

MISTERWRITER'S BOOKS & PIECES MAGAZINE

BOOKS ♦ STORIES ♦ IDEAS ♦ INSPIRATION

Here Today!

Award-winning fiction author and
host of "TLC's "Wedding Island"



Gem of the Golden Isles Series
By Sandy Malone

- 1 - Escape to Jeckyll Island
- 2 - In Bloom on Jeckyll
- 3 - Treasure on Jeckyll
- 4 - In the Shadows on Jeckyll
- 5 - Christmas on Jeckyll

\$16 each
3 for \$30
5 for \$75

*Free tote bag with
the purchase of the entire series
www.SandyMalone.com

SANDY MALONE: From weddings to writing

*Also: John Goodwin, Nicole Fronek,
Tricia Copeland, Book Excerpts & more!*

www.BooksNPieces.com

SEPTEMBER 2026

FROM THE PUBLISHER:

Affordable Ads: Large Reach

Books & Pieces Magazine has always been about helping authors gain exposure.

But what you may not know is that we are also an excellent place to advertise because of our reach.

We have the magazine, website, our social media accounts (FB, IG, LI, TT), and extensive mailing list, all of which gives a reach of about 18,505 readers, not counting their family or friends with whom they may share content. In addition we have friends with large social reaches that also promote our magazine.

For this we should be charging a lot for advertising. We don't. See the rates on the next page. Every author could afford to promote their books.

Give it some thought and reach out if you would like to do so.

William G
william@booksnpieces.com

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MISTERWRITER'S BOOKS & PIECES MAGAZINE

BOOKS ♦ STORIES ♦ IDEAS ♦ INSPIRATION

SHOWCASE YOUR BOOK. REACH **REAL** READERS.

Get your book in front of thousands of engaged readers
in a beautifully designed, premium digital magazine.

AUTHOR FEATURE PACKAGES

BASIC FEATURE

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- ✓ 1 Chapter Excerpt
(up to 3,000–5,000 words)
- ✓ Book Cover Image
- ✓ Synopsis
- ✓ Author Bio
- ✓ Buy Links
- ✓ Included in PDF &
Online Edition



STANDARD FEATURE

\$100

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Newsletter
- ✓ Social Media Post



PREMIUM FEATURE

\$150

- ✓ Everything in Standard
- ✓ Priority Placement
(Near the Front)
- ✓ Larger Author Profile
- ✓ Interview / Q&A
- ✓ Additional Book Listing
- ✓ Newsletter Feature
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(Where Available)

Maximize your exposure with our
most premium placement.

+ \$50

Add a front cover feature
(where available).



CURATED CONTENT

We select quality books
our readers will love.



ENGAGED READERS

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avid readers and
book lovers.



PROFESSIONAL EXPOSURE

A magazine-quality feature
that builds credibility and
boosts sales.

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Thicker Than Blood

An interview with author Sandy Malone



Sandy Malone planned weddings in the Caribbean for 11 years with her retired SWAT commander husband before Hurricane Maria wiped out their company overnight. She left her mark on the wedding world with hundreds of expert columns in BRIDES, HuffPost Weddings, WeddingWire, and the "Wedding Reality Check with Sandy Malone" podcast. She is the author of "How To Plan Your Own Destination Wedding: Do-It-Yourself Tips From An Experienced Professional," and "The Gem of the Golden Isles" series.

Q: When did you start writing?

I started writing when I was little – I believe my first publication was a neighborhood newsletter written on a manual typewriter in Third Grade when I was home sick from school. I became editor of my high school newspaper, then I started an independent newspaper between 15 private schools in DC. I went on to become campus editor of *The Lantern* at THE Ohio State University. I graduated with a degree in journalism.

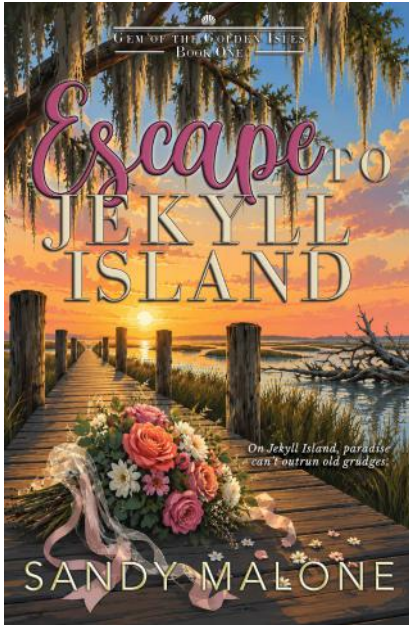
Q: Tell us about your published works. How did they come into being? What is

your latest book about?

My first published works (after writing for lots of newspapers, including the *Wall Street Journal* and *HuffPost*) were non-fiction books that were traditionally published. I wrote a DIY wedding planning book, and then I was asked to ghostwrite several books for other reality TV stars (including a *Real Housewife*). I started writing fiction two years ago and have published five books in the Gem of the Golden Isles Series: *Escape to Jekyll Island* (Book One). *In Bloom on Jekyll* (Book Two). *Treasure on Jekyll* (Book Three). *In the Shadows on Jekyll* (Book Four). *Christmas on Jekyll*

September 2026

(Book Five).



I'm working on a new series now that has a crossover with the Gem of the Golden Isles series. It's called Under the Oaks, and it takes place on St. Simons Island, next door to Jekyll.

I've also written a stand-alone novel that's completely different from my wedding planner series. It's about a patriarchal, society family where money and influence are more important than anything. *Thicker Than Blood* is told through the eyes of three generations of women in that family, two of whom develop

Alzheimer's. *Thicker Than Blood* will be released this fall.

Q: Before you begin writing a book, do you already have the plot and characters mapped out in your mind, or does the story unfold as you write?

I like to do a rough outline and figure out some of the character names before I start writing. I have learned that I need to know how a book ends before I start writing. The middle part writes itself as I go and I get creative and add things while I write, but I have to have a solid direction for the ending from the beginning.

Q: Do you have any favourite authors? If yes, please tell us who they are and why they inspire you.

I love Elin Hilderbrand, Nelson DeMille, Jennifer Weiner, Patricia Cornwell, and Susan Boyer. Elin and Susan write books about characters on islands, and I think I most closely identify with their writing. Patricia Cornwell and Nelson DeMille write the kind of intrigue that sucks me in.

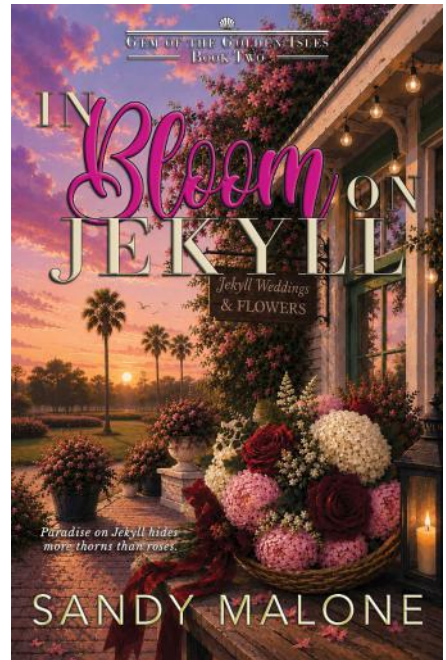
Jennifer Weiner makes me laugh. I think I'd like to hang out with her.

