's kind of interesting." He paused. "That's how my mind works. And now there's a lot of humor in there, too — it breaks up the tension and allows readers to take a deep breath before they move to the next phase."

The novel also features real historical figures — Quanah Parker, the last great Comanche war chief, and Bat Masterson before his Dodge City days, when he was hunting buffalo on the Texas plains. Wortham is a history buff in the most useful sense: not someone who collects facts, but someone who lets

them lean into the story frame he's already building.

"I know Texas from one end to the other. West Texas people talk differently than East Texas folks. They think differently. The people up on the plains deal with the wind. The people down on the coast deal with a different kind of weather." He also knows what it is to step on a sandbur in the middle of the night. "They're little evil balls of hell that grow out on weeds, and when they dry, they're weapons."



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"They make Legos look tame," I said.

"They do," he agreed. He knows what a screen door sounds like when it doesn't quite slam. "It pops two or three times before it settles back into place. If you've been around them, you can hear it."

He knows, too, that in Texas every soft drink is "a Coke." Someone might say, "Hey, do you want a Coke? Yeah — what kind do you want? I want Dr Pepper. He knows that "used to could" is a perfectly good construction, and that "take and carry" and "run you to the store" are things real people say. I told him that "used to could" was my favorite Texas phrase from seventeen years of living there.

"Oh, yeah," he said, with the recognition of a man who has been using it all his life. "Those kinds of things come natural to us. But if you've never been around Texas, you can't plug that into anything you're writing about the state. It's like someone writing about New Hampshire

and then changing the word to Texas and changing a few terms and trying to make it fit. It doesn't work."

People tend to think of Texas as either the South or the West. It's really not either. It's just Texas — and Wortham knows the difference down to the bone.

That's the thing about Wortham's Texas: it's not atmosphere. It's evidence.

★ ★ ★

The most instructive story Wortham tells about his own process is the story of Tom Bell.

In the third novel of his Red River mystery series, Wortham needed a minor character — a handyman, essentially, whose purpose was to repair a house and give a ten-year-old boy something to think about. Tom Bell walked onto the page and then, as Wortham tells it, simply refused to leave.

"The next thing I knew, this guy swelled up and became a huge character that threatened to



take over the entire novel. And so, I had to kill him off in Mexico at the climax of the third act — not realizing that my readers absolutely fell in love with him.”

“For the next couple of years, people beat me up everywhere I went to sign. ‘Why did you kill Tom Bell?’ And I kept saying: number one, it’s fiction — I didn’t kill anybody. Number two, Tom was getting a little too big to handle in the series.”

Eventually, a reader gave him an ultimatum: bring Tom Bell back or lose her as a reader. Wortham went back and reread the novel — something he never does; his finished books go on the shelf and stay there. He discovered something he’d apparently missed the first time.

“I didn’t really kill him off. I just left him shot up and wounded in Mexico.”



Tom Bell came back. He got his own novel, *The Texas Job*, set in the 1930s. Readers are already demanding another.

“My characters are strong — both male and female. They have a story they want to tell, and I just try to weave their story into what it is I’m doing.”

He credits Robert E. Howard with putting words to this experience. Howard, who wrote the Conan stories, once said he put his fingers on the typewriter keys and Conan stood over his shoulder and dictated. “That’s kind of how I do it,” Wortham said. Characters appear without invitation. Some of them have been waiting, he suspects, in short stories he wrote years ago and set aside. Just this week, working on a new Red River novel, he pulled out a short story he’d presented at a Noir at the Bar event in Nacogdoches two years ago. Changed the name. Dropped it in. “I’m twelve, fifteen thousand words farther along — and it kind of breaks things up so you start moving again.”

"My subconscious works on novels all the time," he said. "There's this little guy back there, hammering away on stories that make their appearance later on."

★ ★ ★

Asked about his actual writing process — first drafts, revision, the messy middle — Wortham described something that sounds deceptively simple.

"I sit down with an idea to start the novel. I put my fingers on the keyboard, start typing, and start following that character as he goes. I try to write at least five pages a day, bare minimum — that's my goal. It's like going to work. You have to put yourself behind your desk every day."

The following morning, he reads back over those pages, cleans them up, adds the details he was moving too fast to include, and uses them as a springboard. "Next morning, you get up and read the previous five pages, clean them up, and that's a loading chute into the day's work. If you follow that, you're

fifteen pages in now, you're on a roll. Your story is pouring out of you."

If life interrupts — and it does, family and grandkids and the full business of living — he goes back to the beginning and reads forward. Not to revise, but to climb back inside the characters' heads. "I get back into the flow. And then I just follow the story along."

His wife, a former journalist, is his beta reader. She is, by Wortham's account, thorough. "If I say a horse is one color and then forget, and thirty pages down it's a different kind of horse — she catches that. A lot of people don't have that luxury." She came in from the dark side, he noted — and then stopped himself, laughing. "But she has those skills to go in and clean it up."

"I have to admit," I told him, "I'm kind of envious."

"It's pretty nice," he agreed.

When the manuscript is finished — typically ninety to one hundred

thousand words — it goes to his agent, then his editor. But by then, each act has already been cleaned as he wrote it. “By the time I get the first act finished at thirty thousand words, it’s going to be just about as clean as it can be before it goes to my publisher.”

At any given time, he’s working on multiple manuscripts simultaneously. He lets them compete. “I start these manuscripts and then let whichever one is the most aggressive take over and rise to the top — and then I follow that one out.”

★ ★ ★

One thing anyone who reads Wortham’s fiction notices quickly is the humor. Not jokes. Not punchlines. The kind of wit that arises from people being observed with great precision and no malice. A tortoise that has opinions. A lawman who wakes up in his own grave and treats it as an occupational inconvenience.

“I’m kind of a smart-ass,” Wortham said, by way of explanation. “I love to write dialogue, and I love to listen to people talk. I hang around with a lot of retired police officers. They have their own version of



humor — it's a darker humor. My newspaper columns, over half of those are humor. Not jokes, not ha-ha laugh out loud. But it's the kind of thing that, in your mind, you go: hey, that's right, that's kind of quirky. It makes me grin."

He described the mechanism as "slap-shot humor." "You're talking about one thing, and all of a sudden, you're blindsided by one little detail. And that little detail makes it funny."

Sometimes the humor ambushes him from outside the page entirely. While writing one of his early Red River novels, he put two characters together — a married man and a married woman who weren't married to each other — and let them run off. It was fiction. He made them up completely.

A few weeks after that book came out, his aunt called from the nursing home.

"She said, 'Rev, I've got a bone to pick with you.' And I thought she was mad because I hadn't been to visit her in a while."

She was not mad about that.

"She said, 'You're telling family secrets.' I said, 'What? No, I'm not — what are you talking about?' She goes, 'You're writing where Bill and Ethel got together and ran off. Left their husband and wife and ran off together. We're not telling those stories.'"

Wortham pointed out that the characters were invented. His aunt did not find this relevant.

"I said, 'Well, that's kind of interesting — I didn't know Bill and Ethel had been married before and ran off together. Tell me a little bit about that.' And she said, 'No. Family doesn't talk about such things.' And she hung up on me."

He told this story with the pleasure of a man who has dined out on it many times and expects to dine out on it many more. "When you make it up, you kind of hit a little close to home sometimes."

I told him that reading his work felt like watching someone with a mischievous twinkle in their eye.

"There is," he said. "And that's unconscious. People say: teach me to write the way you do. I can't. I just know that this is what I've developed, and it works for me. And that's what everyone needs to find — what works for them."

★ ★ ★

Everyone has heard the advice: write what you know. Wortham has heard it all his life too.

"That's okay to get started," he said. "But you have to learn to expand out." He grew up in Northeast Texas. He writes about the border country in Southwest Texas, the Big Bend region along the Rio Grande — country where, he noted, you can die from exposure pretty quickly if you run out of water in certain places. He didn't know that country when he started writing about it. "So, I had to go down there, and we spent several vacations walking that country and driving around and getting to know people. And so, then I learned about that area — so I know it." He paused. "Now,

I'm not going to write a novel set in New York City. I've been there, but I don't know enough about it to write it. I might set a few scenes there to give people a taste — but I'm going to get them back out into rural America."

I suggested that "write what you know" doesn't mean literally what you know. "It means write your truth," I said.

"That's it," he said. "That's it exactly."

★ ★ ★

Before he was a novelist, Wortham was a photographer — wedding photographer, freelance landscape photographer, photography teacher for a decade in the Garland school system. Before that, he was trying to get published, and being rejected, since 1964, when he was ten years old and mailing things to Reader's Digest. His high school journalism teacher, after years of watching him turn news articles

into something else entirely, handed him a camera and told him he'd never make it as a writer.

"Wow — were they wrong!" I said.

"You never know," he said. "It took a while. I tried in the seventies when I was teaching. And then it wasn't until 1988 that everything clicked. It was the result of reading three other writers at the same time — I realized their voices were very distinct, and that's when I got my writing voice."

On his desk — visible over his shoulder on our Zoom call — there is a typewriter. His mother

bought it for him around 1970 or 1971. He wrote on it for years; paid for a substantial portion of his college beer by typing other people's term papers. "I can't type on it any longer. My fingers don't work on that kind of keyboard. But the grandkids come in and pound on it until they lock the keys up. They don't know how to get them unlocked. Which is great — I do."

Behind the typewriter: bookshelves. Floor to ceiling, all the way around the room. A rolling library ladder in the corner. His oldest daughter is a high school librarian; when the shelves were finished, she



helped him shelve the books, riding the ladder back and forth — “something out of Harry Potter,” he said. He rereads these books. *Lonesome Dove*, five times through, maybe more. *Appaloosa*, for the dialogue. *The Bottoms* by Joe Lansdale, two or three times. “I’ve told Joe: I’m irritated that you wrote this novel and I didn’t, because this is just a great, great book.” He does not reread his own work. His novels go on the shelf and stay there. Except when Tom Bell demands it.

★ ★ ★

Toward the end of our conversation, I asked him whether he’d ever done any improv.

“Not professionally, not on stage,” he said. “But I have done it with some folks and had some fun with it.”

I told him I was asking because his writing style seemed deeply improvisational — that quality of: if X is true, then what else must be true in this story?

He picked it right up. “Or if X is true, what else could be true — what about Y and Z? It makes no sense, but I’m going to throw it in there anyway.” A beat. “That works, too.”

