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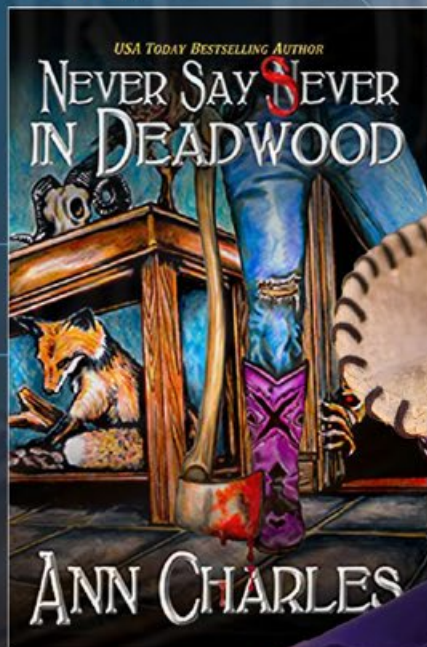


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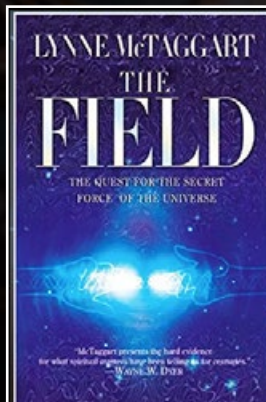


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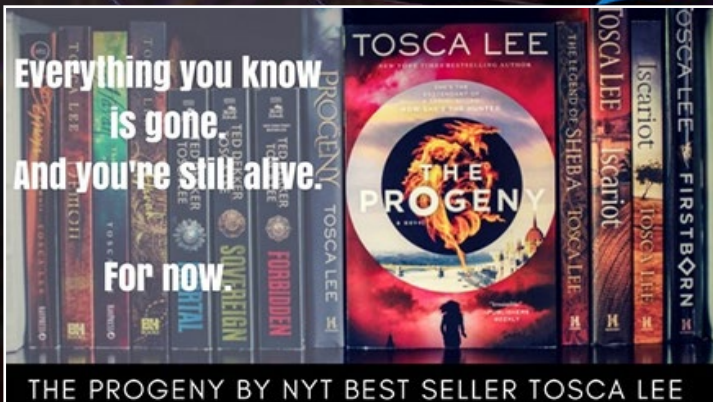


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from the publisher

# INK DROPS

## Are You Ready for the Shape of Your WRITING?

In our August issue, we introduced a new section: **WRITING TIPS**. These are tips, articles, suggestions all designed to help you with your writing.

While these are mostly designed for new writers, you would be surprised to see how many established writers make the same simple mistakes. The reason for this is that once we get comfortable with the process, we tend to glide over simple mistakes. Our eyes get lazy, and we see only what we wish to see.

*This is apparent in many ways, and the real question you should ask is how obvious errors are to your eyes.* Like the two errors in the previous sentence. Did they jump out at you?

Grammatical nuances are also difficult for many writers. The use of commas is another with some authors strictly following guidelines, while others ignoring all but the most basic of punctuation. Who is correct? It depends on who is reading. Or is it whom?

In our many interviews, most authors say they tend to write everything first and then edit carefully. When asked why, most answers have to do with getting stuck endlessly editing a section rather than working on finishing their manuscript. Finishing a manuscript is the enemy of most writers. Complacency, stagnancy,

frustration, self-doubt, self-loathing; these all play a part in work not getting finished. And if you do not finish your work, you are not really a writer, are you?

If this makes you feel bad—don't. We are all guilty of this at some point in our lives. Like so many authors, I have binders filled with stories started, ideas for novels that fizzled after the first chapter, books that reached the two-third mark and idled in apathy with the author no longer enthralled by the premise.

Perhaps I will finish these at some point in my career, I remind myself. Or perhaps these bits will be fodder for critics after I am no longer alive, especially if I can produce at least one smash-hit!

Or perhaps my heirs will go through the contents shaking their heads at what the old man was thinking before discarding the contents and keeping the nice leatherette binders.

### Like thieves in the night

We write because we have to write. It's not a want. It is a 'have to' obsession, playing with ideas, words, and tying it together with research, angst and passion. Like thieves in the night we develop and hatch, scheme and connive, manipulate reality to suit our ends and maybe, just maybe, find that what goes on paper is

actually darn good, our 'fix' if you will. For the moment. And then we find another nugget that attracts our attention. At least, that is my excuse. What's yours?

"You should write because you love the shape of stories and sentences and the creation of different words on a page. Writing comes from reading, and reading is the finest teacher of how to write." — Annie Proulx

This issue features USA Today bestseller Ann Charles, teacher turned children's author, Diann Boehm, and gamester and author, Tim Ahrens.

Short Stories from S.A.A Rivzi, Joshua Packard, and Tyree Campbell....

Write well.



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# Blue Baboon

by S.A.A. Rizvi

A man, not so good-looking, made a fist and slammed the reception desk at the airport.

"Look, I demand a window seat," he said.

"Sir, all the window seats are booked. I'd be happy to give you the seat next to a window seat but at the moment, it's quite impossible," the receptionist said.

Suraj Singh, male servant of Badal Mian, the famous law professor at Cambridge University, listened to the English rattling in his ear.

"Sir, what's wrong?" Said Suraj Singh to Badal Mian.

Badal Mian, who had brought with him Suraj Singh to go along to London for purposes of housekeeping, sighed. An explanation would warrant an effort at translating into Hindi what the man had said, and besides, Badal Mian didn't desire any attention direction toward him at this time. Something twitched somewhere in his body and he turned to stare at Suraj Singh who had given him a tonic at home before they left which would give them both a sort of spiritual protection from evil spirits that might haunt the plane and cause it to fall onto land.

Suraj Singh, when the receptionist called the two of them to the fore, threw the big box he'd taken in place of a suitcase

onto the weighing scale. The receptionist's voice was so laden with disgust at Suraj Singh, who had oiled his entire head with mustard oil and combed it so that his hair parted right in the middle, that Badal Mian had to go toward the receptionist's ear and whisper that Suraj Singh was accompanying him to London, or wherever the hell Cambridge is. The memory of his village pricked Suraj Singh's mind as he practiced some English words he'd acquired at home just for this occasion. He formed his lips to say, 'Hello, how do you do?' to the reception lady but something in him didn't allow the words to come to his tongue. He bent his spine to lift his big box and straighten and align it against the metallic wall of the reception but ripped his too-tight coat when he bent a little further to catch a glimpse of the world beneath the reception lady's skirt. Embarrassed, he stood again and looked laughing at Badal Mian who had simply gotten angry at this act of impropriety. Badal Mian asked his servant to stand away as he took both of their passports out and thumped

them one-by-one on the desk.

"This one's overweight," said reception lady with a look toward Suraj Singh.

"Suraj Singh, what have you put in there? Stones?" Badal Mian turned angrily.

"Books, spiritual books, sir. And a bunch of food items, like bis-cuuts and gulab jamun. Want me to give you some of them?"

"I want you to empty this box of unnecessary items right now," Badal Mian said.

"Done, sir."

Suraj Singh cracked the box open and stood whispering prayers. Inside the box, he'd put the Gita, the Quran, the Bible and the Torah, all wrapped in exquisite fashion in silken cloth, along with a large cassette player and some audio recordings of meditations and motivational talks by gurus and saints. Underneath this layer lay a box of sweets and biscuits which Suraj Singh took the pleasure of devouring right at that instant; he offered a gulab jamun dripping in caramel to Badal Mian but Badal Mian refused.

"Chuck all the food items away. We don't have any need

for them,” said Badal Mian.

“Sir, my mother packed the gulab jamuns for me. I’ll eat these here,” Suraj Singh said.

“Alright, do it quickly.”

Badal Mian was climbing the stone-steps up to their apartment when he fell and hit the back of his head against the edge of a step and died. Suraj Singh tried to call for some help, rushing onto the cold London streets and shouting,

“Dead. Someone help. My master’s dead.”

Suraj Singh wished with his thumping heart that this turn into a dream, a nightmare even, something he could awaken from, but his prayers wouldn’t work. He held Badal Mian’s body and shook the guts out of him but this only further put him into the yarns of trouble because now he had his master’s blood on his hands.

Badal Mian’s body had become wood. Suraj Singh tried breathing into his mouth in an attempt to resuscitate him but the wicked smell of gases formed within threw Suraj Singh against the wall behind him; ‘What did he eat?’ Suraj Singh exclaimed.

Suraj Singh had never seen a toilet like the one in Badal Mian’s bedroom; he didn’t appear very wise in knowing the correct way to sit over the ceramic bowl so he attempted to lift his body up and over the seat and to place his dirty feet over the bowl, sitting with his hips lifted and his knees bent. A smile came across his lips as he angled into the void beneath him and started to move his bowels. The worry began as he got himself tangled between wiping as the English did, or to attempt to fill the tiny lota sitting below him with water from the tap a few feet across. He wiped. But then, he didn’t really feel convinced with himself after he’d wiped, so he tip-toed, his pants sunk at his feet, toward the sink where he filled the lota with water. He turned his hands into small fists when he saw a bird that’d perched on the windowsill, chirping and whistling, a small blue-bird, the likes of which Suraj Singh hadn’t seen in his life.

He settled into Badal Mian’s home, making a cup of tea for himself and reminiscing the moments of sheer joy he’d involuntarily spent in the company of Badal Mian. Turning toward the bedroom,

Suraj Singh thought of the time his father had also involuntarily spent in the company of Badal Mian, taking care of him as if he were his own son.

“Look, beta,” his father had said to him when he was just a young boy. “We are not fated to have the wealth and the privileges of a rich man like Badal Mian. We are just servants, and we hold ourselves in high esteem because we get to serve such a man of status and wealth in our community. A near miracle, it’d be if, by chance, we get even near the current status of our master. Humming-birds can’t envision the heights falcons reach, and we are fated never to touch the limitless skies they soar into.”

As he visualized this moment spent in deep reflection over their condition with his father, he looked into the mirror in Badal Mian’s room and surveyed his face in it. He resisted looking very deeply because, according to the saint he’d visited before embarking on this journey to England, it brought bad luck. He saw a bit of dirt of his skin and rushed to the nearest toilet (there were a bit too many in Badal Mian’s home) and washed his dirty face with soap. The lemony-orangey scent of the soap pleased Suraj Singh and so he washed and scrubbed himself in the bathtub behind him, taking good care not to splash his dirty skin-water onto the woolen rug below.

The tub had a shine on its surface, and Suraj Singh attempted to see the quality of its material by tapping it a few times.

“Ah, pure marble,” he said.

The blue bird came and perched over the window again. Suraj Singh wanted the bird to sing like it did yesterday so he formed his lips to whistle, and whistled until the bird sang, and this made him happy; at least someone in the world listened to this guy.

“Here birdie, birdie,” he said.

The bird flew. The flapping wings of the bird made a sound so delicate and so pleasing to the sensitive ear of Suraj Singh that he felt the need to sleep. He hadn’t had the chance to sleep since he’d come to this mansion because he couldn’t see himself sleeping a good sleep with a dead body lying face-up in the big entrance hall. He didn’t want himself facing the very real and scary world outside, so he sunk into the cushions on the big

sofa in the living room and tried sleeping. He startled himself when he slept on his right hand and made it stop working. His mind hadn't slept; his body felt like someone had pushed all the oxygen out of it. A fear lay somewhere deep inside him, a fear that said he could get blamed for murdering his master; all the evidence suggested that Suraj Singh murdered him. The body, the empty mansion, the malice of a disloyal servant toward his master, had been reasons to doubt Suraj Singh's credibility. A mirror-image to his father, Suraj Singh hadn't even thought of deceiving Badal Mian in any way. But today, all the odds had been stacked against him. A servant, who'd jumped with his master on an airplane to London, poor, recently seen the wealth he could steal, had taken full advantage of the opportunity and pushed down the stairs his master. This could've been the case forwarded by whomever caught Suraj Singh; provided they did find the dead body and provided Suraj Singh remained on the premises when they found the dead body lying face-up in the big entrance hall.

And so, Suraj Singh took a large glass and filled it halfway with water and drank the relatively cool liquid to invite positivity into his life. As he drank, he panned out all his plans of a life lived in England with his master and took to the little balcony where he smoked a relatively dry cigarette which he couldn't remove from his thick lips because he sobbed so loud and deep that he forgot he had a menthol

hanging in between. He felt the cool air of a foggy London morning on his skin and began to open his gaze and to take in the scents of the fresh garden springing before him.

The mild and conservative people of his village would've destroyed every living cell contained inside Suraj Singh's body if they were given the news of the passing of Badal Mian. They had kept a close eye on Suraj Singh, who'd carried forth his dream of living in a foreign country with Badal Mian despite the evangelical wishes of his village members who considered every man who ever went outside the bounds of their village a treacherous villain to bring ill-fate to their community.

Anyway, he searched Badal Mian's room for a diary or something that would give him any information on colleagues or acquaintances who could come out and see for themselves what had taken place here. He looked inside Badal Mian's drawers and found nothing but research papers fixed to binders and a jelly-like substance that, when Suraj Singh applied to his fingers and face, felt wet and slippery. He saw the cover of a little book presiding over a little box on which he saw the picture of a couple having intercourse. He flipped through the pages of this little book noticing some of the pages had been folded at the edges. The rough feel of the pages that felt like a head recently shaven enticed Suraj Singh who took some time to digest the pictures of couples having sexual intercourse in various positions

on those pages. He feared the presence of God. The little book ended and on the last page, he found what looked somewhat like a dried rose. 'A dried rose?' Thought Suraj Singh.

"Ahem, ahem," he said to the dead-body lying face-up in the big entrance hall. "I found a rose in your book."

The dead-body lay stock-still. He saw Badal Mian's eyes, blue-green with a tint of grey, for a last time, before he shut his stiff eyelids. A memory of himself as a young boy entered his mind when the body began emitting sharp odors throughout the big entrance hall. Suraj Singh battled a rabid dog in his youth and killed him using a Swiss knife. He killed the dog since nobody would come and do the dirty job of killing a dog with a bone-deep infection themselves. A miracle would bring days of his youth back but noticing that a lot of time had went past him he swung into the present and embraced the venomous sting of it.

He, too, had fallen deeply in love, or infatuation, or whatever someone decides to call the feeling, once in his life with a girl for whom he killed the rabid dog. The girl ran into the neighboring village with a man so big and so tall he could fight off several wolves at the same time. A little bit of venom still poisoned Suraj Singh's heart from that time, filling it with a subtle resentment, but for the most part, he'd worn the feelings for the girl out. Every now and then, something would return him to the time when he had been in love with the girl, but only then would he



miss her deeply.

He had taken his bike to the neighboring village where the girl had absconded, found the little tavern where the big man drank his beer, and emptied a blue-black pen of ink on the big man's bike's seat, so that when the big man sat unknowingly on it, his butt would turn blue, and he would become the blue baboon of the village. The big man having the nose of a dog, he conjured eyewitnesses to the event of the inking and followed Suraj Singh, who had taken advantage of the rough roads and biked along a trail of stones and dry earth toward another small village to hide himself amongst fellow commoners in a market, and smacked the shit out of him with a cricket bat, to which Suraj Singh had to respond by showing his dirty teeth in an attempt to scare his girl's lover off. The news of the big man hitting with a cricket bat the butt of Suraj Singh was broadcast on local TV and radio channels, and this became Suraj Singh's claim to fame. The big man rushed into a local tavern to hide because now the police came menacingly after him, but Suraj Singh acted like the big man of the two and refused to press charges against the former big man. For a long time after, the streets became no-go zones when the former big man passed through, with people rushing into their homes fearing the reddening of their butts. A couple of years later, people were scared

still of exiting their abodes when former big man walked the empty streets, fearing again the reddening of their butts. A recollection of the event that took place years ago would bring fearful tears to the eyes of the villagers who couldn't fathom going onto the streets without at least wearing a protective shield around their butts in the event that former big man decided to come again with a cricket bat and smack their asses.

"Son of a bitch. He died on me," Suraj Singh now said. "My worst fears have come true."

Inside his heart, Suraj Singh knew no other way to escape this situation than to return to his homeland. He kept the little book he'd found inside Badal Mian's drawer, put the dried rose in between Badal Mian's lips, and went out the door. He hailed a cab to the airport, telling the cabbie to stop at a petrol pump

where he needed to relieve his bladder. A small tip later, Suraj Singh got onto the terminal of the airport, and carried with him the box he'd brought to the airline reception desk, asked the lady there for a ticket to India and stepped his first step on his journey home.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:



*S.A. Rizvi has previously published with [Kitaab.org](#) and has attended the MFA Creative Writing Program at The City College of New York. In 2019, he attended the University of Chicago's Writer's Studio. He received a BA in Philosophy and currently teaches at a school in Brooklyn, New York. Rizvi enjoys soccer and cooking.*

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**A CONVERSATION WITH...**

# ANN CHARLES

Ann Charles is a USA Today Best-Selling author who writes spicy, award-winning mysteries full of mayhem, adventure, comedy, and suspense. She writes the Deadwood Mystery Series, Jackrabbit Junction Mystery Series, Dig Site Mystery Series, Deadwood Undertaker Series (with her husband, Sam Lucky), and AC Silly Circus Mystery Series. Her Deadwood Mystery Series has won multiple national awards, including the Daphne du Maurier for Excellence in Mystery/Suspense. Ann has a B.A. in English with an emphasis on creative writing from the University of Washington and is a member of Sisters in Crime and Western Writers of America.

**B&P:** What are the similarities between archaeology, your youthful plan, and writing novels? And now that you are a successful author, did you retain any interest in archaeology?

**AC:** Writing, writing, writing—both archaeology and storytelling takes a lot of skill and time at the keyboard. The irony is that I opted away from being an archaeologist in my younger years because I felt like there was a little too much writing required. It wasn't going to be near as adventure-filled as Indiana Jones made it seem. Now, having over thirty published books in my rear view mirror, I roll my eyes at my younger self. Although, truth be told, the overwhelming number of bugs involved with many dig sites, along with exposure to the heat and humidity makes writing novels in the comfort of my home much more appealing, especially as I grow older.

However, I do still find archaeology fascinating. Not so much the procedural side of the career, but the adventure and discovery and historical enlightenment that comes with digging into the past. That is why I have a series starring an archaeologist heroine. I'm living vicariously through my character, and have a lot of fun researching the past along with her while planning those books.