Q: When do you generally write? Do you follow a fixed schedule, or do you write whenever you feel inspired to put your thoughts into words?

I write when I have blocked out time to do it because I like to write for hours at a time with few interruptions. It really only takes me a couple of weeks to write a book; it's about having time to do it when I have so much work to do to promote the books I've already published. The writing is the easy part. A guilty pleasure, so to speak. Someday, I hope to be able to write all the time because I've sold enough books to pay somebody else to promote them!

Q: Where are you currently residing? Could you also share your educational qualifications and age?

I'm 53. My husband and I live on Jekyll Island, Georgia, a tiny island just above the Georgia/



Florida line. We moved down here to be closer to my mother after she was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease.

I grew up in Potomac, Maryland, and attended private schools. I graduated from Georgetown Visitation Preparatory School in Washington, DC, the oldest Catholic girls' school in the United States. I graduated from THE Ohio State University with a BA in Journalism in 1996 and went on to attend The Fund for American Studies' Institute on Political Journalism at Georgetown University.



Q: Was becoming an author a conscious decision?

I've always wanted to be a writer, but my mother discouraged it. She wanted me to get a job that I "could always go back to after having children." When I went off to college to study journalism, my mom was positive I was going "to end up writing obituaries on the overnight shift somewhere in the Midwest." I think she forgave me when I started writing the Politics.Net column at the *Wall Street Journal*.

Q: How do you balance writing with other responsibilities? What are your hobbies and interests apart from writing?

When I started writing fiction novels, I committed to it full time. But I only spend a little bit of life actually writing because most of my time is spent promoting the books I've already written. It's a massive, time-sucking job and it must be done or nobody will know about my books.



My husband and I live on a tiny island that's actually a state park, and I'm very involved in a local charitable organization and several other groups. I run a monthly Jekyll Island Girls Night Out that attracts quite a crowd. I also play tennis and love going to the beach with my husband and friends. We've definitely found our forever home here on Jekyll.

I used to do a lot of crafting (love to paint glass) at night but now that I'm an author, I don't have as much time for it because we travel constantly. We have six grandchildren that live in the DC area, and I have to do a lot of book events all

over the place to promote myself. We try to schedule multiple book signings into each trip and make time to see friends and family in between. I have a grandson getting married in Virginia in 10 days and we're doing a book event up there a few days before the wedding. We spend a lot of time road tripping because there's too much stuff for book signings to bring on a plane.

Q: Tell us a little about your works in progress. Do you intend to become a full-time author?

I'm already a full-time author. I'm working on another destination wedding planner series based on St. Simons Island, Georgia, that crosses over with my Jekyll Island book series, *Gem of the Golden Isles*. The first book will be out soon.

My first stand-alone novel, *Thicker Than Blood*, will be released this fall. The book is fiction, but I used it to explore my own journey with my mother's Alzheimer's disease.

Q: What would you like to say to budding authors who lose motivation when a few of their works do not perform well?

It takes a long time to get established in the publishing world. Very few people get big overnight. Patience is a virtue. But at the same time, you should be writing and publishing and taking constructive criticism to make your books better. I finally hired a professional team to help me get my books to the next level and the first thing they told me to do was change my book covers because they looked like travel guides. Ouch. But they were right. We're getting ready to relaunch the Gem of the Golden Isles series with new covers. I can't wait!

Q: If there is one thing you would like to change in this world, what would it be?

I'd like to see an intense plan by the federal government to figure out how to prevent Alzheimer's disease because it's becoming too common.

Q: What does a usual day in your life look like?

I spend my mornings doing housekeeping at my desk – responding to emails, filling book orders that came in through my website, and posting about my books on social media. Afternoons, I tackle the rest of my to-do lists and wish I was on the beach. If it's a book signing day, I get up early and triple check my list of things to bring. I put on war paint, try to arrive early, and pull out my biggest, friendliest personality for the day. I love meeting readers and I love personalizing books for them but it's the most exhausting part of being an author.

Q: Besides English, what other languages do you know or speak?

I speak Spanish, badly. I planned weddings in Puerto Rico for 11 years and many of my employees and vendors didn't speak English, so I perfected my high school Spanish and tried my best. I decided I was bilingual when I started dreaming in Spanish.

Unfortunately, I don't use it much living on the Georgia coast. And Puerto Rican isn't exactly the Spanish we learned in the classroom.

Q: If there is anything else you would like to share with our readers, please feel free to do so.

My husband and I starred in our own reality TV show on TLC called "Wedding Island." My first book series is about a young wedding planner who loses her job on Vieques Island after a hurricane and goes back to Jekyll Island, Georgia, to start over. It's not autobiographical, but it's based on my own experiences. Many of my readers have said they enjoyed watching "Wedding Island" after reading *Escape to Jekyll Island* because they had a better



understanding of where Tally was coming from, and what it was like to plan weddings on an island, seven miles off the coast of another island, in the Caribbean.

Find Sandy at:
www.sandymalone.com
Facebook: SandyMaloneWIV
Instagram: @sandynmalone
TikTok: @sandy.malone

Courtesy: Literary Harbinger

Why I Do NOT Ask Bookstores to Carry My Books, and Why It Makes Sense to Not Ask.

by William Gensburger

When I first started publishing, I would approach bookstores and have them order my books, which they happily did. I had prepared the book sheet with a cover image description and an ISBN number (not Amazon's but one I purchased; more on that in another post. I would approach the store manager with a copy in hand and my book sheet, and explain what the book was about and why it would sell in their store.

I had books placed in Barnes & Noble as well as independent stores. They would usually order 5 at a time. I always left them the copy I brought, signed. And one day I received a letter asking if I would be interested in placing at 150 airport bookstores. I was excited until the mail arrived

and IngramSpark had sent me back a book. And an invoice.

Now you have to understand how book distribution works.

First rule: bookstores will not buy from Amazon. Aside from their dislike of Amazon's monopoly, Amazon offers no wholesale discount for ordering. So they buy through a distributor such as IngramSpark, where they get a discount (assigned by the author during setup). This could be anywhere from 40% to 55%. Obviously, the higher the discount, the better. In addition, they get the right to return the books at any time, with shipping paid. This is to minimize the risk to the bookseller.