“It’s true improv,” I said.

“Yes,” he agreed. And then, after a pause: “I just know where the characters are going. They already know what’s going to happen. It’s already been written.”

“They just have to tell you,” I said.

“Yes,” he said. “And you have to dig down and find what it is that you’re looking for.”

It explains everything — the handyman who swells into a hero, the tortoise with opinions, the short story that sat in a drawer for two years because it was waiting for exactly this novel. None of it planned. All of it followed. He says yes, and the story takes him somewhere he couldn’t have mapped in advance. That’s not a lack of craft. That’s a very specific, very disciplined kind of trust.

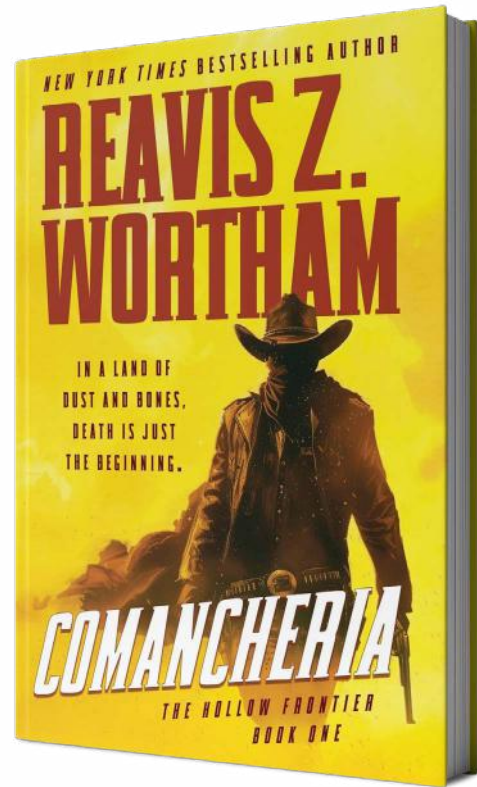
★ ★ ★

At the very end, I told him he reminded me of Mark Twain.

"I'm getting the white hair and mustache," he said. "I'm getting close."

"I wasn't meaning that," I said. "I meant that you are fundamentally a storyteller."

"Well, thank you," he said. "I've been told that. That's a great compliment."



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Reavis Wortham

The author of more than twenty novels, including the Red River mystery series and the Sonny Hawk thriller series. His latest release, *Comancheria*, is available now. His website — and a glossary of Texas terms copy editors keep trying to correct — can be found at ReavisZWortham.com →

Melissa A. Bartell

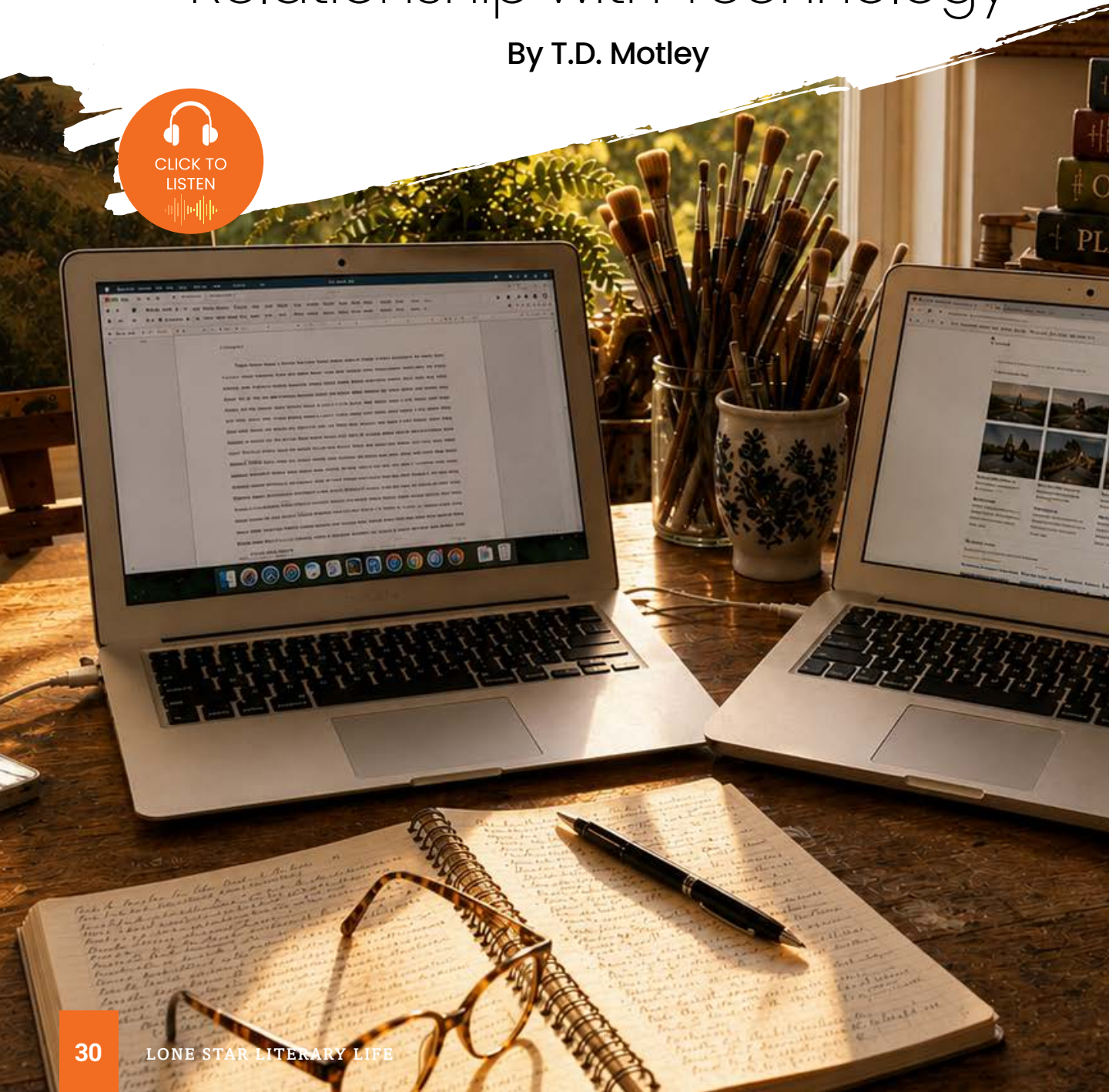
A writer, editor, and voice performer whose work spans fiction, essays, digital content, audio dramas, and improvisational storytelling. A lifelong lover of words and voracious reader, she lives in Texas with her husband, a lively collection of dogs, and more books than she cares to count.

Guest
Article

My Love/Hate

Relationship with Technology

By T.D. Motley





Regarding Lone Star Lit's August theme of "Prepare," I've been paying attention for a week or so to repetitive practices I employ while writing. This is, in essence, a real-time lab report about effective practices. Stay with me, and you'll finally get to be that proverbial "fly on the wall," able to observe three practices that help me prepare successful manuscripts.

Firstly, I confess to being a bit of a "Neo-Luddite." In 19th-century rural England, displaced tenant farmers (called crofters) revolted against new steam-powered tractors, equipment, and mills. Generational farming families were suddenly cast out of their homes and fields onto the open road. Many became reactionary Luddites, *anarchists* in the eyes of the law.

I don't generally embrace technology as a topic of particular interest, so I was surprised to observe myself religiously relying on three modern devices or machines (rue the word!) that I use daily. Perhaps I'm a backsliding Neo-Luddite, after all.

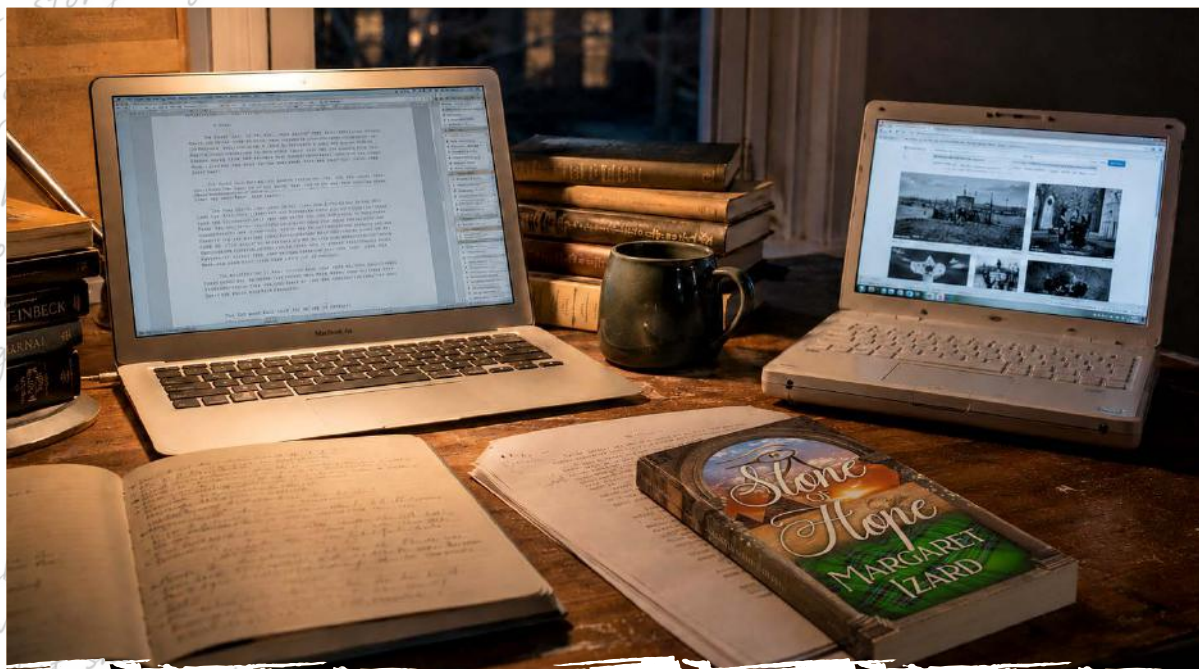
The story begins

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I
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what she loved.



I write
with two
computers.

That is, I write manuscripts on a trusty old MacBook Air alongside an even more ancient Mac laptop that I use only for internet searches. I guess you could say that one utensil is a typewriter (with as many A.I. bells and whistles disabled as possible), and the second is my search engine. In other words, I allow myself to go down random rabbit holes of information on the search engine, while seeing only my current manuscript draft displayed on the typewriter.

