

IAM *Limitless*

Publisher Chelle Honiker Reflects on the History of *Indie Author Magazine* and Looks to New Horizons for 2025

10 Tips for:
Fiverr

Unleash Your Creative Juices: The Science behind Brain.FM for Authors

ALLi Exclusive: Setting Goals and Your Sights on Future Success

The Secret Mindset of a Millionaire Author

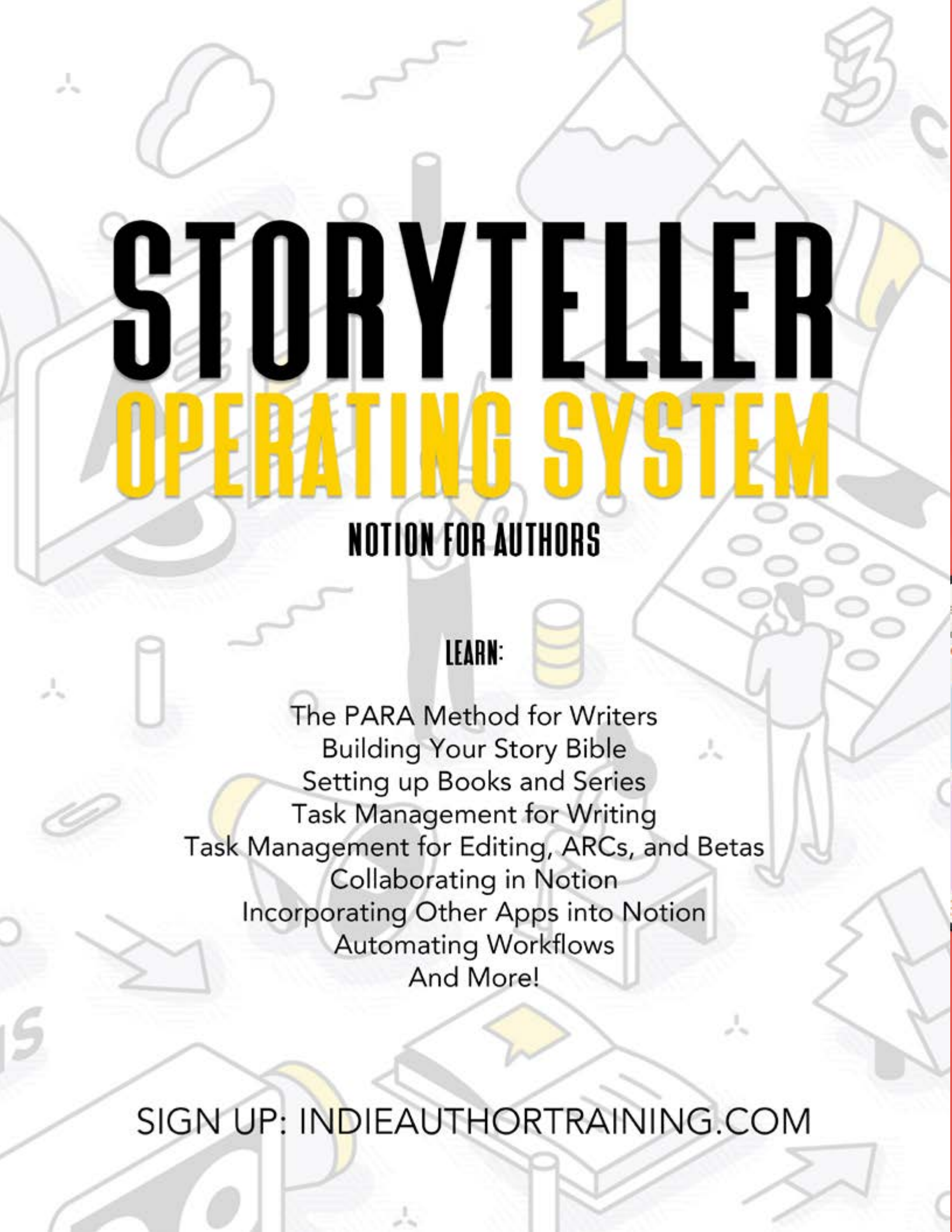
Gone Phishing
Cybersecurity Tips to Avoid Scams Targeting Your Author Business

Living the Romantasy

INDIE AUTHOR MAGAZINE

THE BEST OF INDIE AUTHOR MAGAZINE

Issue 44



STORYTELLER OPERATING SYSTEM

NOTION FOR AUTHORS

LEARN:

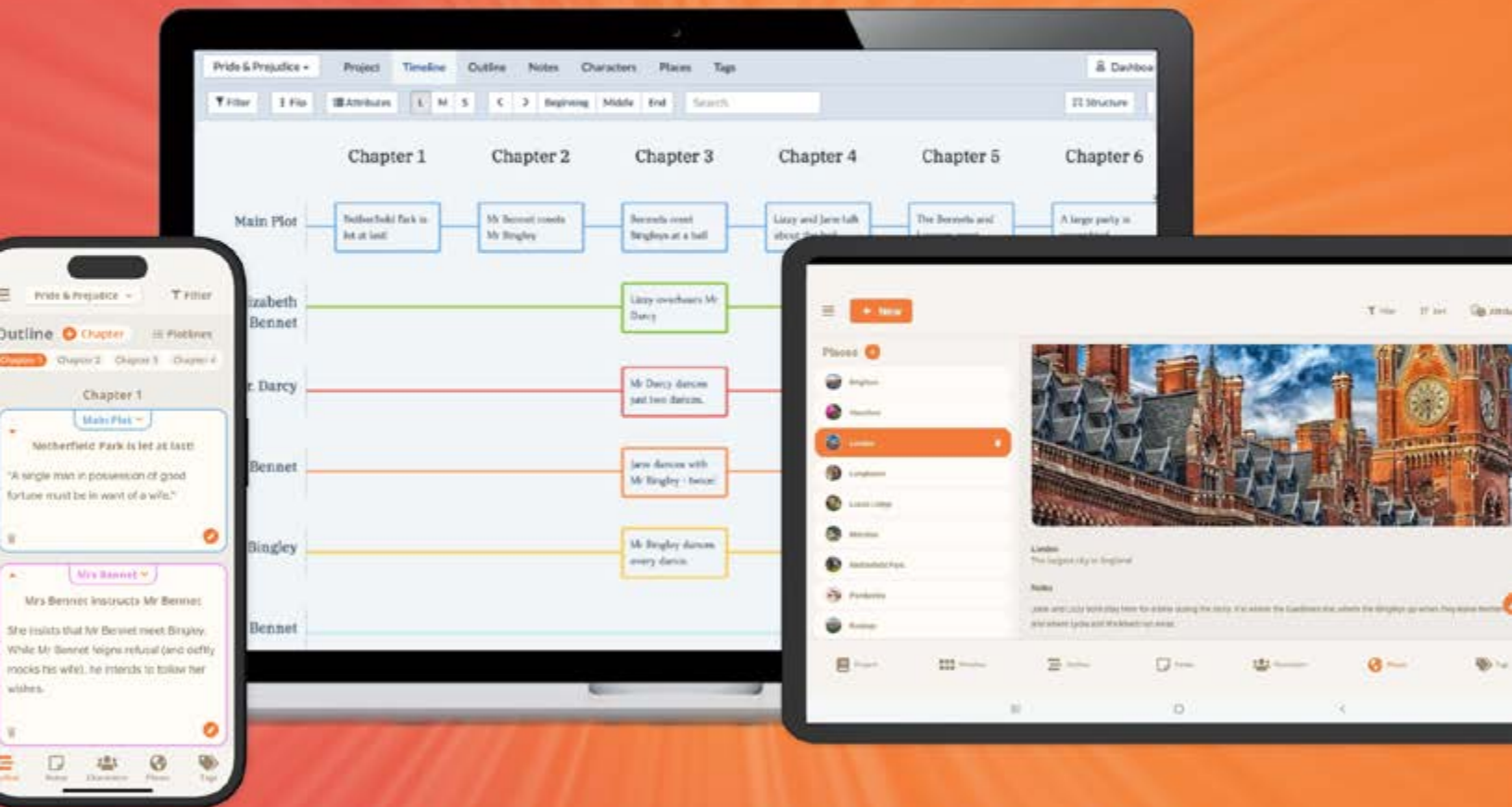
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The screenshot displays the reedsystudio interface, which is designed for writers to manage their manuscripts. The interface is divided into several sections:

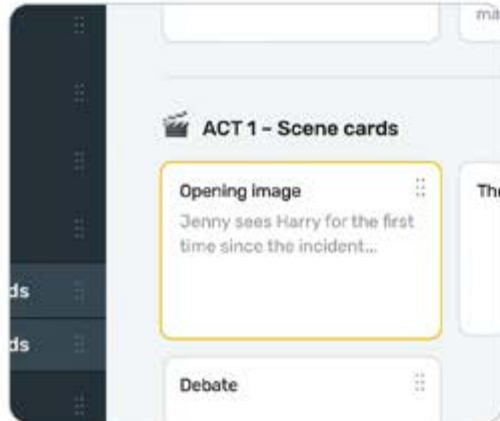
- Manuscript Sidebar:** Located on the left, it contains a list of manuscript components: Front matter, Copyright, Table of Contents, Body, and Back matter. The 'Body' section is expanded, showing '1 Chapter 1'.
- Manuscript Editor:** The central area shows the title 'Rocket Bride' and the chapter title 'The Rehearsal D'. The text of the chapter is displayed, with a highlighted sentence: "Are you ready, Princess?" Bria placed the delicate silver crown "I don't know." Ximara pressed temples, just below where the c bit of a headache. Maybe it's the braids?"
- Goals & Insights Panel:** Located on the right, it provides a summary of the manuscript's progress. It shows a word count of 12,079 words, with a goal of 40,000 words. A progress bar indicates 30% completion. A table shows the word count for each day of the week, with a total of +1123 words added/removed. A 'Manuscript goal' section shows a target of 12,079 words and a deadline of 30 Nov. A note at the bottom states: "Write 1,117 words/day to finish on time".
- Main Characters Panel:** Located at the bottom, it displays three character cards: Princess Andromeda, Aether Lefield, and Captain Perseus. Each card features a stylized illustration of the character.

The interface also includes a 'reedsy' logo at the bottom left and a 'Settings' button at the top right.

WRITE

Make yourself at home

The clean interface, chapter sidebar, and simple formatting controls make Studio feel instantly familiar.



PLAN

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REVISE

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Distribution ready

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— Mark Leslie Lefebvre, MA 2024



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“ I learned more from Western’s publishing program in one week than I learned in five years of trying to figure it out on my own. ”

— Jared Nelson, MA 2025

Kevin J. Anderson and **Allyson Longueira** co-teach Western’s Publishing program. An extremely successful hybrid author, Kevin brings more than 40 years of experience in the publishing industry in books, comics, graphic novels, TV, and film. Allyson brings more than 20 years of experience in traditional and indie publishing in nonfiction and fiction and has won awards for her writing, editing, and design skills. **Gwyneth Gibby** and **Marie Whittaker** round out the program with their extensive experience in the indie publishing industry.



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Beth Duke

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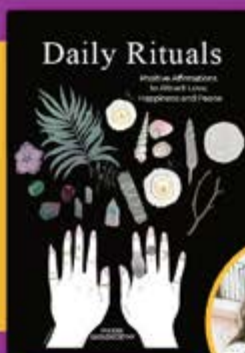
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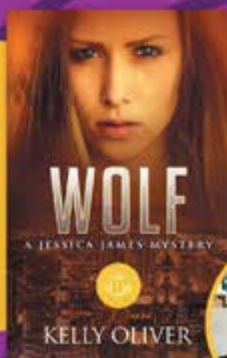
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Katie Cross, katiecrossbooks.com



"Having my own store has given me the freedom to look at my creativity as a profitable business and lifelong career."

Phoebe Garnsworthy, phoebegarnsworthy.com



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From the EDITOR IN CHIEF

2024 has been quite the year, hasn't it?

Over the past twelve months, we've watched the continued rise of trends like direct sales, crowdfunding, and transmedia, allowing indie authors to take even more control of their careers. We've witnessed several organizations and platforms expand their focus to new arenas or adjust to new leadership. We've attended conferences, events, workshops, and writing retreats across the world, connecting with one another in new settings and in new ways.

There have been changes to *IAM* as well. As you'll read in this month's cover feature, over the past year, we've expanded into new realms of the indie author sphere. You may have read special editions of our magazine at events like the inaugural Future of Publishing Mastermind in New Orleans in February or the NINC Conference in St. Pete's Beach, Florida, in September. This past summer, we also launched Indie Author Training, a marketplace for workshops, webinars, and walk-throughs from experts at every stage of the publishing process. Our latest project, Direct2Readers.com, will connect authors and readers and expand things even further.

Next month marks our first issue of 2025, but it will also be our forty-fifth issue of the magazine. Since its inception, we've covered stories and topics from every corner of the indie publishing world, from new tools to emerging genres, guides to launching a book for first-time authors to the habits of those who've crossed the seven-figure mark. You can read all of those and more in these pages—this month, we've gathered some of our favorites into a “Best of *IAM*” compilation. Of course, you can also always read articles on any topic on our website, <https://indieauthormagazine.com>!

As we peer into the new year, I'll leave you with a question: What do you want to see from us in 2025? Have an article idea you'd like to share? A question to ask Indie Annie? Thoughts on what you love or what you'd like us to do differently? Reach out to me at nicole@indieauthormagazine.com and let me know.

Until next year, from myself and all of us at *IAM*, here's wishing you all the best the holiday season and the new year has to offer.



Nicole Schroeder
Editor in Chief
Indie Author Magazine

Nicole Schroeder is a storyteller at heart. As the editor in chief of Indie Author Magazine, she brings nearly a decade of journalism and editorial experience to the publication, delighting in any opportunity to tell true stories and help others do the same. She holds a bachelor's degree from the Missouri School of Journalism and minors in English and Spanish. Her previous work includes editorial roles at local publications, and she's helped edit and produce numerous fiction and nonfiction books, including a Holocaust survivor's memoir, alongside independent publishers. Her own creative writing has been published in national literary magazines. When she's not at her writing desk, Nicole is usually in the saddle, cuddling her guinea pigs, or spending time with family. She loves any excuse to talk about Marvel movies and considers National Novel Writing Month its own holiday.