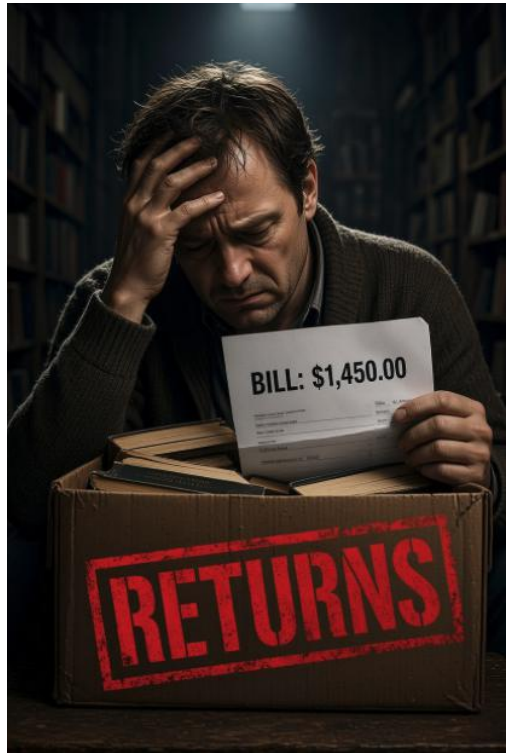
This creates BIG RISK for the author. Here's why:

For argument's sake, let's say your book is listed at \$16.99 and costs \$5.75 to print. You offer a 55% discount, which brings the wholesale price to \$7.64, and your cost is \$5.75, which means your royalty is \$1.80, a sad royalty amount to be sure. The bookseller orders 10 copies. **Your royalty is \$18.00**

You also select whether you want returned books destroyed or sent to you, or no returns allowed. If you select no returns, it is unlikely a bookseller will order your book. At first I thought I could sell them myself if they came back to me, so I opted for return to me.

The bookseller sells 5 copies and **returns 5 copies** to Ingram. Ingram sends me the 5 copies and charges me an adjusted return. Some copies are damaged. I cannot resell these.

5 copies x wholesale rate
(since the bookseller paid



that and is refunded), plus postage (approximately \$1.50 per book. That means $5 \times 7.64 + \$7.50$ (postage). **That means I am billed \$45.70** for the returns,

Remember I earned \$18 in royalty, **so I am in the hole \$27.70.**

And that is for **ONE** bookseller. Imagine this happening across 150 airport bookshops? Could you survive that loss?

I couldn't. I declined the offer.

So what is the solution to this problem?

There is a clean solution.

Do not sell to bookstores through IngramSpark without making some drastic changes. You can do signings, but do not convince the store to buy. Instead, do the following.

- Drop your wholesale discount to 40-45% and **select no returns** on IngramSpark. The bookstore will not order it **UNLESS someone comes in and orders for one**. Then they will order the one copy.
- Adjust the price on Ingram, if needed, so you get a royalty equal to Amazon.

Example: List price \$17.99
less 45% discount = \$9.89;
less cost \$5.92 leaves a
royalty of \$3.99 with NO
RETURN option. This is
lower than my Amazon

royalty.

Adjusting the price to \$18.99 with a 45% discount means wholesale price is \$10.44, less cost \$5.92 leaving a royalty of \$4.52.

BUT, you say, no one will buy from Ingram then. Maybe. But if someone goes to the bookstore to buy it, it is what it is. Otherwise, and most people do this, they look to see if it is cheaper on Amazon and order from there. Either way, YOU win.

ANOTHER OPTION: More difficult to make work.

Buy **wholesale copies** from Amazon, usually less than IngramSpark, and sell to the store directly.

If your book author copy is \$3.50, order 10. Shipping is a flat \$8 so \$43 for 10 books or \$4.30 per book. Still cheaper than Ingram. You create a contract for the store (not a chain store) to take X number of books at 50% wholesale and right of

return. Net payment 30 days.
 $\$16.99 \times 50\% = \8.50 less
your cost \$4.30, meaning
your profit is now \$4.20 per
book. And you have a store
relationship.

INDIE vs BIG PUBLISHER

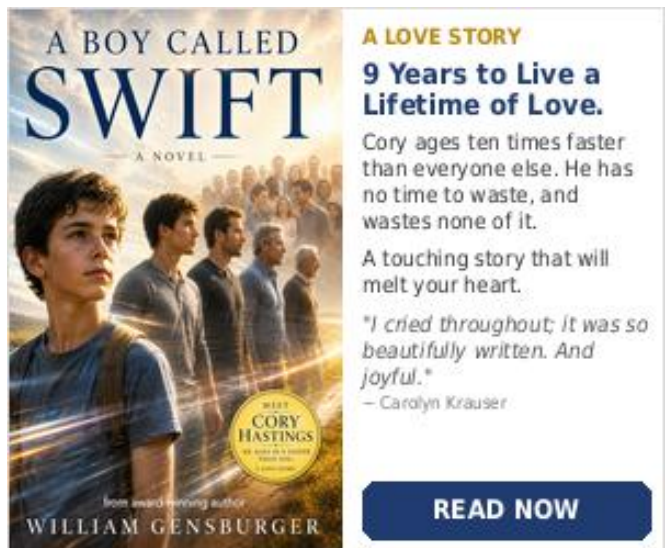
Big-name authors with
publishing contracts do not
have to worry about this.
They have an advance
against sales. If books are
returned, publishers
remainder them out. The
author is not charged. Big
publishers have better
distribution channels that
include Costco, airport
stores, chain
stores, and so on.
Daniel Silva
doesn't sweat his
returns. He has his
big advance and
gets to work on
the next book.

As much as being
an indie author is
good- faster, full
control,
distribution of

your book- it is always the
tricky part. Hopefully this
helps you navigate where to
sell.

I have followed my own
advice. With the bulk of sales
coming from Amazon
(70%+) I have listed
IngramSpark as suggested
above. I still find books sell
there. I no longer get
returns.

In another issue, I will
discuss KDP Select
(Amazon's exclusive for
ebooks) versus wide
distribution. There is a lot to
consider but what do the
sales figures show?



September 2026

Writers of the Future

An interview with John Goodwin

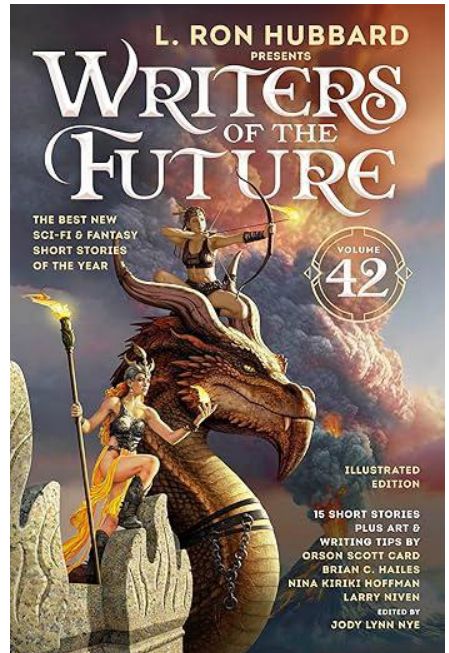


John Goodwin, President Galaxy Press, has been involved with book publishing since 1986, initially publishing all the works of bestselling author L. Ron Hubbard, and from 2002 focusing on his fiction works which includes the internationally acclaimed Writers of the Future anthology, now completing its 42nd year. He is host to the globally syndicated Writers and Illustrators of the Future Podcast, now in its seventh year. He has been a board member of both the Audio Publishers Association and the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce.

Q What would you say is your strength as an author?

I am the publisher of Writers of the Future and host of the Writers & Illustrators of the Future Podcast and my strength is in continuing the legacy as first announced by L. Ron Hubbard in the opening essay in volume one, "A culture is as rich and as capable of surviving as it has imaginative artists....It is with this in mind that I initiated a means for new and budding writers to have a chance for their creative efforts to be seen and acknowledged."