I stopped going back and forth from document to internet on the same screen long ago. The practice gave me *vertigo*, and I constantly lost my place in the draft itself.

2

I write and illustrate my own novels.

In my studio, I'm surrounded by art supplies and reference books on my passions: painting, art history, and organic farming. When I began organizing the sections of my first novel, I realized I needed a large board to write on, some surface to record themes and headings in a format large enough to keep the project in my sight from any viewpoint in the room.

The dear cost of any respectable-sized "dry-erase" boards gave me pause, so I experimented with inexpensive laminated white boards cut from 4X8-foot panels. The size that works best for me is 32 x 48 inches. The thin Masonite backing is rigid enough for me to stand the board upright on the tray of a painting easel. This "project" board is positioned horizontally or vertically, as needed.

When I'm finished outlining one section of a chapter, I erase and proceed to the next with a clean slate. If I've left a dry-erase marker on too long, a short spray of whiteboard cleaner easily removes any excess. When I enter or exit my studio, the large white practice board vividly displays my current outline, reminding me of purpose and progress.



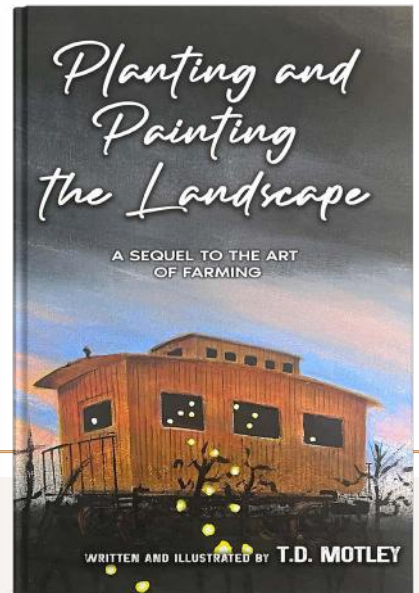
what she felt
what she loved.

Lastly, during hours I must be away from my studio, I'm sometimes without pen, paper, or laptop. I've learned to practice sending 'inspired' manuscript thoughts as brief texts to my cellphone self. An idea or topic of note becomes a text reminder that I know I will review later. For a while, I tried jotting things down on the 'Notes' pages of my phone, but I never remembered to check the app, in the same way that I always forget to listen to voicemail.

For some reason, I consistently check my texts at the end of the day. I guess it just seems the least cumbersome of cell-phone duties to me. Texting myself has benefited my writing in that spontaneous ideas or observations don't just fade away or get lost in the distracting traffic of life's daily travels. Of course, I text myself before I drive out onto the road. Safe practices prepare us for safe journeys. ★

I

I'm
sometimes
without pen,
paper, or
laptop.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

T.D. Motley

A Fort Worth author and artist whose new novel, *Planting and Painting the Landscape*, will be released by Stoney Creek Publishing of the Texas A&M Press on August 18, 2026.



YEARS OF “MAYBE NEXT YEAR.”

The book you've been dreaming of is not finished because you lack *time*. You lack *a plan*.

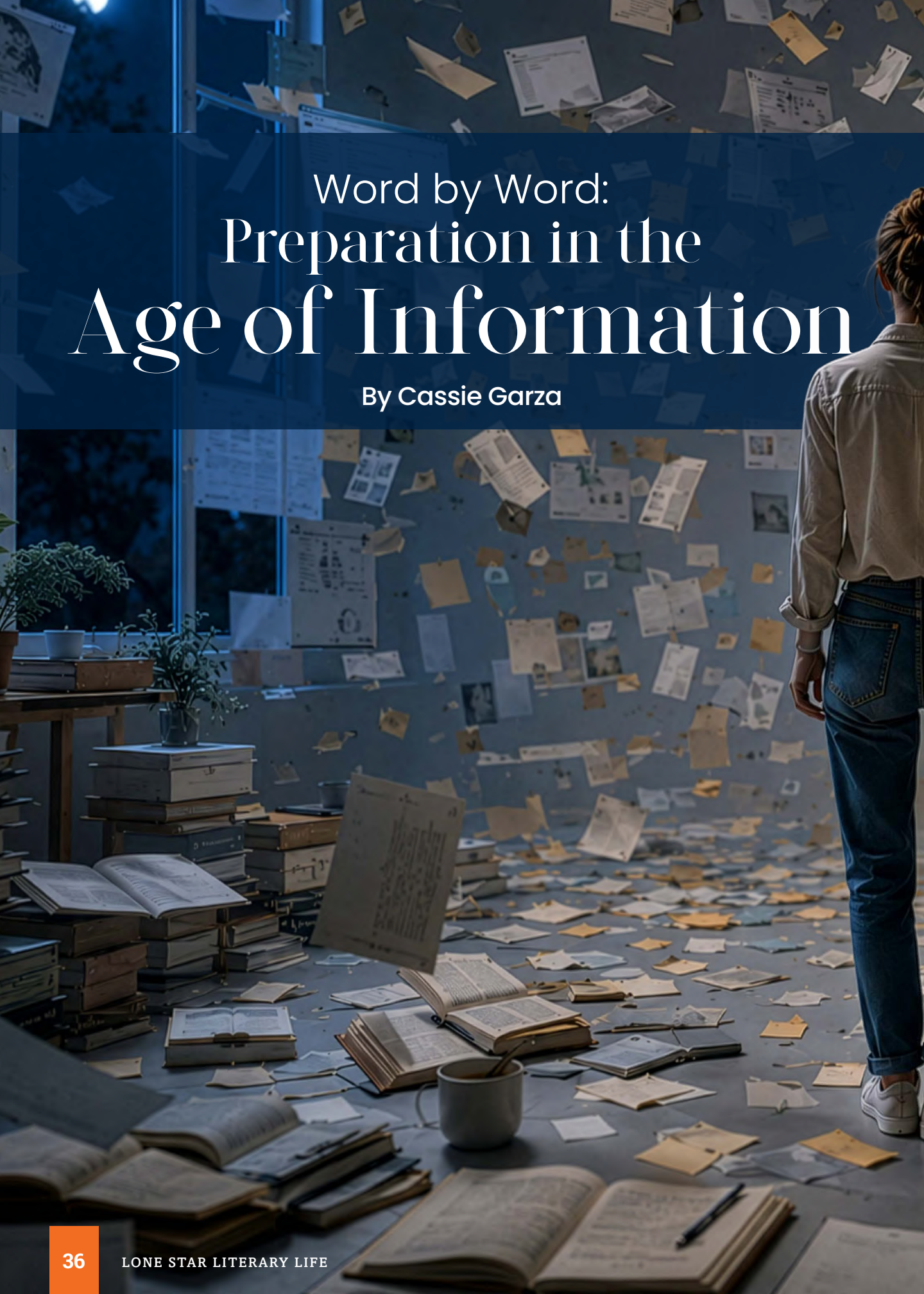
You are the thought leader, the coach, the expert. You have the ideas. Stop letting analysis paralysis and the myth of “finding time” stall your author dream.

A FINISHED MANUSCRIPT IS SIX MONTHS AWAY.

My Book in Six is the 183-day roadmap for nonfiction authors who need structure, not more hours.

- **20 Minutes a Day** (*Write during the cracks in your schedule.*)
- **Idea to Done** (*Month One is dedicated to finding your best idea.*)
- **Real Community** (*Find your author people. No one succeeds alone.*)

WRITE YOUR BOOK TODAY

A person with long hair, seen from the back, stands in a room. The walls and floor are covered with numerous papers, notes, and documents, some pinned and others scattered. In the foreground, there are stacks of books, some open, and a cup of coffee. The scene is dimly lit, with a blueish tint, suggesting a quiet, contemplative atmosphere.

Word by Word: Preparation in the Age of Information

By Cassie Garza



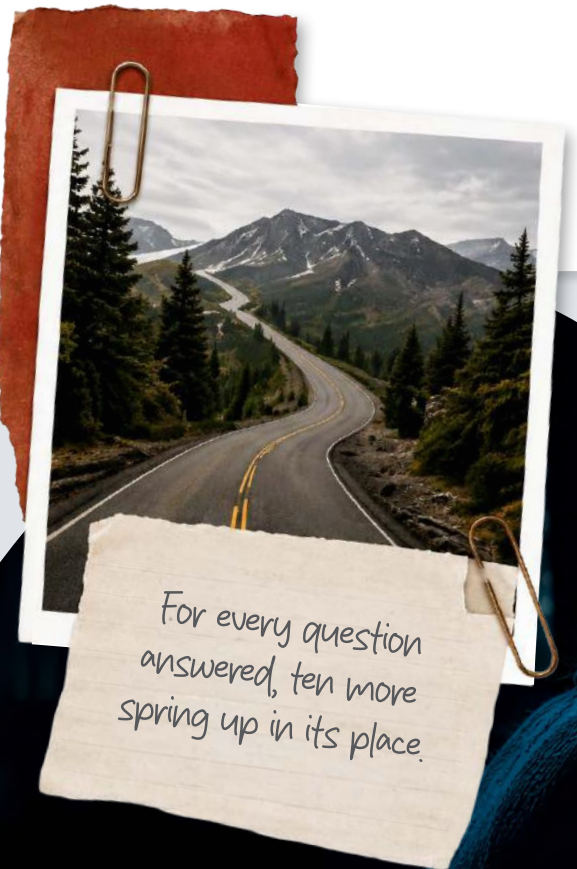
It's midnight. Between blogs, social media, and discussion forums, you've gone down yet another rabbit hole of writing, publishing, and marketing advice. Perhaps you've gained a nugget of information that you hadn't heard before, something that's incredibly helpful for the niche topic you started looking into hours ago. Or, as so often is the case, perhaps you ended up feeling more overwhelmed and woefully unprepared than you did before embarking on this endeavor of inquiry.

The "you" I'm referring to is, of course, me. In my quest to prepare for every pit stop in my author journey, I found myself in this exact situation more times than I care to remember. Rather than fall prey to preparation paralysis, I discovered a trio of less intimidating steps that also happened to start with the letter "P":



Prioritize

REEL



In the Age of Information, every decision tree quickly becomes a decision forest. Plotting or pantsing? Traditional publishing or self-publishing? Going wide or staying exclusive? For every question answered, ten more spring up in its place.