**B&P:** Do you approach your writing from a “what if” perspective, and how does that affect your non-writing life?

**AC:** I live in a “what if” world 24/7 both on and off the pages. Being a natural born worrier, “what if” has hovered at the fringes of my thoughts whether I wanted it to or not. I do believe that this mindset can be beneficial when it comes to creating stories. It helps to open my mind to all sorts of possibilities for the plot, for characters, as well as for the left-brained side of the story writing business.

Take marketing. This beast is wily and constantly changing its colors. To stay ahead of the wave—or just somewhere near the top—you have to think forward and play out several “what if” scenarios. For example, what if I drop a few hundred dollars on a single ad and I don't make my money back? Another example might be, what if I invest a lot of time and money to change my covers for a particular series and it ups my sales by 25%? Will that mean I should change my other series' covers that seems to be doing okay as is?

This also plays out with my personal life. What if I choose to take a weekend off and binge a television series with one of my kids? How will



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that affect the deadlines I have set in place for the next book release? I'll stop there because I could "what if" us off into the sunset and drive everyone nuts.

I think it's important to find ways to take a break from the "what if" life. It's not easy, and I haven't mastered that quite yet, but I have figured out ways to take breaks now and then.

B&P: How do you balance writing and parenting?

AC: Not well, I fear. Ha! Seriously, it's tough. I have times when I feel like I'm doing a bang-up job, and then there's times when I think I'm crashing and burning.

One of the wonderful things about writing full-time is that I'm home a lot for my kids. I might be sitting at my desk working, but if they need me, I'm right there. I can adjust my schedule to fit in a school event or to run them to the store for an item they need for a project.

One of the harder parts about writing full-time is that I'm home a lot with my kids. That means I might be in the middle of an action scene where it's important to really be "in there" with the characters and one of my kids walks up to me and asks me if

I've seen their favorite shirt, yanking me out of the scene.

Mainly I try to juggle this career as best I can with motherhood. When they were little, I would wait to do a lot of work until they were asleep. Now that they are older, I can fit writing and author business in while they are doing homework. They've grown up with author parents, so to them, things like traveling for weeks over the summer for book signings and hearing their parents talk about characters as if they're real people is normal.

B&P: How would you describe your novels in one sentence?

AC: Character-driven stories sprinkled with humor, mystery, suspense, romance, supernatural elements, and whatever else feels right.

B&P: What techniques do you use to improve your skills?

AC: I study movies that I enjoy a lot. I'll watch them over and over—20 or 30 or more times. I'm a visual learner, so it helps me if I watch body language, listen to dialogue, study setting for emotional effects, imagine directing the movie and how I'd move the characters around the set, and imagine the music that would be playing during a scene. To focus on all of these different pieces, it requires multiple viewings. During certain parts of the film I might try to imagine how I would write that on the page and yet keep the pacing appropriate for the scene. Or, I might



jot notes on how I would show a certain emotion on the page that an actor was able to portray with a few lines of dialogue and subtle body movements.

Don't get me wrong, I also study my favorite books. I try to figure out what the author did to set up a laugh, to inspire me to fall in love with a hero, to make me really hate a villain. I note how the layout of words on the page can affect my mindset of a reader, attempting understand the cadence of a scene that moved at just the right speed. Note words chosen for showing emotions or describing a scene.

I don't tend to take classes on craft. For some reason, that shuts my brain down. However, when it comes to marketing and bookkeeping and other more left brain leaning topics, I enjoy finding articles on the subjects or listening to others speak about tactics and their experiments.

**B&P:** I've read that you have multiple series (5, I believe) running simultaneously. How do you keep that straight in your head?

**AC:** For me, keeping the different series straight is similar to keeping different people's lives and surrounding stories separate in real life. For example, one of my sisters has five children. When I talk to her, it's like entering her story world. Her children and their children all make up that particular series. I'm able to keep who and what straight, at least most days. The same can be said for one of my sister-in-law's family. I'm very interested in her children and their lives as well as her own life and how things are going. This is how I keep the different series separated in my head. Violet Parker from the Deadwood Mystery series might know the Morgan sisters from the Jackrabbit Junction Mystery series, but they each have their own whirlwind lives going on that are entertaining in their own rights. Sometimes one of the Morgan sisters will go north and show up in one of Violet's stories, or maybe a character from the Deadwood Mystery series heads south to Jackrabbit Junction, Arizona for a book. This is similar to real life where we have many crossovers.

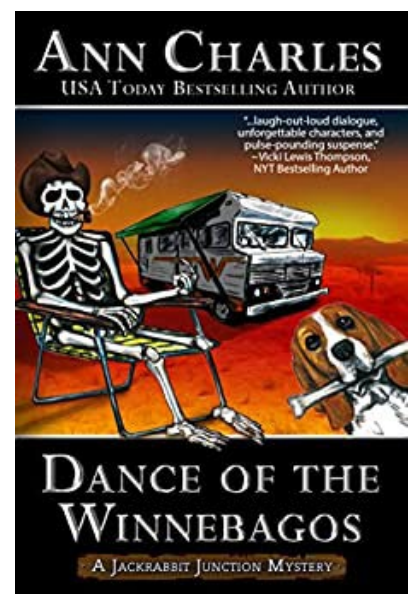
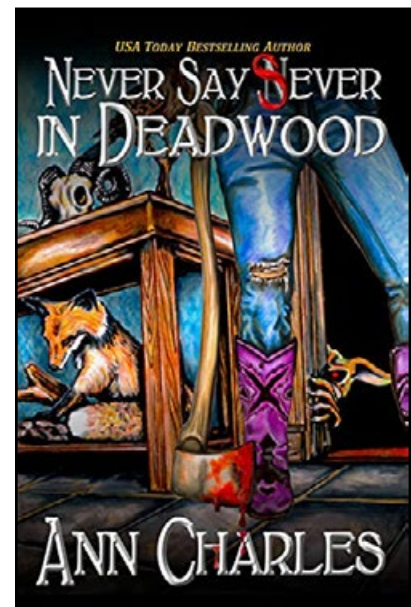
However, there are tons of details that I keep track of when telling a story that I can forget about

in real life without many consequences. Everything from eye color to a preferred perfume to a favorite drink for each character. This requires a database file and—for me—the help of a world keeper. Years ago, a wonderful woman walked up to me at a book

signing, mentioned having read my books, and asked if I'd like help keeping track of details within each series. I was thrilled to find someone who wanted to help with this task. Ever since, Diane Garland from Your Worldkeeper has been tracking all sorts of fine details on each book and character. She works for many authors now, sharing her left brain with several of us who write series books.

**B&P:** What did you do to find your storyteller voice?

**AC:** I kept writing in spite of rejections from agents and publishers. I didn't change my mixed-genre style even though publishers wanted me to pick one category and stay mostly within the walls of that particular box. It wasn't because I was being a







rebel, but rather it was due to accepting that my storyteller voice had a particular style and I was going to need to fine-tune it but stick with what came out on the page. This didn't happen overnight. I wrote my first book (using old fashioned pen on paper) almost twenty years ago. I landed an agent with my fifth full length novel. My fifth, sixth, and seventh books were rejected multiple times before I changed course and formed a small press to publish that seventh book (Nearly Departed in Deadwood) after it won multiple awards but still was rejected from a large publisher. With each book, I've worked to improve my ability to tell a story. Now, over 30 published books later, I'm still working to hone my storyteller voice. I think this will be a life-long learning process for me, sort of like perfecting a golf swing or pruning an overgrown forest into a beautiful park.

B&P: Do you have an agent?

Do you self-market? How did you get on the USA Today Bestseller list?

AC: Since I'm an "indie" (independent) author, I don't have an agent or a publisher to help get my books out to the public. That's not to say it's out of the question. I've contemplated taking on an agent and moving into the role of a hybrid author, but at this time that is not a path I'm interested in traveling. I do have an agent agency that I work with for two of my series in the audiobook realm. For the other audiobook series, I work directly with the narrator and we collaborate to create the files in audio.

I do self-market and some days that can be grueling. At other times, I enjoy experimenting with different marketing and promotional ideas. In the marketing world, things are shifting constantly. I'm required to learn new software, explore different styles of advertising, have a presence on multiple social media platforms. Marketing takes up 50% of my time more days than not. Writers who are aces at marketing and promotion do very well as indie authors. They understand how to build a brand and find new readers using various marketing methods—where to put their hard-earned dollars and what venues to avoid. I've learned a lot about marketing over the years. Some of this knowledge has come from reading books on sales and marketing, some of it came from watching what others are doing to succeed, and much of it came from my own experimentation

ending in some good ROI results and some not so good crash and burns.

As for the USA Today Bestseller title, that came with a mixture of years of writing the best books I could and promoting those titles to gain readership, plus landing an ad in the right venue for the right price. It also includes a little bit of luck at hitting the charts at just the right time. Make no mistake, there is a lot of hard work needed for an indie author to land on the USA Today Bestseller list, but many have done it.

B&P: What is a bad writing day like? Good writing day?

AC: A bad writing day is when I can barely get 200 words on the page, and everything that I have written feels flat and boring, and all I want to do is sit on my couch watching movies while eating Italian meringue buttercream frosting straight from the bowl by the spoonful.

A good writing day is when I easily crest 3000 words and the dialogue is funny, the narration is tight, and I don't want to stop writing even though my body is starting to get tired and my vision is growing blurry. Oh, and I'm still eating that buttercream frosting from the bowl by the spoonful, but for some magical reason the calories are melting away as I type merrily along.

B&P: What is the worst part of being a pro writer? Best part?

AC: The worst? Besides book-keeping, which is tedious for me at the best of times, probably

trying to juggle all of the different hats I have to wear when what I'd really love to do is just focus on writing stories. For example, in one day, I might work on promoting one book Online, create a sales invoice for a retailer's book order, write back cover copy for another book, set up the schedule for our annual Deadwood Fan Party, create some promotional products to giveaway at book signings, give a podcast interview, listen to a sample of an audio-book in production, and write a couple thousand words for a new book. It can be overwhelming some days, frustrating on others.

The best? Being able to make my own schedule and adjust it to spend time with my family. If I need to join my kids for a school event, I'm able to shift things around so that I can be there for them and then work into the evening to finish what needs to be done. The flexibility is wonderful and has allowed me to enjoy some fun field trips, volunteer for class events and parties, and spontaneously clear my schedule to spend time with them going to a movie, on a hike, or even on a day trip adventure. I also enjoy sitting at the table in the morning drinking coffee with my husband, sharing news headlines, and deciding when we want to get started working on book writing business. I have twenty-four hours in a day to accomplish what's on my to-do list. I love that I can choose when I do what.

B&P: If you started out again, what would you do differently and why?

AC: I would focus more energy on improving my craft rather than trying to write to a publisher's whim. When I first started, I was trying to write stories that would snare a contract with a publisher. Had I known that I'd find success as an indie author, I wouldn't have put energy into what is required to have a manuscript accepted by a publisher. I could have started learning about marketing and sales earlier, too, and focused on what would be needed to run my own business, rather than trying to write the perfect synopsis and query letter.

B&P: Advice for new authors? What is the most important thing for them to know?

AC: Remember that this is a long game. Perseverance is key. Rather than starting out thinking that you're going to write a book and be super successful right out of the gate only to be disappointed when things don't go as well as you'd hoped, keep in mind that success comes in steps for most. They don't call it "climbing the ladder of success" because you get to shoot to the top in an elevator (I call those few who manage that winning the author lotto). In reality, those who are doing well in this career have worked for years before being called "successful."

Also, enjoy your journey along the way—the awards you win, the reviews you receive, the readers you meet. Every author's journey is different. If you try to match someone else's successes, you'll soon fail and end up quitting altogether. I have a note on my refrigerator that says: Comparison is the true thief of joy.

B&P: Anything I have not asked you that you would like included?

AC: I write stories to entertain. I don't intend to change anyone's life one way or another. I just want to take readers away from reality for a bit, give them some laughs and maybe some chills, and then send them back to their lives with smiles on their faces and the gumption to continue onward and upward.

I think it's important to decide early on in your career what it is you want to accomplish with your writing. Many go into this field wanting to make big headlines or big money. That's fine if that's their goal. Knowing what you want to achieve with your writing career will help you decide which route to take on the road to success.

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# GYROSCOPE

by Tyree Campbell

Dear Towhomit,

I dove headfirst off the cliff this morning in what looked like a suicide attempt. A strong wind swept me up and deposited me back on the grass, several meters from the precipice. The others were aghast, of course; my father, especially. I'm the Heir to the Throne, so to speak. If there's going to be a Throne left. Why am I even here? It's my duty to...

The flap to the tent opened. Without turning around, Paul Barrow knew it would be his father. He stopped writing and waited, knowing the old man would gather himself first, letting his anger steamroll into an outburst. But he closed the diary and placed the pen beside it. Waiting.

A faint whiff of something fragrant graced Paul's nose, and he realized someone else had entered the tent behind his father. Not his mother; she left discipline and recriminations to the old man. The only other viable options were Liza Talbot or her daughter, Alexandra Sinclair. Unless, of course, one of the men had a secret he was willing to reveal, now that the hunting party was isolated and lost. Alexandra, then, Paul concluded. But why?

His father cleared his throat, and muscles knotted in Paul's shoulders. At forty-four, the old man was not really that old, but he was so called around CommEarth corporate headquarters in Atlanta. Paul even referred to him obliquely as the old man, although a sneer sometimes accompanied the reference. After another coarse "ahem," the question reverberated throughout the tent like thunder.

"Just what in the hell did you think you were doing?"

Still Paul did not turn around. "I should have thought that would be obvious," he said, his soft voice a sharp counterpoint to his father's inquiry.

"You scared the shit out of me," said Barrow. "Your mother as well. What were you trying to do, kill yourself?"

Paul knew it would do no good to respond with

the truth, but he made the attempt anyway. "I was trying to prove a point," he replied, and now stood up and turned around. As tall as his father's six-foot, but with far more brown hair, Paul had inherited most of his softer looks from his mother. Though he hardly looked effeminate, and certainly was nothing of the sort, his father continued to regard him as a creature of a weaker species. Even now, in the dim light of the tent, Paul felt the weight of his disrespect and disgust. You're going to succeed me as president and CEO? the old man seemed to be saying by his bearing and attitude.

Not if I can help it, Paul thought. But he had yet to summon the courage to say as much to him.

Behind Barrow and to one side stood Alexandra Sinclair, tall and slender and aloof. But now the expression in her dove-gray eyes was hard for Paul to read, in the shadow of his old man.

"And I suppose you're writing all this down in your journal," Barrow fleered, and wiped a sheen of sweat from his forehead with a dirty handkerchief. "Christ on a popsicle stick! What the hell would you have written, had you succeeded?"

The point was that I did not believe I would succeed, thought Paul. But he withheld the words, because they would only keep his father in the tent longer.

"It's a diary, Pop," he said instead, for the umpteenth time.

"Diaries are for sissies."

Paul's chest rose slightly and fell under the green jersey, his sigh inaudible. After a moment, silence won out. Barrow thrust the tent flap open and



left, leaving behind a “Bah!”

Alexandra, to Paul’s mild surprise, remained, tilting her head to one side as she regarded him with a curious expression. A smile toyed with the corners of her thin mouth.

“Am I in your diary, Paul?” she asked.

“No.”

The smile died stillborn. “Oh.”

Idiot, Paul told himself, after Alexandra ducked from the tent. We’re stuck here, and she’s the only female available for companionship. But the notion faded quickly; he had other problems to solve.

Sunlight heated Paul and brought forth beads of perspiration as he emerged from his tent. Along with his, the other four tents had been arranged in a circle, rather like wagons against natives in the Old West. Except they had yet to encounter any natives. He shaded his eyes and gazed out at the rolling savannah with its sparse, browning grass and its sprinkling of solitary trees; at the dense mixed forest on the hillside that bordered the encampment; and then, turning around, at the ocean beyond the cliffs and the narrow river that became a waterfall as it spilled down into it. The cliffs reminded Paul of the Cliffs of Moher on the west coast of Ireland, although these were but twenty feet high, if that. Near the precipice grew a copse of trees, and just landward of that rested what remained of the Cessna. The pilot, Roberto Dario, had been thrown clear and, presumably, over the cliff. They had not spotted his body in the rocks below—the

rocks toward which Paul had dived head-first without success.

It occurred to him that he had no sense of direction in this place. He might assume that west lay in the direction of the sun’s motion—the sun was in fact headed toward the horizon at the end of the ocean—but he had no confidence in that assumption. With a sliver of iron or steel he might contrive a compass of sorts, but they had not packed anything useful in that regard for a hunting trip. And the bag in which the compass had been packed was lost overboard along with the pilot.

Looking out at the ocean, Paul was aware of eyes on him, as if someone meant to prevent him from repeating his next death spiral. He turned his head slightly to look at the Cessna and the trees again. There on a boulder sat Adrian Skinner, who had been hired as the party’s hunting guide. Skinner was in his early thirties, black-haired and pale-eyed, and generally as silent as the zephyr that filtered through the leaves of the trees. He had a lean physique, like that of a bicyclist or a climber, and of the men in the party Paul felt the least threatened by him. The eyes Paul had felt belonged to Skinner.

But it was a woman who touched Paul’s arm. He twitched, and spun around, and found Alexandra standing within arm’s reach. The heat from the sun was as nothing compared to that which now enveloped him, yet it was the heat from above which focused her attention.

“We should find shade,” she

said, “like the others.”

“You’re afraid I’ll jump again.”

Despite misgivings, Paul let her lead him to a cluster of trees opposite the Cessna and well away from the others. For the moment, at least, she no longer wore an air of superiority that verged on haughtiness; she seemed almost human now. He thought perhaps she was beginning to realize that, a week after the crash, they might be stuck here a while, wherever here was, and that her only other option for companionship was the taciturn man sitting by the airplane. But it was an act, a façade; to her he would suffice until they were rescued.

He did not tell her that he doubted a rescue was forthcoming.