Q What is your favorite part from your book 'Writers of the Future Volume 42'?



As the publisher, it is meeting the writer and illustrator winners and hearing their story on how they created their story/art, and what it means to



have won this competition. I have a better feel for the significance when I look at the art and read/listen to the story.

Q How do you handle literary criticism?

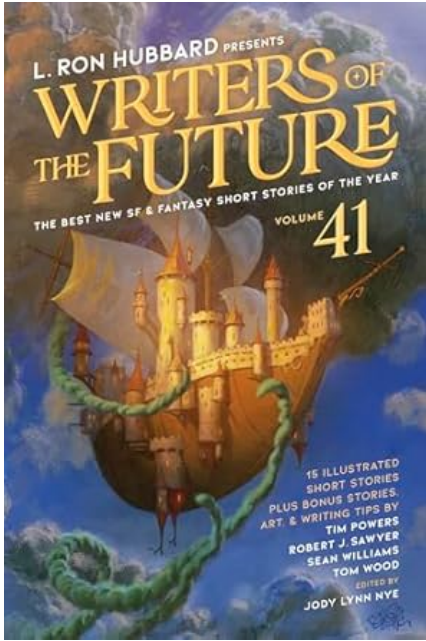
I accept and appreciate honest criticism. Of course I prefer praise for the books. But if someone doesn't like one of the stories, then as long as they are not hateful about it, I accept that they do not like that story or type of story.

Q What do you like about audiobooks?

They provide a different dimension to reading a story. I usually have a print book, at least 2 eBooks, and an audiobook going at any given time. With my podcast, I read a book a week usually. The audiobook is strictly pleasure as I read much faster than listen.

Q How has the experience of writing and publishing a book influenced your perception of yourself?

I feel good when I can help other writers and artists achieve their dreams.



Q What, in your opinion, are the most important elements of good writing?

For fiction writing, story is king. A reader will forgive a lot of writerly sins if it is an excellent story.

If it is an excellent story and it is also well-written, then that is all the better. If you are going to present known technology in your story, make certain you are accurate.

And lastly, if you think you can simply put it out there and they will come, you are sadly

mistaken. There were over 5M books published in 2025 and discoverability has become your second biggest challenge following having written a good book.

Q What is your work schedule like when you are writing?

I am a book publisher and I only work half days – meaning 12 hours/day. ;)

Q What is the significance of the title 'Writers of the Future Volume 42'?

It is the 42nd year of publishing winners of the international Writers and Illustrators of the Future Contests. This year we surpassed the 1,000 writers and illustrators published in the series. We have had winners from 52 countries, entries from over 175, and thousands of entries each quarter. The podcast has over 4M listens per episode. The forum has been #1 the past 3 years in science fiction writers.

The Contest was founded by L. Ron Hubbard and he directed that it continue being funded.

So there is no entry fee, no age, ethnic, nationality, or any other requirement other than you can't be a pro (defined on the website www.writersofthefuture.com) and it is judged blind by several of the biggest names in science fiction and fantasy writing and illustration. All the judges ever see (until the book is published) is the story/

illustrations and a number assigned to it.

Q What did you want to be when you grew up?

A fireman or cowboy, then when a bit older I wanted to be a city engineer. But then I found that helping people was the most fulfilling so have been doing that for most of my life.

Courtesy Sassy Reads



Grab a **FREE** copy of my first short story anthology: **Distant Rumors**, 10 acclaimed stories, each with a different style but all compelling and with interesting characters.

For example: **The First and Final Thing** about a wealthy man who gave away his fortune when he was diagnosed as terminal, with less than six months to live. The story starts after 6 months, when he is not only alive but totally healthy. This one is an homage to Hemingway.

“With his ability to **transform the commonplace into the extraordinary**, Gensburger delivers a **sophisticated collection** that will stay with the reader for a long time.” ~The Prairies Book Review

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September 2026

Book Excerpt

COMING SOON

THE
PEOPLE
APPLES
OF
SWEETWATER
FIELDS

NO ONE EATS THE FRUIT.
EVERYONE HAS A SECRET.

ONE SECRET
BECOMES DEADLY.

WILLIAM GENSBURGER

After 10 years away, Edwin Ransom returns to Sweetwater Fields with his fiancée because she wanted to see his birthplace. But what they found instead, would ruin both their lives forever.

His name was Edwin Ransom, and in the thick June heat the shuttle van carried him and Claire the two hours out from the regional airport, along back roads that narrowed with every mile, past hayfields gone gold and a reservoir that flashed silver through the trees and disappeared again.

The driver was old, gray stubble along a heavy jaw, a flannel shirt gone soft with washing though the day was warm enough that Edwin had rolled his own window down an inch. The man had tried conversation twice in the first hour — asked where they were headed, though he already knew, asked if they'd been through this part of the state before — and Edwin had given him short answers both times, and by the second hour the driver had stopped trying, and the van had settled into the low hum of tires and country radio turned down almost to nothing.

Claire slept against the

window most of the second hour, her head tipped, her hand loose in her lap with the engagement ring catching the light every time the road curved and the sun found it. Edwin didn't wake her. He watched the mile markers instead, and the old stone walls that ran along the fields on both sides, low and gray and built by hands two hundred years dead.

He knew this road. He hadn't been on it in ten years, but the body remembers roads the way it remembers stairs in the dark, and some part of him had been steering it in his head from the moment the van left the highway.

Claire stirred beside him, her eyes opening slowly, disoriented the way people are disoriented waking up in a moving car.

"Are we here?"

"Almost."

She sat up, rubbed at her eyes, looked out at the fields going by.

The town limits sign came up on the right, small, green, the paint gone chalky with weather.

SWEETWATER FIELDS, POP. 940. Beneath it, in an older, hand-lettered style that didn't match the rest of the sign, someone had added ESTABLISHED 1871, the letters uneven, the kind of thing painted once by one man a long time ago and never touched up since.

The road became Main Street without any particular ceremony, the shoulder narrowing, sidewalks appearing, brick storefronts rising up close on either side. Claire leaned forward against her seatbelt to see better.

"Edwin. Look at this place."

He looked. Awnings in faded stripes. A barbershop with a pole that still turned. Flower boxes under the windows of the pharmacy, red and white geraniums, not a dead bloom among them. A church spire further down, white against a sky gone the pale, scoured blue of high summer.

"It's pretty," Claire said. Then, quieter, almost to herself, like she was correcting something she'd said too quickly: "Too pretty."

The van carried them on, past the grocery, past a beauty shop

with gold script on the window, past the police station with its flag hanging still in the windless afternoon. The smell of apples had been with them since the town line, faint at first, one thread among the ordinary smells of a small town in June — cut grass, hot asphalt, somebody's charcoal grill starting up early.

It was only as the buildings began to thin out again, Main Street giving way to the last few houses before the road curved south, that the smell thickened all at once, the way a radio station comes in clear after miles of static. Claire had gone quiet, watching a low stone wall come up on the right, half-buried in ivy, running the last stretch of the road before it turned away from the street and out of sight.