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ALLI EXCLUSIVE

Setting Goals and Your Sights on Future Success

The idea of goal setting can seem intimidating, but it's often a lack of goal setting that leads authors to a place of stress and overwhelm. Without a clear idea of your goals for your author business, you may try to do everything you see successful authors doing without considering that their goals, needs, life circumstances, and the stage of their business differ from yours. Understanding and prioritizing your own goals helps keep you focused and in control of your author path, regardless of the stage of your business.

BEGINNER AUTHORS: CREATE AND TRACK A PLAN

As a new author, learning about all the processes involved in publishing—not to mention continuing to refine your craft—might feel overwhelming, and it's challenging to look beyond getting your first book published. But once you've achieved that milestone, it's crucial to think about your long-term goals. What is your plan? What is your vision, and how do you intend to achieve it? Consider taking the following steps to lay a strong foundation for what you want your career to become and shape your business's growth.

Evaluate past achievements. What worked well for you over the past year, and how might you capitalize on that success? What didn't work well, and is it something you want to work to improve or something you want to set aside?

Define clear objectives. Determine what you want to achieve in the coming year in terms of writing, publishing, and marketing. Use the mnemonic SMART to assess your goals—are they specific (e.g., number of words written or editorial passes completed), measurable (e.g., return on investment of paid ads), attainable (e.g., appropriate for the stage of your author business), relevant (e.g., tied to your vision for your author business), and time-bound (e.g., have a specific target date)?

Create an action plan. Break down your goals into actionable steps and distribute these tasks throughout the year using a schedule that includes daily, weekly, and monthly tasks. This approach ensures that large goals are manageable, and progress is consistent.

Monitor your progress regularly. Put a monthly meeting with yourself on your calendar to assess what you have accomplished and what needs adjustment. This continual monitoring helps you to stay on track and make necessary modifications to your plan.

Adapt and adjust. Flexibility is key to responding to unforeseen challenges and opportunities that may arise throughout the year.

Incorporate creative well-being. Balance productivity goals with personal well-being. Ensure your planning includes time for creative rest and play. This balance helps maintain motivation and prevents burnout, fostering sustained creativity and productivity.

You'll find resources from ALLi for establishing a solid foundation for goal setting here:

- <https://selfpublishingadvice.org/annual-planning-for-indie-authors-and-poets>
- <https://selfpublishingadvice.org/creative-planning-principles>



EMERGING AUTHORS: PLAN FOR PROFIT

For emerging authors, planning should be an integral part of your writing business to ensure not only productivity but also profitability. Incorporating values into your plans makes them more meaningful and personal, fostering long-term success. How can you approach this?

Evaluate current performance. Begin with a thorough review of your current performance. Assess your sales figures, reader reviews, website traffic, and social media engagement. This helps identify areas of success and those needing improvement.

Define productivity and profit goals. Measure your output in terms of books published. Track your financial performance by calculating the money earned after deducting publishing expenses. Aim to increase your profit margins progressively. Evaluate your influence



and impact through platform reach and engagement. This can be measured by book sales, follower numbers, and audience interaction.

Incorporate personal values. Ensure your plans reflect your personal values and goals. Gauge your creative happiness by self-observation, rating your pleasure in work from one to ten. This helps ensure you enjoy your creative process, preventing burnout.

Follow a structured creative planning process. Implement a review and adjustment process that will help maintain a balanced approach to both creative output and business growth.

By integrating these steps, emerging authors can create a sustainable and fulfilling writing business, balancing creativity with business acumen.

Orna Ross, founder of the Alliance of Independent Authors, offers a monthly business planning program for authors. More information is available at her website, <https://ornaross.com/from-orna/category/gocreative>.

EXPERIENCED AUTHORS: STAY FLEXIBLE

Even experienced authors can benefit from a regular thorough reevaluation of goals. Consider “big picture” items like genre, brand, writing style, and website design. A major pivot might open opportunities you would miss without this exercise.

Especially for experienced authors, a common pitfall is to focus too much on the business side and neglect the creative side, risking overwhelm or burnout. Effective creative business planning factors in rest and play alongside creative work.

Learn more with these ALLi resources:

- <https://selfpublishingadvice.org/indie-author-pivots>
- <https://selfpublishingadvice.org/restart-your-creative-flow>

Setting goals is vital for charting your path, seizing opportunities, and maintaining a balanced pace. Take time to step back, assess your performance, celebrate your accomplishments, and adjust your goals as needed. Don't forget to prioritize goals for creative rest and play; this balance is key to sustaining your drive and realizing your full creative and business potential as an author. ■

Matty Dalrymple, ALLi Campaigns Manager



Matty Dalrymple, ALLi Campaigns Manager

The Alliance of Independent Authors (ALLi) is a global membership association for self-publishing authors. A non-profit, our mission is ethics and excellence in self-publishing. Everyone on our team is a working indie author and we offer advice and advocacy for self-publishing authors within the literary, publishing and creative industries around the world. www.allianceindependentauthors.org

Dear Indie Annie,

I love setting New Year's resolutions, sitting down with my planner, and mapping out my most productive and creative year yet. I do it every December ... and I end up falling off the wagon halfway through February. I know we all do it, but how do I actually stick to the goals I set?

Determined to Make This Year My Year

Dear **Determined,**

Well, bless your ambitious little heart! You and I must be kindred spirits because I, too, am a sucker for a good New Year's resolution. There's just something so crisp and clean about that fresh start, isn't there? Like cracking open a brand new notebook, all pristine and void of ink blots and eraser shavings.

But alas, my dear, we both know how that story usually ends—with our shiny resolutions gathering dust next to the elliptical machine we promised ourselves we'd use daily. I will share with you, my sweet child: I use my exercise equipment to hang clothes that fail to make it to the closet.

After so many weeks tirelessly working toward your goals, actually reaching them can start to feel like you're Cinderella trying to fit her foot into that glass slipper after the clock strikes twelve. The magic has worn off, and your feet have swollen from all that dancing! What can be done?

As it's the holiday season, let's gather around the fire for an uplifting tale.

Once upon a time, a young writer lived in a land not so far away, with dreams as big as the full moon. Each December, as the year

drew to a close, this plucky heroine would sit down with her trusty pen and parchment, determined to map out the most enchanting tale of productivity and creativity the world had ever seen.

"This will be my year!" she'd declare, her eyes sparkling with ambition. "No more being a Cinderella, relegated to the shadows while the bestseller ball goes on without me. This time, I shall go to the ball and dance the night away!"

And so our hero would set forth, crafting resolution after resolu-





Got burning questions about the wibbly-wobbly world of indie authoring? Eager to unravel the mysteries of publishing, writing woes, or anything in between? Give your quizzical quills a whirl and shoot your musings over to indieannie@indieauthormagazine.com. Your inky quandaries are my cup of tea!

tion—writing more pages, drafting more plots, conquering the dreaded social media kingdom. She’d imagine herself as the belle of the literary ball, her book clutched tightly in her hands as the crowd showered her with accolades.

But alas, like the chime of midnight, reality had a way of shattering those glass slipper dreams. Come February, our heroine would find herself back in the ashes, her grand plans in tatters around her.

“How could this happen?” she would wail, tears staining her cheeks. “I was so close to my happily ever after!”

Well, my dear, let me be your fairy godmother, because the truth is that your story doesn’t have to end in disappointment—not if you learn to rewrite the script.

First, stop waiting for that magic wand to appear and transform you into a productivity princess. Instead, channel your inner Merida and take matters into your own capable hands. Craft a plan of attack, complete with measurable milestones and accountability partners to keep you on track.

And when the going gets tough, as it inevitably will, resist the urge to shrink back into

the shadows. Remember, Cinderella didn’t let a little thing like a missed curfew stop her. She dusted off her dreams, kept that glass slipper firmly in her grasp, and marched right back to the ball.

You, my darling, must do the same. Summon your courage, draw upon that well-spring of determination, and keep moving forward, one step at a time. The only thing standing between you and your happily ever after is your own willingness to fight for it.

Take a deep breath, straighten that tiara, and get ready to slay those writing goals like the fierce heroine you are. The world may try to keep you in the ashes, but you, my dear, were born to shine. Now go forth and make magic happen!

Happy writing,
Indie Annie



10 TIPS FOR FIVERR

As authors, we know how valuable time is. However, this non-renewable resource tends to slip between our fingers when it comes to accomplishing tasks we lack either the time or expertise to complete. Outsourcing tasks by using a freelance network platform like Fiverr can help save you time and money and prevent you from spinning your wheels while trying to get your book to market. You can learn the difference between cheap labor and work from a professional that's of a great value and fits well within your budget.

WHAT IS FIVERR?

Fiverr is a global professional freelance marketplace that has been connecting sellers and buyers on a secure platform since 2010. Its name comes from the minimum starting price of five dollars initially set for services, or “gigs,” offered on the site. Through Fiverr, you can find professionals offering services at affordable prices for anything from ghostwriting, illustrations, and web design to contracts and marketing services. When outsourcing tasks to small businesses and freelance creators, it's important to conduct extensive research and become as knowledgeable as possible about the process beforehand. This can help create an experience you can benefit from and revisit while navigating the publishing process. Fiverr's encrypted, secure platform protects both parties from fraudulent transactions, so any business conducted directly on the platform with new sellers is ensured to be a safe and smooth exchange.

Here are a few tips for setting proper expectations and preparing for the outsourcing process.



GET CLEAR ON WHAT YOU WANT

The first step for a successful experience on Fiverr is to plan. Spend some time thinking about why you're seeking assistance on your project or the service or product you need. Next, get as clear as possible about what your desired outcome will look like. Would you like a targeted social media ad, a carefully curated lead magnet, or a showstopping book cover? What problem will your ideal product solve? What is your budget, and what time frame works best for your needs? Knowing what you want will help you understand what to look for when selecting the best seller.

2 USE A DETAILED SEARCH

The service headings on the Fiverr website are useful for finding the specific type of service you want. Take some time to navigate the wide range of services offered. If you don't see the exact service you want, or you're overwhelmed by the number of results, use short-tailed keywords to refine the results. For example, "education book reviewer" or "Historical Romance book reviewer" will provide more useful options than "book reviewer."

Pro Tip: You can also favorite the profiles of sellers you are interested in by clicking on the heart icon in the upper right-hand corner of their profile. Visit your favorites list from time to time to check their availability for upcoming projects or to see if they're running any promotions. By doing so, you may also receive email alerts for similar products and services.

3 BE MINDFUL OF THE SELLER'S NUMBER OF REVIEWERS AND AVERAGE RATING

Gauging how many customers a seller has worked with and their average ratings helps paint a quick picture of the type of experience you can expect while working with them. Fiverr uses levels to categorize their sellers based on monthly performance, the timeliness of the project completion, and buyer satisfaction. A Level 1 Seller with a fast response rate and an average rating above 4.5 is a viable option. A Level 2 Seller on Fiverr has completed at least fifty orders on time, with an average rating of 4.7 or higher.

Pro Tip: You can save money by working with a New Seller. These freelancers are often seeking the criteria to reach Level 1 Seller status and may be open to offering reasonable services to build their portfolio and favorable ratings. Be mindful that sellers must be active for at least sixty days and need to have met quantity and revenue criteria to be eligible for Level 1 Seller status. A quick look at a seller's full profile will show you how long they have been a member, their last project delivery, and any customer review details.

4 HEED FIVERR'S RECOMMENDATIONS

After you've spent time on the site, Fiverr will provide a list in their recommendation tab based on your search history. Be sure to check this section regularly to ensure you're weighing all of your options during your vetting process. The list often includes sellers with high customer rankings who have worked with several customers. If these things are important to you and time is of the essence, it may be a great option.

5 CONVERSE WITH MULTIPLE SELLERS

Reach out to sellers who meet your criteria to learn more about them. This can help you determine the best fit for your project. Ask specific questions to identify whether they possess your desired qualifications, have provided past results that match what you're looking for, and can meet your deadline. Remember to request proof of results in your specific niche. For example, if you're a self-help writer and they've only worked with Sci-Fi authors, determine whether they'll be able to provide the results you're looking for before moving forward.

6 REQUEST THE SELLER'S PORTFOLIO, AND STUDY SIMILAR CUSTOMER REVIEWS

When looking into a seller, be sure to review the quality and results of their past projects. If they have a tangible service, they should have a portfolio listed on their profile. If not, they will likely have a list of deliverables on their profile that tells you what to expect while working with them. Ensure the language on their profile is thorough, concise, and error-free. One of the best ways to determine the level of quality a seller can provide is to study their customers' experiences. Check the negative and positive reviews that pertain to your project. How did the customer say they were treated? Were their expectations met? Would they recommend the seller?

7 UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU'RE PAYING FOR AND WHAT YOU'LL RECEIVE UP FRONT

Depending on the type of service offered, sellers provide tiers of service for their customers ranging between basic, standard, and premium packages. Full payment for the service is required up front. If the terms of your desired service aren't included in the packages listed, you can contact the seller to request additional services. For example, if their standard graphic design package includes a 3-D mockup cover, but you don't need one, you can message the seller and request a replacement item or a price adjustment. Also, you'll want to negotiate the number of post-delivery revisions the seller is willing to make on the project before entering the agreement. Give yourself time to review and approve their work within three days of delivery. After that time period, Fiverr automatically marks projects as complete. After a project's completion, it will be the seller's decision whether to honor additional revision requests or to require a new project agreement for revisions or additional services.

Pro Tip: Payment options include credit card, PayPal, or Apple Pay. Fiverr uses the real-time EUR/USD exchange rate to calculate total costs in US dollars at checkout.



BE RESPONSIVE

Your seller will likely be in touch with you throughout the process. It's important to keep lines of communication open by being accessible to the seller in case they have questions about your project. Download the Fiverr app and turn on your notifications so that you're instantly aware of any efforts the seller makes to get in touch with you. This is especially important post-project delivery when you're in the three-day grace period.

Pro Tip: To help create a healthy working relationship for you and your seller, be cognizant of the seller's time zone and remember that they must also honor project deadlines for other clients.



OVERWHELMED? CREATE YOUR OWN GIG!