They climbed a gentle slope and finally seated themselves on the trunk of a tree that had fallen to land at a slight angle, she a little above him, as if it befitted her station. She was wearing what he surmised was the last of her clean clothes, a new pair of black jeans and an aqua pullover that exposed her already-reddened arms and shoulders. He was aware that she was not wearing a bra, and chided himself for even noticing. For even looking to find out. He switched gears, and wondered why she had brought him to this place, isolating them from the others. He was hardly attired to her standards; his own black jeans had worn through at the left knee, and the fabric over the right thigh was thinning. He’d worn the green jersey for the past four days. And his sparse,

youthful beard was beginning to show.

"I'm sorry," she said softly.

"Only because of your limited options."

She stiffened. "You needn't be cruel."

"We should be clear where we stand, you and I."

"You've made yourself clear," she groused. "But can we declare a truce?"

"A truce," he said, without enthusiasm.

"An armistice, then."

Her voice trembled, and Paul glanced at her. A sheen of moisture made her pale eyes glisten. The budding tears might be real, or they might be a ploy. Suddenly he found himself wanting to trust her, and to trust what he saw in her.

"An armistice," he agreed, nodding. "Tell me why."

Alexandra hesitated, and dropped her gaze to the patches of grass between her feet. Paul had no idea what might shame her, and wondered whether her superior demeanor might itself be a façade. In a trice she became to him a sympathetic creature—not weak, but burdened with normal human concerns exacerbated by their current plight. His right hand twitched; he wanted to reach out to her, to comfort her with a touch, but feared her interpretation of the gesture.

Her admission came out of nowhere. "Because I am alone, and I am frightened," she whispered.

Belatedly Paul understood. Two decades younger than most of the others, she'd had no one to talk to or to confide in. By nature distant himself, he had not encouraged conversation. Of roughly the same age, of course they should have gravitated together. He realized that now.

Sunlight through the foliage dappled her short golden hair, and tears still made her eyes gleam like silver in the broken shadows. He looked directly at her and said, "Cougar."

Startled, Alexandra blinked. Her lips formed a soundless question.

"You're five months older," he explained. "I won't make twenty-one for another month."

She barked a laugh. He thought it was good to hear her laugh, and better that he had made her do so.

"Tell me what frightens you," he suggested.

A brief silence followed, while she composed herself. "It's . . . little things," she said presently.

"I . . . the day after we crashed, you looked up at the sky and said the sun was wrong. It was almost orange, and seemed smaller. My father said it was just pollution, like the horizon at sunset at Los Angeles. But that wasn't the sun, that was the clouds, and they were brownish orange. I've seen them."

"Wait till you see New Jersey. Such a lovely vermilion sky."

"Oh, I wouldn't want to go there." She brushed imaginary tresses from her cheek, and went on, "You also said this place was wrong, all wrong. I've been thinking about that. What did you mean by it?"

Paul did not respond

"Is this . . . are we on another world?" she asked.

"How could we be?"

"I don't know, I don't know. Our smart phones don't work. But the airplane's radio still works, and Adrian says it's not picking up any transmission at all, not even static fuzz."

"Alexandra," he said, and paused. "May I at least save a couple of syllables by calling you Sandy?" he asked. Or better yet, Alex, he thought, annoyed with himself, but it was already too late to change.

At first she frowned, almost glaring at him. "Just not in front of the others," she relented.

"Sandy, you stayed awake during the flight across the Caribbean. Was the plane diverted? Did aliens beam us somewhere?"

"You're making fun of me," she pouted.

"Not at all." He plucked a leaf from one of the trees and examined it without interest. "The truth is, I've had parallel questions. But no answers. Thus my comment about something all wrong."

They heard a shout. John Talbot was returning from what he called a recce, a term from his few years in the military. A plumber by trade, he had improved his lot in life when he became Barrow's hunting partner. He was carrying a fabric shopping bag from which protruded a long branch, and he was waving for attention. "I found berries," he declared.

"Oh, good," said Paul, sotto voce. "We can eat."

Alexandra laughed, but added, "We'll need to arrange a food supply if we have to stay here much longer."

Paul stood up.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"I want to look at the ocean again," he told her. Her eyes widened. "You're not . . ."

"No, of course not." He held out his hand, and she took it, pulling herself to her feet. "I want to check something."

They strolled toward the precipice, and halted when they were able to see the rugged shoreline below. It stretched in either direction as far as they could see. Directly below, the waves worried at clusters of dark rocks that had fallen from the cliff in years and centuries past. Salty froth flew almost high enough to reach them.

"No wind," said Paul. "Wind kept me from falling, but now there's not even a breeze."

She touched his hand, and took it. "But what does it mean?"

"All in all," he said slowly, feeling his way, "it means we are marooned here by design."

"Seriously. By whom? Why?"

Paul noted that she took his remark at face value, without the sarcasm he was accustomed to from his father. He shook his head. "I don't know. I do know that I should have fallen onto the rocks." He turned to her. "On the way, we flew west of the West Indies; that was the flight plan. You were looking out the window. Did you see a volcanic cloud? A plume forty thousand feet high?"

"N-no. What . . . ?"

"Because Pelee on Martinique had been erupting for the past four days."

She shot him a worried look. "But what does it mean?" she asked again.

"It means we never made it to Guyana." He glanced around. "I don't know where this is. Somewhere within fuel range. Colombia, maybe."

"Not another world?"

Paul felt helpless against the question. A misdirected flight? Another planet? Either way, he had no facts to tell him how, or why. All he had was a sun that looked odd, and a gravity that could be neutralized by wind. And a volcanic eruption that had not been spotted. He told her as much.

"A radio that works but doesn't seem to reach anyone," Alexandra added.

"We've been brought here for a reason," said Paul. "I think I proved that harm will not befall us. It won't be allowed."

"It sounds like a Survivor episode."

Paul chuckled. "That's easy enough to disprove. You're not wearing a bikini."

"I didn't even bring one."

"Well, darn."

A voice called to them. His father's voice. It boomed enough to frighten seagulls, Paul thought . . . and stared out at the ocean again. Where were the seabirds? He added that to the list of Odd.

"Coming," he called, and led Alexandra back to the others.

The gathering—Paul could hardly call it a meeting—was run by his father, Marcus Barrow, CefuckingO. It consisted of announcing a decision made without Paul's input, or Alexandra's, either.

"We are marooned and incommunicado," began the elder Barrow, without preamble. "We don't know where we are. All this means we may be here for quite a while. We have supplies for twelve days—the anticipated duration of this hunting expedition—and seven of those days have already passed. We have weapons for our protection. We have shelter. We have clothing. We have running water of a sort. We can gather dry wood and make fire."

Barrow paused a moment to look at each person in turn. "What we do not have is a food supply. However, we have made a start in arranging one. Jack here has located a berry patch some distance away."

"About half a mile," Talbot threw in.

"He proposes to plant some canes around here," Barrow went on, "and I agree."

"That's a bad idea," said Alexandra. "Berry vines are very intrusive; they'll take over. We'll have to move our site before long."

"Which shows what you know, baby girl," snapped Talbot.

After a sharp glare at the girl, Barrow continued. "We'll start a rudimentary garden. We'll have to find things that are edible, of course. Other berries; nuts, perhaps some fruit. Game, if we can find it. Eggs—."

"Do you see any birds?" Paul broke in. "Have you seen any here?"

"There are always birds, sonny," said Talbot, his tone dismissing the question. "We'll find them."



Paul shook his head slowly, but made no reply. Barrow said, "We'll all have to search for edibles. I want teams of two; in case one gets into trouble, he or she will have help." His gaze took in both Paul and Alexandra. "That includes the two of you," he added, directly to Paul. "It's about time you started to pull your own weight."

Alexandra's hand on Paul's arm soothed him. He decided to discount the notion of a façade; she was the girl she presented herself to be. He did not rise to his father's jibe. Instead, he stood up, and Alexandra with him.

"We'll go look for those edibles now," he announced, and they headed back toward the forest. He ignored the elder Barrow's snide remark about "only looking for things we can eat."

When they were out of earshot, Alexandra asked, "How long have you put up with that?" "All my life."

After a moment, she said, "I hate my step-father."

"I agree with you about the berries," Paul told her. "But nobody's listening."

Trees forced them to make an erratic trail along the slope; they ducked, and pushed branches aside, and scanned the ground for anything that might provide some sort of nutrition. They found only sparse vegetation, leaves, and twigs. Here and there they lost their footing, and caught each other. Already sweat dampened their shirts. From time to time Alexandra rubbed her bare arms, and Paul noticed that she had acquired several minor scratches during

their walk.

"I think there's some aloe in the plane," he said.

"I hadn't planned on quite this much adventure," she admitted. "Mom and I were supposed to go shopping in Georgetown while the men were out hunting. Your mom was going with us." She smiled ruefully. "I suppose you were going with them."

"Reluctantly," he told her.

"I've field-dressed a deer. I've no need to do anything like that again. And I haven't noticed any deer trails here yet, or any other trails, for that matter. No burrowing animals, no animal signs, no feathers, nothing."

"Let's add that to your list," she suggested.

"Already done." A breeze tousled his hair. "Hey, feel that?"

Alexandra's own short golden hair was already in disarray, and her loose aqua pullover was fluttering despite the extra weight of perspiration. "Where'd that come from?" she said.

Wind caught at Paul as he pulled Alexandra to the lee side of a broad tree trunk. "It actually reminds me of February in Chicago," he said. "Except this is a lot warmer. Sandy . . . I don't think we can go any further. This is about as strong as the wind that blew me back to shore."

Worry wrinkled her brow. "I don't understand."

He pointed toward another tree in the direction from which they had come. "Let's go over there," he said, and curled an arm around her shoulders.

"Hold onto me."

"Watch that hand."

He moved it higher on her

shoulder. "Sorry."

"Don't be. You can try again tonight, and see what happens."

Again his face warmed, hotter than the sun, and remained so even as they took shelter behind the next tree. Here the wind lessened, gently soothing them, and she turned into the arm around her, and set her cheek against the top of his shoulder. He felt her breath heat the side of his neck.

"Thank you," she whispered.

"For?"

"This armistice. This . . . peace. I needed it."

His chin rubbed her forehead as he nodded. "Are you still frightened?"

"Yes. But it's all right now." He quickly put a little space between them, and she looked at him with a question in her pale eyes.

He felt his face flush. "Sorry." Alexandra merely smiled.

"Let's follow a trail that runs along this wind," he said, leading her away. "We should find out how far it extends."

She trod carefully on loose dirt and past exposed roots. "Why?" she asked.

"Because I think the wind delineates our boundaries," he answered slowly, speaking the notion even as it occurred to him. "We're here by design."

"Nobody else will believe that," she said.

"And you?"

"I'm having some trouble wrapping my head around it," she conceded. "But . . . well, but. We have some facts, even if we don't know what they mean yet. And this wind is a

fact as well. We don't feel it in the open, which is exactly where we should feel it." She paused briefly, the light breeze drying her skin. "Paul?"

He realized this was the first time she had called him by name. "Right here, Sandy."

"Whatever this is . . . whatever is going on here, I'm taking your part."

The declaration of faith lightened his heart. "Boom," he said.

The barrier of impassable wind continued all the way back to the cliffs. For the sake of direction Paul assigned the barrier to the southern boundary, the cliffs to the west, and the savannah to the east and north. A glance at the encampment suggested that none of the others had bothered to conduct a search. Too busy making autocratic decisions, he decided.

"Back to the war," Alexandra said quietly, as they approached.

Paul made a face as he spotted the berry cane and its dirt ball resting beside a hole already dug for it. Someone had cleared away the grass around it as well. Paul reckoned that, at a mere couple of meters from the Talbot's tent, the patch would compel them to move within two years at most. He doubted the time would matter—given the party had been brought here by design, the resolution surely would come within a reasonable time. Even so, the decision regarding the location of the patch was, to be polite about it, ill-advised.

But there was something besides dirt trapped in the ball, and

as Paul drew nearer, he realized what it was. He bent down and retrieved a small, irregular lump of coal that had gotten wedged in the root system. Something for his father's Christmas stocking, he thought, straightening.

Almost immediately the elder Barrow snatched it from his hand, accompanied by a command to "Let me see that."

"It's coal," Barrow announced, having gained black marks on his hands. "Bituminous, from the look of it. If there's a seam, we can burn coal instead of wood. It burns longer, and provides more heat."

"Isn't it hot enough already?" asked Alexandra, with a glance back at the sun over the ocean.

Her step-father gave her a withering look. "For cooking, baby girl," he said.

"For metal-working as well," added Barrow. "Assuming we can find proper ores here."

"We won't be here that long," Paul muttered.

"We have to plan as though we will," countered the elder Barrow. "Speaking of burning, we ought to plan a burn of some of this grass. It will add carbon to the soil, as well as clear a spot for a garden."

"You've no idea where the prevailing winds would blow the fire," said Paul. "You can't do this."

Barrow stepped closer, glowering. His torso puffed out the camouflage hunting outfit he was wearing. "I can't do this?" he snarled. "You forget who you're talking to, Paul."

For just a moment Paul started to square his shoulders and

confront his father. But the moment passed, because Alexandra's hand on his arm reminded him that he had other concerns. Without a word, he turned around and walked away, with her still holding onto his arm.

"Come back here," shouted Barrow.

Paul did not even slow his departure. Presently he heard a sound of disgust, and knew that there would be no pursuit for his disobedience. He and Alexandra once again came to a stop where they could see the waves crashing on the rocks.

But there were no rocks below. The waves dashed against the cliff itself, barely ten feet below them.

Alexandra gasped, while Paul stood with his mouth agape. Madly he sought to reason out an explanation, but nothing occurred to him.

"What," said Alexandra, "does this mean?"

He took refuge in observable facts. "This isn't the Bay of Fundy," he said, with subdued confidence. "We're looking at an expanse of ocean, not a bay or strait where water can be channeled. The ocean level has risen about ten feet in the past . . . what, three hours? That can't be a tidal effect."

Worry and fear made Alexandra's voice shake. "So in three more hours we'll all be under water?" she asked.

Paul shrugged. "If this were a natural phenomenon, there would be signs of inundation here. Yet we see none of that."

"So . . . something unnatural

**Continued on page 42**

# TIPS FOR WRITERS

In this section you will find useful tips to help you on the journey toward publication. If you have some to share, please email them to [Editor@BooksNPieces.com](mailto:Editor@BooksNPieces.com).

## Poor Man's Editing: A Good First Step

Let's face it; editing your work can be a time-consuming, and costly exercise, although one that is vital to successful writing.

The truth is that you must have a professional editor/proofer go through your finished work, after you have already edited it through various cycles. Yes, more than one cycle of edits.

There are a few things you can do to jump-start your edits. Obviously start with the spelling and grammar checkers that come with most word processors. While simplistic, it will catch some basic errors, spelling mistakes, some hyphenations missing or unnecessary. But it will not catch nuances, such as...

"I went to meat my uncle at the store."

Often these programs will even miss extra, unnecessary words, such as...

"It was a fine the day."

These extra words are not incorrect, just incorrectly placed within the sentence.

Before undertaking any self-editing, you should put your story aside for a few days (at least), so that the familiarity of

it diminishes slightly. While it is still imprinted in your memory, a your brain will fail to recognize the simple errors it glossed over

the first time. A little distance allows you to catch things you missed before.

Depending on your

computer system; your computer should also be able to read your work back to you in a voice of your choice by using the 'Accessibility' features. Hearing your words read back to you makes it much easier to catch mistakes and poor sentence structure.

Even better is to ask a friend or family member to read your story aloud to you.

There is a huge difference in how the brain identifies speech through auditory processing versus how the brain identifies speech through visual pathways.

There are also a number of computer programs that can scan your document and point out the mistakes.

Among these are [Grammarly](#), [AutoCrit](#), [Pro-Writing Aid](#), [Hemingway App](#) and more. And

your word processor will include a spelling and grammar checker, also.

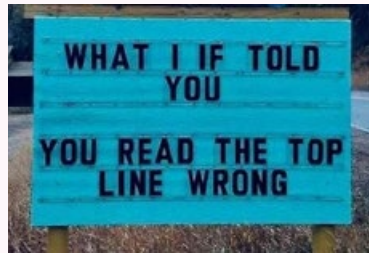
Which should you use? All of them. Just remember that they are automated, not sentient, and have a lack of nuance, relying instead on programmed grammatical references.

One good thing about using any of these programs is by flagging many things, your brain looks at the work with fresher eyes.

After a few rounds of editing, I still recommend recording yourself reading the story or chapter. Your ears have more years of experience than your eyes—think of all the baby years just listening—and while you may not catch an error while recording, you almost certainly will when listening to the playback.

You will also be able to detect issues with pacing, details that should be expanded, areas that should be shortened or deleted. A wealth of opportunities to improve your work.

Offering fans an advance look at your work, a Beta-read, and telling them to let you know when they catch mistakes, is another low-budget editing tip. Readers are often the first to find



Sign found on the Internet



things that slipped by, missed by even a paid proofreader—they make mistakes, too.

As for hiring editors on a budget, here are a few suggestions. Books & Pieces Magazine has had no experience with any of these, and they are offered for your own evaluation.

PaperBlazer (<https://www.paperblazer.com/>)

Lincoln Creative Writers (<https://www.lincolncreative-writers.com/>)

Reedsy (<https://reedsy.com/>)

Proofed (<https://proofed.com/>)

These are still not inexpensive for a novel-length work, however, the quality of your finished manuscript is most likely the most important aspect outside of your story quality. As such, it would be prudent to budget for a decent editor.

One of the lowest priced options we found is Cheap Book Editing USA (<http://cheap-editing-usa.com/>) that charges approximately \$500 for an 80,000 word book. We cannot testify to the quality of the finished product, however, if you are on a tight budget, there are options.

And finally UpWork (<http://www.upwork.com>) may also be an option. You select editors, their hourly rates clearly listed. You can get an estimate before deciding.

If you have passed through many edits, and decide that you just cannot afford a pro-editor, at least consider a proofreader. They often cost less, and will spot many of the things that will drag your manuscript down.

# Authors: Get Rid of your Low Resolution Headshot Images

## Pet Peeve #1

For most publishers is receiving low resolution images from the author or publicist.

What is a low resolution image? Usually something with a 72 dpi (dot per inch) size, often from your computer. Translated means, in every inch of space there are 72 dots that make up the image.

For a print publication, you

need to have a 300 dpi image to avoid a blurry blob on the printed page. That's 300 dots per inch.