Behind it, the ground rose gently, and behind that, orchard — row after row of apple trees, more trees than a town this size could reasonably need, fanning out and back from a single tree at the center of it all, a tree so much larger than the rest that it seemed to belong to some other, older species entirely, its branches heavy

and drooping under the weight of fruit gone red-black at the shoulders.

It was the second week of June. That tree had no business bearing fruit at all, let alone fruit like that.

"Is that the orchard? From the smell?"

"Cemetery, mostly. Orchard's part of it."

"They keep an orchard in the cemetery?"

"Always have."

She didn't ask anything else. The van slowed, and Edwin saw where it was slowing for — a two-story building of dark stone directly across the road from the cemetery wall, older and heavier-looking than anything they'd passed on Main Street, set back behind a short gravel driveway. It was the last building before the wall took over the whole west side of the road, the last thing in town, it seemed, before the town stopped being a town and became this instead.

"Sweetwater Inn," the driver said, the first thing he'd said in over an hour. He pulled in slow, gravel crunching under the tires,

and brought the van to a stop close by the front steps.

Edwin got out first. The gravel under his shoes was scattered, unevenly but everywhere, with dead leaves — brown, curled, brittle enough that a few of them crumbled where his heel came down. He looked up. No trees close enough to the drive to have dropped anything, nothing except the orchard across the road, and orchards did not send their leaves a hundred feet across open asphalt, not in June, not ever. He looked at the leaves a moment longer than the thought deserved, then went around to help the driver with the bags.

The driver set the last of the suitcases down on the gravel and straightened, working a hand into the small of his back. He looked past Edwin, at the wall directly opposite, and at the tree rising up behind it, close enough now that its shadow would reach the inn's own windows by evening.

"Regional's the only pickup point from here," he said. "You call ahead when you're ready to go back. Don't just show up expecting me sitting there waiting on you."

"We will," Edwin said. "Thank you."

The driver nodded, but he didn't get back in the van right away. He was still looking at the wall, at the tree, the way a man looks at a thing he'd rather not be looking at but can't quite make himself stop.

"Be safe," he said finally, in a voice gone gravelly with age or cigarettes or both. "Don't let pretty towns fool you." He looked at Edwin when he said it, not at Claire, like the warning was meant for one of them specifically and he'd already decided which. "They all got their secrets."

He said it plainly, without drama, the way a man delivers a piece of information he considers simple fact rather than warning, and then he got back into the van, and pulled around, and was gone back down Main Street the way they'd come, and did not look back once.

Claire watched the van go, then turned, taking in the building behind them and the wall across the road from it in the same slow sweep. "We're staying right across from it."

"Only inn in town."

"Of course it is," she said, and it wasn't quite a joke.

The porch ran the width of the building, boards bowed slightly in the middle from decades of weather, a row of rocking chairs facing the street that didn't look like anyone had sat in them in a long while, though none of them were broken and none had been removed, as if the inn were still furnished for guests who had simply stopped coming, and nobody had gotten around to admitting it.

Above the door, a neon sign spelled SWEETWATER INN in tired red letters, humming faintly. As Edwin watched, the second E flickered, went dark, came back, went dark again, on some rhythm of its own that had nothing to do with the letters around it.

He pushed the door open and held it for Claire.

Inside, the air was cooler, and smelled of old wood polish and something underneath that, cigarette smoke gone into the walls over so many years it had become simply part of the air rather than a smell in it. A woman

sat on a stool behind the front desk, positioned so her eyes were level with the guest book laid open in front of her. She was old — how old, Edwin couldn't have said with confidence, somewhere past seventy and looking every year of it — and she held a cigarette between two fingers, burning low, a good inch and a half of ash curved at the tip and somehow, impossibly, still holding on.

She didn't look up right away. Edwin set the bags down.

"We have a reservation," he said. "Ransom."

The woman's eyes came up, and they went to Edwin's face and stayed there, moving over it slow and unhurried, the way a person studies a photograph they haven't seen in years, checking it against a memory to see what's changed.

"Non-smoking room," Claire said, glancing at the cigarette, then up at the ceiling tiles, gone the color of weak tea from decades of exactly this.

The old woman didn't answer that. "You that Ransom boy, ain't you?" It wasn't a question, and she didn't wait for him to answer it as

one. "Ain't seen you round here since your mama died."

"That was a long time ago," Edwin said.

"Ten years." She said the number flat and exact, the way a person says a number they've been keeping somewhere close at hand, waiting for a use for it. The ash on her cigarette trembled and held. Her eyes moved to Claire, to the ring on her left hand. "And you're his misses?"

Claire lifted her hand, and the light through the front windows caught the stone. "Almost."

The old woman looked at the ring a moment, the way she might look at a weather report she didn't much trust. "Always watch the ones you marry," she said, and reached beneath the desk without looking, and came up with a brass key, and slid it across to Edwin. "You find out their true colors after the honeymoon."

The key was stamped 13.

"We don't have no breakfast or nothing like that," she said, already turning back toward whatever she'd been doing before they came in.

"That's fine," Edwin said. "We'll

manage."

She took a long pull on the cigarette. The ash finally let go and fell to the counter, and she didn't glance down to see where it landed.

The stairs were narrow, carpeted in a pattern gone soft and indistinct with age, and creaked in the same two places on every step, so that by the fourth step Edwin had already learned the rhythm of it without meaning to. Room 13 was at the end of the hall, the last door, the numbers on it slightly crooked, one screw missing from the 1.

Inside, the air was close and still, and smelled the way old paper smells when it's been shut up too long without a window ever opened to let it breathe. Claire stopped just past the threshold, her suitcase still in her hand, and looked around the room slowly, the way a person looks at a used car they're already regretting having agreed to see.

The bedspread was a faded floral print, gone from whatever its original color had been to a uniform, tired rose-beige, the pattern only barely still legible.

The carpet held pale rectangles where furniture had once stood and didn't stand now, ghost outlines of a room arranged differently, a long time ago, by someone who no longer lived there to remember it that way. A single lamp on the nightstand between the two beds threw a weak yellow circle onto the ceiling.

"Edwin." Claire set the suitcase down on the end of the bed, carefully, like she wasn't sure she trusted the bedspread. "Is this really the only place?"

"Only inn in town."

"There's nowhere else. A motel out on the highway, maybe. Something with—" she gestured, a small helpless motion, at the room in general—"carpet from this century."

"I checked before we left. This is it."

She sat down on the edge of the bed, testing it, and it held, and she seemed to take some small comfort from that. "It's not that it's bad," she said, in the voice of someone building a case for herself as much as for him. "It's just — old. In a way that feels

older than old, if that makes sense."

"It's a hundred and fifty years old. Probably feels exactly as old as it is."

She almost smiled at that, and crossed instead to the window, working the latch free, and put both hands under the frame and shoved. It stuck, held, and then gave all at once with a shudder that rattled the glass in its pane, and warm air came in, thick with the smell that had followed them the last mile into town, stronger now, sweeter, close enough to taste.

Across the street was the cemetery wall, and behind it, filling almost the entire window, the tree — the same one from the road, red and impossibly heavy with fruit, close enough now that Edwin could pick out individual apples the unnatural size of a grapefruit, hanging low enough on some branches to brush the top of the wall.