If you're drowning in viable seller options, no matter how refined your search results, you always have the option to create your own gig for a base fee of five dollars. This allows you to set a project price within your budget while freelancers bid on the opportunity to work with you. Benefits of creating a gig include:

- being in control of the process
- getting as detailed as necessary regarding the project details and your expectations
- drawing serious inquiries only
- avoiding the need to negotiate on price
- Setting a deadline that works for you

Just remember to provide necessary reference documents or websites, qualifications, and the appropriate timeline and process details to ensure a smooth transaction.



MIND YOUR P'S AND Q'S

If your project's quality weren't important to you, you wouldn't be open to hiring a freelancer. Etiquette is key when partnering with others on creating a project that will represent you in the best way possible. Be kind to your seller and cultivate a relationship with them that can result in repeat business. Having a reliable professional who is willing and able to support your mission is a beautiful thing, so treat your seller well, and they'll be happy to see your name in their inbox in the future. ■

Eryka Parker

INDIE

IAM Limitless

**PUBLISHER CHELLE
HONIKER REFLECTS ON THE
HISTORY OF *INDIE AUTHOR
MAGAZINE* AND LOOKS TO
NEW HORIZONS FOR 2025**

AUTHOR MAGAZINE

Three years ago, *Indie Author Magazine* was an idea that Creative Director Alice Briggs and I shared. It was a bold step into the unknown—much like any indie author deciding to take their manuscript and share it with the world. When we launched *IAM*, our goal was clear: to create a resource that would speak directly to authors about the business of writing. We wanted to empower indie authors with knowledge, build a sense of community, and celebrate the independent spirit that drives us all. Over the past three years, we've featured countless success stories, provided insights into an ever-changing industry, and created a space where authors could learn from one another.

Creating this publication meant building a startup, which was a process filled with challenges, lessons to learn, and moments where we felt like we were flying the plane while building it. As the magazine grew, we kept coming back to a single North Star question every time we considered a new project: What problem are we solving? We asked ourselves, "What else do indie authors need to succeed? What other tools, skills, and connections can we help provide?"

Today, we're proud to say that not only have we grown beyond that initial spark, but we've also expanded our vision into a thriving ecosystem that's here to empower authors at every stage of their journey. From the tools to help manage your career to training that demystifies the complexities of publishing to reaching readers directly and finding new ways to connect you with your ideal audience—we're all in.

As publisher, I rarely take liberties with the articles we publish. I have immense trust in our editorial team, and I leave the journalistic decisions in the capable hands of Nicole Schroeder, our editor in chief, who ensures that our content maintains the highest standards of quality and relevance for our community. But as we approach the start of our fourth year, I find myself compelled to reflect on our journey so far, and to share a glimpse into what lies ahead for *IAM*. This reflection is not just about our growth as a publication but also about the spirit of independence, resilience, and creativity that has driven us from the beginning—qualities that are shared by every indie author who has embarked on this path. Our story is a shared story. The challenges, the victories, the lessons learned—these are experiences that connect us as a community, and I wanted to take this opportunity to celebrate that.

INTRODUCING OUR SISTER PROJECTS

Over the past few years, the question of what authors needed to succeed led us to launch three projects alongside the magazine: Indie Author Tools, which began shortly before *IAM* first published; Indie Author Training, which launched this past summer; and Direct2Readers.com, which came out of its beta phase in October. All are designed to echo our overarching theme: “when writing means business.”

Indie Author Tools (<https://www.indieauthor-tools.com>) is our way of helping authors navigate the often-overwhelming landscape of writing and

publishing tools. Born out of a shared spreadsheet created during the pandemic by twenty-two authors who were writing together each day and sharing their lives online, it has grown into a curated resource to make life easier for any indie author. From apps to keep you organized to platforms that streamline your workflow, we've gathered a list of tools that can help you succeed. Think of it as a companion to your creative toolbox, providing a guidebook to the resources others have gathered so you can choose what works best for you.



Indie Author Training (<https://indieauthortraining.com>) is all about leveling up. Born from our inaugural Author Tech Summit, which proved so popular when it launched in 2022 that we realized we needed to create an evergreen resource, Indie Author Training has grown into an Etsy-like marketplace. It's a space where the best and brightest instructors in our industry can host and lead their online courses with our support, and where students can scroll through lessons from industry leaders in one convenient space. Publishing isn't just about hitting “publish” anymore, and mastering marketing, understanding algorithms, creating compelling book blurbs, and building websites has become an essential part of the book creation process. Indie Author Training curates courses, product walk-throughs, and informational webinars from the best in the industry, and it shares book club summaries of leading business books and strategies.

DIRECT --- to READERS

Direct2Readers.com offers readers a personalized experience to help them discover their next favorite book and connect directly with the author to purchase it. The site is a directory, not a traditional bookstore, so readers can easily find authors without the clutter of sales pages and algorithms that dictate what they see. It also features a dedicated chatbot and database that doesn't feed other large language models (LLMs) to help them find the kinds of stories they're searching for. For authors concerned about their work being used in ways they aren't comfortable with, this closed system provides peace of mind while fostering authentic connections with their audience.

These projects are part of a bigger picture—to support authors not just in creating or distributing their stories but in thriving within the publishing industry. We want every indie author to say: “I’m not just writing; I’m running a successful, sustainable business.”

FREEDOM AND POSSIBILITY

This past summer, I took a two-month sojourn—something that had been on my vision board for several years. I traveled to eight countries in eight weeks: Scotland, England, Finland, Denmark, Amsterdam, Germany, Belgium, and Sweden. I met hundreds of writers, shared stories at conferences, and soaked up every bit of culture along the way. All the while, I stayed connected with our vibrant indie community, proving that we aren't just building a business but a lifestyle where authors get to create their own terms for success.

Like many of you, I chose this path because I wanted freedom: to tell my stories, to share knowledge, and to live life without boundaries. The goal behind *IAM* and its sister projects is to create that freedom and possibility for everyone in our ever-expanding community.

As we round out 2024 and look ahead to the coming year, the *IAM* brand is expanding too. *IAM* is closely partnered with Author Nation, where, as programming director, I've had the opportunity to curate a diverse range of experiences designed to support indie authors in every aspect of their journey, with the help of an amazing program-

ming committee. We're adding more variety to the ways in which we share the articles written by more than eighty contributors, including video, short-form content, and audio. Our new twice-weekly short-episode podcast takes deep dives into a single topic each episode, such as finding community, author finances, or the future of the publishing industry. Our partnerships with ALLi, Reedsy, Lulu, and ProWritingAid allow us to remain connected with some of the biggest organizations and businesses in the indie author community, allowing us to provide you with firsthand information on updates and new releases. We're even partnering with TikTok directly to create education and provide more opportunities for authors and instructors on Indie Author Training.

In 2025, Indie Author Training will continue to bring you a curated selection of even more courses led by experts who deeply understand subjects and innovations critical to indie authors, including direct sales, transmedia storytelling, intellectual property management, and the craft of writing itself. We'll also continue to foster community within those spaces, with book club summaries and discussion groups for each course open to both students and instructors.

Direct2Readers.com is the next frontier for our organization, a space where authors will connect directly with readers via a directory of indie-published books and populated with direct sales links for any format. Our goal is to give authors more autonomy over their relationships with readers, and to help readers find the books they want in a way that's not only beneficial to them but also best supports the authors.

Indie Author Tools is a free, crowdsourced resource that we are continually expanding to better serve the needs of indie authors. In the coming months, we'll be adding more reviews, how-to tutorials, and other practical content designed to help authors make informed decisions about the tools they use. Our focus is on making this resource

as engaging and useful as possible, with in-depth reviews, step-by-step guides, and contributions from the author community. Whether you need insights into the latest apps, workflow solutions, or helpful tech tutorials, Indie Author Tools aims to be your go-to companion in navigating the complex world of writing and publishing.

We've said it from the beginning, but we want to drive the point home: Being an indie author isn't just about being self-published. It's about embracing a spirit of independence, taking control of your career, and defining success on your own terms. It means being resourceful, resilient, and ready to carve out your own path in an industry that's constantly evolving. Our story is your story—full of risks, growth, and unrelenting passion. Together, we're proving that when writing means business, the possibilities are limitless. ■

Chelle Honiker



Chelle Honiker

Chelle Honiker is an advocate for the empowerment of authorpreneurs, recognizing the importance of authors taking charge of both their craft and careers. In response to this need, she has founded a media and training company dedicated to supporting these creative professionals. As the co-founder and publisher of Indie Author Magazine, IndieAuthorTraining, Indie Author Tools, and Direct2Readers.com, Chelle's team of more than 80 writers, editors, trainers, and support staff provides resources and insights that help authors navigate the complexities of self-publishing. Her role as the programming director for Author Nation, an annual conference in Las Vegas, further exemplifies her commitment to fostering a community where authors can grow and succeed. With a career spanning over two decades in executive operations and leadership, Chelle has honed her skills in managing complex projects and delivering impactful training programs. Her experience as a speaker and TEDx Organizer has taken her to many countries, where she has shared her insights with diverse audiences.

PLANNING TRAVEL TO A CONFERENCE?

Use miles.



Explore ways to make the
most of your award miles.

Writelink.to/unitedair



IAM's Customizable Countdown Checklist for a Successful Book Launch

You read the how-to book. You borrowed the spreadsheet your author pal created. You invested in the trendy project management software. You have a checklist or three.

Yet every time you launch a book, you cringe—because you forgot to order a cover and realized this when you were uploading the book two hours before the KDP deadline (this really happened), or you neglected to change the price on your free first-in-series, or you never sent out review copies, or you overlooked the email with corrections from your proofreader, or ... you get the idea.

Part of the challenge in systematizing the book launch process is that not all releases are created equal. The time, money, and energy you're willing to invest in book 1 of a new series differs from what you'd put behind the re-release of a backlist title or a lead magnet. The strategies employed for Romance differ from those applicable to nonfiction. The production process and marketing opportunities differ for audiobooks, foreign translations, or multi-author collaborations. You also have to factor in qualifiers such as budget, skills, marketing goals, release frequency, and career level.

As such, we want to offer a list of common book release tasks—administrative, production, and marketing—and a basic timeline that you can customize to fit your business's needs. Use it as a starting point to develop a system that works for you and all your different releases, so you can skip the frantic, pulling-your-hair-out stage of publishing. Keep in mind these tasks and timelines are only suggestions. Your process and calendar will differ, so skip any steps that don't apply or tweak things as you go.

TIPS FOR CREATING A MANAGEABLE BOOK LAUNCH PROCESS AND CALENDAR

One of the biggest challenges in creating a book launch protocol is the array of strategies and techniques available to authors. Realistically evaluate your resources, especially time and money; your assets, such as established readership and number of published titles; and what you want to accomplish with your launch plan, which may include sales, series read-through, distribution to a new market, or establishing a name in a new subgenre or niche.

Tune in to the publishing community to learn what's working, learn about resources, and add new options. Beware, however, of FOMO, the fear of missing out. You do not—and should not—do what everyone else is doing. Some of the most successful authors focus inward to develop a highly personalized launch plan and tactics geared to their unique assets, readers, and priorities. Start small and build on your success, which means tracking each tactic and correlating results.

PRE-LAUNCH CONSIDERATIONS

Developing a book launch process and calendar is beneficial in that you don't need to "reinvent the wheel" every time you release a new book. A master checklist and

timeline is a great starting place but may need adjustment. A few considerations:

Lead time: How soon before the release date can you finalize your manuscript? Is there sufficient time to solicit endorsements and professional reviews, which can require up to six months? If you use alpha or beta readers or an ARC team, have you factored this time into your production schedule?

Budget: Prioritizing outcomes is a good way to decide where to invest your marketing money. Researching costs and expenses is helpful for creating a realistic budget.

Soft or hard release: A soft release, where the book goes live before active marketing begins, might be a good option for new authors. It allows you to ensure all elements are accurate and in place. Authors may also choose to do a soft release to build organic momentum. Hard releases kick off with heavy marketing activities from the start.

PRE-LAUNCH SETUP

Before releasing a book, especially if you want to use marketing strategies, authors need to ensure the basic business structure is in place. This includes creating accounts at distributors or aggregators, building a website and/or landing page, developing a newsletter sign-up site, creating social media profiles, and setting up author profiles on Goodreads and BookBub.



PRE-LAUNCH PRODUCTION AND MARKETING

(2-6 months before launch)

Two to six months before a book's release, you're still solidly in the manuscript production stage of the publishing process. You've written "The End," but you're not done with the story just yet—over these next few weeks, you'll need to complete any last-minute editing and cleanup to the text and complete the layout for the formats you plan to publish. If you've got a planner, now is the time to put it to work; plug in your publish date, then spend some time backtracking to find the dates you'll need to send materials to your editor, street team, or cover designer.

- ☐ Complete manuscript
 - ☐ Gather feedback from alpha and/or beta readers
 - ☐ Self-edit manuscript
- ☐ Edit manuscript
 - ☐ Complete developmental edits
 - ☐ Complete line edits and/or proofread
 - ☐ Finalize manuscript
- ☐ Book cover production
 - ☐ Brainstorm cover art, fonts, color scheme, samples, and comparable titles
 - ☐ Commission book cover with designer
 - ☐ Obtain high-resolution covers for all assets (e-book, print, audio, etc.)
- ☐ Asset production
 - ☐ Identity formats and specifications for production (e-book, print, audio-book, ARCs, etc.)
 - ☐ Assemble materials needed for formatting: style guide, high-resolution cover(s), front and back matter, final edited manuscript, logos, chapter heading images, title page, etc.
 - ☐ Format book—outsource this or complete it yourself
 - ☐ Conduct quality check on all formatted assets
- ☐ Prepare front and back matter
 - ☐ Set up preorder for next book in series if including in back matter
- ☐ Write book description, tagline, short blurb, and full-length blurb
- ☐ Select excerpts, pull quotes, and teaser quotes
- ☐ Assemble assets (formatted files, covers, metadata) for upload to distributors
- ☐ Research and identify categories and keywords
- ☐ Set up preorder
- ☐ Assemble retailer links—created shortened links, if applicable
- ☐ Add book data and retailer links to website
- ☐ Book cover reveal blitz
- ☐ Recruit social media influencers and/or ARC team members

COPY OR PRINT
COURTESY OF IAM

(2 months-2 weeks before launch)

Your story is polished; your cover is perfect. Now is the time to shout about it to your readers. From two months until about two weeks from launch day is the marketing stage, where you share the news about your new release with the world. Set up preorders, promote the book on social media and in your newsletter, and prepare any additional materials you want ready for once your book hits the shelves.