For an online publication, 72 dpi is fine. Authors should have 300 dpi imagery and let the publisher reduce it if necessary. Since a lot of publicity material is mailed out, or printed in newspapers or magazines, there is simply no excuse to not have adequate images.

## Pet Peeve #2

Publicity is the lifeblood for every author. That said, there is nothing worse for a publisher than having a small selection of author images, especially when they have been used extensively elsewhere. No publisher

wants their magazine to rerun overused imagery. The solution is simple; get a lot of different images taken. Have some headshots, some full body shots, some posed and some natural. Include book signings or book talks, interactions with people. These make for interesting visuals and publishers will enjoy being able to make you shine. And make sure that they are high resolution images. You do not have to get a professional photographer. Most smart phones take fantastic pictures. Just ensure the lighting is good with no shadows on your face.

## Pet Peeve #3

When you take photos of yourself please do NOT use filters, especially the social media filters. First, they look ridiculous; if you are afraid your face is too hideous to be seen, trust me that a selfie, or glamor filter will not help any.

Publishers will always try to make you look good for our publications, but we cannot work with filtered imagery.

And finally, a thought: When readers want to see what you look like, it is only to see you in contrast to themselves. Your book made them feel good. Your image is simply a connection to the reader. Make it a genuine one.

# Agents, Publishers, and Scams, Oh My!

We live in a crooked world. This is apparent in most of what we see and do. Don't get me wrong, not everyone is a crook, just as not everyone is out to get you. But there are a lot of them out there, all looking legit.

This article will give you some tips on recognizing them, and some resources that can help steer you clear.

## THE FIRST RULE

The first rule is that **you should not have to pay an agent or publisher**. Legitimate ones get a percentage of your earnings.

This is why Vanity Presses, so called because they appeal to your desire to be published, are to be avoided. For a fee they will do all the work, and still get a percentage of your royalties.

So what work do they do? Edits, proofing, cover design, layout, submissions to Online publishers like Amazon or Barnes & Noble, social media posts on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc.

If you think that is a good deal, think again. Generally the most difficult part of publishing your work is the edits and cover design. You can get a cover designer on Fiverr.com for a low cost, and you can do most of the editing yourself (see the tip on low-cost editing in this issue), leaving room in your budget for an external proofer to catch those niggly mistakes that always survive.

Repeat the first rule out loud because you will encounter pub-

lishers with a great explanation of why you should pay some of those costs.

As for Literary Agents, or Book Agents, here there are just as many scams.

I was friended on a social media platform by one such agent. The message was benign, stating that he/she had seen my postings and invited me to submit a chapter and cover letter to their offices via email or post.

Sounds legit, right?

Checking the website I could see the agent had many authors represented. However, none of the names stood out as anyone I had seen on a bestseller list, in interviews, or in any way that I would expect an agency to represent. Furthermore, the publishers that handled these clients were clearly small and vanity press outfits.

## THE SECOND RULE

The second rule is that no matter who publishes your book—you, a mainstream publisher—YOU will still have to market the book to get it noticed.

You are a small fish in a very large ocean, and everyone and their grandmother has published something—usually badly done, badly edited, bad cover. This affects you.

Imagine standing downtown in San Francisco, holding your book high. With the throngs of people, will anyone notice you?

So you must devise a way to

make your book stand out. And that will NOT happen on social media—honestly, social media is a pool of vampire writers all trying to sell each other their books.

A warning from several online writer groups, including <https://absolutewrite.com>.

Scammers are very active again. Have you been contacted?

There are no shortage of scamming literary agents, publishers and the like that approach writers on this and other forums, or via email.

Before you get enamored, do some research. One link is above. Here are some more:

<https://lnkd.in/gmfvH9Qj>

<https://lnkd.in/gCakeBi4>

<https://lnkd.in/gVvwngTi>

<https://lnkd.in/g8NJaWMg>

<https://lnkd.in/ghC5ZQEQ>

<https://lnkd.in/gQdxwGmd>

And THIS ONE is especially important---

<https://lnkd.in/ggtd-fpt>

Stay safe out there. We work too hard to be fooled!

<https://lnkd.in/gJngF4GT>

# Small press v Vanity Press v DIY

**It doesn't take a genius to start up a publishing company. There are always lots of victims.**

I'm going to get flak from publishers for this article because they will all claim that they are legitimate and helping writers get published. Some offer a fee-based service; select what you want done and they do it. No guarantees where you will wind up. Others secure you in a timed contract, charge you no fees up front, then collect the fees from royalties.

Unless you are dealing with a mainstream publishing company, one of the big ones that do handle everything, you have to ask yourself this one, giant question: **Do I need a publisher or can I do it myself?** The answer depends on your comfort level.

**Vanity Press** companies make their money by taking a fee and printing a set number of copies. They are called Vanity Press because they appeal to your vanity; having a book in your hand is one heckuva ego stroke. After that they do not care whether you sell a single copy. Their job is done. Even worse is if their contract binds you to them for a period of time. If so, you are stuck.

Some companies offer 'No costs to You' (that includes cover design, proofing & editing, layouts, ISBN, uploads, marketing and more.) Ask yourself "How can they make any money?" There is always a catch.

Many small publishers will often handle your work at no cost, and split royalties with you. They tie you to a contract ranging from a year to five years, giving them time to recoup their investment, and hope that your work sells. The problem with most small publishers is that they are NOT marketing companies, have little knowledge of how to promote a book beyond Facebook, Twitter, or Pinterest. They have no mailing list, limited site viewers, and as a result, have little to offer you. The appeal to being a publisher is as strong as the appeal to have your published book in your hand.

Many companies will offer you a set number of

free copies of your book; however it is reasonable that you pay wholesale costs for added copies. It is not reasonable if you are obligated to buy additional copies.

**So how do you know whether your publisher fits this category?** Ask them for their marketing plan before committing and have, in writing, exactly what they are going to do. If they claim it is proprietary information, then I would suggest that you go elsewhere.

**IT'S ALL IN THE CONTRACT!** Or it should be.

The contract is the clue to all things. Everything should be spelled out in the contract. Believe me when I say that the publishing company will have no hesitation to demand that you meet the contractual obligations you signed on for. They are, after all, a business. And you are the commodity.

Even with a beautifully covered, solid layout, well-edited and proofed novel, you are faced with the one elephant of a problem. Everyone and their mother has

written a book and is competing with you for attention. Amazon couldn't care less whether your book is a hit or not. Their costs come from printing, as do their profits. And studies have shown that the average book might sell only a few hundred copies in its lifetime. Hardly an income for you, the writer.

Bookstores and other tangible outlets rarely deal with small publishers and authors, unless the risk is removed. They usually want a larger number of copies, shipping paid, with an option to return them after a designated period of time, at your expense, and no money takes place unless the books sell, and even those come with a waiting period before a check is cut. Even at wholesale prices, that is one huge gamble for you to take, especially without any guarantee for placement in the store, or in-store promotion.

Because of this reason, so many writers have gone **the self-publishing route**. And rightly so,





## WRITING TIPS FOR ALL WRITERS

except for that elephant in the room; **marketing**.

Writers are not pushy people, usually. They write. They observe. They do not negotiate well. They are filled with unrealistic hopes, and count on the success of one writer out of millions, that makes a living with their book sales.

So if you should not use a Vanity Press, and most likely not even a small publisher, what should you do?

There are so many tools out there for the writer to use, many free, many a low cost.

### COVER

You can have a cover designed at a low price from [Fiverr.com](https://www.fiverr.com), or even get stock images from [Dreamstime.com](https://www.dreamstime.com), [Envato Elements](https://elements.envato.com) (<https://elements.envato.com>), [Shutterstock](https://www.shutterstock.com) (<https://www.shutterstock.com>), and use the cover creator on Amazon's [KDP Publishing](https://kdp.amazon.com/en_US/) site ([https://kdp.amazon.com/en\\_US/](https://kdp.amazon.com/en_US/)).

You can design your own cover using a Photoshop clone that is free to use, called [Photopea](https://www.photopea.com) (<https://www.photopea.com>).

### LAYOUT

There are excellent layout programs for both Mac and Windows (Vellum and Atticus) that make it simple—you select the theme, the font and the programs do the rest, offering you almost every format at once.

The KDP site has a wealth of

templates you can use, [book calculators](https://kdp.amazon.com/en_US/help/topic/GSQF43YAMUPFTMSP) to tell you everything from size requirements to costs and royalties. ([https://kdp.amazon.com/en\\_US/help/topic/GSQF43YAMUPFTMSP](https://kdp.amazon.com/en_US/help/topic/GSQF43YAMUPFTMSP))

You can set up an account at KDP and upload your book quite easily. If you need instructions, YouTube can offer you a wealth of instruction.



### DIY IS BEST

There will be a learning curve, but it should not be too painful. With the wealth of resources available you should be able to manage. So what's the advantage to doing it yourself?

First, your royalty share will be 100% of the royalties. You will have no fees that further reduce your share. You are directly responsible for how you list your books, not just on Amazon, but anywhere you choose.

### ONE IMPORTANT NOTE.

You will need an **ISBN**. This is an identifier number that is used globally to list your book. Amazon offers a free ISBN. I do not suggest using it. You will only be able to use it on Amazon, and it identifies you as an amateur—

no independent bookstores will carry your book if it is only an Amazon ISBN. They do not like Amazon.

To get your own ISBN is not difficult, however there is a small catch. The cost for one ISBN number is \$125. That said, the cost for ten is \$295. If you are serious about writing, the latter is a good deal. Besides, each format of your book (aside from ebook) needs its own ISBN. So if you plan hardcover and paperback, that's two ISBN numbers right there.

Alternatively, you could buy a number from anyone with extras. The only problem is that however they are listed with the ISBN issuer, is who will show as your publisher.

In the USA you can get your ISBN through [Bowkers](https://www.myidentifiers.com) (<https://www.myidentifiers.com>) otherwise, outside the US, use [The International ISBN Agency](https://www.isbn-international.org) (<https://www.isbn-international.org>).

### VIDEOS

Here are a few videos to help you get started.

How To Self Publish A Book On Amazon (STEP-BY-STEP TUTORIAL) > [HERE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gRY3d5aBiUI)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gRY3d5aBiUI>

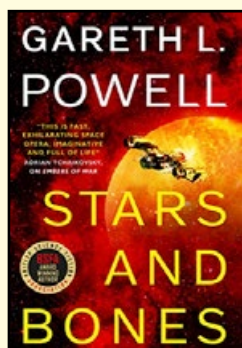
Self Publishing On Amazon KDP for Beginners 2021 > [HERE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ablBygcmlc8)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ablBygcmlc8>

If you find this valuable information, please share it with your writer friends.

[Note: B&P Magazine gets no compensation for this referral. Use a your own discretion.]

# HAVE YOU READ THESE **EXCELLENT** BOOKS



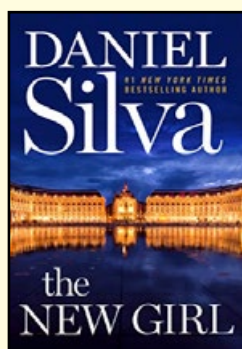
Seventy-five years from today, the human race has been cast from a dying Earth to wander the stars in a vast fleet of arks—each shaped by its inhabitants into a diverse and fascinating new environment, with its own rules and eccentricities. When her sister disappears while responding to a mysterious alien distress call, Eryn insists on being part of the crew sent to look for her, and may just hold the key to humanity's survival..

**CLICK HERE.**  
<https://amzn.to/3N6IKER>



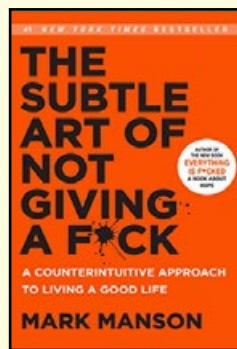
The United States lost World War II and was subsequently divided between the Germans in the East and the Japanese in the West. It's America in 1962. Slavery is legal once again. And it seems as though the answers might lie with Hawthorne Abendsen, a mysterious and reclusive author, whose best-selling novel describes a world in which the US won the War. Philip K. Dick at his best.

**CLICK HERE.**  
<https://amzn.to/39zJEkr>



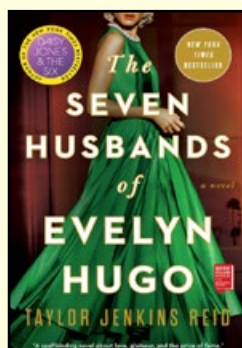
At an exclusive private school in Switzerland, mystery surrounds the identity of the beautiful raven-haired girl who arrives each morning in a motorcade fit for a head of state. Her father is Khalid bin Mohammed, a much-maligned crown prince of Saudi Arabia. He is now reviled for his role in the murder of a dissident journalist. And when his only child is brutally kidnapped, he turns to the one man he can trust to find her before it is too late. Gabriel Allon.

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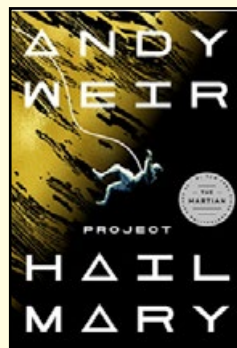
For decades, we've been told that positive thinking is the key to a happy, rich life. "F\*\*k positivity," Mark Manson says. "Let's be honest, shit is f\*\*ked and we have to live with it." In his wildly popular Internet blog, Manson doesn't sugarcoat or equivocate. He tells it like it is—a dose of raw, refreshing, honest truth that is sorely lacking today.

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Aging and reclusive Hollywood movie icon Evelyn Hugo is finally ready to tell the truth about her glamorous and scandalous life. But when she chooses unknown magazine reporter Monique Grant for the job, no one is more astounded than Monique herself. Why her? Why now?

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Ryland Grace is the sole survivor on a desperate, last-chance mission. Except that right now, he doesn't know that. He can't even remember his own name, let alone the nature of his assignment or how to complete it. And he's just been awakened to find himself millions of miles from home, with nothing but two corpses for company.

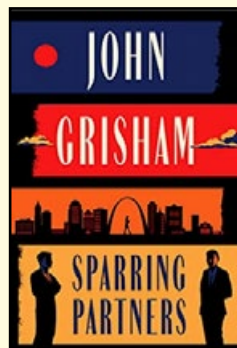
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From #1 New York Times bestselling author Colleen Hoover.

After serving five years in prison for a tragic mistake, Kenna Rowan returns to the town where it all went wrong, hoping to reunite with her four-year-old daughter. But the bridges Kenna burned are proving impossible to rebuild. Everyone in her daughter's life is determined to shut Kenna out, no matter how hard she works to prove herself.

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# TIM AHRENS

## It's All A Game: Game Novels and Life

Tim Ahrens has self-published my third book, 'Dark Creatures The Grand Game.' Published through Atmosphere Press, Tim has realized a lifelong dream, incorporating role playing games into a fictional world.

**B&P:** Why did you decide to write? What prompted that?

**TA:** When I was about fourteen a very good friend of mine introduced me to Roleplaying. The very first game I ever played was called Dungeons and Dragons. We gathered

A fairly large gaming group together each weekend to play. As luck would have it, I always seemed to be singled out as the Dungeon Master. As time progressed more and more people in our group kept suggesting that I write down some of the adventures I dreamed up for the game. This was the first steps I took to becoming the writer I am today.

**B&P:** You've been writing for 40 years. What obstacles have you faced and how do you find the will to push on?

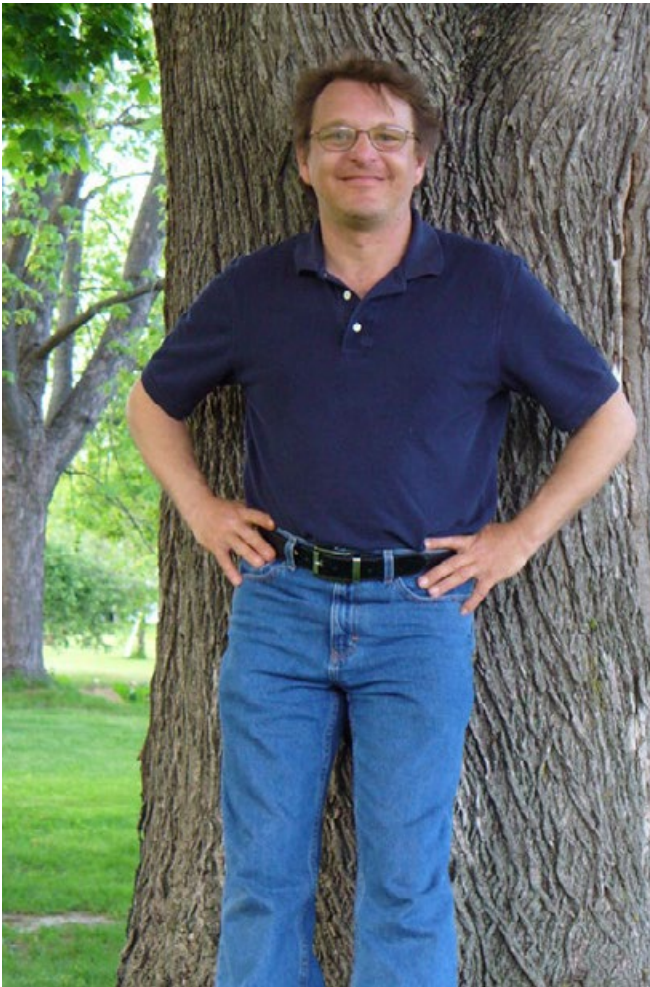
**TA:** There have been a lot of obstacles over the years. Learning who and what to write was one of

the biggest. I overcame that one with the help of my friends who always encouraged me and gave me confidence. My first, second and third rejection letters almost ended my writing career. But again, good friends and the urge to tell stories won out. As I grew older it was more of a challenge to balance life and work with my writing. That took a lot longer to work out than I had hoped but I eventually came up with a compromise.

**B&P:** You're a retail manager and yet manage to find the time to write novels, and game related novels. How do you manage this?

**TA:** It's a lot like going to the gym. Or any other event that you really want to attend. I set a scheduled time that I am going to write each day and then I stick to that time. Sure, things come up now and then that throw a wrench in that plan. But for the most part I can usually keep to that system without too much trouble.

**B&P:** You've stated that you







write by envisioning characters first, or the atmosphere the story will be set in. What draws you to a particular character or atmosphere?