Claire stood there a moment, looking at it, her hands still braced on the windowsill.

"You wanted to come," Edwin said, from behind her.

"You were coming for your friend's funeral. It made sense for me to be with you." She didn't turn around. "That's all it was."

"I might not have come at all, if you hadn't pushed for it."

That did turn her around. "You never talk about your childhood," she said. "Not once, not really, not in two years. I want to know everything about the man I'm going to marry, Edwin. Is that so strange?"

He crossed the room and kissed her before he answered, and for a moment the closeness of the room and the sweetness coming through the window both fell away.

"I love you," she said, against his mouth.

"I love you too." He drew back just far enough to see her face. "There weren't many good memories here. That's all it is."

She held his eyes a moment longer, decided to let it rest there for now, and turned back to her suitcase, unzipping it, laying blouses out across the bedspread with the brisk, determined efficiency of a woman who had resolved to make the best of a

place that wasn't making it easy for her.

On the nightstand between the two beds sat a small ceramic bowl, and in it, two apples.

They were enormous — the same impossible size as the fruit on the tree outside, red going almost to black at the shoulders, skin so tight and glossy it looked lacquered rather than grown.

Claire reached for one, turning from the suitcase without looking, the way a person reaches for fruit in a bowl without thinking twice about it.

"Don't," Edwin said, faster than he meant to.

She stopped, her hand still extended. "Why not?"

"Just — don't. Trust me."

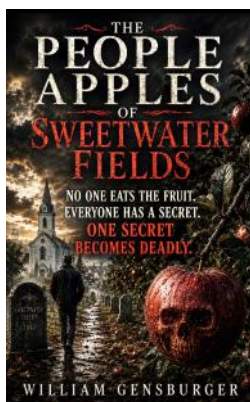
She looked at the apple instead of touching it now, studying its size the way she might study a number that didn't add up. "I've never seen apples this big in my life."

He told her, then, the way it had been told to him a long time ago, standing in this same room or one very much like it: the tree in the cemetery, older than the town itself according to some, and the

belief that had grown up around it and never quite died, the way beliefs don't in towns small enough to keep them alive on nothing but repetition — that because the tree grew where it grew, out of that particular ground, the souls of the dead went into it. Into the roots, and up through the wood, and out into the fruit.

Claire's mouth curved, not quite a smile. "You don't actually believe that."

"Have you seen apples that big before, anywhere, in your whole life?"



This book will be released in September. If you would like to be notified when it is available, please join William Gensburger's VIP Reader List [HERE](#).

ASK AI

Sometimes you have to consult the fastest, most comprehensive algorithm out there.

The question posed to ChatGPT for this issue was: **How will the expansion of AI affect the market for books and how will it affect the income opportunities for writers?**

ChatGPT: AI is likely to make the book business simultaneously **much larger and much harder for individual writers**. The key change is not that AI will eliminate books. It is that it is eliminating the scarcity of books.

We already have evidence that this is happening. A July 2026 NBER study found that monthly **e-book releases roughly tripled** between 2022 and late 2025, from around 100,000 per month to more than 300,000. The researchers found that AI-containing books represented more than half of 2025 releases in their data, while average ratings, usage, and sales ranking deteriorated. Established authors, however, performed considerably better than the flood of new AI-era entrants. That distinction is extremely important.

What I think happens to the book market

For most of publishing history, producing a competent 70,000-word novel required months or years. AI can now dramatically compress that process. As models improve, someone will be able to specify something like:

“Write a 75,000-word cozy mystery set in Savannah, female protagonist, humorous tone, romantic subplot, twelve chapters, similar audience to X and Y.”

The resulting manuscript won't necessarily be great, but increasingly it will be good enough. And one operator can produce dozens or hundreds.

Consequently, the supply curve for books is exploding while the number of hours people have available to read isn't.

That creates an enormous attention problem.

Instead of competing against 20 other new thrillers appearing this week, an author may eventually compete against thousands of algorithmically generated thrillers tailored to very specific reader preferences.

This is already one of the publishing industry's primary concerns. In a 2025 Book Industry Study Group survey of more than 500 industry professionals, **81% identified saturation from AI-generated content as a significant concern.**

Amazon is responding, but it hasn't prohibited AI books. Amazon KDP's current AI-content policy requires publishers to disclose AI-generated text, images and translations to Amazon, while AI-assisted work does not require disclosure. Amazon also reserves the right to remove material that creates a poor customer experience.

What happens to writers' income

I expect a bifurcation rather than a uniform collapse.

The middle of the writing market is probably in the most danger.

Historically, an author could make

some money simply by producing a reasonably competent book in a viable genre. That becomes considerably harder when competent prose becomes nearly free to manufacture.

And writers weren't making much to begin with. **The Authors Guild's author-income research reported median book income of only \$2,800 a year** across all authors, and about \$12,000 in book income for full-time authors in its 2022 data.

AI puts downward pressure on those numbers through market saturation.

But I don't think the best human writers disappear. Something different happens.

I expect the market to increasingly divide into three groups:

Unknown author producing generic books Severe pressure

Mass AI book producer Very high output, tiny revenue/book

Recognizable human author with audience Potentially much stronger position

The third category is where the opportunity lies.

"Human written" may actually

become valuable

There's an interesting countereffect developing.

Once consumers know that millions of books can be generated automatically, authentic human authorship becomes a differentiator.

The Authors Guild has already introduced a **Human Authored certification** specifically for this reason. Its 2025 annual report says the increase in higher-quality AI books is making readers increasingly wary of books they haven't received through recommendations or trusted sources.

That suggests something important about the future:

The author's identity becomes part of the product.

Readers won't merely buy:

A mystery novel.

They will increasingly buy:

The new mystery novel by an author I know and trust.

That is essentially what already happens with Stephen King, James Patterson, John Grisham, Colleen Hoover, etc. AI accelerates that

phenomenon down into the independent-author market.

AI will also make good writers more productive

There is another side that gets overlooked.

AI can dramatically reduce the non-writing costs of being an author.

A writer can use **AI for research assistance**, developmental analysis, proofreading assistance, metadata, advertising copy, audience analysis, social posts, newsletters, translations, audiobook preparation, cover concepts, book trailers and advertising experimentation.

BISG says AI is already being applied throughout publishing in editorial work, marketing, metadata, rights management, accessibility, forecasting and other areas.

So a human writer who previously managed one book a year might eventually manage two or three books while spending more time on actual storytelling rather than administrative work.

That creates a paradox:

AI will hurt writers who compete with AI, but it may

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THE FLOOD IS REAL.

- E-book releases tripled from 2022 to 2025.
- Over 50% of 2025 releases contain AI-generated text.*
- Average ratings, usage, and sales ranking are down.

*NBER Study, July 2026 (w34777)

THE OPPORTUNITY IS REALER.

- Readers will increasingly seek trusted authors they know.
- Human authenticity becomes a premium.
- Writers who build audience and use AI as leverage will thrive.
- Your voice. Your stories. Your connection. Irreplaceable.

THE MARKET WILL SPLIT INTO THREE GROUPS

1. UNKNOWN AUTHORS WRITING GENERIC BOOKS



Severe Pressure

Competing with thousands of AI-generated books. Harder to be seen. Harder to earn.