- ☐ Create graphics for social media, newsletter, blog, media kit, etc.
 - ☐ Preorder graphics
 - ☐ Cover reveal
 - ☐ Coming Soon
 - ☐ Now Available
 - ☐ Countdown
 - ☐ No text/evergreen version
- ☐ Add graphics to social media rotation
- ☐ Assemble media kit and/or sell sheet
- ☐ Preorder
 - ☐ Research preorder promotion available through retailers
 - ☐ Set up preorder giveaway
 - ☐ Announce in newsletter and on social media
- ☐ Cover reveal
 - ☐ Set up cover reveal giveaway
 - ☐ Announce cover reveal on social media and in newsletter
- ☐ Book paid promotions and advertisements—David Gaughran and Kindlepreneur offer helpful lists
- ☐ Request cross-promotion activities with peer authors
- ☐ Set up Goodreads giveaway
- ☐ Add book to BookBub profile, Amazon Author Page
- ☐ Create, format, and set up distribution for bonus content
- ☐ Prepare marketing and ad copy
- ☐ Distribute ARCs to readers, reviewers, and influencers
- ☐ Schedule release day celebration activities
 - ☐ Blog tour
 - ☐ New release takeovers
 - ☐ Cross-promotion events
- ☐ Design and order marketing collateral (bookmarks, postcards, etc.)
- ☐ Update back matter of previously published books

COPY OR PRINT
COURTESY OF IAM

LAUNCH DAY PRODUCTION AND MARKETING

(1-2 weeks before launch)

It's release day! Today is a celebration of all the hard work you've put in these past few months—and that's not including all the time you spent writing the story before that. But your work still isn't quite done. Make sure you take some extra time around launch day to set your book up for success: post about it to your readers, throw a launch party, set up advertisements, and begin tracking your sales. And take a moment to soak it all in. After all, you did it! Your book is finally out in the world.

- ☐ Upload final files to retailers ten to fourteen days before release
- ☐ Share media kit/graphics with author cross-promotion partners
- ☐ Promote new release
 - ☐ Send new release newsletter
 - ☐ Add new release teasers to social media rotation
- ☐ Engage and interact with readers and reviewers on social media
- ☐ Schedule or launch Facebook, AMS, and/or BookBub ads
- ☐ Promote backlist or other books in series—consider submitting for a BookBub Featured Deal
- ☐ Host new release celebration
- ☐ Announce new release giveaway

POST-LAUNCH PRODUCTION AND MARKETING

(1 week after launch and ongoing)

An author's work is never done. Your book may be in readers' hands, but to truly set it up for success, be sure to check in on it monthly or quarterly to update your ads, refine your metadata, and promote the book along with the rest of your backlist. After that, stretch those fingers—it's on to the next book!

- ☐ Monitor and adjust ads
- ☐ Track sales and correlate to promotional initiatives
- ☐ Continue cross-promotion activities (newsletter swaps, posting in other reader groups)
- ☐ Follow-up with reviewers and cross-promo partners who have not yet engaged
- ☐ Update/refine keywords and categories
- ☐ Add editorial reviews to retailer product page
- ☐ Update media kit
- ☐ Send follow-up newsletter with thank-you message and what's next
- ☐ Continue to seek marketing opportunities (seasonal, discounts, cross-promo, etc.)

WANT TO READ MORE?

COPY OR PRINT
COURTESY OF IAM

There is no shortage of resources to help authors develop a process that can be replicated and customized for each launch. Here are just a few:

- *My Book Launch Planner* (2023) by Mandi Lynn and Stone Ridge Books
- *How To Launch A Successful Series: Your Book Launch Survival Guide* (2023) by Helen B. Scheuerer
- *Successful Book Launch Secrets* (2020) by Donna Partow
- *Plan a Profitable Book Launch* (2021) by Mandi Lynn and Bethany Atazadeh
- *Release Strategies: Plan Your Self-Publishing Schedule for Maximum Benefit* (2019) by Craig Martelle and Michael Anderle
- *Launch That Book* (2023) by Tammy Karasek
- *The Nonfiction Book Publishing Plan* (2018) by Stephanie Chandler and Karl W. Palachuk
- *How to Revise and Re-Release Your Book* (2018) by Penny C. Sansevieri
- *Writing and Releasing Rapidly* (2019), *Writing and Marketing Systems* (2020), and *Writing and Launching a Bestseller* (2021) by Elana M Johnson
- *Romance Your Plan* (2020) by Zoe York ■

Maria Connor

Maria Connor

Maria Connor is the founder and owner of My Author Concierge, which provides high-level project management support services to self-published authors. She is the author of *The Self-Publishing Checklist Series*, a USA Today bestselling contemporary romance author, and an international speaker on writing, editing, marketing, and publishing topics. Since 2010, she has worked with more than a hundred authors across all genres, published more than 35 titles herself, and presented more than 30 workshops regionally, nationally, and internationally.



Gone Phishing

CYBERSECURITY TIPS TO AVOID SCAMS TARGETING YOUR AUTHOR BUSINESS

Scams became much more prevalent with the widespread use of the internet, and as perpetrators grow more sophisticated and continue to update their tactics, it's no longer just the technologically un-savvy who are falling victim. Cybersecurity professionals categorize many of these scams with the term "phishing," and these scams are sadly increasing—according to a 2023 report by Zscaler, with a year-over-year increase of nearly 50 percent.

Common email scams can target banking or retail customers—"log in or your account will be closed"—that aim to steal passwords. Other scams demand the receiver submit private data to a malicious website. In my twenty years of working in cybersecurity, I'm seeing more email scams than ever before specifically target authors and other creative businesspeople. Here are some of the latest examples—and how to recognize them.

SCAMS TARGETING YOUR LIVELIHOOD

As indie authors, we've all heard the horror stories of authors who say their Amazon or Facebook business accounts were canceled for no reason. As it's difficult to get the "real reason" behind these disappearing accounts out of the parent companies, many indie authors live in fear of this happening to them. So when emails appear stating the recipient has violated terms of service and will have their account canceled unless they respond immediately, it's natural for authors to react.

Unfortunately, many authors have fallen victim to giving their Amazon or Facebook username and password—or even payment and banking information—to the perpetrators of these scams. With your Amazon information, scammers can often access your credit card information or send tens of thousands of dollars of merchandise, with you paying for



it. With your Facebook information, scammers can access your contact list, making it easier to scam your friends and family or to implement Facebook Marketplace scams under your name.

SCAMS TARGETING PAYMENT FOR YOUR WORK

Several years ago, an email “deposit-and-return” scam became popular where the scammer would try to convince a victim to send a few hundred dollars in order to receive a larger payout. Often, the scammer would tell the victim a sad story over email—often mentioning a large amount of money the scammer can’t access—but promise a larger payout in return for a payment that would allow them to access the large amount of money. The larger payment never materializes.

Today, that scam has evolved into a fake purchase of creative assets. These scams generally work like this: The scammer will request licensing of an author or artist’s story or artwork for several thousand dollars for a project or workshop. The payment will then be made with a cashier’s check or another non-cash method. Immediately afterward, the scammer will send a communication canceling the project and will request a refund of the money. The author or artist might send back the money before the cashier’s check, or other payment type, clears their bank, only to discover later that the check was fake—and they’re out several thousand dollars.

Over the past few years, many authors have received scam emails from a variety of real Hollywood movie studios, literary agencies, and publishers, using the names of real employees at the business, telling the author their book has big potential for a movie, a publication deal, or something similar. The first email often simply asks for a reply. If the author replies, the scammer then sends a variety of paid offers for services to turn the book into a screenplay, a treatment, a professional synopsis—all for thousands of dollars. These scammers take the money and disappear.

HOW TO SPOT THESE SCAMS

No matter the target audience of an email scam, most of them have several of the following factors in common:

- a business name that is trusted, crucial to your business, or both, such as Amazon, Facebook/Meta, TriStar Pictures, or PayPal;
- a sense of urgency, especially for threats to cancel your Amazon or Facebook ads accounts;
- generic greeting or non-specific references to your books;
- a “from” email address close to—but not a match—with the official business; or
- an email that invites you to click on a link to fix the issue.

Well-established companies are often victims of these scams and employ enterprise-level software solutions, often for tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars, to prevent these scam emails from reaching their users. As indie authors, we're not in a position to implement these larger security solutions, so vigilance has to be our first defense.

Therefore, experts suggest you look for the following items to minimize the risk of falling victim to one of these scams.

Look at the "from" email address. If it isn't from a domain name matching the business, there's a high probability that it's a scam. For example, "tristar-pictures-inc@gmail.com" was a scam sender in a scam email to get a movie made of an unspecified book. The company logo in the header or email isn't proof of anything genuine.

If there's a link in the email, move your mouse over the link, but do not click. After a second or two, a URL will appear—and if it's a scam, the URL will not match a real Amazon or Facebook or Paramount Pictures link.

Is there a lack of specificity? Genuine emails will never say "Dear customer" or "Dear ma'am or sir." Requests to turn your book into a movie will specify which book the company is interested in—not refer to it as "your book."

Even if the link looks real, never click on a link inside an email to enter your username and pass-

word or update your payment information. Instead, exit your email program and log in directly to your Amazon KDP account or Meta Business Suite if you are worried there's an issue.

If you receive a one-time passcode on your phone but didn't request it, do not provide it to anyone over the phone or via text.

Check it out—outside of email. Call someone at the organization (using a phone number that's NOT in the email). Search on scam-reporting sites like Writer Beware; an experience just like yours may have been identified as a scam.

OTHER SCAMS

Email scams that install malware, keyloggers, or viruses on your computer when you click on a link are common, though not usually targeted specifically at authors. Predatory "vanity publishers" will request thousands of dollars from writers in order to publish their book, then expend minimum effort in editing, cover design, and marketing. Similarly, some companies offer author-unfriendly terms for serialized fiction that leave little if any money for the author—and can lock them in for years. Although not the same as the email phishing scams described here, these bad business practices can correctly be called "scams" as well,

and Writer Beware has excellent advice on recognizing and avoiding these businesses; an article summarizing 2023's biggest scams and issues is particularly impactful.

WHAT IF YOU FALL VICTIM TO A SCAM?

Time isn't your friend if you've been a victim. First, contact any financial institution that may have been affected and report possible fraud. There is a chance you may not be held responsible for fraudulent transactions, but this depends on the transaction. Change any potentially compromised passwords. If you suspect malware has been installed on your machine, disconnect or power down your device, and contact a professional who deals with malware.

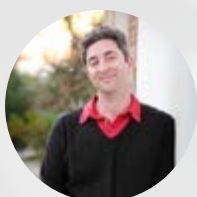
If you've disclosed credit card or banking information, or potentially given scammers access to this information via a separate account, you may need to cancel your debit and credit cards, as well as freeze your credit. In the USA, you must freeze your credit with all three credit reporting agencies: Experian, Equifax, and TransUnion.

Many countries offer places to report fraud and scams. In the USA, scam emails can be reported to reportphishing@apwg.org, and victims can report to the Federal Trade Commission (<https://ftc.gov/complaint>).

RESOURCES

- Defining and avoiding phishing scams: <https://webroot.com/us/en/resources/tips-articles/what-is-phishing>
- The U.S. Federal Trade Commission's advice on avoiding online scams: <https://consumer.ftc.gov/articles/how-recognize-and-avoid-phishing-scams>
- The prevalence and impact of phishing attacks: <https://blog.checkpoint.com/2023/01/23/brand-phishing-report-q4-2022/>
- Author-specific advice and resources on avoiding scams of all kinds: <https://writerbeware.blog/> ■

Paul Austin Ardoin



Paul Austin Ardoin

Paul Austin Ardoin is the USA TODAY bestselling indie author of *The Fenway Stevenson Mysteries* and *The Woodhead & Becker Mysteries*. He holds a B.A. in creative writing from the University of California, Santa Barbara and an M.B.A. in marketing from the University of Phoenix. His book *Zero to Four Figures: Making \$1,000 a Month with Self-Published Fiction* is scheduled for publication in June 2023.

Seven Apps to Gamify Your Writing Sessions, and Other Author-Approved Methods for Boosting Your Word Count

No matter how much we love writing, every author knows the struggle of days when the words won't flow and our attention wants to drift to other things. Maintaining a regular writing schedule means some sessions are inherently more productive than others—but that doesn't mean you can't trick yourself into putting words down on the page anyway.

Across several categories, including education, health and fitness, and sustainability, research has shown gamification can provide at least temporary positive benefits for users who are looking to increase consistency of a behavior or productivity toward a goal. Indie author and video game journalist Grace Snoke writes that the same benefits can happen when gamifying writing. "I liken it to achievement hunting in video games," Snoke writes. "In some games, you may not know the achievements and are surprised by them when you earn them. Other games, you know the achievement and are working hard to get it, then you celebrate when you get it. With writing novels, or even short stories, there is also the achievement of

writing 5,000, 10,000, or more words. And there's an even bigger sense of achievement at finishing the novel. It gives the same dopamine burst as getting an achievement in a game does."

Author Audrey Hughey agrees. She uses gamification techniques and platforms for both her fiction and nonfiction writing as a way to motivate herself through less immediately rewarding tasks. "Writing a book is often a long-haul journey where you won't see rewards until you publish and market your tail off," she writes. "Gamifying writing keeps us writing, even when our long-term rewards can seem hidden in the foggy landscape of the future."

Gamifying writing sessions is not a new concept; in fact, several platforms and sites already exist to help authors boost their daily word counts and maintain a consistent writing schedule. We've gathered a list of some of the most popular ones that are worth a try the next time you hit a slump and need to level up your productivity.

WRITING

Written? Kitten!

<https://writtenkitten.co>

Sometimes motivating yourself to write is as simple as having the right reward. Written? Kitten! finds suitably adorable options among Flickr's "most interesting" photos, displaying a new random photo of a kitten after every hundred words you write. The word count requirements you need to meet before the site offers a new photo can be adjusted, as can its image search parameters. Click on the link at the bottom of the site's web page and edit the URL in your browser to specify the image keyword you'd like to use instead.