TA: That's a great question. Its more like what inspires me at the time. I have always had a very vivid imagination. That being said dark tune on an October night, or a sunset on a quiet fall day. Even the shape of a cloud in the sky or an image from an anime can set my mind off. Once I have the feel of the story, I wish to write then I begin to populate the world the story will take place in. From there it sort of becomes a snowball rolling downhill. It just keeps getting bigger and bigger.

B&P: Your super-hero alter ego is Green Lantern? Why?

TA: The Green Lantern to me seemed to stand for not just the justice you might find on earth. He stood for the justice of all life in the galaxy. He stood toe to toe with some of the biggest monsters in the universe with only his own will and the power of his ring to protect him. Its kinda like they stated in the

movie Emerald Dawn. When you put on a green lantern ring your life is no longer your own. I respected and loved hal Jorden for that.

B&P: What was your childhood like? You said you watched horror shows with your father. How did this influence you?

TA: I started watching the black and white Universal Monster movies with my dad when I was about Ten. The tragedy of what happened to the Frankenstein monster as well as Lawrence Tabot battling his fear and despair taught me a lot. I had a fairly ordinary childhood. Every Friday and Saturday night as I was growing up, I would spend time with my dad and watch classic horror movie. He also introduced me to the Twilight Zone, Outer Limits, and the Night Stalker. My father really loved his horror movies. I think it was through the moments I spent with my dad that I was influenced the most in what and how I write. We would always spend time talking about whatever the horror movie was about after the picture was over. He

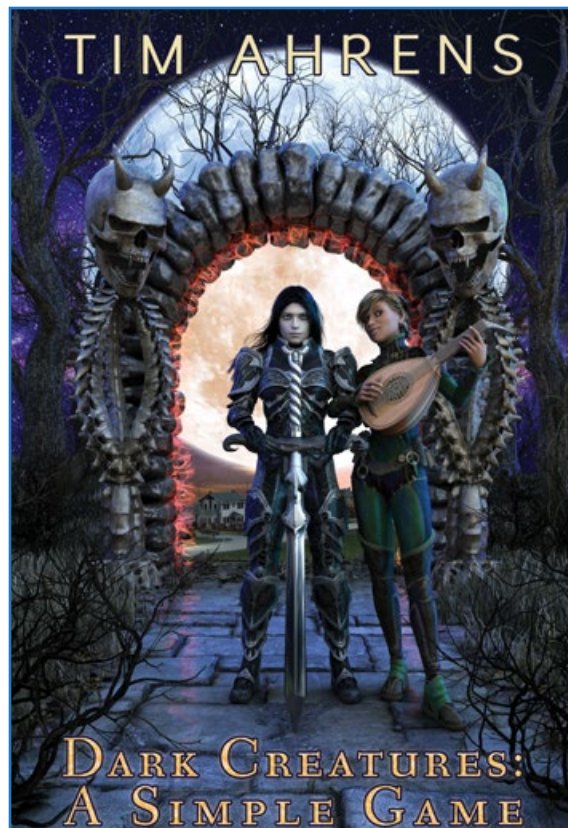
would always listen intently to what I thought then give his own opinion. We had some great talks.

B&P: What's your writing time like and how much writing time do you get?

TA: That all depends on when I get home from work and what needs to be done around the house. Truthfully, I get about one to two good hours of writing in a night. Sometime more or less as I said depending on what's going on.

B&P: Any advice for new writers?

TA: Yes, Number one rule if you want to be a writer never give up. It doesn't matter how many rejection letters you might pile up. Or how many people tell you will never make it. If you love to write and have a great story to share





with the world, never give up on that dream!

Find Tim Ahrens at:

**Website:**

<http://www.thedarkcreatures.com/>

**Amazon:**

<https://amzn.to/3w3Wx9q>

## Book Excerpt:

From 'The Grand Game,'  
by Tim Ahrens  
Chapter Four  
*I Am's Plaything.*

Harvey Gaines sat listlessly in the middle of Waunona park.

The rotting wood of the rusting steel park bench he rested on was barely able to hold his weight. Even at his current weight of one hundred and five pounds, the bench still groaned when he moved. His shoulder length

brown hair was pulled back into a tight pony-tail. It was unwashed and looked greasy and unkempt. A worn, wet, and faded yellow concert shirt hung on his thin five-foot seven-inch frame.

His hole-ridden, dirty jeans were damp from the mist that fell from the angry looking gray sky. He felt the heaviness of his waterlogged socks as they clung to his slick, sweaty feet.

His deep brown eyes looked up from the overgrown, weed-infested ground he had been staring at.

Waunona Park seemed like a haunted place to him.

Overgrown with crabgrass and weeds, its rusty monkey bars and empty sand boxes gave off a desolate, morbid ambiance.

The depressing color of the sky and cold wind only added to the feeling. A run-down shelter barely holding itself together was at the park's center. Walking out

from within the tired structures appeared a well-dressed man.

His shoes were polished, black and shiny. He wore a well-tailored, gray suit, fresh white shirt, and black bow tie. His black hair was cut short and well groomed. On his head he sported a small brown derby. He glanced around for a moment then started walking towards the wasted looking teen. Harvey watched the man with his blood shot eyes as he approached, wondering all the while why such a sharp dressed man would wear such a crappy looking hat.

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ALL FORCED TO  
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## TALES FROM THE SCRIPT

Observations and Opinions on Screenwriting by  
script doctor LANCE THOMPSON [scriptdoc88@gmail.com](mailto:scriptdoc88@gmail.com)

### Second Thoughts

Commenting on my last column about trouble in the second act my esteemed colleague and learned script doctor Scott McConnell suggested a follow-up piece on how to make obstacles in the second act unique and different from each other.

The second act is all about placing obstacles between the main character and his goal. As the character encounters obstacles, his actions or decisions reveal who he is. Some writers call this a “character arc,” and some view this as a character undergoing a necessary change. I believe that the character does not change, but his true nature is revealed.

Imagine a group of people taking a voyage on a yacht. All are charming, friendly, and civilized. On the surface, they are all wonderful people. But imagine if the yacht springs a leak or gets battered in a storm and starts to sink. Imagine also that there isn't room in the lifeboat for everyone aboard. Some will fight for spots on the lifeboat, others will give up their spots to those more in need, others will follow some other course. How characters act under extreme circumstances doesn't change them—it reveals who they are, their true personalities and priorities.

Obstacles for a character in the second act can be external (economic hardship, an opposing team, a wild animal stalking its victim) and internal (fear, avarice, pride, shame). The best external obstacles will be the ones that trigger the character's internal flaws. For example, if a character has

a great fear of heights, his goal may require him to climb the highest mountain or parachute out of an airplane. If a character fears a painful secret, he should have to risk revealing that secret to attain his goal.

Obstacles in the second act should increase in difficulty as the story progresses. They should be additive rather than episodic. For example, in The

Game of Death, Bruce Lee's last, unfinished movie, Lee must fight a series of martial artists, each one more skilled than the last. The obstacles increase in difficulty. But he overcomes each opponent one by one, so the obstacles are episodic. More effective would be a story in which each defeated opponent is joined by the next so that Bruce Lee must fight one, then two, then three opponents. If he only has a limited time to accomplish this, the obstacles compound and multiply.

The more complex the character and the more flaws that he has, the greater variety of obstacles the writer can invent. Obstacles and the character's decisions and actions to overcome them will tell

us who the character is at heart and help us identify with him in his quest to reach his goal.

*Lance Thompson is a script doctor, ghost writer and actor. He can be reached at [scriptdoc88@gmail.com](mailto:scriptdoc88@gmail.com).*

You can read more about Bruce Lee's final script, 'Game of Death' at <https://bit.ly/BruceGOD>



Bruce Lee's sketches for 'Game of Death' from [FanPop.com](http://FanPop.com)



# Diann Boehm

YA and Children's Author, Illustrator

Diann Floyd Boehm is an award-winning international author of children's books and has published young adult historical fiction. Diann writes books to inspire readers to be kind, like themselves, and "Embrace Imagination."



B&P: You were the author and illustrator of your first two books. Was that difficult to juggle?

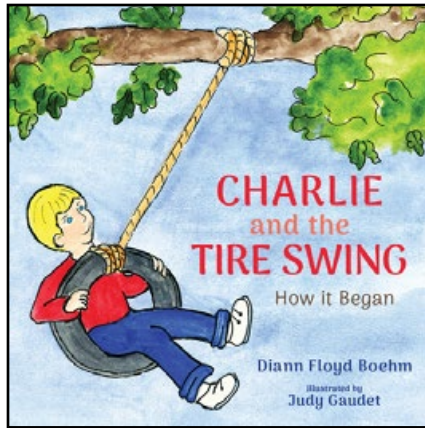
DB: I had never thought about illustrating before, just taking silk painting classes. I remember thinking about the character, the little girl living on the moon, and where I wanted to go with future stories. I remember thinking about how I wanted to do something different with the illustrations, and then while I was painting, it dawned on me what to do. I became very excited, so juggling the story and the illustrations was not difficult.

B&P: What made you decide to branch off from teaching into writing?

DB: As they say, life is a journey, and I had been out of the classroom training teacher on how to use technology effectively in the classroom. I enjoyed that very much as it connected me to teachers and students. I wrote stories while teaching at the school and as an educational consultant. Once we moved to Dubai, my story writing became full-time.

B&P: How has the market for children's books changed over the last few years?

DB: I am sure my publishers can address this question better, but I will share with you that I am so pleased that Hybrid Publishing Companies have become more widely accepted by mainstream bookstores.



Hybrid publishing, in a nutshell, is 'author-assisted publishing.' There are many types of 'hybrid' publishing companies, and you must find the one that is right for you. I am pleased to have found two 'hybrid' publishing companies, OC Publishing and Texas Sister Press.

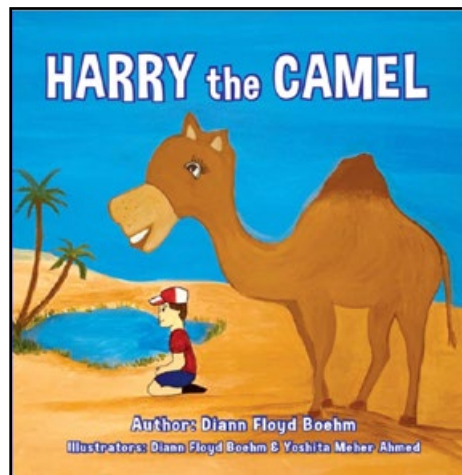
B&P: How do you begin the process of putting a book together?

DB: I do not have to worry about putting the book together; thank goodness the publishing companies do that.

B&P: You've also written a YA novel 'Rise! A Girl's Struggle for More' which was based on the

life of your grandmother. Could you tell us a bit more about that book and also how difficult it was to take reality and make it fictional?

DB: I am deeply proud of 'Rise a Girl's Struggle for More,' but truthfully, when I came up with the idea to write a book that would inspire young people to go for their dreams even if it takes a while to make them happen, I had no idea how difficult historical fiction is. Of



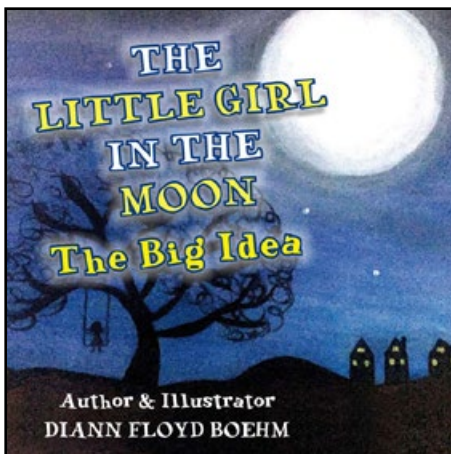
course, I have enjoyed reading biographies and historical fiction. Still, now that I know all the research, the hours, and in some cases, years that go into writing historical fiction, I admire the authors who write in this genre.

I told my mom about my idea to write a story based on grandma, who needed to be educated at a higher level than High School, which was unusual for a girl born in 1904. My mom loved the idea but warned me it would be a lot of work. My mom

was an avid reader and never went anywhere with at least two books with her. She usually had 2 – 3 books she was reading at the same time, and she got her love of reading from her mom. Family history and stories are important to my parents; therefore, I have family stories passed down through the generations on both sides of the family. Lucky for me, in the case of 'Rise A Girl's Struggle for More,' I had my mom telling me the more grown-up versions of different things grandma experienced. My mom and I made a road trip and traveled along the train route we are pretty sure grandma would have taken to Missouri. Then we visited the school, which is now a museum. It was a trip we both found very special, and we felt grandma was with us the whole time. Many have enjoyed the story, so OC Publishing has requested that I write a sequel. I am overwhelmed with joy and am busy researching and writing the new adventures of Ruby.

B&P: You've traveled with your husband, including a stint in the Philippines, and lived away for fourteen years. How has international travel adjusted your viewpoints when it comes to writing?

DB: My husband and I have been very blessed to see the world. His first job as a Foreign Service Officer overseas was in Manila, Philippines. I had only lived in Virginia and Texas before then. It was a great way to start a marriage. I taught at the

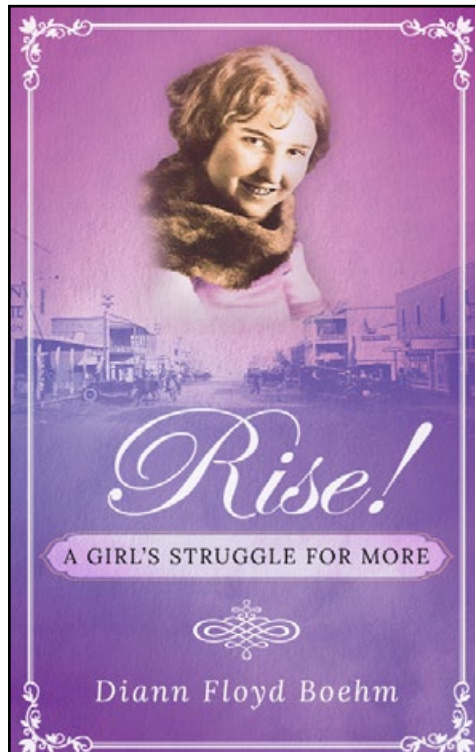


American International School and performed with the 'Repertory Philippines' in two of their musicals, Annie and Pipan, at the National Theater.

We traveled to various parts of Asia while we were there. Then, we returned home, and my husband began Law School at the University of Texas; I was a first-time mom and started teaching in a private school in Austin, Texas. Fast forward, we moved to Dubai when our kids were grown and lived overseas for 14 years and what an experience. I dog sled in the Arctic with Julie Amer, 'Mountain High Company', where we raised money for breast cancer and helped with breast cancer awareness. I did humanitarian work with several outfits in Uganda, Ethiopia, and Kenya. With each experience, I grew as a human being in discovering the respect and beauty of life and culture in other countries. My husband and I traveled to many places for vacation but also to learn and find new ways to give back to the world.

When it comes to my writing, yes, of course, it has an impact, and the one thing I can say is I wish everyone would realize we are more alike than different. To embrace the beauty of people and learn from one another. We are all blessed with talents;

learning from another person in another part of the world is just magical. Let me share a couple of experiences, I met a lovely jewelry maker in Kenya, and we gathered our supplies and sat under a beautiful tree for shade as we made our necklaces. In Ethiopia, I walked a few miles to the river to collect drinking water for the family. Those are just two of so many experiences that



would take your breath away. I have a deep respect for the villagers and their life. I loved sitting in a Neba Hut with the locals and laughing and telling stories while we shared a meal. You think in side how lucky you are to meet these beautiful people and know you are all the same. You want food on the table for your family and peace and harmony. These experiences have

helped me understand what I want my focus to be with my stories, to love one another, to be kind to others, to love yourself, and to embrace imagination.

B&P: What is your writing process like?

DB: I am the type of writer that writes the story and then worry about the outline.

My steps are; basically, an idea comes to me. I think about it and let it just percolate for a while till the story becomes clear. I might wake up in the middle of the night and have to write; sometimes it is when I first wake up, and other times I will be working in the garden, and all of a sudden, the story becomes apparent, and I write it down. If it is a chapter book, the chapter will become evident, and I can write.

Then there is the editing process: I do the first edit, then it goes to a professional editor, and finally to the publisher to see if they are interested.

Once I receive a thumbs up, it is time to look for an illustrator.

I do not use the same illustrator for two reasons, it took me a long time to be published, and I feel it is the same for an artist. First, I want to open the door for an artist so they can share their gifts, and secondly, I think stories have a different feel, so having a different artist for my stories makes sense to me.

B&P: Advice to new authors? What is one thing they must do?

DB: My advice to new authors



is to start writing. If you start and stop, your book will never get written. There is no perfect sentence off the bat. Just write your story. Find a place that is just for writing and devote time to it. You might start with 15 minutes and work your way into more time. Believe in yourself and the story you want to tell.

I would ask yourself, why do you want to write? If the answer is—I want to write a book that will become a movie, or I want to write a book and become rich, then you need to reevaluate why you want to be an author

B&P: If you could do it all over, would you change anything?

DB: Well, I would hire a publicist. I was not aware of publicists for authors. I have always just thought of them for the Stars. Why? Because they help you get your books known, and that is what I want. To have my stories

inspire readers. To make people smile, learn something, and embrace imagination. I am lucky to have met Mickey Mikkelson, my publicist, as I always learn something new from him.

I would also say find some author groups immediately; do not wait till you are published. When you find a group that is supportive of each other, then your craft as an author improves, and friends flourish. I belong to 'Through the Eyes of Authors' run by Aimee Ravichandran, who also has the company Abundantly Social. The authors are the most supportive people I have ever met. There are no words to express how much I have learned from Aimee's company.

B&P: Anything you would like to mention I have not asked?

DB: I want to suggest to people, even if you do not wish to be a published author, to make

time for yourself. Go to the park with a notepad and observe the setting and people around you. Write what comes to mind. It might only be a few adjectives or a complete sentence. Like, the ducks today were having a fun time diving deep for the fish. Being in nature, looking at the clouds, and hearing the birds can make your heart sing. Think about it; your day is filled with blessings just by having air in your lungs and breathing for another day, so go out and enjoy the magic around you.