Every head in the information Hydra might have strong opinions on how you should proceed, but that doesn't mean you have to listen. It's

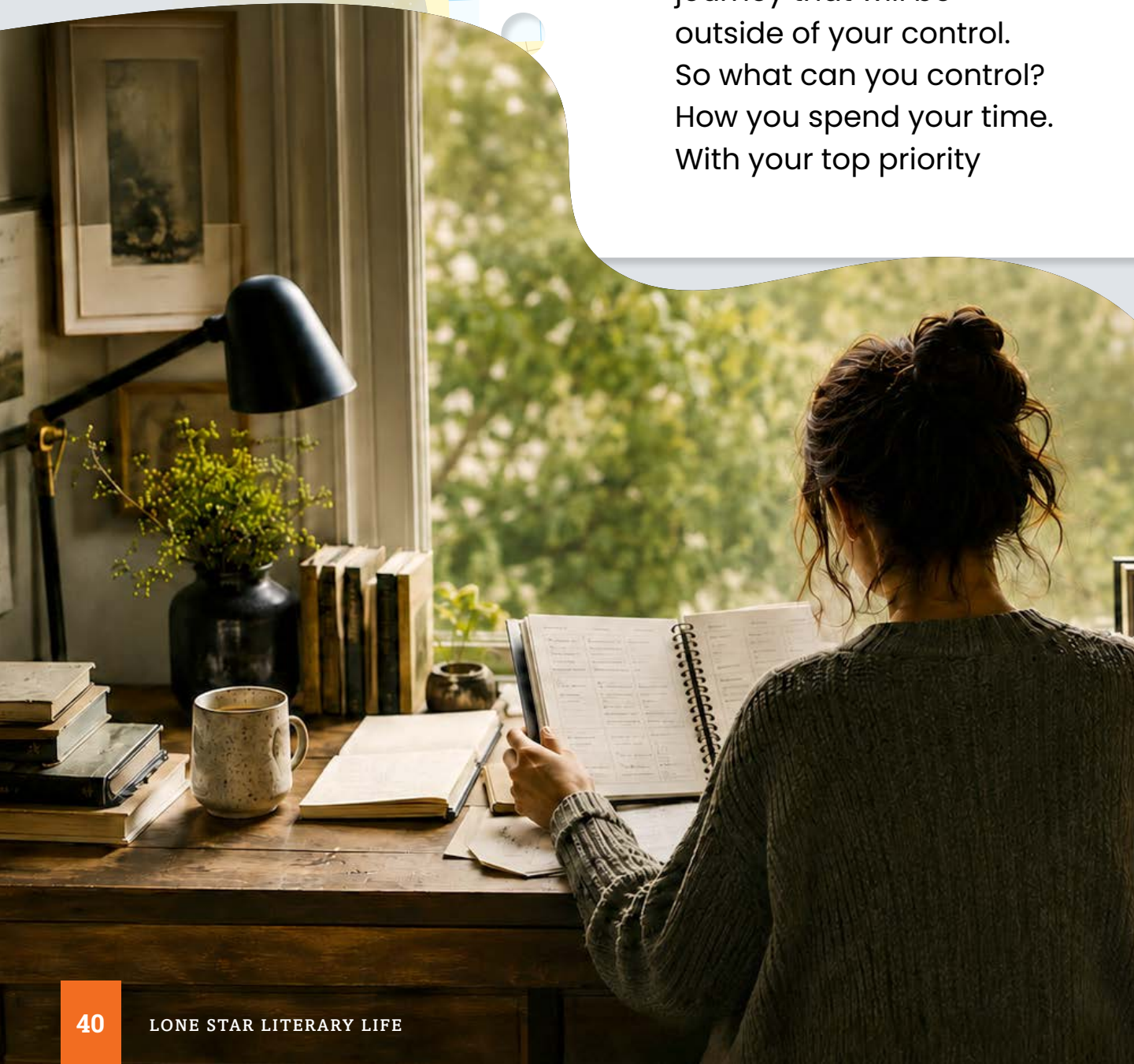
time to prioritize. Take a hard look at that monstrous to-do list you've been building and identify the most pressing goal. For example, as I shifted from editing to formatting my final manuscript, I prioritized researching cover art dimensions over revamping my website design. One of those tasks was pertinent to my immediate goal, and the other one...not so much.





Plan

There will always be elements of your author journey that will be outside of your control. So what can you control? How you spend your time. With your top priority



in mind, plan your next steps and how much time you can reasonably invest in them.

If you need to research the best way to get through a first draft, plan out how much time you're willing to invest in reading books or listening to podcasts on the topic. The same idea applies to marketing goals. If

you're preparing to launch a promotional campaign, your plan might look like scheduling five social media posts per week for the next month. Setting that boundary on time will keep you afloat as you wade through information going forward.



REEL

Persist

After advice from real-life authors, spreadsheet upon spreadsheet of compiled information, and stacks of secondhand books, I had an epiphany. Or, rather, I finally got my hands on a copy of Anne Lamott's *Bird*



by *Bird*. Lamott's advice? When a project becomes unbearably overwhelming, make it bearable by taking it one step at a time. Or one bird at a time, as it were.

The Age of Information poses unique challenges in the sheer amount of content, facts, and opinions available to you at any given moment. But absorbing all the information in the world does not guarantee perfection in your author journey. True

preparation is the intentional pursuit of knowledge, equipping you enough to move forward in your project but not overwhelming you to the point of paralysis.

So the next time you feel yourself getting sucked into another wormhole of information, remember to prioritize, plan, and persist. You will get to where you need to go.

Word by word. ★



Cassie Garza



Based in Fort Worth, Cassie Garza has a background in biology and recently published her debut rom-com, *Love En Route*.

August

Bookish Events

Prepare for a month of book romance and author events. Our calendar is sortable by city, so you can find out which authors are signing at a fabulous indie book store near you. Click here for [links to the August events below](#), or visit the **Lone Star Lit Bookish Events calendar** for information on all upcoming author signings and bookish events across Texas. ★



North Texas Indie
Bookstore Crawl



Bookstore
Romance Day

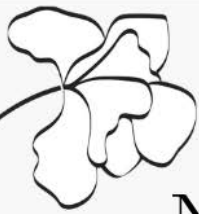


Lubbock Book
Festival



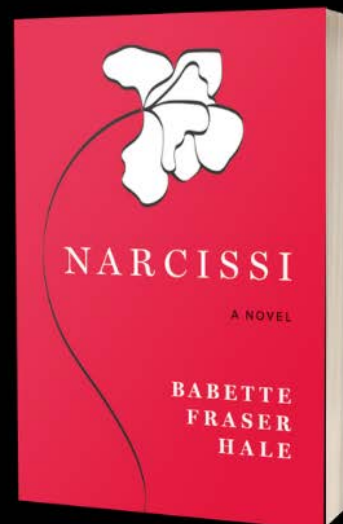
Book Boyfriend
Bash





NARCISSI

*Hurt is never
the whole story.*

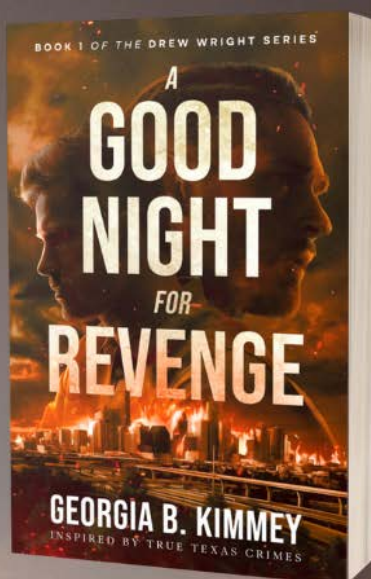


B A B E T T E H A L E

COMING SOON

THE DREW WRIGHT SERIES

by Georgia B. Kimmey



**REVENGE
HAS MANY
FACES.**



**WHO SAID BLOOD IS
THICKER THAN
WATER ?**



TEXAS LITERARY PODCASTS

The Currently Reading Podcast



The best reading life doesn't happen by accident. It starts with a plan. *The Currently Reading Podcast* helps readers prepare for their next favorite book through lively conversations, thoughtful recommendations, and a refreshing philosophy they call "Reader Know Thyself."

Each week, hosts Meredith Monday Schwartz and Kaytee Cobb share what they're reading, spotlight exciting new and backlist titles, and help listeners discover books they'll genuinely love, not just the ones everyone else is reading.

This month's theme is **PREPARE**, and that's exactly what this podcast does best. Whether you're building your next TBR stack, branching into a new genre, or simply looking for trusted recommendations from fellow book lovers, *The Currently Reading Podcast* equips you to read more intentionally and enjoy every page.

Prepare your bookshelf, your library holds, and your reading goals by listening to **The Currently Reading Podcast.**



Discover even more Texas literary podcasts waiting for you on our website, where you can find an expanded list.