The Most Dangerous Writing App

<https://squibler.io/dangerous-writing-prompt-app>

With several authors and writing-focused social media accounts spotlighting the app recently—searches on TikTok for the app return 70.9 million post results—the Most Dangerous Writing App has also become one of the most popular. Set your session timer and start writing, but once you start, don't stop or the app will delete your progress. Rather than a timer, you can set a session word count, and “hardcore mode” also gives users the option to blur everything they've already written. The Most Dangerous Writing App may be a terrifying prospect to some, but to others, it's the perfect way to break through writer's block ... or else.



4thewords

<https://4thewords.com>

Other apps gamify individual writing sessions, but 4thewords turns the writing process into a true fantasy game, with an avatar to level up, in-world quests, combat encounters, and a world map—and interacting with or unlocking any of it requires you to write. Battles against monsters are speed- or endurance-based writing challenges, and quests require you to complete a number of battles, write a certain number of words, or maintain a writing streak for a set number of days in order to earn collectibles or gear. The app has both free and paid options, with subscribers having access to additional features such as more customization options within the game and support for more than one project per account. Subscriptions cost \$96 annually for Member accounts and \$144 annually for Pro accounts.

Pro Tip: Hughey started using 4thewords earlier this year after she saw some friends using it. She even used

the site when writing her responses to *IAM*, she admits. “I think what I enjoy most about 4thewords is the ability to get in some fun, no-pressure gaming at the same time as working on my writing projects, which are deeply important to me,” she writes. “Also, my writing time is easier to guard with 4thewords because my (school-age) kids love games, too, and they understand quests and time limits. When I ‘play,’ they cheer me on and want me to win.”

Ohwrite

<https://ohwrite.co>

If you’re motivated more by the idea of group writing challenges, Ohwrite allows you to host writing sprints with other authors in a virtual sprint room. Users can set a timer for all participants at once and write directly in the app, and once the sprint is finished, the app will display competitors’ word counts on the right side of the page. The app also tracks your writing progress over days, weeks, and months using the site, so you can view your individual statistics over time if you’re sprinting consistently.

Pro Tip: Beyond apps specifically built with game mechanics, several word processors include features that can track or boost your productivity during writing sessions. Scrivener users can set a manuscript or session target word count to create a gauge at the top of the project that changes colors as they near their goals, and Atticus offers several tools for drafting books faster, including a habit tracker and built-in sprint timer.

GENERAL PRODUCTIVITY

Staying focused during writing sessions is important, but as indie authors, we juggle plenty of other non-writing responsibilities as well. If you’re looking to gamify the business tasks on your list, or if you prefer more general productivity tools to keep you focused on your manuscript, here are a few additional apps to try.

Flora

<https://flora.appfinca.com/en>

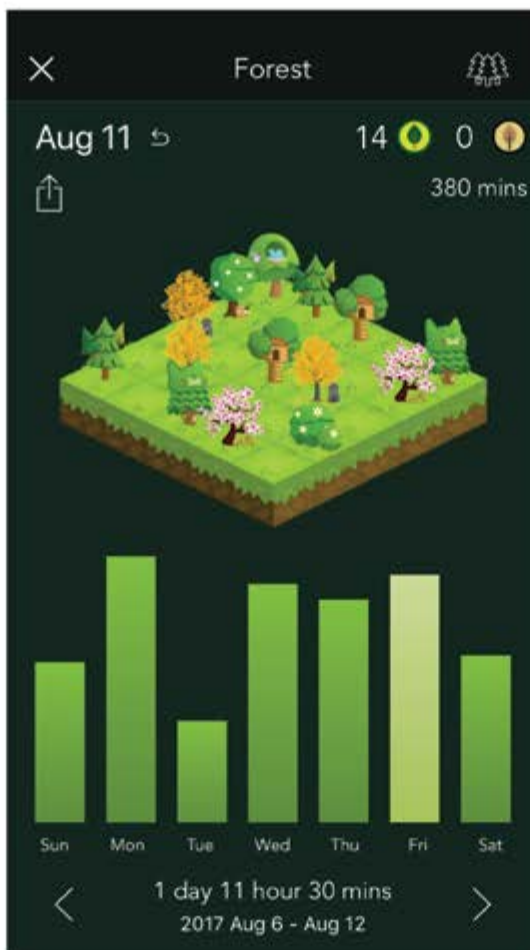
Inspired by the Pomodoro technique, Flora is an iOS and Android app that encourages users to stay off their phone and on task with a virtual garden that flourishes the more time you spend focused. Set a timer, then set your phone aside; if you avoid leaving the Flora app during that time, you’ll receive a flower, tree, or plant to add to your garden, but if you exit the focus screen before the timer goes off, your plant will die. As you complete more focus sessions, you’ll be able to travel to other regions of the world and collect new plants, and if you want to up the ante, you can also put money on the line—the app will only charge you if you kill your plant, with the money going toward planting real trees in Africa, East Asia, and South America. The app

also includes an in-app to-do list, tools for tracking time spent focused, and a friends list so you can run focus sessions with other app users.

Forest

<https://forestapp.cc>

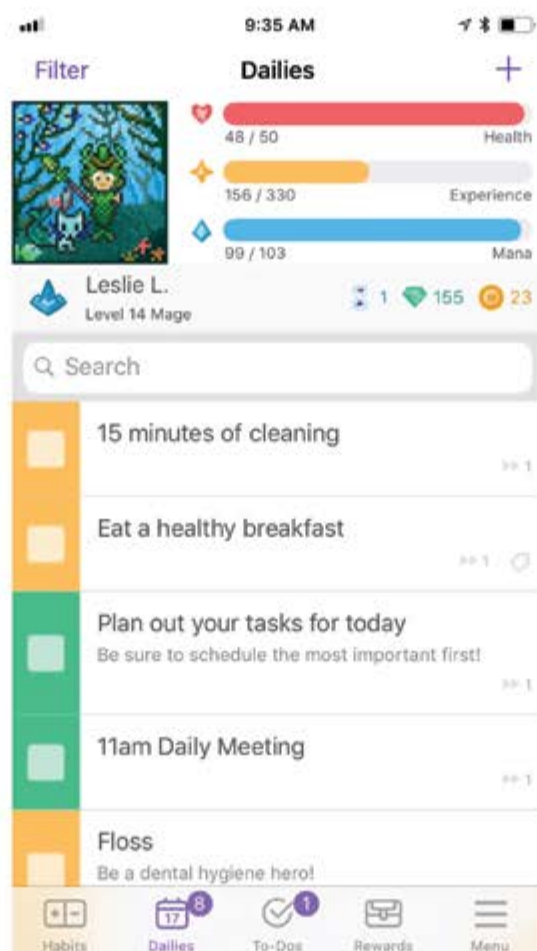
Forest is another iOS and Android app, incredibly similar to Flora. The app is a paid app rather than a free app with in-app purchases like Flora. However, successful focus sessions in Forest reward users with coins that can be used to purchase a greater variety of trees, ambient music, and other customizations for their virtual forests, as well as to plant real trees with the organization Trees for the Future via the Real Forest tab. The app also includes features that allow you to sort trees into forests based on tags and track your focus statistics, set calendar reminders to run a focus session, and invite friends to a focus room, similar to Flora.



Habitica

<https://habitica.com>

If 4thewords turns your writing sessions into a fantasy game, Habitica does the same for your to-do list. Using role-play game mechanics, users create a character and enter their to-dos, daily tasks, habits, and rewards into the site. Checking off tasks earns you gold and experience points, but marking a negative habit or missing a daily task costs you health. As time goes on and you gain more experience, you'll have the ability to level up and select from one of four classes: healer, warrior, mage, or rogue, as well as join an adventuring party with other players. Users can also complete quests, collect pets and mounts, and join sitewide challenges to earn gold and equipment—all by checking off tasks and positive habits regularly. The app is free to use, though some customizations and quests cost gems, which are purchasable, or a paid subscription.



OTHER GAMIFYING METHODS

Of course, even beyond gamifying apps, there are countless ways to turn your writing sessions into fun challenges or competitions. Snoke has used several strategies for keeping herself motivated, from adding stickers to her calendar to represent the number of words written each day to creating a tiered reward system for larger word count milestones. Most recently, she writes each task she needs to complete on a sticky note, then adds the note to a jar once it's complete. "There's something that kicks in and gives a boost of dopamine [when] the project/writing goal is completed," she writes.

Consider organizing group writing or productivity sprints with friends, or set smaller goalposts for yourself to make it easier to keep track of forward progress. The National Novel Writing Month Wikipedia page, [Wikiwrimo](https://www.wikiwrimo.org/wiki/Word_crawl), provides a list of word crawls and other writing challenges authors can do on their own or alongside others: https://www.wikiwrimo.org/wiki/Word_crawl. Whether you use a dedicated platform or make your own rules, the reward is the same: making the road to your next published book just as fun as the finish line. ■

Nicole Schroeder

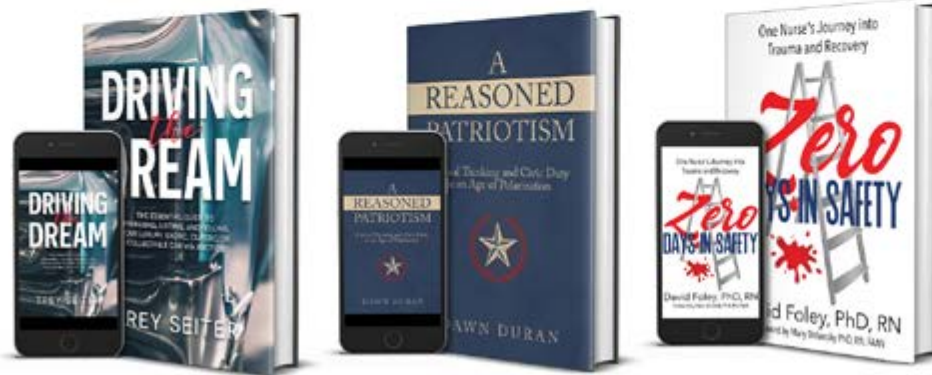


Nicole Schroeder

Nicole Schroeder is a storyteller at heart. As the editor in chief of Indie Author Magazine, she brings nearly a decade of journalism and editorial experience to the publication, delighting in any opportunity to tell true stories and help others do the same. She holds a bachelor's degree from the Missouri School of Journalism and minors in English and Spanish. Her previous work includes editorial roles at local publications, and she's helped edit and produce numerous fiction and nonfiction books, including a Holocaust survivor's memoir, alongside independent publishers. Her own creative writing has been published in national literary magazines. When she's not at her writing desk, Nicole is usually in the saddle, cuddling her guinea pigs, or spending time with family. She loves any excuse to talk about Marvel movies and considers National Novel Writing Month its own holiday.



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Habits of Seven-Figure Authors

What author doesn't dream of becoming a millionaire? Every writer wishes to have a tremendous income straight from their books, along with thousands of adoring readers. The mountain it takes to achieve such a pinnacle, however, can seem long and daunting, especially to authors who struggle to sell single copies of their title. These elusive writers who have such exceptional careers seem so high above the average traditionally published author, who, according to the Authors Guild's 2018 Author Income Survey, is likely to make twelve thousand dollars a year or less. So are there secret habits to success that these millionaire authors have discovered?

Rachel Hanna is willing to share her story. She is a successful seven-figure author of Women's Fiction. She writes Southern Romance books that center on stories about family and friendships, with characters who range in age from teenagers to middle-aged adults to characters in their eighties. "Older characters have interesting things going on in their lives, too, so I try to highlight them," she says. "It's not true, at least not for me, that you have to center your story around a young twenty-something." To date, her backlist includes almost forty books.

Hanna has a degree in journalism and worked in that field before she began working from home in many different areas. She was never a big reader but decided to write her first book in 2012 during the Kindle boom.



“I started publishing that same year and started making money,” she says. “Then I had a personal crisis, believing that I wasn’t a professional author, so I started trying to change everything in my business. I lost that momentum.”

She turned to running an eBay business, which she describes as exhausting and frustrating. The job required her to work long hours every day of the week, which wasn’t how she wanted to live her life.

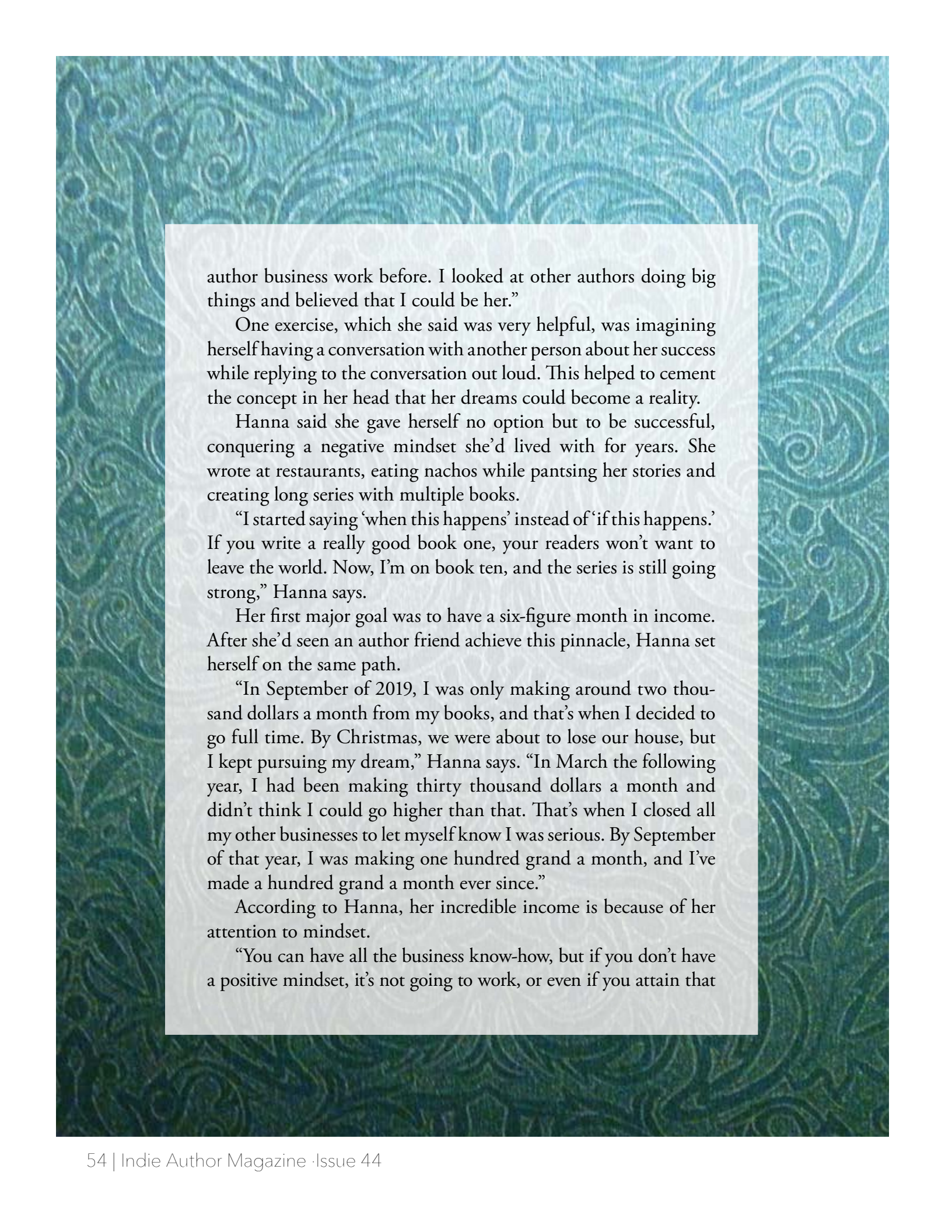
“We were struggling. I hit the point where I was done, and I either had to give up or believe in myself and what I wanted to do. So in 2019, I decided to let everything go and focus on becoming a full-time author,” Hanna says.