Find Diann Boehm at:

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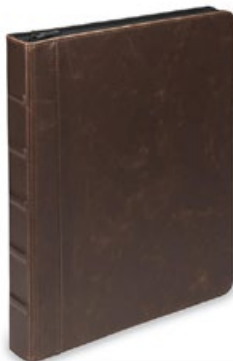
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**SHORT STORY**

# The Possum *and the Plum*

by Joshua Packard

## *The 1st Day*

One day in late May, there lay a plum tree in an orchard beside a small knick knack shop. Suddenly, a plum fell from that tree, and the events that followed would go down in history as the greatest mistake ever made. You see, there was a small possum below that tree, and, with the plum in his mouth, he scurried to the deck of the shop, ate the flesh, and left the pit above the stairs.

Directly after this, a young man of an unknown name, walked out of the door with a handful of cheap wines and slipped on the pit, fell, and broke his leg. Now, beside the pit just happened to be a broken floorboard, and noticing that instead, the man blamed the floorboard and the store owners therewith. Having no money to pay for his hospital bills, and filled with anger that all his wine bottles had broken and that he would miss his son's graduation that night, the man decided to sue the owners. When he got a lawyer, who incidentally happened to be a past carpenter and floor specialist, the lawyer grew very vexed that a store would not be up to code. Going along with coincidences, that afternoon, the lawyer noticed in his office that there were no fire exits. Filled with wrath that the city was lacking in safety regulations, he then decided to visit more stores and shops and they too, strengthened his spite, for half had broken floorboards. Knowing that something had to be done, the lawyer went to the mayor in city hall and demanded that the mayor send inspectors to every store in the small town and hand out fines. A lawful man, the mayor agreed.

Now, as it was, the town's people were exceedingly poor and but humble farmer folk. They had no money to pay fines, and barely made it by themselves on their meager salaries. One store

owner in particular, threatened with a \$5,000 fine which he could not pay lest he went bankrupt, decided to speak up in the streets and rile up the other store owners. Very quickly, they began to form a de facto coalition and attended regular meetings with one another, discussing their concerns with the city's codes and conducts. After many talks and deliberations, the owners decided that they would all go on strike and threaten the city with closing all of their stores at once if the mayor didn't stop sending inspectors.

## *The 2nd Day*

Hearing the demands of the people, yet being an ardent follower of rules and a former judge, the mayor refused to give into the demands of the people and insisted that city officials continued to hand out fines. Immediately after this, the store owners, keeping their word, closed all of their stores within one hour. Naturally, the town's people worried and quickly began to panic.

Seeing that the owners were serious and concerned of the lay people, the mayor grew worried and pleaded with the owners that he would lower the fines. The owners, however, seeing their impact and power to influence politics and the town overall, decided that they would demand lower taxes while they struck. Knowing not what to do, but that they and all their families were starving for food, the city council grew furious and threatened to send in the national guard and bring in government assistance if the stores were not opened. One must understand that the town was situated in a small valley surrounded by large mountains and at least a hundred miles from the nearest town. There was no option to leave and get food somewhere else close.

Meanwhile, the citizens began to rally and riot in the streets that night. Some stores were burned to the ground during this and this only fueled the anger of the store owners, enticing them to stand their ground and refuse service in spite. The meetings became more and more regular, to the point where the owners began to form their own society called the “Society of Store Men”. For the violence against them and their stores, the Society of Store Men declared the lay people terrorists. In retaliation, and believing themselves to be fighters of freedom and choice, Society members sporadically burned down barns to send a message. They wished to be feared and honored for giving the people food and resources.

Angry as well, the common people formed their own group bent on fighting the Society and named themselves the “Commonwealth Crusaders”. During their meetings, they proclaimed members of the Society of Store Men terrorists, as they had done.

At one point, attending a meeting at a local Buymart, the leader of the Society was assassinated through the window by a Crusader while giving a speech. Directly after this, a horde of Crusaders ambushed the store and made war with the Store Men. This would go down as the first battle in the town, forever called the “Battle of Buymart”.

## *The 3rd Day*

The following day, desperate

and hungry, the mayor sent in the National Guard to restore order. They enforced martial law and set a curfew for the citizens. Seeing the violence, the guards attempted to arrest as many people as possible, but this only enraged them further and fighting continued.

Now, rather peculiarly, at the height of the starvation and discord, a small politician who owned a closed-down fast-food joint called the “French Fry Kingdom”, defected from the Society of Store Men and gave a speech in front of city hall. He called himself “Fred” and made a deal with the people: that if he gave them endless amounts of food for free, they should pronounce him mayor instead. Desperate, and thinking it was a good deal, the people agreed and dubbed him “French Fry Fred”.

Eventually seeing his power and how dependent the people were on him, French Fry Fred began to slowly ask for more power, and the small politician and owner he used to be began to grow very large. Crazy with his might, he began to show signs of psychosis. He would dress up in a large french fry costume with ketchup on top and wear it every second of the day and night, even as he slept. He vowed to eat only french fries at every meal and created his own food lingo that he’d speak in his grand orations.

The National Guardsmen couldn’t help but take notice of the godlike figure of Fred. They saw how easily he could mollify the people and cease the violence. For this reason,

they eliminated the curfews and allowed congregations and large gatherings which had for a while been banned. That night, while the people (and even guardsmen and policemen) awed and wondered at the speaking french fry that was Fred, Fred stood upon a large podium and gave a fantastic and flamboyant speech. In his crazed state, he threw cheeseburgers and chicken nuggets into the cheering crowd. Suddenly, for no reason at all during this, save perhaps coincidence alone, as Fred lifted up his hands while saying, “I am the savior sent from the French Fry Kingdom in Heaven!”, a lightning bolt from a storm which had been raging all day, struck the microphone in front of him. The people grew silent, their jaws dropped, they began to cry, they bowed, and they wailed in praise of their newfound Christ.

## *The 4th Day*

On the next day, the people quickly converted Fred’s restaurant into a church and sanctuary. It was the haven and holy spot of the food saviour who had come down to bring peace and appetites to the world. All were required to pray before entering the establishment and all food that came out of it was blessed beforehand. In the heart of the city, a large throne was built and erected on which Fred sat and said, “Salvation lies with me. All who follow the way of the french fry will earn everlasting food and happiness in the French Fry Kingdom



above!”.

The National Guard about this time, sat around and ate cheeseburgers from him. Already somewhat on his side, they began to wholeheartedly give themselves over to him after seeing his charisma and charm. Nearly all swore their allegiance to him and vowed to protect him with their weapons. Meanwhile, Fred chose ten of the most gluttonous people in town (one for each of his chicken nuggets in his to-go boxes) and appointed them to be his disciples. With their mouths agape, they were instructed to write the manifesto of French Fry Fred and the doctrine of Fredism. It was soon the norm that any who spoke out against Fredism or fast food in general, would be drowned in a vat of mustard or be tortured with seasonings sprinkled in their eyes.

Later that evening, Fred stood from his throne and declared to the people that a new order should be set up—a crusade of sorts. He demanded that the “Republic of Fredists” be established throughout the Pacific Northwest in which they dwelt. To get the remaining guardsmen and policemen on his side, he offered them seven-figure salaries in the new Republic. Before the clock struck midnight, they were all converted and religionized.

## *The 5th Day*

On the fifth day after the plum fell from the dastard tree, the Fredists and their guards gathered up a convoy with all

the town’s vehicles and drove and marched towards Portland, Oregon. On the way, Fred tied himself to a pole atop one of the trucks and sang and danced—still in his costume, of course. After a few hours, singing hymns and raising his hands as though he was in an opera, a bee flew into Fred’s mouth. Quickly, Fred choked and suffocated to death. From that point onwards, one would assume, the era of the holy French Fry and Fredists all around would disappear and slowly evaporate. One would be sorely incorrect.

When the convoy finally made it to Portland, they discovered Fred’s lifeless body. Needless to say, all broke down before him, wailing, sobbing, lamenting of their God. Shortly thereafter, the Fredists gathered round, buried and martyred him, and vowed to forever spread his message. This didn’t come without disagreement, however. Some thought Fred preferred cheeseburgers over fries and would have wanted only burgers in churches, while others believed that Fred was not some saviour, but God himself manifested in the flesh. These disputes resulted in the splitting up of the group into factions, and many versions of Fredism were formed.

It was about this time, that an extremely wealthy magician in the city began to take notice of Fred after being visited at his home by a Fredist missionary. Seeing the amazement of his influence, he contemplated becoming a saviour himself. He fashioned for himself a large

burger costume, walked out into the streets, and proclaimed himself the great and most merciful “Burger Boy”.

Burger Boy then, as the Fredists had done, visited people’s homes and performed magic tricks (which people took as miracles). In no time at all, he began to garner a significant quantity of followers, and they began to be called the “Burger Boy Children”; their father, St. Burger Boy. It was obviously inevitable that two major religions could not co-exist in the city, so war eventually broke out between the Burger Boy Children and Fredists. Great and violent fighting ensued in the heart of the city, until something even stranger occurred. As this all happened, a small hippy with a bullhorn held up a walnut and said, “I have seen the truth!” The hippy explained that, while eating some wild mushroom in the woods, he saw a walnut and it began to speak with him. The walnut “spoke” to the man and explained its name was “Fred”. The hippy, being a Fredist himself, knew that the only explanation was that the walnut itself was the incarnation of French Fry Fred.

The violence instantly halted and all the people surrounded the nut, marveling and drooling over it. The hippy then handed out more wild mushrooms he found. When the people began hearing the voice too, they fell to their knees and prayed.

“Hail the walnut! Praise Fred!” They cried.

In no time, all sects of Fredism were reunited, and even Burger Boy and his Children

started to take notice. Eventually, even they turned into Fredists.

## *The 6th Day*

As the story of the walnut swept across the country (and later, the world), the new religion, that of post-Fredism, called Walnutism, was established. The sacred nut was painted gold, and a large cathedral was constructed around it. The religion did not come without skepticism, however. There were many who did not have faith in the nut and stuck with their own anti-nutist beliefs.

The old disciples of Fred, along with the new priests of Walnutism, began to rile up the people of Portland and swiftly, they vowed to abolish all other religions in the West and form their Republic. Not too long afterwards, part of the National Guard reserves conquered the major cities and capitals of the Western states and the empire of Walnutism was erected.

It was about then that the U.S. President started to take notice of the strange phenomenon and civil unrest. Curious of it, he made the decision to visit the Walnut in person. When he entered the cathedral and stared upon the nut, the clouds above incidentally departed from beneath the sun, and the golden nut glowed and radiated with the sun's light. He, like the others, knelt before it in penance and cried. He made an oath with himself that he would give his life over to Walnutism and make it the official religion of the nation. As he prayed, a small boy came up to him, also praying, and told the story of how the nut cured his common cold. This only strengthened the President's newfound faith.

From there, the President chose to live in Portland and appointed Walnut priests as his head advisors and cabinet. They too, instructed him to make Walnutism the official religion and have it be taught in every school. The President, then wearing a headdress of walnut leaves and twigs and necklace of french fries, stood up with his chest high, and declared the order that the consumption of all walnuts from thereon would be illegal, and the plants only the priests could grow.

The lay people and nonbelievers of the nut grew angrier and angrier as every hour passed. Many began to eat only walnuts as their meals in spite, and dozens of them died of potassium poisoning as a result. A new war started to kick off between the two sides, and very, very suddenly, a walnut revolution commenced.

## *The 7th Day*

The shrine of the Fredian nut started to become increasingly guarded by soldiers and policemen about this time, but the cathedral still remained vulnerable because of the fighting. In an act of desperation, the President, as Commander-and-Chief, ordered that every last member of the National Guard be sent to protect the shrine. Unable to argue, they agreed. Congress, by this time, was very angry at the President and reluctantly started impeachment proceedings against him.

The previous night, the President had a dream about the nut in which it spoke and gave revelations unto him. He came to see that all nuts were a part of one great nut-monarchy, with Fred, the holy Walnut, as the king. Moved by this, he swore to protect and continue to build up the Walnut kingdom.

In an act of sanity and retaliation, Congress and the lay people teamed up and established the "Brave Entente Against Nuts" organization, or "B.E.A.N." for short. The Vice President was appointed its leader. That day, the V.P. held a rally and, with grand speeches and hand gestures, the BEAN people began to even worship him. Soon, all unions across the East coast and South joined the BEAN coalition and encouraged all employees to make BEAN propaganda with Lima beans as their symbol. Even news stations and media outlets began changing their names to things like, "The Daily Bean", "The New York Beans", "US Beans Today". Flags of Lima beans were strung and hung up on every street corner outside of the Western Walnut kingdom.

Of course, a civil war erupted eventually when a Walnutist accidentally ran over a BEANist spokesman. This civil war was at least a hundred times

as terrible as the first American civil war, and, seeing a chance to strike and take over the West while they were preoccupied with fighting, Eastern countries launched nuclear weapons against the U.S. They would walk through the ashes and take over afterward. The President, however, having the Nuclear Football on his side, and not going down without a fight, put his codes in and sent the U.S. arsenal of nuclear weapons across the world and to the rest of the U.S.

Indeed, as the bombs roared

and flashed above and across the planet, there lay the possum in his hole beneath the ground, quietly sleeping with a half-eaten plum beside him.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**



Joshua (J.R.) Packard is currently an undergraduate at Central Washington University majoring in journalism and creative writing.

He has one novel, three novel-

las, and various short stories in magazines published. He is fond of literary and dystopian books, and light-heartedness and absurdity on the children's books side.

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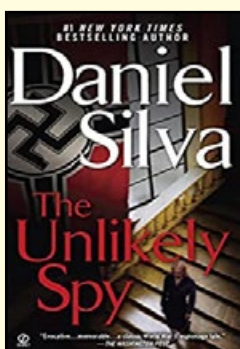
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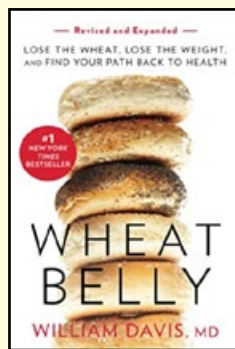
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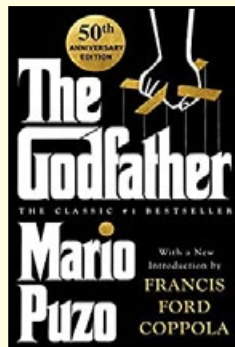


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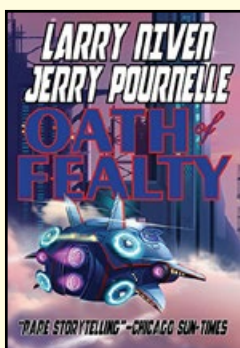
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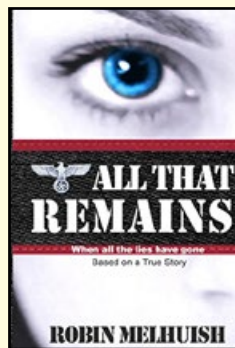


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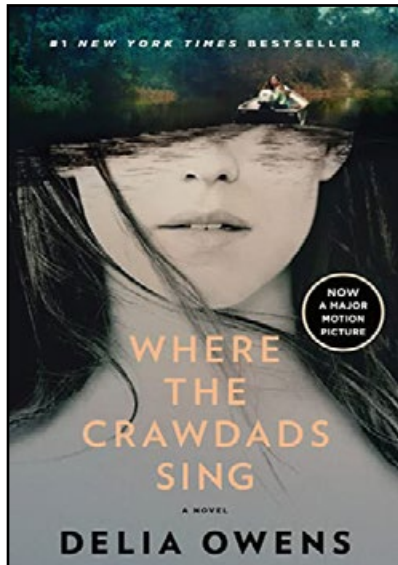
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## BOOKENDS

by *Jill Hedgecock*

AUTHOR: 'Between Shadow's Eyes' and 'Rhino in the Room'  
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**'Where the Crawdads Sing'** (2018, G.P. Putnam's Sons, paperback, 379 pages, \$9.98) by Delia Owens is the compelling story of Kya, also known as the Marsh Girl. Abandoned at 7 years old—first by her mother who walked out on all of her children and then by her drunken father—Kya learns to fend for herself with only gulls as companions. Resilient, smart and above all, a survivor, the spunky narrator soon discovers how to feed and clothe herself while evading local authorities.

As she matures into a lovely teenager, her beauty lures two love interests. Tate, her brother's good friend who befriends her and teaches her to read and Chase, the local high school quarterback. But things

don't go as planned for either romance, and the book takes a turn that leaves the reader guessing what really happened. The twisty-turvy plot, the details of nature, and an infusion of poetry, makes the book a page-turner with just the right mix of tension and description.

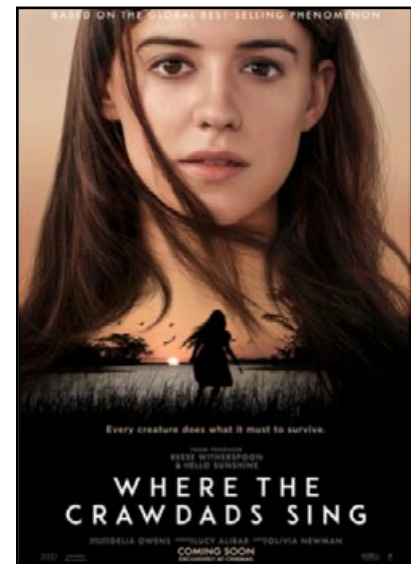
Owens also has a knack for seamlessly weaving in socially-relevant topics such as the undercurrent of racism in 1950s and '60s North Carolina. Kya observes the inequality of black people after she befriends Jumpin'. The man not only provides her with a small income by buying Kya's harvested mussels, but he also makes sure his wife educates Kya on the facts of life. Kya's other salvation is her friendship with Tate, who not only encourages her love of nature by exchanging small marvels of nature with her such as a special feather or an interesting shell, but ultimately introduces her to a book publisher interested in her collections and observations of the natural world in the marsh.