2. MASS AI BOOK PRODUCERS



Very High Output, Tiny Revenue Per Book
Lots of books.
Little connection.
Commoditized content.

3. RECOGNIZABLE HUMAN AUTHORS WITH AUDIENCE



Strongest Position

Trust. Loyalty. Backlist.
Direct relationships.
Multiplying opportunities.

“The author's identity becomes part of the product.

Readers aren't just buying a book. They're buying you.

AI IS YOUR LEVERAGE—NOT YOUR REPLACEMENT

Use AI to handle the heavy lift—so you can focus on what only you can do.



RESEARCH



DEVELOPMENT & EDITING



PROOFREADING ASSISTANCE



MARKETING & ADS



NEWSLETTERS & CONTENT



TRANSLATIONS



AUDIOBOOK PREP



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AND MORE...

AI handles more of the work. You create more of the impact.

THE OLD EQUATION



WRITING ABILITY



PUBLISHING



MARKETING



AUTHOR INCOME

THE NEW EQUATION



WRITING ABILITY



DISTINCTIVE VOICE



REPUTATION



AUDIENCE OWNERSHIP



MARKETING



AI



AI LEVERAGE



AUTHOR INCOME

BY ~2030, EXPECT:

- ✓ Far more books.
- ✓ Lower average sales per title.
- ✓ Smarter AI-generated content.
- ✓ Harder to discover new authors.
- ✓ More reliance on recommendations, influencers, trusted reviewers, and author brands.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Don't compete with AI on producing content. Compete on being human.

- ♥ Build genuine connections.
- 👤 Own your audience.
- 🚀 Leverage AI to scale your impact.
- ★ Turn your authorship into an asset, not just a book.

YOUR VOICE.
YOUR STORIES.
YOUR LEGACY.
IRREPLACEABLE.

WRITE. CONNECT. CREATE. LEAD. *That's your edge.*

substantially help writers who use AI as leverage.

The economic shift I expect

Today the economic equation is approximately:

Writing ability + publishing + marketing = author income

I think it is becoming:

Writing ability + distinctive voice + reputation + audience ownership + marketing + AI leverage = author income

Writing skill remains important, but it won't be sufficient.

And "audience ownership" becomes especially important. An author with 10,000 genuine email subscribers has an asset that somebody uploading 200 AI novels doesn't automatically possess.

That means mailing lists, direct reader relationships, websites, appearances, interviews, book clubs and recognizable branding become substantially more valuable.

There's another consequence: backlists become more important.

If someone discovers an author and likes one book, that person's

other books suddenly have credibility that anonymous AI-generated titles don't possess. Ten or twenty books by a known human author can therefore function as an interconnected economic asset rather than twenty unrelated products.

Where I think this ends up by roughly 2030

I would expect dramatically more books to be published, substantially lower average sales per title, increasingly sophisticated AI-generated books, greater difficulty discovering new authors, and stronger reliance on recommendations, influencers, trusted reviewers and author brands.

At the same time, successful authors will operate increasingly like small media companies rather than people who merely write manuscripts.

They will monetize novels, audiobooks, direct sales, subscriptions/memberships, special editions, courses, speaking, licensing, adaptations and their existing intellectual property.

So I don't think the economic future for writers is necessarily bleak.

I think the economic future for someone who writes a book, puts it on Amazon and waits for people to find it is bleak.

The writers with the strongest prospects will be those who establish a recognizable human identity, build a direct reader base and use AI aggressively for everything it does well without allowing it to replace the thing readers ultimately associate with that writer—the voice and stories.

For an established author with a substantial backlist, this actually presents a potentially significant opportunity. The strategic question changes from "How do I sell more copies of this book?" to "How do I turn my authorship, readership and entire catalog into an asset that AI-generated competitors cannot easily reproduce?"

EDITOR NOTE: While much of his makes sense, one has to factor in popular authors like James Patterson who turn out a large volume of material with coauthors, as more of a competition than AI. With publishers limited by the number of new titles each year, the already-small market will get smaller.

Alternative means of reaching



audiences will be needed for self-publishers. Perhaps groups of writers forming cooperatives to maximize their mailing lists would be effective.

I do not see AI as evil. I do see using AI to write your work as a cheat, especially given the new AI checkers, even though they are not accurate. One AI checker proclaimed Genesis in the Bible as 75% AI.

My co-author, JC Ryan and I have started to implement a new disclaimer at the front explaining that we write the books, but we do use AI for research development, and final proofing (after a paid proofreader). It is, after all, just a tool to be used.



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The Interview Mindset

by **Nicole Fronek**

A conversation, touchpoint, sync, whatever it is officially labeled in the calendar invite, it is an interview. The dialogue that unfolds during the time together is for you as much as it is for the organization. Where the fit might be right on their side, it may not suit your needs, or vice versa. Such an assessment early on is key to save time for both parties, but the process is necessary to determine chemistry as well as ability. In-person or virtually, interviews can be reframed to a source of excitement, as opposed to stress. Simon Sinek reflects on this concept, sharing observations when Olympic athletes are interviewed.

In his YouTube video, *Nervous vs. Excited* (Sinek, 2018), he shares how the script can be flipped on approaching difficult situations. When viewing the video, I immediately considered the value of this mindset when preparing for an interview. When the unscripted moments of interaction surfaces, to offset the 'deer in headlights' expression, the following key items, understood backwards and forward, can make the difference between sounding confident to unprepared. Hearing when you can start, rather than, we'll get

back to you, might be the matter of demonstrating your personal brand and leadership slogan throughout a few experience-based talking points.

For added context, a personal brand is what is preferred to be known for and intentionally reinforced through words and actions. A leadership slogan, whether applying for a lead role or not, offers a polish and uniqueness many do not bother taking the time to create. An identity statement should closely align with personal branding, and strengthen it as a sort of supportive element. Lastly, experience-based talking points provide opportunities to share specific examples of how you can resolve challenges they have based on learning in previous scenarios. Through storytelling, results are demonstrated bringing



Books & Pieces Magazine

contents from your resume to life.

Equally important, of the three, the storytelling portion shapes the majority of the conversation. Such narratives allow appropriate timing to showcase knowledge of industry language and proficiency. Including how you led and worked with others to achieve objectives, supporting your approach to achieve productivity as a collective. Role model behavior is always in vogue and as such, sought after far and wide. Rather than sharing how accomplished you are growing sales revenue, share a success story that highlights an uptick in sales from a recent promotional idea executed within a division. Examples offer anchor points in the interview and generate added interest if your abilities.

Reflecting on the start of my professional journey, asking for interview advice commonly resulted in an emphasis of learning about the company – stock ticker, location of the headquarters, annual revenue. General details readily available online have lost the spotlight in conversations. Such information is good to know, especially when roles require a physical relocation, but such points rarely come up. Repositioned the importance of high-level company

particulars to an emotional intelligence perspective, I have equipped myself with information surrounding company culture. This shift has led to an evaluation of fit before engaging an organization to persuade recruiters of my ideal candidacy.