She told her husband to move everything eBay related out of her office, so she could use it for writing, and she completely abandoned all other projects in order to pursue a career in Women’s Fiction. The change wasn’t easy. Her backlist wasn’t performing well, and there was no replacement income if her titles failed to sell.

“I didn’t want to give myself a fallback, thinking that if it didn’t work, I’d go back to something else,” Hanna describes, “because if you’re doing that, you’re giving your brain a chance that it won’t pan out, so I didn’t give it any chance.”

She thought about what a full-time author would do every day. She decorated her office like the setting of her novels, printed out a vision board of what she wanted to achieve, and posted notes on income goals everywhere she could see them.

“I tried to surround myself with successful people, who had the things I wanted,” Hanna says. “I read and listened to only uplifting things—happy music, funny movies. I meditated until it put me into a whole different mindset, and that’s what was different this time than all the other times I’d tried to make my



author business work before. I looked at other authors doing big things and believed that I could be her.”

One exercise, which she said was very helpful, was imagining herself having a conversation with another person about her success while replying to the conversation out loud. This helped to cement the concept in her head that her dreams could become a reality.

Hanna said she gave herself no option but to be successful, conquering a negative mindset she’d lived with for years. She wrote at restaurants, eating nachos while pantsing her stories and creating long series with multiple books.

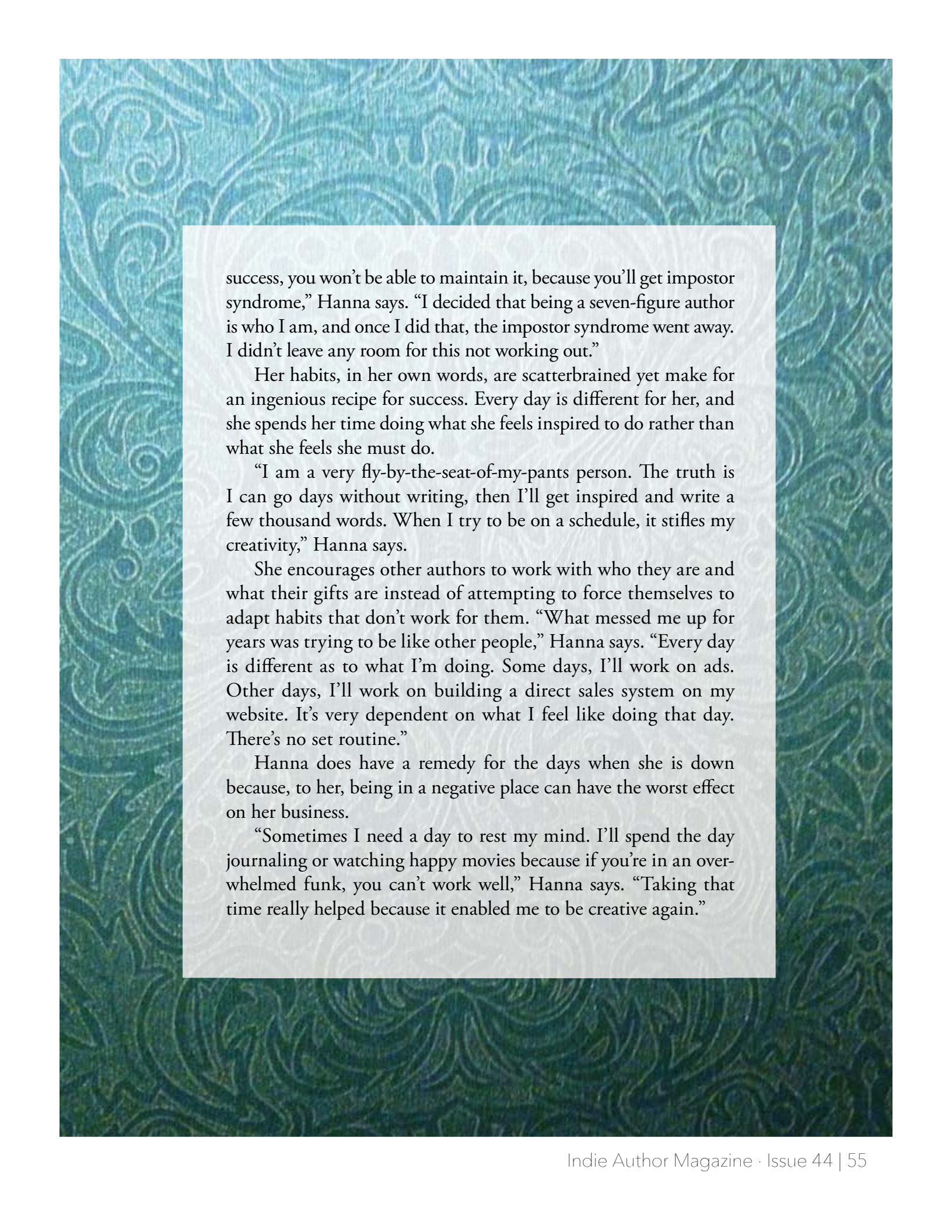
“I started saying ‘when this happens’ instead of ‘if this happens.’ If you write a really good book one, your readers won’t want to leave the world. Now, I’m on book ten, and the series is still going strong,” Hanna says.

Her first major goal was to have a six-figure month in income. After she’d seen an author friend achieve this pinnacle, Hanna set herself on the same path.

“In September of 2019, I was only making around two thousand dollars a month from my books, and that’s when I decided to go full time. By Christmas, we were about to lose our house, but I kept pursuing my dream,” Hanna says. “In March the following year, I had been making thirty thousand dollars a month and didn’t think I could go higher than that. That’s when I closed all my other businesses to let myself know I was serious. By September of that year, I was making one hundred grand a month, and I’ve made a hundred grand a month ever since.”

According to Hanna, her incredible income is because of her attention to mindset.

“You can have all the business know-how, but if you don’t have a positive mindset, it’s not going to work, or even if you attain that



success, you won't be able to maintain it, because you'll get impostor syndrome," Hanna says. "I decided that being a seven-figure author is who I am, and once I did that, the impostor syndrome went away. I didn't leave any room for this not working out."

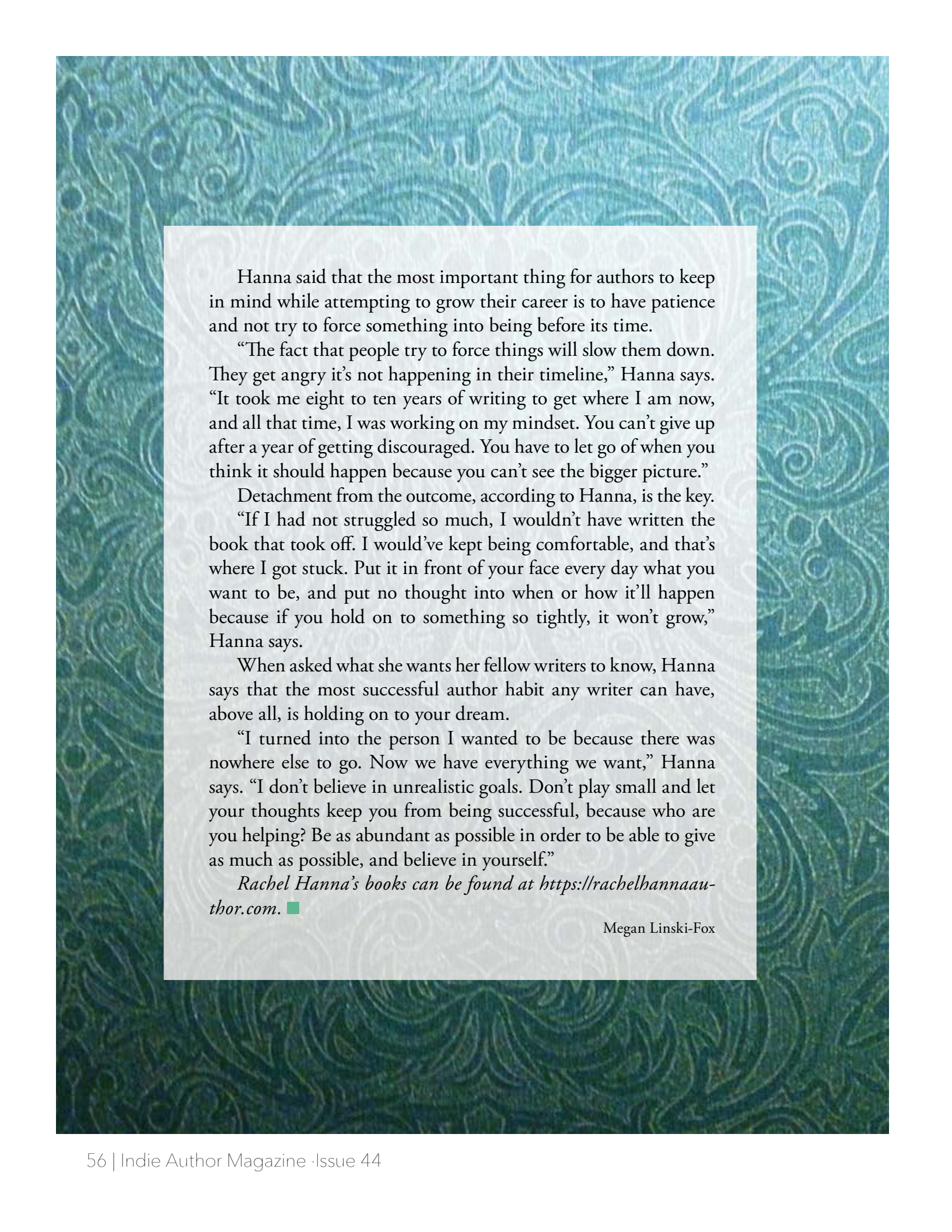
Her habits, in her own words, are scatterbrained yet make for an ingenious recipe for success. Every day is different for her, and she spends her time doing what she feels inspired to do rather than what she feels she must do.

"I am a very fly-by-the-seat-of-my-pants person. The truth is I can go days without writing, then I'll get inspired and write a few thousand words. When I try to be on a schedule, it stifles my creativity," Hanna says.

She encourages other authors to work with who they are and what their gifts are instead of attempting to force themselves to adapt habits that don't work for them. "What messed me up for years was trying to be like other people," Hanna says. "Every day is different as to what I'm doing. Some days, I'll work on ads. Other days, I'll work on building a direct sales system on my website. It's very dependent on what I feel like doing that day. There's no set routine."

Hanna does have a remedy for the days when she is down because, to her, being in a negative place can have the worst effect on her business.

"Sometimes I need a day to rest my mind. I'll spend the day journaling or watching happy movies because if you're in an overwhelmed funk, you can't work well," Hanna says. "Taking that time really helped because it enabled me to be creative again."



Hanna said that the most important thing for authors to keep in mind while attempting to grow their career is to have patience and not try to force something into being before its time.

“The fact that people try to force things will slow them down. They get angry it’s not happening in their timeline,” Hanna says. “It took me eight to ten years of writing to get where I am now, and all that time, I was working on my mindset. You can’t give up after a year of getting discouraged. You have to let go of when you think it should happen because you can’t see the bigger picture.”

Detachment from the outcome, according to Hanna, is the key.

“If I had not struggled so much, I wouldn’t have written the book that took off. I would’ve kept being comfortable, and that’s where I got stuck. Put it in front of your face every day what you want to be, and put no thought into when or how it’ll happen because if you hold on to something so tightly, it won’t grow,” Hanna says.

When asked what she wants her fellow writers to know, Hanna says that the most successful author habit any writer can have, above all, is holding on to your dream.

“I turned into the person I wanted to be because there was nowhere else to go. Now we have everything we want,” Hanna says. “I don’t believe in unrealistic goals. Don’t play small and let your thoughts keep you from being successful, because who are you helping? Be as abundant as possible in order to be able to give as much as possible, and believe in yourself.”

Rachel Hanna’s books can be found at <https://rachelhannaauthor.com>. ■

Megan Linski-Fox

Three Ways to Up the Ante in Act 2

P L O T

Sol Stein once said, “The function of suspense is to put the reader in danger of an overfull bladder.”

When suspense is properly implemented in a story, the reader is taken by the hand and led to great peaks and thrown off mercilessly, only to have them scurry up the next hill for you to do it again. Authors have a duty to the reader, a promise to fulfill in which the story moves along without wasting their time.