Owens earned a Bachelor of Science degree in zoology from the University of Georgia and a Ph.D. in Animal Behavior

## 'Where the Crawdads Sing'

by Delia Owens

from the University of California at Davis. She has lived in some of the most remote areas of Africa while conducting scientific research on lions, elephants and other animals. Capturing these experiences in writing, she has co-authored three internationally bestselling nonfiction books about her life as a wildlife scientist. Owens won the John Burroughs Award for Nature Writing and her work has appeared in *Nature*, *Journal of Mammalogy*, *The African Journal of Ecology*, and *International Wildlife*. She currently lives in Idaho. Owens's conservation work in Zambia was clouded by controversy following the shooting of a suspected poacher in 1995. The anti-poaching patrol involved in

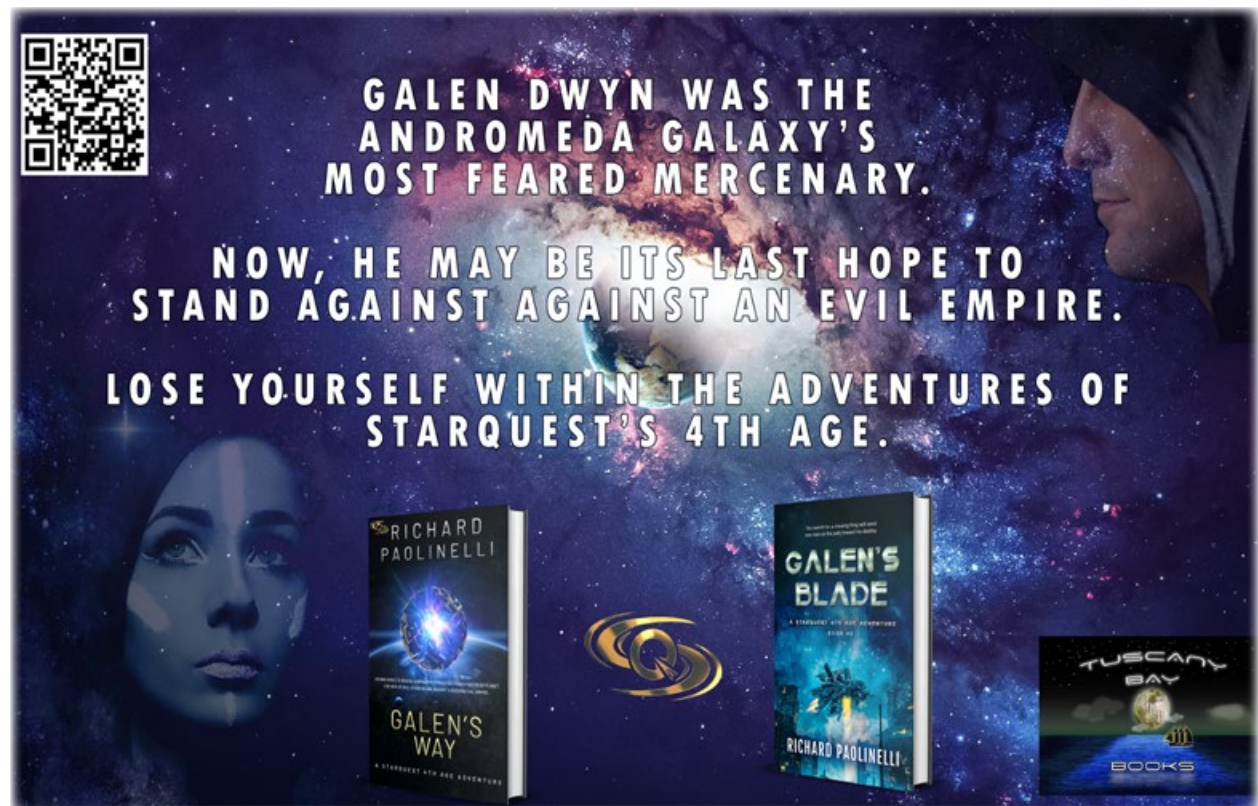
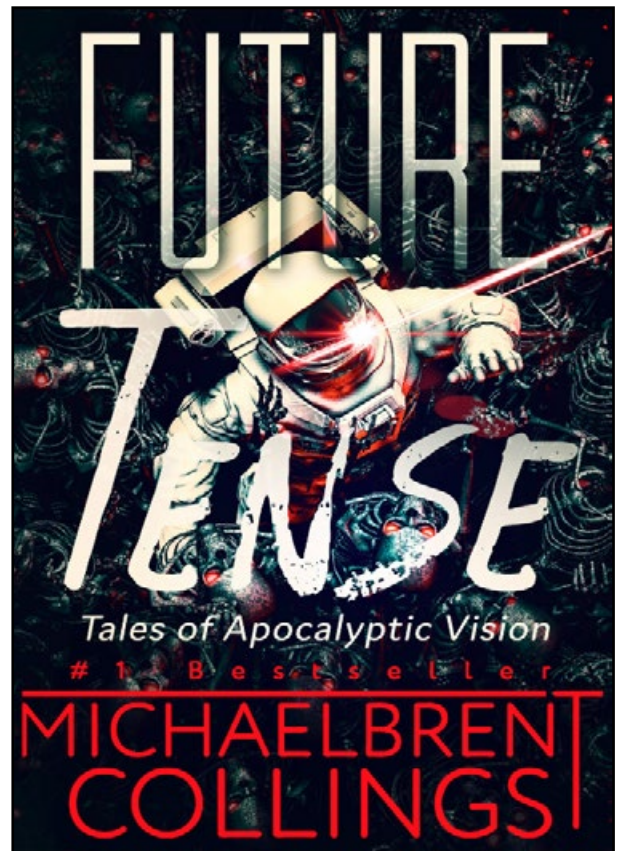




the death was part of a conservation project run by Owens and her then husband, Mark Owens. The crime was never solved, and interest in the case has resumed as a result of the popularity of 'Where the Crawdads Sing.'

The novel has received many well-deserved accolades. It has been on the New York Times Bestseller List for 171 weeks and counting. It was An Amazon Best Book of August 2018, A Reese Witherspoon x Hello Sunshine Book Club Pick, and made the Goodreads Choice Awards List.

It was released as a major motion picture on July 15, 2022 to mixed reviews with many movie-goers lamenting that the book was better. Fans of Barbara Kingsolver's nature novels such as 'Prodigal Summer' and 'Flight Behavior' will likely enjoy this novel. 'Where the Crawdads Sing' has sold more than 15 million copies worldwide, if you haven't bought it yet, now's the time. If you have it and haven't read it yet, it should be moved to the top of the pile.





## Gyroscope

### Continued from page 19

has changed?"

Now Paul sighed. "It would seem so."

"What?"

"I don't know." He glanced around. Already the rest of the hunting party was busy with camping chores. All except Adrian Skinner, the guide who was now seated on the airplane's broken wing, and Skinner was watching him and Alexandra. "I'm beginning to think he knows, though," said Paul.

"Shadows are getting longer," said Alexandra, her voice barely audible over the waves breaking below. "It will be dark in another hour or so. Paul . . . I'm hungry."

"Delmonico's is in my tent."

"Ribeye steak?" she said.

"Baked potato with sour cream, broccoli with Béarnaise sauce, a merlot from Languedoc, and candlelight?"

"Would you settle for field rations, warm sodas, and a couple candles?"

"Boom," she said.

Dear Towhomit,

I am now convinced that we have been brought to this place, but I still don't know why. I now have an ally, and perhaps more: Alexandra Talbot

"Sinclair," amended Alexandra, hovering near his shoulder. "My father's name. I kept it. Alexandra Sinclair. Do you have to write that right now? I thought we—."

"Please. I need to do this

while I'm thinking about it fresh."

Sinclair. We're developing a list of Odd, of things we know but cannot yet explain. We seem to be surrounded by an impenetrable wind, cause unknown. The ocean level is rising inexplicably; something must have changed in the environment, but what? I think Adrian knows

"No," said Alexandra. It was almost a yell. She began to walk around the center pole of the tent while she spoke her mind. "No, Paul, it's not that our environment is changing, but that we are changing our environment! Not us, not you and I. But the others. You've called them on it. Putting a berry patch here instead of simply gathering the berries when they're ripe. Burning the grass to clear a garden. Burning coal instead of wood. Planning to mine the coal, probably strip-mining, since the seam is near the surface." She paused to regard him. Already he had stopped writing, and was standing up where she wouldn't collide with him during her peripatetic thinking. "It's us," she said again. "We're changing it. We're the agents of environmental change."

Paul scuffed at the canvas floor of the tent. "You're saying that when we effect a change in the environment, the environment responds with a change of its own." Abruptly he rolled his eyes. "Well, duh! Yes, that's exactly what been happening, all over the planet. That's the sim-

ple equation. But . . . but these are local changes—the ocean level, the winds—and they must be engineered somehow."

Alexandra looked doubtful.

"How would you engineer a ten-foot increase in the ocean level?"

"I don't know. Nuke Antarctica? But we've seen the difference in ocean level, Sandy. So it's happened. Or . . ."

She snapped her fingers. "Or it's all an illusion," she cried.

"I don't think so," he replied, shaking his head. "I think we really see these things—the ocean, the savannah, the forest. And certainly the trees are real, because they scratched you. But what part of what we see is real, and what part only looks real?"

A somber silence followed his question. Finally Alexandra said, "This is crazy."

"A good night's sleep should help to clear our heads."

Her dove-gray eyes acquired a million-mile gaze. Her fingers toyed with the hem of her jersey, as if she were going to lift it. "What makes you think you're going to get a good night's sleep?" she asked.

"Captain Nemo," said Paul, the next morning, while they shared single-serving boxes of cold cereal. "He was the covert benefactor for the refugees who landed on his mysterious island. We're looking for Nemo."

"Adrian Skinner?" asked Alexandra, between crunches.

He shook his head. "He's the observer. I'm betting the radio does reach someone: whoever is behind this. They receive

reports of what transpires here.”

Alexandra dismissed this with a desultory wave of her hand. “Conspiracy theory,” she snorted.

“Exactly.”

She spun back around. “What?”

“We are the victims of a conspiracy,” Paul went on. “To what end, I don’t know, but—.”

Shouts outside the tent interrupted him. Talbot’s voice; something that sounded like a slap; a scream. His father demanding a cessation of hostilities, although not in so many words. Paul grabbed Alexandra’s hand, and they rushed from the tent.

John Talbot was standing over his fallen wife, Alexandra’s mother, who had a large red mark on her left cheek. He was so angry that he was unable to speak, and could only make mouth noises. The elder Barrow was tugging on Talbot’s shoulder, trying to pull him away. Paul’s mother appeared to be in shock. For a change, Adrian Skinner was standing up; he looked as if he might be about to intervene.

Alexandra rushed to her mother and knelt down on the grass beside her, arms around her for support.

Paul drew up to his father. “What’s going on?”

“It’s about time you woke up,” said Talbot, to Alexandra. “You slut.”

The vulgarity galvanized Paul in a way he had never known before. He stepped forward and swung his fist at Talbot’s face. Though Talbot flinched, the blow landed on his cheek and knocked him back a step. Talbot caught his balance, and flashed a bloody grin as he raised his fists.

“Come get some, sonny,” he said.

“That’s enough, Jack,” Barrow said, in a tone that demanded compliance. To Paul, he added, with only the barest hint of mockery, “Well, you might make a man yet.”

Paul took a couple of deep breaths and let them out slowly. “What’s going on?” he asked again.

“Liza Talbot has been sneaking additional rations,” Barrow answered.

“I was hungry!” Liza screamed. Alexandra tried to hold her down, but she struggled back to her feet. “Nobody has done anything to get us out of here. It’s all pioneer stuff with you. Ration this,

ration that. It’s . . . it’s . . . irrational!”

“The radio doesn’t reach anyone,” Barrow said calmly. “We have to—”

“I’m not sure that’s true,” said Paul, with barely a glance in Skinner’s direction. “I think we’ve received a response.”

“You’re crazy,” sneered Talbot.

“What are you talking about?” Barrow demanded. “The radio doesn’t get through. Our smart phones don’t work. Nobody knows we’re here.”

Paul jammed his hands into his pockets and trudged over to the berry vine that had been transplanted the day before. Not unexpectedly, its leaves appeared to be somewhat wilted. He caught a whiff of something sour and pungent, and after several seconds he identified it. “Bug spray?” he said, turning around to address his father.

“We don’t have any pesticide,” said Barrow, with a trace of sarcasm.

Paul sighed. “Have you seen any bugs here?” he asked.

“No, but that doesn’t mean they’re not around. We can’t take any chances with any crops we plant. And we’re getting ready for that burn, so we have a place to cultivate whatever we can find.”

Paul shook his head. “The prevailing winds blow out toward the grasslands. If you start a fire here, there’s no telling how far it will burn out of control.”

“We’ll control it,” Barrow said, his jaw clenched. His eyes flashed anger. “Same old Paul, trying to save the world.”

“Just this little part of it. Pop, have you looked at the ocean?”

“Yeah. It’s an ocean. So what?”

“Does it look a little different to you today?”

Barrow squinted toward the horizon. Waves were dashing above the cliffs, with the wind blowing salty spray inland. “Tide’s come in,” he said at last.

Paul held out an ushering arm. “Let’s go up and look at it,” he suggested.

“I don’t need to . . . oh, all right. I’ll humor you.”

They approached the cliff, with Alexandra trailing a step behind. None of the others followed, but Paul had the impression that Skinner was watching them closely out of the corner of his eye. They reached a point about three paces from the prec-

ipice. Briny froth pelted them as the waves crashed not more than five feet below.

Staring, Barrow swore softly.

Paul said, "It's risen about fifteen feet since yesterday, Pop. That's not tidal."

"No," his father agreed.

"Tell him about the wind," said Alexandra.

"What about the wind?"

"The wind that blew me back onto the grass after I jumped," Paul replied. "The wind Sa . . . Alexandra and I encountered in the forest. It's a wall of wind, and it is impenetrable. It's as good as an electric fence. We tried, but we couldn't get through it." He looked back at the rolling savannah. "I'd bet if you go far enough out there, you'd encounter the same winds."

Paul paused for a moment, and took Alexandra's hand. "So what has changed since yesterday morning, Pop?"

The elder Barrow frowned. Wrinkles high on his forehead disturbed the gleam of sunlight from his balding head. "I'm not sure I follow you," he said. His gaze took in the pair of them. "Unless . . .?"

Paul held up their clasped hands. "I don't mean this," he said. "From the time we crashed here until yesterday, you were all plans and schemes and preparations for a stay of long duration. You were going to do this and that. But you hadn't actually done anything. Yesterday, you did."

He released Alexandra and began ticking his fingers as he made his points. "You dug up

a berry vine and not only transplanted it, but you placed it in a spot not suited to this encampment. You sprayed it with bug spray without considering the effect that spray might have, on the plant and on the fruit it might bear. You're going to start a fire you probably will not be able to control—"

"You don't know—"

"Will you please just for once hear me out?"

For a moment the elder Barrow's nostrils flared, as if he were on the verge of an explosion. With a visible effort he calmed himself, drinking in a deep breath and letting it out very slowly, while salty spray wafted all around them.

"You found a lump of coal and immediately planned to locate and exploit the seam," Paul continued, as if there had been no interruption. "You're going to use it in our campfire instead of harvesting the fallen trees in the area and using them for firewood."

Barrow dismissed this with his tone. "You're concerned about carbon emissions."

"The point," Paul said stiffly, "is that you're not. The point is that you glommed onto the idea of burning coal as soon as the opportunity arose, yesterday, without at least exhausting the alternatives first. And the main point is that this occurred yesterday."

"I don't care for the way you're talking to me, Paul," said Barrow.

"I don't care for the way you never even grant me the courtesy of a hearing, Pop."

Alexandra inserted herself

between them, her presence a silent plea for peace.

"Right," said Paul. His lips puffed as he blew air out. "I'll just finish. Half a minute. You can wait that long to resume raping the landscape."

Alexandra's hand on his arm stopped him.

Paul nodded. "But see, that's what has changed, Pop. Since yesterday, you've either taken action or made specific, deliberate plans to take action on our environment here. Since yesterday, the ocean level has risen," he glanced out at it, "a good fifteen feet. Now, I'm not prepared to explain why this has occurred; I know only that it has occurred, and that it has occurred in apparent conjunction with the various actions I listed."

"Apparent," repeated Barrow.

"I'm guessing that if you continue changing our environment," said Paul, "the ocean level will continue to rise, flooding our campsite, flowing up that river over there and inundating the land."

Barrow made a sound of disgust. "What you're suggesting isn't even possible."

"What if it is?"

"Then tell me how," demanded Barrow. "You're suggesting that my decision to burn coal in our campfire has caused the ocean level to rise fifteen feet." He looked sharply at Paul. "Do you understand how insane that sounds?"

"In fact, I do," said Paul. "But humor me a little longer. Go back to the camp and tell the others that you're not going to burn the grass or spray any more



plants with Bugdead, and you're going to harvest and burn firewood for cooking and for warmth." He looked up at the sun for a moment. "Though why we need warmth here, I've no idea. Anyway, go tell them. It's only noon, or close to it. Let's see what happens to the ocean level by sundown. If it has gone way down, will you at least give my thoughts some consideration?"

Barrow turned away and headed back toward the camp.

"Pop?" called Paul.

But the elder Barrow waved him off, and continued onward.

"What are you thinking?" asked Alexandra, after Barrow was out of earshot.

"It's a set-up," Paul answered. "I don't know how, and I'm not completely sure why, but someone is trying to teach us something. More specifically, to teach my dad something." He looked out at the ocean again. "It's the only thing that makes sense. And even that doesn't make sense."

"But you got him to listen to you," Alexandra pointed out. "That's something."

Paul turned and glared at the camp, where his father was talking in a low tone to the others. "He's probably telling them to go out and bring back all the coal they can find."

Hand in hand again, they began walking toward presumed north and the river. Paul drew his concerns away from the environment to give some attention to what had developed between himself and Alexandra. Something of an outcast in the camp because of his tender age and his father's general dismissal of him as a sentient being, he was grateful that Alexandra, Sandy, was taking his part whenever it seemed necessary. They'd formed a bond under the duress of isolation, and the romantic in him wondered how long that bond would last after they returned to civilization.

"You're awfully quiet," said Alexandra, as they reached the crest of a low hill that marked the halfway point to the river. She squeezed his hand. "But you're not tense," she went on. "So you're not thinking about your dad and what he might do. Therefore, it's either the problem of why we're all here, or . . . or it's about us. You and me. I'd say a penny for your thoughts, but inflation is rough

these days. How about two dollars and fifty-three cents?"

Paul smiled in spite of his questions.

"That's better," she said.

"This is sudden and unexpected," he blurted, unable to stop himself.

"Maybe for you."

He stopped, and turned to her. "What does that mean?"