Another topic worth exploring is that of internal advancement. Conversations that come into play when succession planning is necessary offer a range of wildcards. From interim backfills to concrete integration, how far your career could go will vary, but the important item to remember is that your name is on the list. Your track record is evident and the associated credibility has turned into an invitation. Being familiar, available, and interested present a trifecta of benefit for the organization. A potential advancement interview should be entered with confidence as well as a touch of humility.

Answer questions relying on your known qualities the team, manager, or client have come to expect. There may be some mental gymnastics to work through when confronted with a panel, or group interview, but remaining excited, not nervous, will radiate in expression and word choice. Those at the table may feel energized in return, and therefore eager to learn more. An exchange in positive enthusiasm will

maintain momentum. When individuals lose track of time, the interview may feel like just a conversation - this is the moment when you may find your last comment in the conversation to be, yes, I'd like to move forward.

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About the Author



Nicole Fronek, “The Coach” and CEO of Two Horse Productions, consults for Fortune 100

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WHAT'S DRIVING OUR OBSESSION WITH DARK FANTASY?

by Tricia Copeland

Have you been in a bookstore lately? Seen the dozens of shelves filled with dark fantasy romance novels? Are you following the romantasy craze that seems mostly fueled by a craving for dark subject matter? Well, if you haven't, I'm not sure where you've been. But for those of us who follow genre crazes, we've noticed. Even my friends who self-reportedly are not readers have jumped in hook, line, and sinker. And by that I mean they are hooked on everything dark magic, dark romance, dark creatures, characters, plots, and storylines inside romantasy books and are sinking their teeth into every title they can get their claws on. But why?

I'm not a psychologist, and I didn't ask AI to tell me why we're flocking to this fantasy inching towards horror romance craze. I love losing myself in fantasy everything, probably much more than the average person. I've watched *The Vampire Diaries* series, inspired by L. J. Smith, at least twenty times in the past five years. I've read Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series three times and watched the movies more times than I want to admit. I've been obsessed with Charlaine Harris's inspired *True Blood* series. But I tend to lean towards an ostrich mentality, and this is completely the norm for me when it comes to uncomfortable world events. But what about everyone else? What is the allure?

Kingdom Journals - Realm Chronicles Saga



Let's break this down. We all remember twenty-twenty, right? I won't list all the losses and emotional turmoil we've endured lest you stop reading this article and run to the bookstore for your next dark romantasy fix. How does dark romantasy satiate our need for escape so well? Because it's the perfect prescription. First, it's fantasy. There are no vampires, werewolves, witches, or ghouls that can actually enslave us, drain our blood, or steal our souls. The plot lines can't occur in real life. Therefore, although

dramatic and dark, they're not going to make us lose sleep. Second, it's romance, with the promise of a forever happily ever after. And third, it's the premise of power. The romance in many instances finds women stepping into more dominant, sex-positive roles, and claiming their power.

This is why I believe dark fantasy romance has become such a craze. It's the perfect escape and prescription from our daily onslaught of the outside world. Dark fantasy lets us surround ourselves with fantasy, intrigue, drama,



darkness, lust, and power when we feel most vulnerable. It tantalizes us with the what-ifs and immerses us in fantasy worlds where the humans somehow, even given the nightmarish creatures of the dark realms, prevail.

Tricia Copeland

Tricia is the best-selling and award-winning author of the *Kingdom Journals* and *Realm Chronicles* series. Her characters include witches,

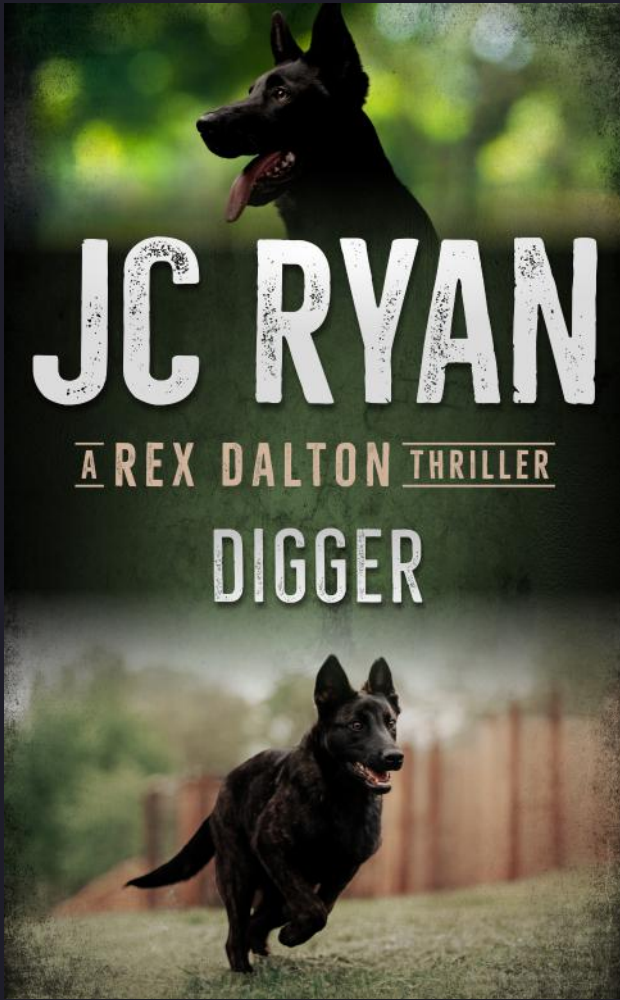


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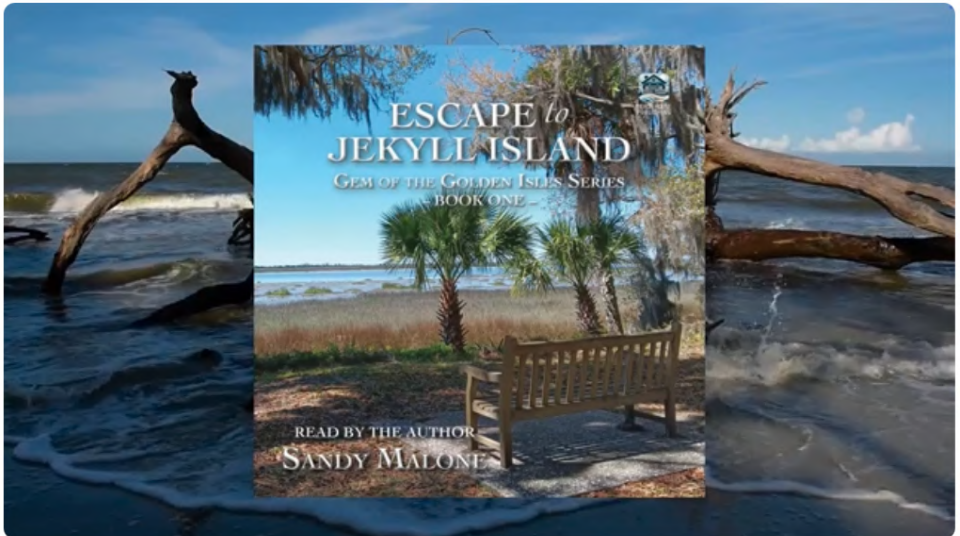
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