THE TRUE STORY OF THE WILD BUNCH'S FORGOTTEN OUTLAW QUEEN

**"A ride you
don't want
to miss!"**

HOWARD KAZANJIAN

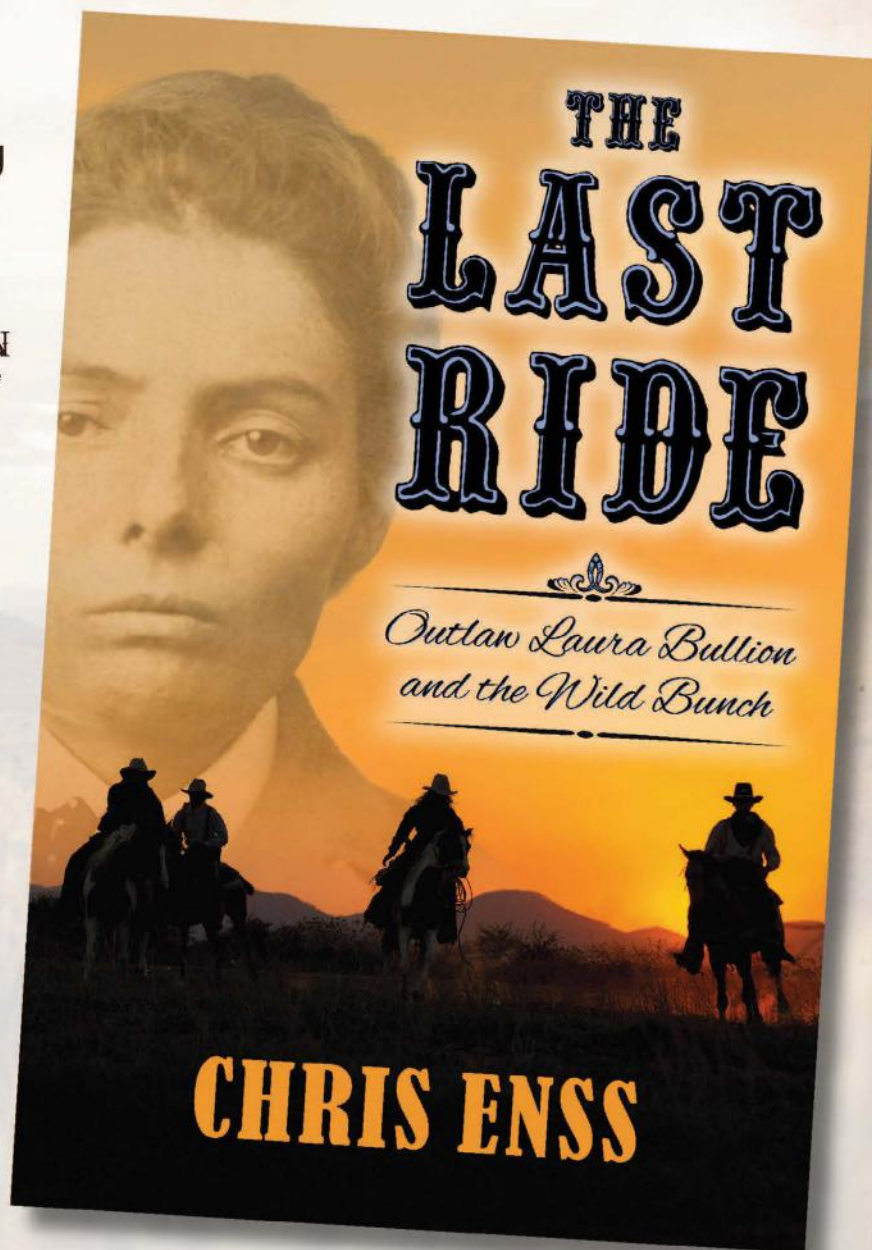
Academy Award-nominated executive
producer & author

**"A new kind
of old west
outlaw."**

REAVIS WORTHAM

New York Times bestselling author

**AVAILABLE AT
YOUR LOCAL
BOOKSTORE
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New York Times bestselling author Chris Enss reveals the extraordinary life of Laura Bullion—the Wild Bunch's only known female train robber.


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Texas Books Preview

Prepare to be

Amazed!

Prepare your TBR to take you through the last weeks of summer and the run-up to a new school year with some fresh new Texas-connected books. Provide the little ones in your life with a touching new tale. Equip your beach bag with a new thriller. Stock your favorite reading spot with the perfect story to while away a slow afternoon. ★

Enjoy these standouts, and [click here to visit the full collection on our website.](#)



CLICK TO
LISTEN



CHILDREN'S / PICTURE BOOK

Brave Belle's First Halloween

By Cindy J. Vanous
Illustrator, William "Bubba" Flint

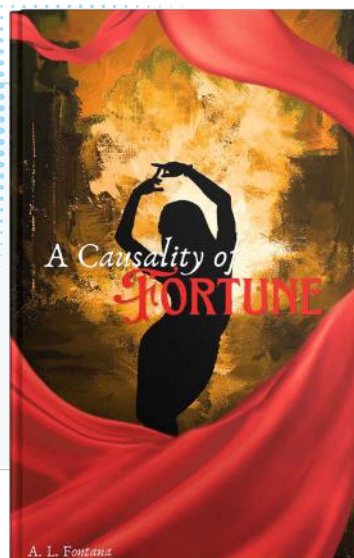
Little Doorknob Bookshop
June 1, 2026

FANTASY / ROMANCE

A Causality of Fortune

By A. L. Fontana

August 9, 2026

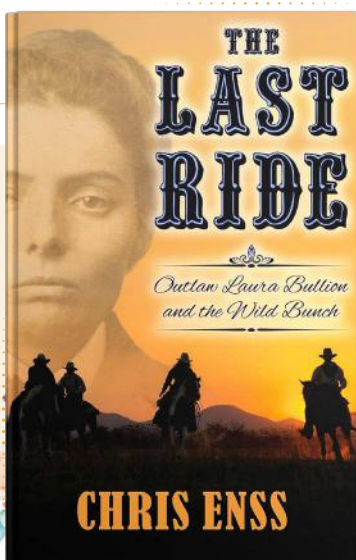


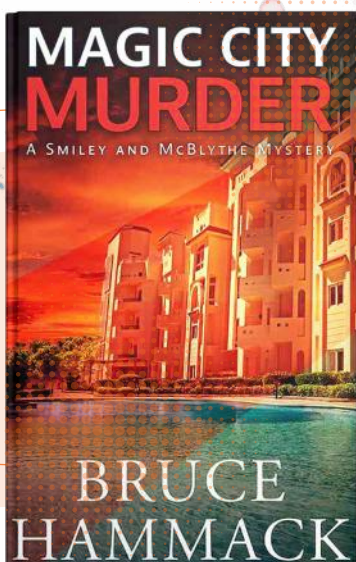
NONFICTION

The Last Ride: Outlaw Laura Bullion and the Wild Bunch

By Chris Enss

FarCountry Press
August 15, 2026





PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR MYSTERY / CLEAN MYSTERY

Magic City Murder

By Bruce Hammack

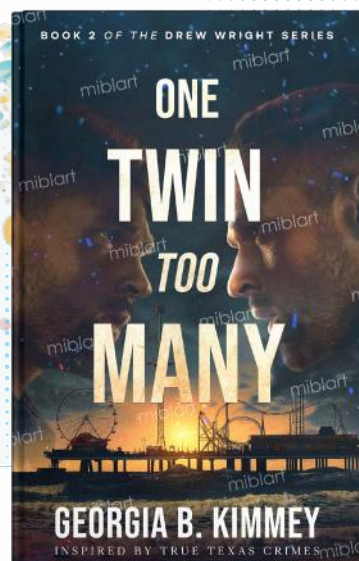
August 6, 2026

CRIME / SUSPENSE / THRILLER

One Twin Too Many

By Georgia Kimmey

July 30, 2026



ROMANCE

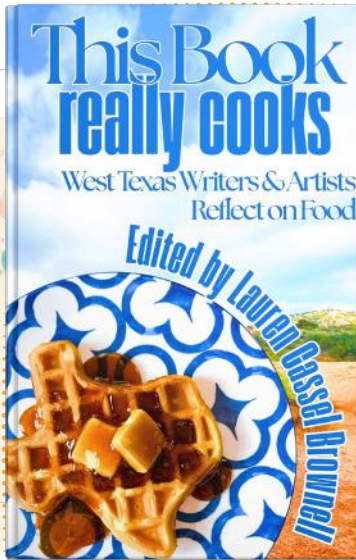
Tides of Trust

Coast Dreams, Book 4

By Alexa Aston

Oliver-Heber Books

August 18, 2026



NONFICTION / FOOD AND COOKING / ART

This Book Really Cooks, Volume 1

West Texas Writers & Artists Reflect on Food

Edited by Lauren Cassel Brownell

Books That Really Cook

August 10, 2026

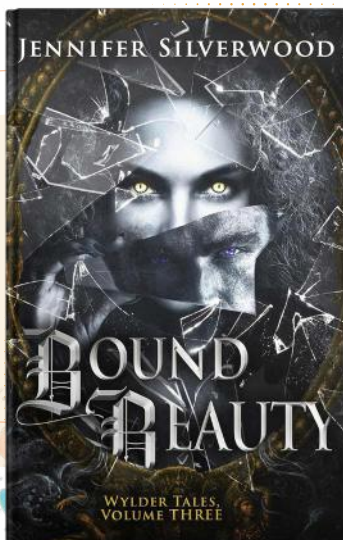
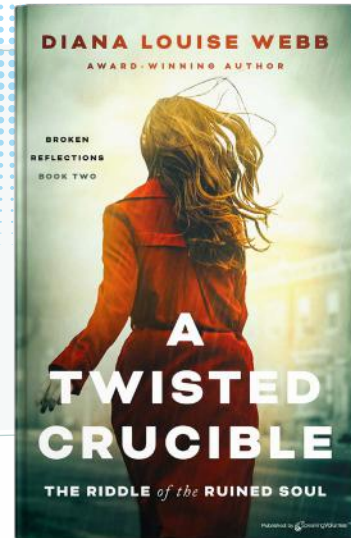
THRILLER / SUSPENSE

A Twisted Crucible: The Riddle of the Ruined Soul

By Diana Louise Webb

Speaking Volumes, LLC

July 21, 2026



FANTASY / FAIRY TALES

Bound Beauty Wylder Tales, 3

By Jennifer Silverwood

SilverWoodSketches

July 14, 2026

Marketing Moment

As authors, we spend a lot of time preparing our books for the world.

We revise. We edit. We hire designers. We agonize over blurbs and keywords and launch plans.

Then, somewhere along the way, someone tells us it's time to market.

So we create social media accounts. We design graphics. We write captions. We schedule posts.

And somehow...it still feels awful.



*If you've ever wondered why
marketing feels so much
harder than writing your
book, you're not alone.*

schedule posts

write captions

hire designers

edit

revise

Prepare the
Marketer
Before the Marketing



If you've ever wondered why marketing feels so much harder than writing your book, you're not alone. The problem usually isn't a lack of marketing tactics. More often, it's that we've prepared the marketing, but not the marketer.

Being prepared to market your book doesn't begin with your Instagram account, your Canva templates, or your email newsletter.

It begins with preparing your mindset, your nervous system, and your expectations.



Prepare Your Mindset

One of the easiest traps authors fall into is believing every outcome is either a complete success or a complete failure.

A great review means you've "made it." A quiet launch means your book is doomed. One viral post convinces you you've finally figured it out. Three posts with little engagement make you question whether you should quit altogether.

The truth is much less dramatic.

Most marketing exists in the middle.

Most readers discover books gradually. Most audiences grow slowly. Most successful authors build their visibility one conversation, one relationship, and one opportunity at a time.