But the literal center of the book, called the “sagging middle,” has often been the child of literary neglect. In any genre, readers crave the rising tension of the beginning and the climactic mic-drop of the end; in between those two points, however, they often face endless travel logs, overfed descriptions, and entire chapters where nothing happens. Writers and readers both recognize the sagging middle, acknowledging a slog in writing and reading respectively, once the exciting wonder of a new story has worn off and before the climactic conclusion of act 3 kicks off.

It is not enough to simply “get through” the middle of the book. Readers need to feel like their attention is valued. Thankfully, dropping another hill in your character’s way is a viable solution to filling the middle of the story—and there are a few easy ways to do it.

INTRODUCE A PROBLEM

There are many methods to writing a story, and it’s hard to dictate the right and wrong way to create art, but introducing a problem your characters must solve before they can move forward creates suspense by making the reader wonder *what if?*

THICK

What if Gollum turns Frodo against Sam?

What if Harry never makes it on the train to Hogwarts?

What if the Losers leave Derry and leave It to its own devices?

Characters with a problem to solve are not enough. Characters must be interesting and full, and the outcome of solving the problem should give them what they need—or what they think they need—to move forward in the story. A writer's job is not to be nice to a character and deliver the goods to them on a platter. Be mean, implement a problem when your story starts to slow, and let your characters grow and learn in the process. Your reader will feel terrible for them, and that is the goal of a writer—to elicit an emotional response from the reader.

RATCHET UP THE TENSION

As a cousin to suspense, tension is the outcome of conflict. Rub your hands together enough and tap someone, and they might get shocked. Tension comes from the moment your brother chases you around the house with his statically charged hand; suspense leaves you wondering whether you'll manage to get away. Readers love a bit of tension; they love to ponder *what happens next?*

Tension isn't meant to be injected without forethought, however. Tension requires two or more points that tug on the characters, normally plot points, and threaten to pull them backward or forward in the story. In the sixth Harry Potter book, Harry is petrified on the train on his way to Hogwarts by his nemesis, Draco Malfoy, dragging the momentum backward. In Stephen King's *It*, the Losers are terrorized by It individually, which causes them to suspend their disbelief that It has returned and pulls everyone forward in the story.

By tightening up plot points, you create tension and a more cohesive plot for readers.

ENERS

IMPLEMENT A PLOT TWIST

Plot twists can be tricky to do right, but it is so satisfying when you do. A well-crafted plot twist will strike a reader, dropping their jaw and renewing their investment in a story. A plot twist doesn't have to be plot-altering. It just needs to be the result of an earlier planted seed that went unnoticed by the reader.

Remember the brother with the staticky hand? What if the would-be victim is a notorious prankster and had set up a piece of tape across the door he plans to escape to, which he ducks under at the last minute? Now, the prank is on the prankster.

Keep in mind, your readers will recognize a cop-out or *deus ex machina* if you haven't set these details up ahead of time. Don't forgo the details. Set out the evidence for your plot twist earlier in the story, and your readers will find it satisfying.

Now we have a story where the reader is invested in the outcome, which can go several ways.

BE FLEXIBLE

It's hard to dictate right and wrong in storytelling. There are only best practices, but even those can be warped by a writer armed with the right tools. If you've set the boundaries early on through a compelling story and believable characters, you can subvert these ideas and bend the rules.

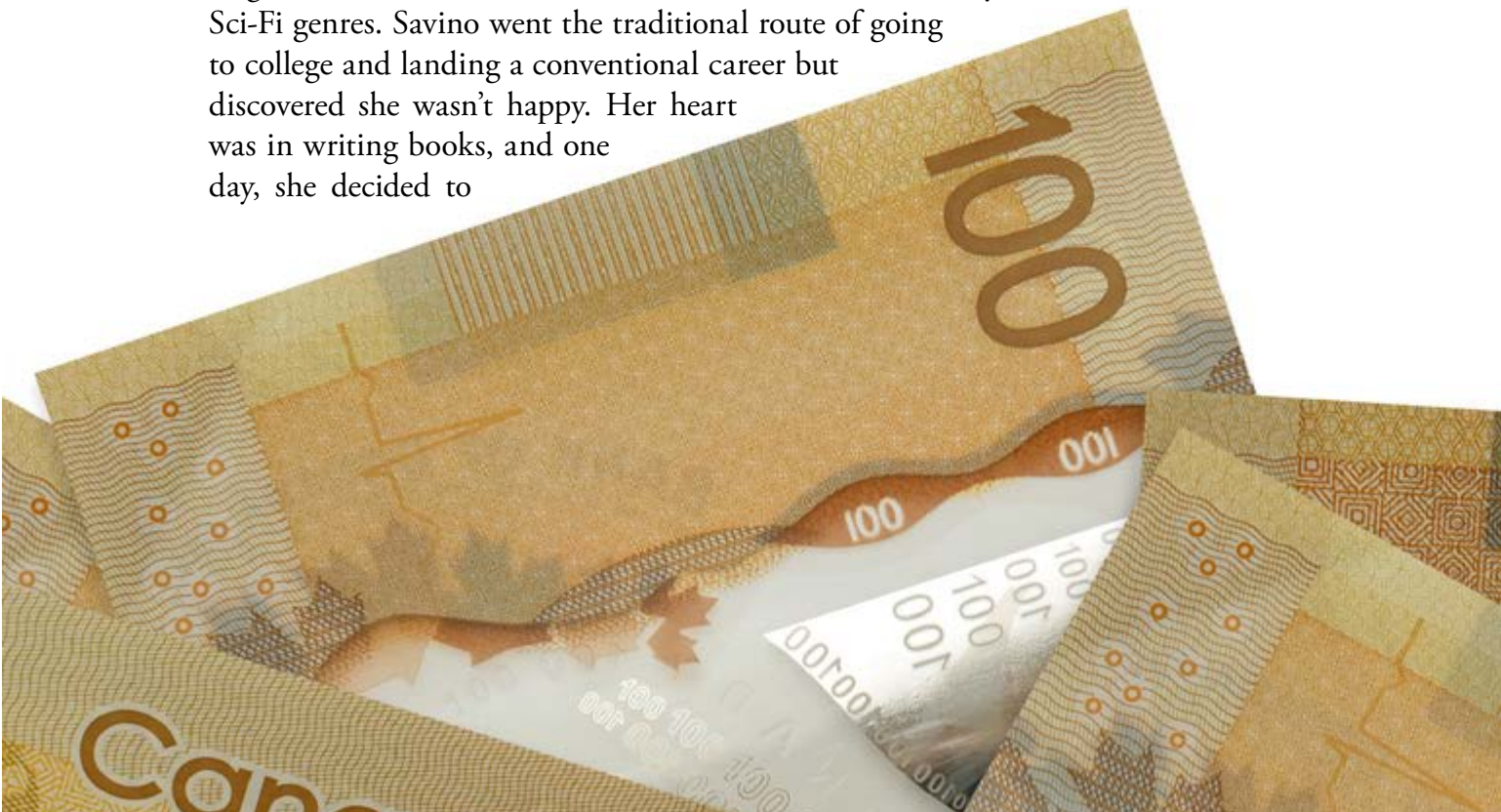
The sagging middle shouldn't be something you dread writing. If you dread it, the reader certainly will too. Look for ways to add depth and energy to your story, and keep the momentum for their arrival at act 3. Whatever you do, find a way to drag your reader up the mountain again, and keep the story moving forward to the finish line. ■

David Viergutz

The Secret Mindset of a Millionaire Author

Millionaire authors can seem so grandiose. It's hard to imagine an author making six figures a year from their work, let alone ten times that amount. Despite the apparent monstrosity of this task, there are many indie authors achieving this monument every year. Perhaps they know something the general public doesn't—or perhaps they think differently than most authors do. Are seven-figure authors really that different from the everyday writer, and is there advice these publishing dynamos can give to help elevate the dreams of others?

Lee Savino is a seven-figure author with a collection of over two hundred English and translated titles in the Paranormal, Urban Fantasy, and Sci-Fi genres. Savino went the traditional route of going to college and landing a conventional career but discovered she wasn't happy. Her heart was in writing books, and one day, she decided to



take the leap and become a full-time author. After years of publishing, she managed to accumulate her publishing expertise into a seven-figure author career.

“The biggest common denominator was we [my coauthor and I] wanted to make money from our books and we were okay with making money from our books. When I started out, I wanted to make money, but I wasn’t allowing myself to make money,” Savino says. “It can be helpful to dig into any resistance you have.”

For many years after publishing her first novel, Savino struggled to increase her author income. She’d plateaued around thirty thousand dollars and wasn’t able to increase her income beyond that rate until she looked into changing her mindset.

“I used to believe you have to work hard and do something you hate in order to get paid well. I also used to believe rich people are all bad and evil, and I didn’t want to be evil, so I made sure I didn’t make above a certain amount,” Savino says. She had to change that mindset in order to become a bestseller, and that meant allowing her subconscious to lead the way rather than her conscious mind.

“When you let go, you’re able to create, and creation comes from the subconscious mind creating, versus the conscious mind, which is the manager mind,” Savino says. “And if you’re critical of yourself, you’re shutting yourself down.”

One of the most optimal ways Savino helps to control her ego is to practice exercises in letting go of fear. “I talk about goal setting and putting stuff out there and writing it down, but it can be helpful to write something down and put it in a box, then let it go,” Savino says. “What happens is your subconscious mind works on solving the problem.”

Savino says her routine varies, and that she doesn’t put pressure on herself, which is key to generating success.

“I dither around for an hour with social media and emails, and try to do a good chunk of writing in the morning, then I’ll go to yoga, because I used to sit in bed and write all day, and now I have back issues,” Savino says. “Taking care of your health and paying attention to pain is becoming increasingly important. After yoga, I goof off—I could write again, but I usually book a lot of meetings.”

Savino’s schedule remains untethered, and she insists that every day is different, with her responsibilities requiring her to wear a lot of hats. “I have a busy business with all these things to do,” she says. “There’s a lot of moving parts, so there’s more to my business now than writing one book a year in English.”

One of
her most



powerful tips for achieving seven figures for authors is to learn to delegate the tasks that you don't have to do, while focusing on the tasks that you're best at. "It's okay to be yourself. I had a goal of being a millionaire author, but that doesn't have to be anyone's goal, and you don't have to be alone," Savino says. "Hire people to help you, because that's what it's about. You want to write the book, but once it's done, you get help. Do the things that only you can do, and the things that you can do, but someone else can do too, hire that out. Use brain power, and delegate things to get off your plate." Though this might sound like an impossible summit for a new indie author, Savino encourages that finding help doesn't have to break the bank, as she often traded services with other authors early in her career to find the assistance she needed.

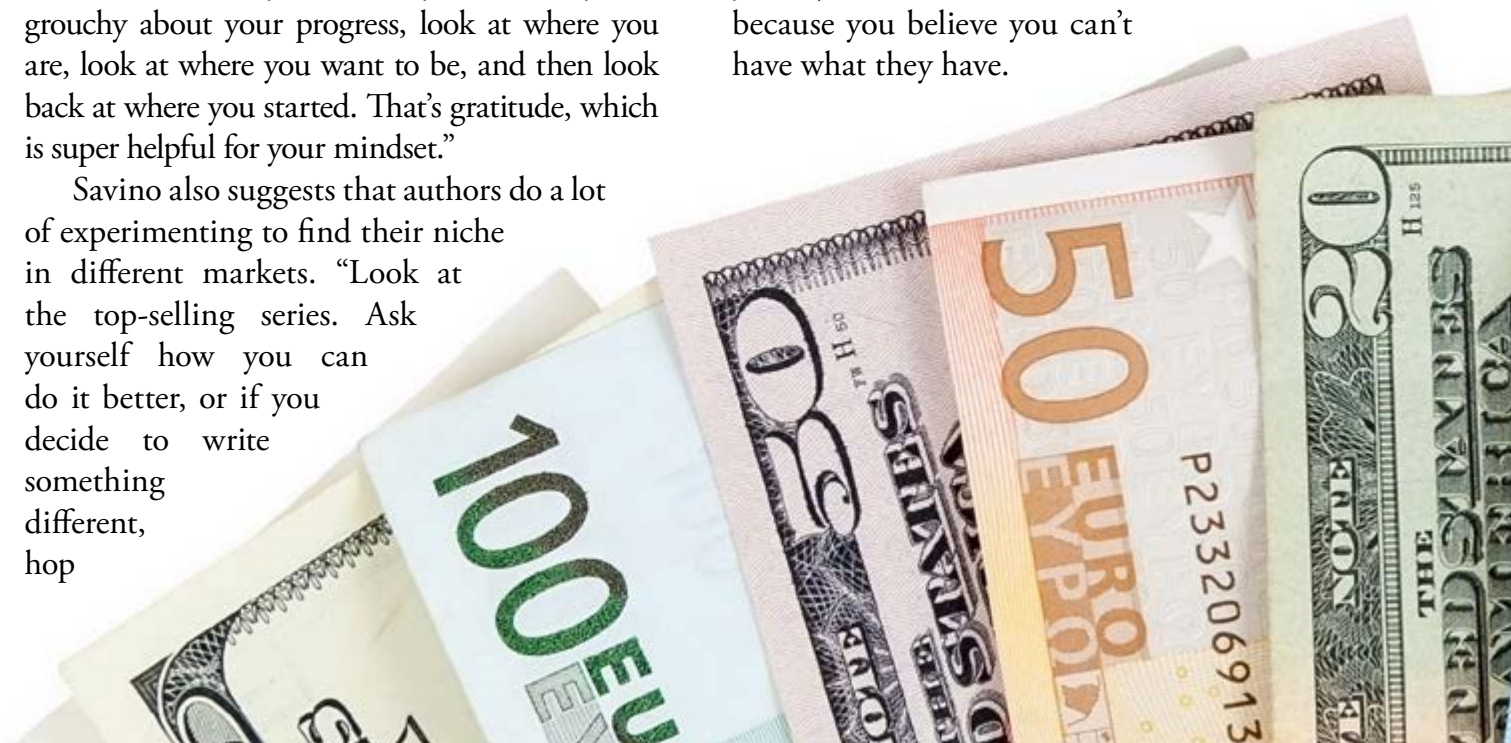
"Start where you are. Hire who you can; barter with other authors, do beta read and editing swaps, because you can learn a lot from critiquing someone else. You need to find out what in your business is necessary," Savino says. "Then, if you're grouchy about your progress, look at where you are, look at where you want to be, and then look back at where you started. That's gratitude, which is super helpful for your mindset."