"I'm not as impulsive as it seems," she admitted. "Since this trip began, I kind of knew you and I would . . . okay, maybe not last night in your tent, but I thought at least we would get better acquainted. I mean, we've known each other for years. But you appeared to be more interested in your diary."

"It's therapeutic," he told her, as they resumed their journey toward the river. "And cathartic."

"I shouldn't wonder."

"It helps me keep myself together whenever I feel like I'm coming apart."

"You don't want to follow in your dad's footsteps?"

"God, no. I want . . . I want to finish up my degree this semester and . . . and . . ."

"Save the world?" she asked.

He shook his head. "That's not a task for one person," he said. "No, I just want to do some good, somewhere."

"Greenpeace? Quieteart? Sierra Club?"

"Yeah, maybe."

They reached the final downward slope before the river, and swished through the sun-baked grass. "Ah, skinny-dipping," she said.

The notion startled him. "What? No!" He felt his face warm. "I mean, no, that's not why I wanted to come here."

"Pity, that."

"Besides, they might see us. No, I wanted to find out how far we could go in this direction."

"About as far as we went last night in the tent," she said smugly. "If we stay below the crest of that last hillock. Paul?"

"Yeah?"

"Just kiss me, and I'll shut up. I know you've got a lot to think about. But you don't have to worry about you and me, about us." She clutched at his hand again for emphasis. "Understand?"

"I do."

"One more thing," she said. "I love the way you are so gentle with me. But every once in a while I'd like you to keep in mind that I'm not made of spun glass. I won't break."

"Um," he said. "I, ah . . . to borrow from double-o seven, you want to be taken, not interred."

She groaned, then glared at him. "That was an unspeakable pun. You are so going to pay for it. Now, shut me up."

He kissed her.

"You can do better than that," she pouted.

He could, and he did.

The river purled past them, on its way to the ocean. Though the dusty yellow-orange sun had sunk halfway down to the horizon, it cast enough heat on Paul and Alexandra to keep them perspiring well after they had finished causing themselves to sweat. Sprawled now on the makeshift bed of their clothing, they each fell into their own reveries. Paul's, to his chagrin, focused not on the young woman beside him, but on their current plight. He felt as if there were some essential ingredient that continued to elude him; that if he could identify it, everything here would suddenly make sense.

Someone, Paul was certain, had managed to control a little portion of the environment. Or had established the semblance of control. The hunting group had intruded—or had been made to intrude—into this portion, and to affect or plan to

affect that control. Their actions were akin to jamming a stick through the spokes of a moving bicycle.

"Gyroscope," Paul said suddenly, and sat bolt upright, startling Alexandra. Her dove-gray eyes peered up at him, squinting in the sunlight.

"The environment here is like a gyroscope," he expanded. "We've been sticking things in the spokes. It's off-kilter."

"The environment anywhere," Alexandra put in. As unself-conscious as Paul, she sat up and drew her knees up, wrapping her arms around her legs. "I think I see what you mean," she went on. "In the past two days we've made adjustments to our surroundings, all of them without giving any thought to the effects those adjustments might have."

Paul nodded. "There's nothing inherently wrong in planting a berry vine bramble for cultivation and harvesting," he said, more thinking out loud than speaking to her. "But we planted ours without planning, without asking ourselves what it would do to our surroundings. We sprayed it with a quasi-insecticide without asking what it would do to the ground, to ourselves, and to our digestive systems. We're going to burn the grasslands to make room for crops. Crops which in fact we don't even have seeds for. We're going to burn coal unnecessarily. Each thoughtless act upsets the balance of the gyroscope. Remember those toys we used to have as kids?"

"Um . . . no. But I know what one looks like," she added quickly.

ly.

"You could start them up by pulling on a string, like on a top, and stand them on the point of a pencil," said Paul. "No matter how you tilted the pencil, the gyroscope remained vertical. As long as it was spinning, anyway. A bicycle wheel is just another gyroscope, but on its edge. As long as you keep pedaling, the bicycle remains upright." He laughed, and said, "And so does the rider. But poke a stick through the wheel, and off you go. We've been doing that to the environment here."

Alexandra shook her head. "But that doesn't explain the rise in ocean level," she objected. "I mean, yeah, on a large scale, the things we do can affect it. They are affecting it."

"Pop's corporation has been quietly buying up land five to ten miles from the coastlines for years now," he said. "New waterfront properties. They'll be worth a lot more."

"That's sick."

"No, that's profit. I don't really blame him for that. It's a good financial move. But his corporation has also been doing things to the environment to cause those coastlines to change. In ignorance, I'm sure; Pop is neither malevolent nor malicious. Thing is, I doubt he'd stop even if he grasped the principle of environmental cause and effect."

"But the rise in ocean level here," Alexandra persisted. "How does that fit in?"

"That," said Paul, "is a very good question. Maybe it hasn't actually risen."

"I don't understand."

"I'm not sure I do, either. I think it has to do with the mechanism by which they control this little portion of the environment."

"They?"

As if on cue, they heard Skinner's voice. It sounded close by, as if he were standing on the other side of the hill.

"Don't worry, I won't look," Skinner called. "But I would ask you two to get dressed now, please."

\* \* \*

"I can't wait to read this diary entry," said Alexandra, as she climbed back into her jeans.

Paul chuckled, and fastened his belt. Her calling it a diary instead of a journal endeared her to him. She "got" him in ways no one else had done. But when they reached civilization again, what then? His face sobered as he looked at her. Insignificant for the moment were the personal problems he faced with his father, or their present isolation, even the strange man waiting on the other side of the hill to hear from them again.

Yet what did he really know about her? Like himself, she was in her last semester, he at Michigan, she at Wisconsin. He had been compelled to major in Business Administration by his father, but he had added a second major in Environmental Studies on his own, and in opposition to him. As far as he could recollect, Geology was her major, glacial geology her specialty. She had a second major, but it eluded his memory. Still, where did that leave them? He avoiding what his father declared as his duty

by going off instead on a Greenpeace mission to save the blue whales? She at a post in Antarctica, studying glacial progression and calving?

"I thought I had put a smile on your face," said Alexandra.

"Post-coital lassitude," he told her.

"My, aren't we clinical."

Paul laughed, despite his mood.

"I told you not to worry about you and me," she reminded him.

"We can work this out." She paused, and added, flashing a grin, "Except on game day."

"Game day?"

"You're a Wolverine, I'm a Badger."

"Oh. Right." He gazed toward the crest of the hill and said, "We'd better see what he wants."

She tugged at his arm to stop him from calling out to Skinner. "What do you want?" she asked.

"Seriously."

"Yes, seriously."

"You," said Paul, without hesitation.

"Boom," said Alexandra.

\* \* \*

They called out to Skinner that they were now presentable. The taciturn man quickly appeared on the crest of the hill and strode down to them. Seen up close, his long, ruddy face was darkened by a week's worth of stubble. But there was a touch of mirth in his pale eyes as he shook hands with Paul, then with Alexandra.

"We should sit down," Skinner suggested. "This may take a while."

The three of them moved to

the riverbank and made themselves as comfortable as possible on the rough grass. Paul was feeling a touch of embarrassment. How long had Skinner been waiting on the other side of the hill? What had he . . . heard? A glance at Alexandra told him she was asking herself the same questions.

"About two hours," said Skinner. "I heard what I needed to hear."

Paul started. Alexandra said, "Please don't tell me you're telepathic."

Skinner smiled. Paul thought it was the first time he had seen the man smile.

"Hardly," said Skinner. "But I'd be astonished if you both didn't have the same unspoken question, under the circumstances." He leaned back on the grass, arms braced behind him. "You've almost put it all together, Paul," he went on, adding with another smile, this one directed at Alexandra, "with some very good insights from you. I particularly enjoyed the gyroscope analogy. Most apt. What you two are seeing—some of what you're seeing—is holographic. You've already located much of the boundary. The remainder runs just on the other side of the river, which is real. Beyond that is actually a forest, much like the one next to your camp. The wind you feel is forced air circulating around the perimeter. As you've surmised, it is virtually impenetrable. We didn't want any of you to wander off . . . or to throw yourselves off the cliff. The sun's color is affected by the projection. By the way,



on a lighter note, those berries tend to give you what we call the trots, as Mr. Talbot should be finding out fairly soon.”

Alexandra laughed. Paul asked, “How are you generating the field?”

“It cost a bit of money, of course,” Skinner answered readily. “We shut it off for a few hours each day in the early morning. The holographic generator is inside the plane, which is why I generally discouraged anyone from going in there. Especially you two.”

Alexandra’s pale brow wrinkled. “Why us?”

“Because we were the targets of this exercise,” Paul said suddenly, having just made a connection. “Not my dad, or yours.”

“But why?”

Paul looked to Skinner, who said, “You can lead a corporate executive to the truth, but you cannot force him to accept it. A nice little truism. ‘Nice’ in its original meaning, that is to say. To your father, Quietearth is just another radical fringe organization bent on pelting various upper management individuals with spoiled cabbage and tomatoes.” He laughed lightly, and went on, “Not that we haven’t done that, but there are those of us who realize that to elicit a lasting and useful response, we have to have both demonstrative proof and a rational program. You can’t just shut down refineries, or EMP every vehicle that has electronic ignition—which is just about all of them these days—or stop mining coal. Nor should you want to; there is

a happy medium that can be reached. There are those of us at Quietearth who are working on relevant proposals based on our independent studies. In the meantime, someone needs to . . . let’s say ‘cultivate sensibility’ in the minds of those who have the power to effect change quickly enough to do some good, yet slowly enough to cause no more than the maximum acceptable disruption. Obviously, that’s a fine line to walk.”

“You said ‘someone,’” said Alexandra. “Not Quietearth, then?”

Skinner turned to Paul. “Would your father give us a hearing?” he asked.

“He wouldn’t want you in the same zip code,” replied Paul.

“But he might give Paul a hearing,” Alexandra cried suddenly. Her face glowed with her eureka moment. “That’s what this is all about.”

“Especially,” added Skinner, “if you have something simple and demonstrable to show him.”

“Like the rise in ocean level,” said Paul.

“And the fall of it,” Skinner put in. “Before I came out here, I listened. He wasn’t happy. But he told the others they were going to hold off on the burn, and use fallen trees for firewood. He even got his wife to wash off the leaves of the berry vine, not that that will make the berries more edible. That’s not the point.”

“So the ocean level is,” began Paul.

“Part of the illusion,” said Skinner. “Oh, there is an ocean there. You felt the spray. But it’s about twenty feet below the cliff.

And the projection will show that presently.”

“How,” said Alexandra. She licked her lips and tried again. “How did you manage all this? I mean, holograms and . . . illusions and who knows . . . ?”

A faint smile toyed with the corners of Skinner’s mouth. “We had a lot of help from some folks in Marin County,” he admitted. “Of course, it helps that we’re now a tax-deductible organization.”

“Where exactly are we?” Paul asked.

“Near Punta Herrera, on the Yucatan coast. No, you would not have spotted the volcano smoke.”

“Omigod,” cried Alexandra. Her eyes widened in horror as she regarded Skinner. “You got the pilot killed, just to set this up. You’re a—”

Skinner quickly shook his head. “We’ve taken great pains to keep all of you safe,” he told her. “As Paul here learned first-hand. No, Roberto Dario is very much alive. He’s not just a pilot, he’s a stunt pilot, and a very good one. Works for indie films, mostly. He knows how to crash. You’ll see him again when we reach our support camp, about half a kilometer beyond the wind barrier.” He looked from Paul to Alexandra and back again. “Well, someone has to fly you out of here.”

“An illusion,” said Barrow.

He and Paul were standing near the precipice that overlooked the ocean, with the sun about to set. Twenty feet below them, waves continued their

slow erosion of the rocks.

A lesson, corrected Paul, thinking to himself. It would not do to rub his father's nose too hard in the mess he had made. Little steps, Adrian Skinner had said. We're in a hurry, but we have time if we keep putting one foot in front of the other. This was a first step. One of many.

"A consequence, Pop," Paul said aloud. "A connection."

Barrow slowly nodded. "I'm beginning to grasp that. But you're suggesting that I close down CommEarth. That we close down the corporations—"

"No."

". . . and the manufacturing—"  
"No."

". . . and millions of people will lose their livelihood—"

"No, Pop, that's not—"

Barrow turned to him and said softly, "Would you please just hear me out?"

Paul grinned. "Of course, Pop," he relented.

"What you're suggesting is a radical change that will destroy the country and society as we know it. Don't you like the life you have? Don't you appreciate your education, your car . . . your ribeye steaks?"

"I love ribeyes, Pop. I'm just not willing to use the Earth as a dump for animal waste, to say nothing of adding methane to the atmosphere, the smell of meat-processing plants located too close to the cities, the . . . I don't want to go on and on."

He gazed out at the real ocean.

Moments later, Barrow cleared his throat. "You seem to have cemented a relationship with Alexandra," he said, in the tone

of a friendly observation.

Paul decided to be blunt. "If you're referring to last night and this afternoon," he responded, "that's really a small part of it. I keep a diary; you call it a journal. She calls it a diary. Not because it's a diary or a journal, but because it's what I call it. She accepts my frame of reference. She's compatible in ways I cannot even begin to express to you. Yes, there are differences. Education, university, upbringing. I can't imagine what it must be like to be raised by someone who is not your parent and who regards you as being in the way, as she has been raised. It makes me appreciate you and Mom, together all these years. But again, that's a little thing. Life is really a series of little things. Big things only obscure that.

"And what we do to the environment is a series of little things. A plastic milk carton here, a cigarette butt out the window there. Burning sulfurous coal because it's less expensive than anthracite. Manufacturing incrementally improved smart phones—like the ones your CommEarth manufactures in China."

"What's wrong with—?"

"The primary difference between the Polara 6 and the Polara 5 is that the Six accommodates ten—count them, ten—more apps than the Five. The Five accommodated sixteen more than the Four, which was geared to five hundred apps, or hundreds more than most people can keep track of. All three models came out in the past eighteen months. What a

waste!"

"It makes money for us," Barrow protested.

"Yeah. Pop, it's not one thing and it's not just CommEarth. It's Red-Bands replacing Blue-Rays replacing DVDs replacing VHS—"

Barrow shook his head. "Technological development, that's all."

"Pop," sighed Paul, "we've had Red-Band technology since VHS came out. We just held it back to make more incremental money. But again, that's just one symptom. It's a lot of little things." He sighed again. "To fix it, we have to take one step here and one step there, so their effects accumulate like a downhill snowball. No, we can't shut things down. Yes, the end result might well be the radical change that you fear so much. But that's a couple centuries or more into the future. It's a big change, but over time people will adapt. If we do things right, the effects of most incremental changes will be minimal. You won't realize you've traveled until you arrive at your destination."

His father, uncharacteristically, did not respond.

Maybe he's mulling it over, Paul thought. It's a beginning. Now to get him involved . . .

"Pop, you're worth six billion dollars. People will listen to you."

Barrow stared at him. "Seven billion, thank you."

"I know." Paul faked a downcast look. "I was kind of hoping for an allowance."

Incredibly, Paul felt his father's arm slip around his shoulders. They began walking slowly back

to the encampment. "I was thinking more along the lines of a wedding gift, if it comes to that. Or perhaps if you had it now, it might lead to that. What would you do with it?"

Paul shrugged. "Set up a trust fund to disperse it where it's needed."

"Always the sensible one. You are going back to the university, right?"

"I have to keep up with Sandy . . . I mean Alexandra."

Barrow stopped, and Paul with him.

"As for people listening to me," Barrow said. "I do know two or three senators who are up for re-election next year. And . . . other people."

"Seriously."

Barrow nodded. "I won't say I'll agree with everything you think, Paul. But it might be useful if you formed some sort of consultancy, to advise me on where we should and should not develop. I might not take the advice; in fact, it's doubtful that I will. But . . ."

"But it's a little step," said Paul. "And ComEarth would be leading the way."

Barrow grinned. "That thought had occurred to

me."

Alexandra spotted their return, and walked out to meet them. She disengaged Paul from his father, and led him aside.

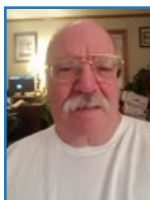
"Did you two have a nice talk?" she asked.

"He thinks I should start an environmental consultancy for corporations," Paul answered. "I think I agree."

Her eyes brightened. "Want some really really long-term help?"

"Boom," said Paul.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:



*Tyee Campbell is a retired U.S. Army translator (Russian, Spanish, and Thai) who tells stories when he's not taking care of two husky mixes, both handfuls, and a kitchen garden and collections of oddments. He also writes the Bombay Sapphire super-heroine series for Pro Se Press. His latest novel, 'Avatar,' is available on Amazon.*

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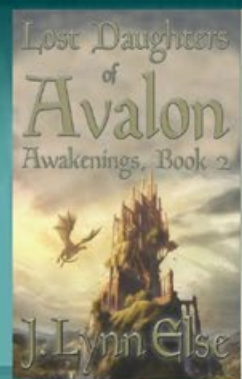
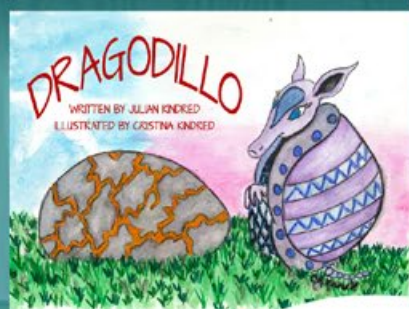



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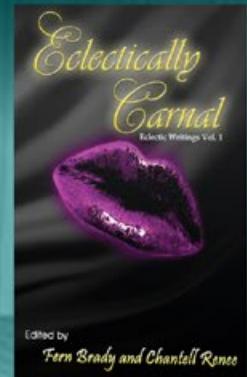
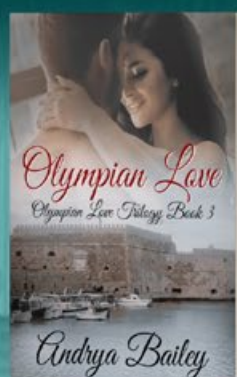
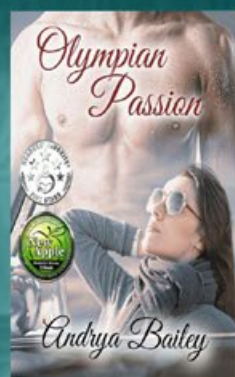


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