When you catch yourself imagining the best- or worst-case scenario, pause and ask yourself: *What's the most likely outcome?*

Usually, things aren't nearly as wonderful or as terrible as our minds convince us they'll be.

A balanced mindset makes it much easier to keep showing up.





*Your body
often recognizes
stress before
your mind does.*

Prepare Your Body

Marketing isn't just mental.

It's physical.

Have you ever sat down to post on social media and suddenly felt tired? Or found yourself avoiding opening your email? Maybe you noticed your shoulders tighten before recording a video, or your stomach sink before announcing your book.

Your body often recognizes stress before your mind does.

Instead of pushing through those feelings or criticizing yourself for having them, become curious.

What are you afraid might happen?

What story are you telling yourself?

Are you worried about rejection? Looking foolish? Being judged? Feeling like you're bothering people?

Those physical signals aren't signs that you shouldn't market your book. They're clues pointing toward beliefs that deserve your attention.

The more you learn to notice those reactions without letting them control you, the more authentic your marketing becomes.



Prepare Your Expectations

Many authors unknowingly measure themselves against outcomes they can't control.

Will people buy my book?

Will this Reel go viral?

Will someone leave a review?

Will this podcast invitation turn into sales?

Those questions matter, but they aren't the best way to measure whether your marketing is working.

Instead, focus on goals that are entirely within your control.

Have you created clear, cohesive branding?

Do you understand exactly who your ideal readers are?

Are you consistently showing up where those readers spend their time?

Are you building genuine relationships instead of chasing algorithms?

These are the habits that create lasting careers.

The results will come, but they almost always arrive later than we'd like.



Prepare for the Long Game

Marketing isn't something you finish.

It's something you practice.

The authors who build sustainable careers aren't necessarily the loudest, the most extroverted, or the most naturally gifted marketers.

They're the ones who prepare themselves to keep showing up, even when the results aren't immediate.

They've learned to quiet the inner critic, manage their expectations, and build marketing habits they can actually sustain.

That's a very different kind of preparation than creating another social media graphic.

And it's the kind that changes everything. ★

*Marketing
isn't something
you finish. It's
something you
practice.*



Join Us Live



If marketing your book feels exhausting, overwhelming, or like something you're constantly avoiding, you're not broken. You probably just haven't been taught how to approach it in a way that works for you.



Join us for our live workshop on

August 27 at **6:00 p.m. CST**

Why You Hate Marketing

Together, we'll uncover why promoting your book feels so difficult, identify the hidden beliefs and habits that get in the way, and build a marketing approach that feels simple, authentic, and sustainable.

Because once you prepare the marketer,
the marketing becomes much easier.

[RESERVE MY SPOT →](#)

AUTHORS, LET'S GET THE WORD OUT—FOR FREE!

At Lone Star Literary Life, we love helping Texas authors shine—and that starts with two totally free tools just for you:

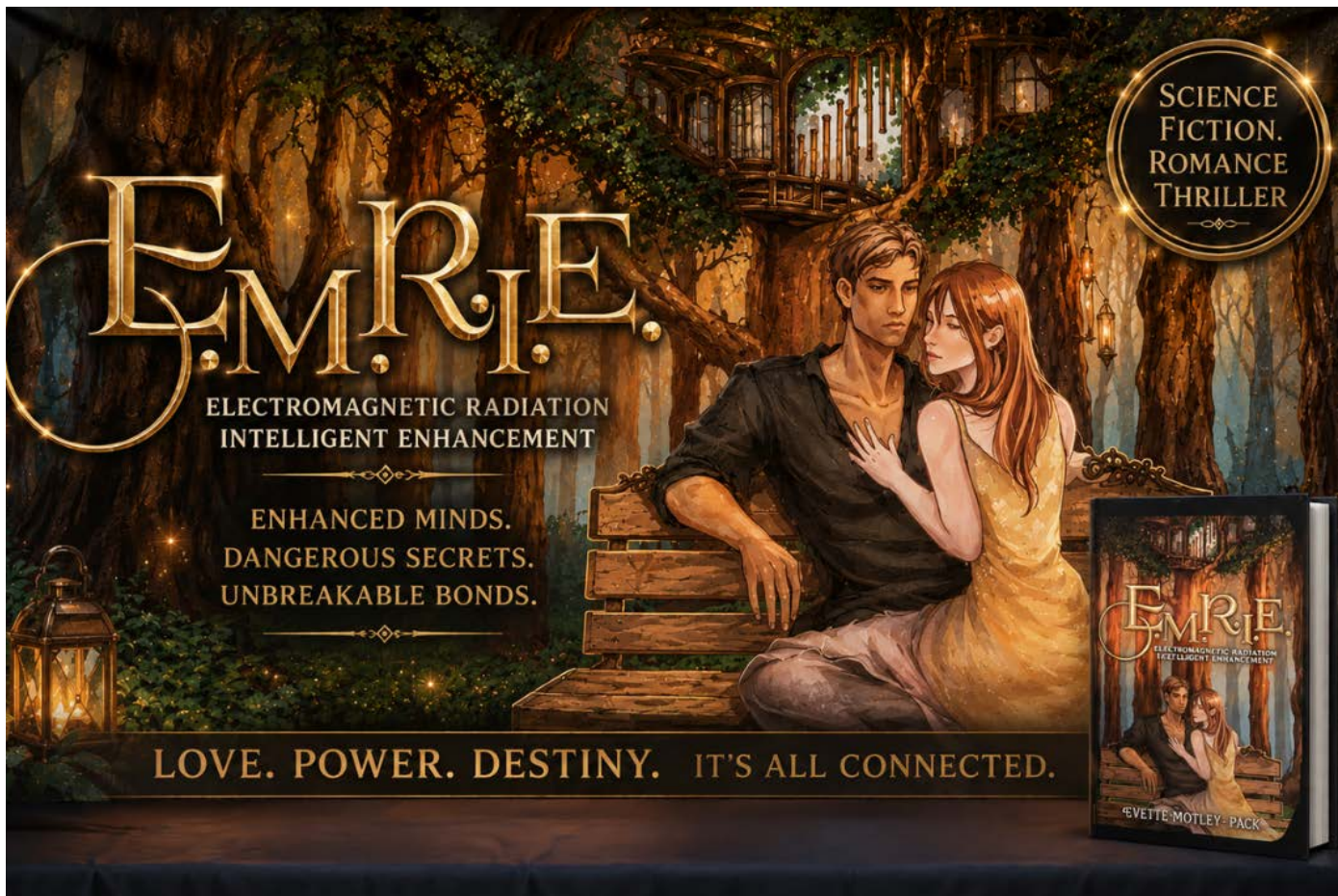
✦ Texas Books Preview

Have a new release? Submit it for a complimentary listing in our monthly Texas Books Preview—a go-to feature for book lovers, librarians, reviewers, and bookstore buyers across the state.

Texas Bookish Events Calendar

Hosting a launch party, book signing, or workshop? Add your event to our statewide calendar and connect with readers who are ready to show up and support.

LET'S TELL TEXAS ABOUT YOUR BOOK!





Kadius Hollis



Brad Ricks

Stephen Weller



Ashley & Leslie

Summer

Lone Star Literary Life has been busy supporting Texas book festivals and authors.

In June, we were at the Texas Horror Lit Fest held in Irving. There was an abundance of authors and readers all in one place, finding new authors and books to read. This event was perfect for those who appreciate the darker side of literature. We discovered a few new authors to add to our list, upcoming releases, and even one author whose series is being made from her books.



Book Fest Adventures

In July, we made our way to Denton for the Texas Book Lovers Con. This event saw around 5k visitors. Many authors sold out of their books over the weekend. There are some happy readers (and authors!) out there who were lucky enough to snag a copy of those books. The attending authors spanned genres from children's books to nonfiction, from romance to fantasy, sci-fi to mystery, and everything in between. This first-time event was a smashing success, and we're excited that the organizers plan to do it again. ★



Leslie, Cassie Garza, Jill, & Amy



Leslie, Amy, Karen Brooks, & Jill



Leslie & Amy



Amy & Leslie

AUTHOR AWARDS

R O U N D U P



CLICK TO
LISTEN



Prepare to be amazed by all the awards earned by these stellar Texas authors. These authors are earning accolades and bringing the gold home to Lone Star State. [Click here to view the complete list of winners and finalists](#) in the Will Rogers Medallion Awards, Silver Falchion Awards, and more. ★



AWARDS AND ACCOLADES



Reading the West Book Awards Winners

Picture Books – *Painting Wonder: How Pauline Baynes Illustrated the Worlds of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien* by Katie Wray Schon

Young Readers – *Three Blue Hearts* by Lynne Kelly

Young Adult – *Legendary Frybread Drive-in: Intertribal Stories* edited by Cynthia Leitich Smith



Kingsley Tufts Poetry Award

Winner – *An Authentic Life* by Jennifer Chang

Discovery Winner – *Cowboy Park* by Eduardo Martinez-Leyva



Independent Author Awards

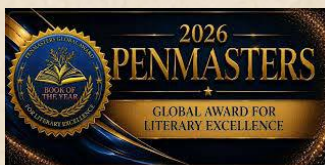
Nineteenth Century Non-Fiction – *Betting on Horses* by Preston Lewis

Political Fiction – *Born in the Aftermath* by Ian Griffin

Thriller – *Lies to Forever* by Marlene M. Bell

War – *Born in the Aftermath* by Ian Griffin

Young Adult Non-Fiction – *Pint-sized Pioneers at Play* by Preston Lewis



Joe Battaglia won the Grand Prize in the Best Book of the Year and Best Fiction categories of the **2026 PenMasters Global Awards for Literary Excellence** for his novel *Beneath the Rings*.



Whitney Cubbison won the Silver Medal in the Regional Fiction: Europe & Russia category of the **Independent Publisher Book Awards**.

Natalie Musgrave Dossett won a Silver Medal in the Historical Fiction category of the **IPPY Book Awards** for her novel *Sarita*.



Bret Anthony Johnson was named a **2026 Guggenheim Fellow**.



Stephen Graham Jones won the **Nebula Award** for Novel from the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers Association for his novel *The Buffalo Hunter Hunter*. The novel also won the **Nebula Award** for Superior Achievement in a Novel and the **Locus Award** for Best Horror Novel.



Lise Olsen won the Book category of the **Investigative Reporters & Editors (IRE) Awards** for *The Scientist and the Serial Killer. The Search for Houston's Lost Boys*.

Bill W. Sanford won the Soul-Driven Fiction Series award of the **Texas Authors Book Contest** for his novel *The Scar of Cain: The Books of Jasher, Book 1*.



Catherine Tucker won the Legal Thriller category of the **National Indie Excellence Awards** for her novel *Tall Cotton*.



Lin Wilder won the Books in a Series category of the **Book Excellence Awards** for her Dr. Lindsey McCall Medical Mystery Series.

Lentic Systems by Chelsea Woodard claimed the **2026 Vassar Miller Prize in Poetry** from UNT Press.

REEL

REEL

Tex-Indie Author
Book Fair

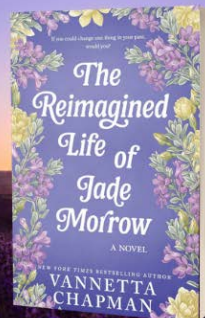
Saturday, October 17th

10 AM - 5 PM

Houston



Add to
your TBR
List!



The
Reimagined
Life of Jade
Morrow

by Vannetta Chapman

"An emotional and uplifting
novel about grief, friendship,
second chances, and learning
that it's never too late to
choose a different future."



NORTH TEXAS ASSOCIATION OF
INDEPENDENT AUTHORS

**PRESENTS:
THE FIRST CHAPTER**

Join us for an exclusive introduction to the North
Texas Association of Independent Authors a new
membership organization created to empower,
educate, and connect independent authors
throughout North Texas.



Thursday, August 13, 2026
12:00 PM - 1:00 PM



Live On Zoom
QRCode Registration

NTAIA

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MEMBERSHIP@NTAIA.ORG

WWW.NTAIA.ORG



THE SCAR
of
CAIN
THE BOOKS OF JASHER, BOOK 1

The Books of
JASHER

BILL W. SANFORD

"A masterpiece of ancient mystery
and modern suspense. The ultimate
secret society thriller."

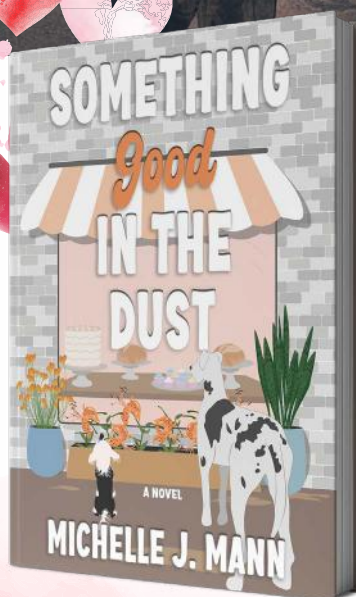
– Texas Author's Museum Award Winner

Texas Reads *Romance*



August is Romance Awareness Month, an initiative that encourages people to improve their relationships through romance. One of the suggested ways to observe is to read more Romance books. That's a recommendation we support not only for this month but for every day of the year.





Something Good In The Dust is the second book in The Good Ones series. It contains respectful autism representation as well as other disability representation, lupus representation, and also involves a character with a brain injury. The digital book is free to borrow for Kindle Unlimited subscribers. It is also available for purchase in hardbound, audiobook, and paperback formats.

Small Town Romance

Impulsive and carefree, 32-year-old Lilly spends her days running a bakery and daydreaming about her next travel destination. But what she yearns for, more than anything, is finding someone she can be her true, quirky self around. And in small-town Willow Creek, the chances of finding her match are slim to none.

That is, until Kade, a reserved but sexy police officer, comes to town, searching for an escape from his past. Jaded and trying to remain a loner, all he wants is to start a new, quiet life in sleepy Willow Creek.

But when Kade pulls Lilly over one night, it sparks a string of quirky run-ins that eat away at

his reserved nature. When the dust storm rolls in, they end up on a collision course, and she becomes an irresistible light in his bleak world. As for Lilly... this uniform-clad, unadventurous man makes her giddy in the best ways. In a windstorm of subpar driving skills, unfortunate sourdough decisions, and questionable pet choices, Kade and Lilly find that opposites really do attract. Each moment spent together sparks undeniable chemistry, bringing the promise of something more.

But when someone from Kade's past makes an unexpected visit, bringing his past traumas to the surface...will he and Lilly find a way forward or let it all crumble?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michelle Mann

Michelle Mann writes sweet, contemporary small-town romances with heartfelt characters and a healthy dose of humor, as well as deeper topics such as disability representation. She lives in West Texas with her husband and two of her children.

Workplace Romance

Emma McCoy is done with corporate life, and she's been saying so online, one viral takedown at a time.

But after a brutal week in tech, a spontaneous night out at an Austin wine bar leads to something she didn't see coming: a charming stranger, electric chemistry, and a connection that feels genuine.



Accidentally Viral is the first book in the From Austin, With Love series. It's now available in eBook and paperback. *Accidentally Cursed*, Book 2 in the series, will be out on October 31, 2026.

That stranger is Michael Bass, billionaire heir, overwhelmed CEO, and a man desperate to escape the weight of his family's empire for just one weekend. By Monday morning, they're both hopeful that this is the start of something worth holding onto.

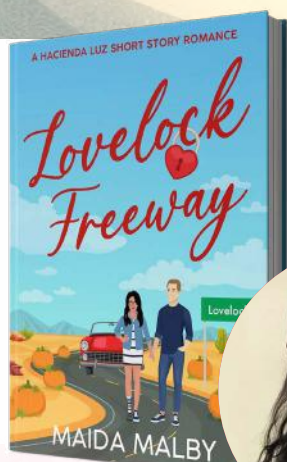
When Emma's anonymous workplace rants accidentally go viral, the fallout is swift and messy. Suddenly, everything they felt is tangled up in power, pride, and impossible choices. Michael must decide how much he's willing to risk for a woman he can't forget. Emma must decide whether the man she fell for was ever real.

Because sometimes the person who understands you best is also the one who can hurt you the most. ★

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Carolyn Hawkins

A lifelong reader and writer, Carolyn Hawkins brings you a debut novel with lots of laughs, spice, and, of course, a happily ever after. Armed with a BS in Journalism & Literature, Carolyn spent years hustling through corporate America before burnout nudged her back to the dream she'd put on pause. Now she writes the kind of swoony romances she loved as a reader from her home in Austin, Texas.



Maida Malby is enjoying her summer watching various sporting events—tennis, soccer, basketball, and golf—and cheering on her favorite athletes, some of whom she just learned about this July. She may or may not be inspired to write a couple of sports romance stories in the future. Maida is also out and about signing books while continuing to add words to her long-running work-in-progress, *Samui Heat*. You can find her recent short story, *Lovelock Freeway*, [here](#).

What to Read Next in
**Young
Adult**



Welcome to Texas Reads YA!

As a teen who loves to read YA,
I sometimes have a hard time
finding quality YA novels.

These novels contain
paranormal aspects and an
air of mystery to them. The
characters go through a journey
of discovery about themselves,
their families, and the world
around them while experiencing
different challenges and
mysteries.



CLICK TO
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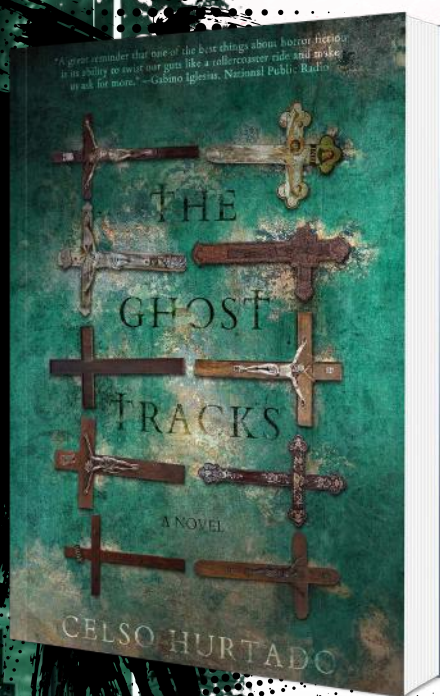
THE GHOST TRACKS

A seventeen-year-old Texan from the wrong side of the tracks starts a supernatural detective agency—this is Fear Street for a diverse America.

Erasmus Cruz is from the wrong side of the tracks. His dad was a junkie who overdosed. His mom chose to run off rather than raise him. His only passion is the supernatural and his only family is his grandmother, whose aches and pains, he soon learns, aren't just from old age but cancer.

Desperate to help his grandmother pay for treatment, Erasmus sets up shop as a detective. But he won't be investigating burglaries or missing pets. Instead, Erasmus sets up San Antonio's first supernatural detective agency. From hauntings to exorcisms, he soon finds that San Antonio is a much scarier place than even he knew.





The Ghost Tracks contains 3 intertwining paranormal cases that weave together and unfold with perfect pacing to keep you guessing. It is a solid horror book with gore and many surprises and is darker than you might be expecting.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Celso Hurtado

Celso Hurtado was born and raised in San Antonio, TX. He has been a punk guitarist, worked in the political arena, and has played entirely too many hours of *The Legend of Zelda*. In his writing, he strives to surprise his readers, and make them think twice before investigating that creak in the hallway.



Floating

Boy and the Girl
Who Couldn't Fly



Things Mary doesn't want to fall into: the river, high school, her mother's life. Things Mary does kind of want to fall into: love, the sky. This is the story of a girl who sees a boy float away one fine day. This is the story of the girl who reaches up for that boy with her hand and with her heart. This is the story of a girl who takes on the army to save a town, who goes toe-to-toe with a mad scientist, who has to fight a plague to save her family. This is the story of a girl who would give anything to get to babysit her baby brother one more time. If she could just find him. It's all up in the air for now, though, and falling fast. . . . ★

Floating Boy and the Girl Who Couldn't Fly has a compelling writing style with interesting characters and an interesting concept. The story is engaging and raises questions about religion, science, and relationships all while solving a mystery.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Stephen Graham Jones

Stephen Graham Jones is the NYT bestselling author of thirty-five or so books. He really likes werewolves and slashers. Favorite novels change daily, but *Valis*, *Love Medicine*, *Lonesome Dove*, *It*, and *The Things They Carried* are usually all up there somewhere. Stephen lives in Boulder, Colorado. It's a big change from the West Texas he grew up in.

Sydney Spell is a nursing student at UT Austin. She has enjoyed reading throughout her adolescence and is an especially big fan of YA novels.

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2026

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@ 9:00 a.m.



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TOMLINSON
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Sponsored by Tomlinson Press

Date & Time: Saturday, October 17, 2026 | 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Location: Hood County Senior Center
501 East Moore Street, Granbury, TX 76048

Free to the Public!

Author Tables: \$60 (mostly 5-ft round; limited 6-ft rectangle)

Vendor Fee: \$50

Limited spaces available

Register at: www.tomlinsonpress.com

Contact: Kelli Martin, Owner – 682-205-4500

Deadline: September 1st | Payment due upon registration

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Most authors are applying the wrong strategy for their stage.

START THE QUIZ



Before You Write

THE AUTHOR'S GUIDE TO NOVEL PREP



What separates a good story from one that falls flat? Is this a question you often ask yourself? The answer is not luck or a publisher's whim. It's an expertly crafted story that began with preparation.

Does your mind spin with characterization, plot, emotion, dialogue, setting, point of view, and all the literary techniques—thinking one must be dominant to achieve bestseller status?

Word One



Prewriting the novel using methods that match how the writer processes information that can transport an ordinary story into an unforgettable one.

Many writers skip novel-preparation altogether, but

knowledge about novel prep paves the way for success.

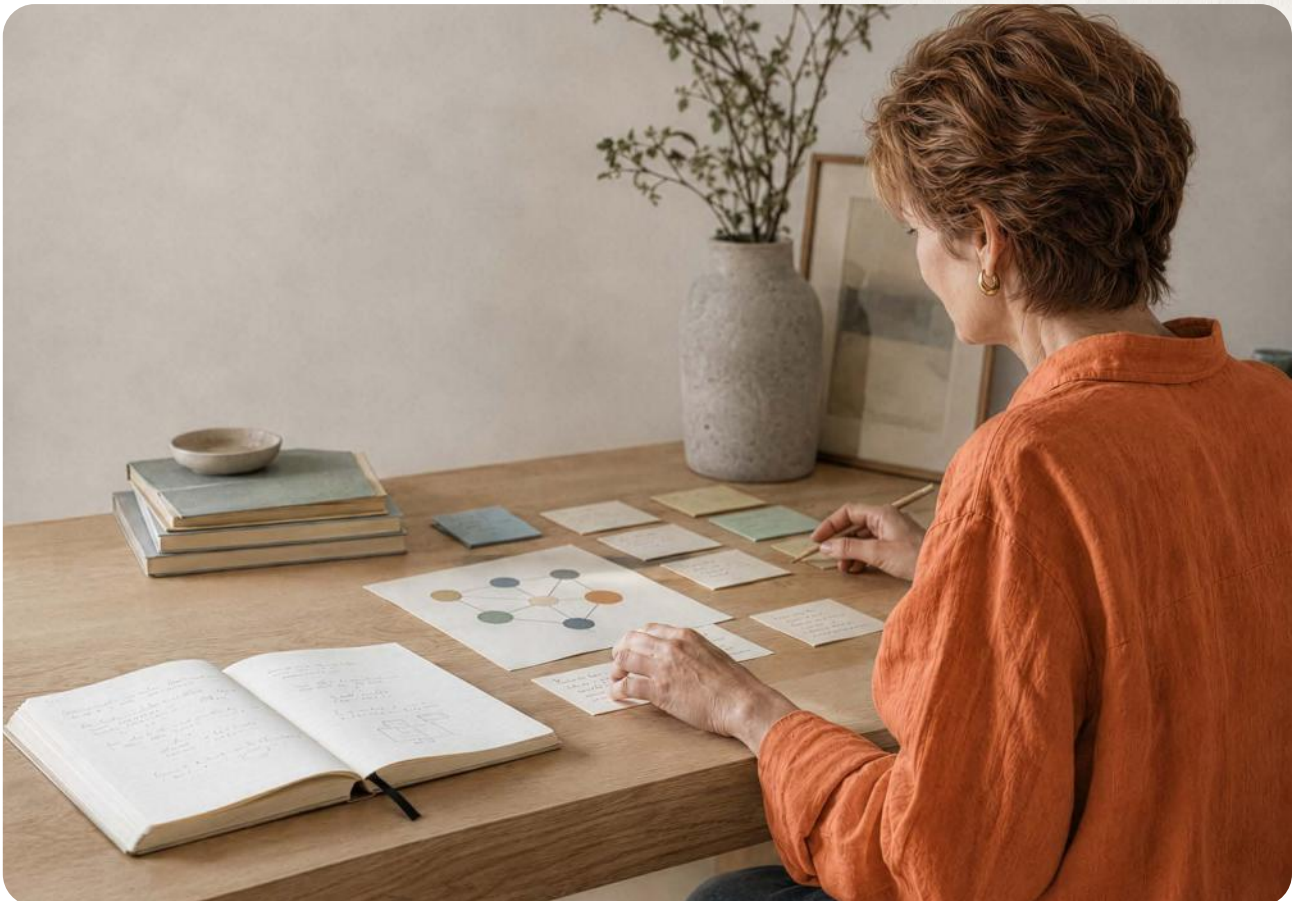
Understanding the different layers of preparation helps create a story that blends our unique personalities with carefully crafted art. The result keeps readers asking for more.

Mental

Each one of us develops writing tendencies and preferences according to how our minds are wired through life experiences and our innate nature. No writer ever feels confident using another writer's method of novel prep. We take valuable information and tailor it to fit our needs. The outcome is the same, but the method of achieving it differs.

“

Study your personality type to discover how you learn best and find ways to strengthen your craft. Overcome challenges with methods designed specifically for you.



Research

Researching our stories tends to never end. Granted, we want more information, history, and culture for credibility and our characters' points of view, but the time comes when we need to apply that research to our story.

If you are looking for a research checklist and resources, please email me at diann@diannmills.com



Structure

- Some writers are outliners who spend hours and days outlining every facet of their stories.
- Some writers are seat-of-the-pants writers, also termed discovery writers or character-driven storytellers.
- Some writers are a hybrid of both.
- Some writers respond well to writing sprints.
- Some writers embrace flexibility.

Your structure doesn't determine the value of your story, but the method dictates the best way for your story to unfold.



“

Structure is valuable and weaves your story into one exquisite piece of art.

Environmental



“

Setting is the often-forgotten literary technique that subtly shows how a behind-the-scenes environment shapes and strengthens character.

PPS – Practical Preparation Strategies

Preparing to write your novel allows you to expand on the power of your imagination. Composing a treasured novel is like weaving a tapestry of colorful threads to create a stunning story. Each thread highlights the others, with none

having dominance, but always beginning with character.

Character is who the story is about. The hero has a goal to reach or a problem to solve and is met with obstacles along the way. The antagonist's goal is to stop the protagonist. Period.



“

August is a time of preparation for fall and then, begin. I encourage you to set aside time to determine the best way to prepare for your next novel.

The reader loses their hold on reality and becomes the character, vicariously living the story with the hero.

The plot or storyline is the hero's journey. The scenes build on each other while working their way to a dark moment when everything

is lost, except for what the hero learned in each prior scene.

Emotion, dialogue, setting, symbolism, sensory perception, and point of view weave through each scene, enhancing and showcasing character.

DiAnn Mills

DiAnn Mills is a bestselling author who invites readers to expect an adventure—where heart-pounding suspense meets unforgettable romance and faith shines through every challenge. Known for crafting gripping plots and richly layered characters, DiAnn believes every breath we take unfolds a story waiting to be told—so why not make it thrilling?

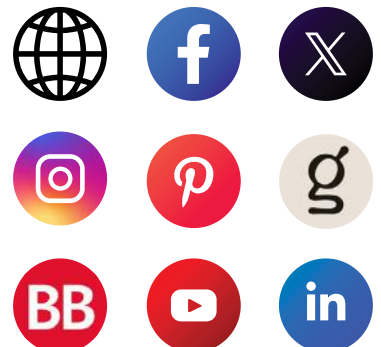
Her novels have appeared on the CBA, ECPA, and *Publishers Weekly* bestseller lists and have earned numerous honors, including the Christy, Selah, Golden Scroll, Inspirational Readers' Choice, and Carol Awards.

DiAnn is a founding board member of American Christian Fiction Writers and serves as Conference Advisor for the Blue Ridge Mountains Christian Writers Conference. She is also active in Advanced Writers and Speakers Association, Mystery Writers of America, International Thriller Writers, the Jerry Jenkins Writers Guild, Outliers Writing University, and The Christian Pen. Passionate about helping others succeed, she invests in writers through mentoring, book coaching, editing, and dynamic workshops she teaches across the country.

A self-proclaimed coffee snob who roasts her own beans, DiAnn enjoys diving into good books, experimenting in the kitchen, and unabashedly spoiling her grandchildren—whom she insists are the smartest kids in the universe. She makes her home under the sunny skies of Houston, Texas. ★



Connect with DiAnn for behind-the-scenes glimpses, writing tips, and lively conversations at





"Abernathy's worldbuilding is remarkable...
The characters are realistic and skillfully crafted...
a well-rounded book, especially for teen readers
looking for a book with a touch of fantasy.
A bewitching story with a charming cast and an
enchanted sea setting."

—Kirkus Reviews for *Indigo, the Deep*

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The Lone Star Literary Life



M A G A Z I N E



The Lone Star Literary Life Magazine

Editorial Calendar

 MONTH	 THEMES	 AD CLOSE	 CONTENT DEADLINE	 PUB DATE
JAN	RESOLVE	12-15-25	12-15-25	01-07-26
FEB	EXTEND	01-14-26	01-19-26	02-04-26
MAR	HOPE	02-11-26	02-16-26	03-04-26
APR	GROW	03-11-26	03-16-26	04-01-26
MAY	HONOR	04-15-26	04-20-26	05-06-26
JUN	EMPOWER	05-13-26	05-18-26	06-03-26
JUL	SPARKLE	06-10-26	06-15-26	07-01-26
AUG	PREPARE	07-15-26	07-20-26	08-05-26
SEP	WELCOME	08-12-26	08-17-26	09-02-26
OCT	THRILL	09-16-26	09-21-26	10-07-26
NOV	GATHER	10-14-26	10-19-26	11-04-26
DEC	INSPIRE	11-11-26	11-16-26	12-02-26



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