Savino also suggests that authors do a lot of experimenting to find their niche in different markets. "Look at the top-selling series. Ask yourself how you can do it better, or if you decide to write something different, hop

around and experiment," Savino says. "For me, it was about taking the money coming in and investing it in ads, BookBubs, newsletters. Try to find more readers and build your mailing list, because you want to have fans you can touch over and over again. Put some of that investment into audiobooks, then do translations. Ideally, all these moving parts enable you to do something even better, then bring all your fans with you while finding new ones."

She encourages authors to keep pushing forward, especially if they see potential in a new series.

"If you can make fifty thousand [dollars] a year, you can make a hundred thousand. If you can make a hundred thousand, you can definitely make seven figures," Savino says. "You've gotten readers who like your stuff, so now it's about getting more readers, and there are always more readers. Your fellow authors are never your competition, because they are always helping you bring more people into the market, and if you're jealous of another author, it's because you believe you can't have what they have."



“Colleen Hoover is finding new readers every single week. This market is infinite, and you will never reach all your readers. It’s just a matter of scaling,” Savino continues. “Ask yourself how to take your intellectual property and sell it in different formats and languages. Reinvest your money so you can have more reach.”

Of course, experimenting with platforms and different avenues of media entertainment takes financial risk, but Savino knows that the more an author is willing to take risks, the greater potential of returns for their career.

“The most successful authors know if they lose money, they’ll get it back,” Savino says. They know they’re not a bad person or unworthy because they lost money, and they’re not afraid to make money and lose it all again. It’s all because they know they’re good enough as they are.”

Savino believes that within a few years, indie authors will be producing graphic novels, webtoons, animation, theme music, and even films for their own work. “First comes the intention that you want something that big. It some-

times doesn’t feel that safe to be that rich, but we’re on this planet to have fun and do what we want, so you have to ask yourself what you want. Because if it pops in your head and you want it, you’re meant to have it.”

Above all, Savino insists, there’s one key to having a seven-figure author career, and that’s self-love, accepting yourself as you are wherever you might be in your business and not pressuring yourself to be more than what you’re able to be at the current moment.

“It becomes an exercise in raising your own self-esteem, unconditionally loving yourself—not when you finish the book or when you hit [the] *New York Times*, but right now, and knowing you don’t have to prove yourself. I thought by reaching these goals everyone would celebrate me and I’d be good enough, but I can celebrate myself and be good enough right now, even if I’m getting out of bed at noon.”

Lee Savino is an author of Paranormal, Sci-Fi, Dark, and Contemporary Romance that leaves a lasting impression. She also teaches courses on millionaire author mindset, which can be found at <https://millionaire-author-coaching.teachable.com/courses>. You can discover her books at <https://leesavino.com>. ■

Megan Linski-Fox



From the Stacks

ATOMIC HABITS

James Clear

<https://indieauthortraining.com/groups/atomic-habits-james-clear>

Success as an indie author isn't about waiting for inspiration to strike or setting lofty goals that feel out of reach. It's about showing up every day, putting in the work, and letting small habits build over time. Whether you're trying to finish your next draft, market your latest release, or grow your readership, *Atomic Habits* gives you the tools to make steady progress, one step at a time.

Take a look at this book through Indie Author Training's Book Club Summaries to find

- an audio deep dive into the material,
- a synopsis geared toward indie authors,
- a discussion forum to connect with other readers, and
- questions to help you apply what you learn to your business.

Visit <https://indieauthortraining.com/course-category/book-club-summaries> to learn more and explore other titles.

SOUNDBOOTH THEATER

<https://indieauthortraining.com/soundbooth-theater>

Soundbooth Theater is a full-service audio production company offering multi-cast audiobook production and Cinematic Audio, dramatizations that are enhanced with sound effects and music to give a more theatrical auditory experience. Authors work with the company on a royalty share, so there is no upfront cost of production.

CREATE 6 MONTHS OF SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT IN 2 HOURS

<https://indieauthortraining.com/webinars/create-6-months-of-social-media-content-in-2-hours>

During this practical session, Sarah Oldman, the creative force behind Author Services by Sarah, walks through an easy-to-follow process to plan three to twelve months of engaging content in just one to two hours. Oldman's strategies can help repurpose and schedule content efficiently and balance promotional posts with value-driven content, and the included handout can be used over and over for future planning.

The *Indie Author Magazine* podcast has been refined and focused for bite-size listening, giving you just what you need to know about some of the biggest topics in the industry. Here are the latest episodes you may have missed:

- "From Writer's Block to Flow: Brain.fm and the Power of Sound"
<https://open.spotify.com/episode/4uypWkBZNfNsCzFLhfv6QI>
- "Mastering YouTube: 10 Essential Tips for Indie Authors"
<https://open.spotify.com/episode/7kenTvXbZUSUxE6BybWdIX>
- "Finding Community: Tackling Loneliness as in Indie Author"
<https://open.spotify.com/episode/5dXZQB8ISyOSvAD6JQywoh>
- "Ergonomic Essentials: Creating the Perfect Home Writing Setup"
<https://open.spotify.com/episode/1YUkH65nknnyxi0iSOw6NA>



LIVING the ROMANTASY

Romantic Fantasy (AKA Romantasy) is a subgenre of Fantasy that pairs a strong romantic subplot with a Fantasy main plot. The focus can skew toward the Fantasy plot with a significant minority of romantic elements, or it can balance fairly evenly between the two.

Romantasy is often confused with its sister genre, Fantasy Romance. While the Venn diagram of their readership does overlap, distinct expectations mean readers of one may not choose to read the other. If you like both, you're in luck: A quick look at the bestseller lists and Amazon charts shows the likes of Sarah J. Maas, Raven Kennedy, and Laura Thalassa flying high, proving that both genres sell for traditional publishers and indie authors alike.

ROMANTIC FANTASY AND FANTASY ROMANCE: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

Both genres tend to be written for women readers and feature romantic relationships, which can be heterosexual, LGBT+,





GENRE TROPES IN ROMANTIC FANTASY

or polyamorous (as foregrounded by reverse harem's success in recent years). They run the gamut in terms of heat level, from no hint of sexual desire even in characters' thoughts all the way to explicit sex scenes with four-letter anatomical terms. Whichever you choose, as with any Romance, it's advisable to signal the heat level to readers through marketing material, including covers and blurbs.

Where Romantic Fantasy is a subgenre of Fantasy, Fantasy Romance is a subgenre of Romance (some readers shelve it as "Fanrom"). As such, books in that subgenre obey the rules of Romance (e.g., ending with an HEA or HFN), broadly follow the Romance structure outlined in Gwen Hayes' *Romancing the Beat*, and tend to have a single or dual point of view. Each book in a series generally follows a different couple. They are romances—they just happen to take place in a Fantasy setting. An example is Grace Draven's *Radiance*.

Romantic Fantasy books, on the other hand, follow Fantasy rules and expectations (some readers shelve these as "Romfan"). They tend to be longer (books longer than one hundred thousand words are common, and those beyond two hundred thousand words are still within normal parameters though fifty-thousand-word novels

also exist within series) and will feature fantastical elements, such as magic, fantasy creatures, and worlds that, while influenced by the history of our own, are *not quite* the same.

They may or may not follow Romance rules; for example, the heroine might have multiple partners, as seen in *A Court of Thorns and Roses* when the central character moves from one love interest to another through the course of the series. An HEA/HFN is not guaranteed in Romantic Fantasy books; however, readers may still be disappointed if your epic love story doesn't end happily.

Books in a series tend to follow the same central characters as they face various trials and tribulations and may feature single, dual, or multiple points of view. Raven Kennedy's *The Plated Prisoner* series, beginning with *Gild*, is a recent example.

When trying to remember which is which, it's helpful to keep in mind the second word is the noun (Romantic *Fantasy* or Fantasy *Romance*) or its core genre while the first word is the adjective that tells you what kind of Fantasy or Romance.

KEY FEATURES OF ROMANTIC FANTASY

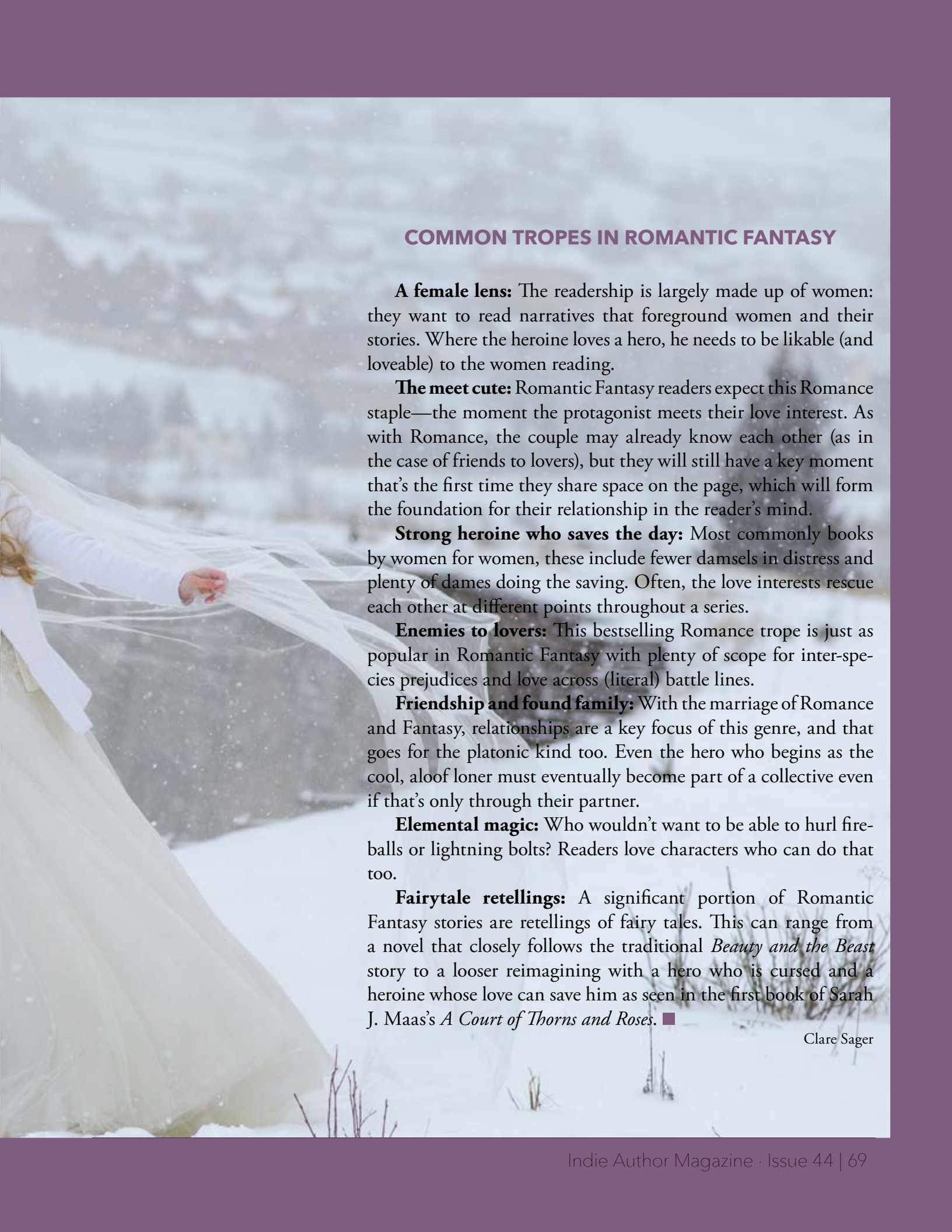
While most Fantasy tropes can find a home in Romantic Fantasy, readers have specifically come to expect some key elements from this genre.

These stories are at their core Fantasy adventures. That could take the form of finding the MacGuffin, saving the world from the evil overlord, or even becoming the evil overlord in a more villainous take on the genre. (Indeed, villain Romance, a romantic trope, translates well into the genre.)

That being said, readers do expect the romance to be significant and take up screen time: The brief mentions of romance in *The Lord of the Rings*, for example, don't qualify it as Romantic Fantasy and would disappoint the genre's readers.

Ultimately, we come to Romantic Fantasy for stories that combine adventure and romance and allow us to escape the mundane world for as long as it takes to turn a few (or several) hundred pages.



A woman in a long, flowing white dress stands in a snowy field. Her arms are outstretched, and she appears to be holding or letting go of something. The background shows a vast, snow-covered landscape with distant mountains under a soft, overcast sky. The overall mood is ethereal and romantic.

COMMON TROPES IN ROMANTIC FANTASY

A female lens: The readership is largely made up of women: they want to read narratives that foreground women and their stories. Where the heroine loves a hero, he needs to be likable (and loveable) to the women reading.

The meet cute: Romantic Fantasy readers expect this Romance staple—the moment the protagonist meets their love interest. As with Romance, the couple may already know each other (as in the case of friends to lovers), but they will still have a key moment that's the first time they share space on the page, which will form the foundation for their relationship in the reader's mind.

Strong heroine who saves the day: Most commonly books by women for women, these include fewer damsels in distress and plenty of dames doing the saving. Often, the love interests rescue each other at different points throughout a series.

Enemies to lovers: This bestselling Romance trope is just as popular in Romantic Fantasy with plenty of scope for inter-species prejudices and love across (literal) battle lines.

Friendship and found family: With the marriage of Romance and Fantasy, relationships are a key focus of this genre, and that goes for the platonic kind too. Even the hero who begins as the cool, aloof loner must eventually become part of a collective even if that's only through their partner.

Elemental magic: Who wouldn't want to be able to hurl fireballs or lightning bolts? Readers love characters who can do that too.

Fairytale retellings: A significant portion of Romantic Fantasy stories are retellings of fairy tales. This can range from a novel that closely follows the traditional *Beauty and the Beast* story to a looser reimagining with a hero who is cursed and a heroine whose love can save him as seen in the first book of Sarah J. Maas's *A Court of Thorns and Roses*. ■

Clare Sager

WELLNESS

Give Your Brain a Break

HOW TO BALANCE LIFE AND WORK AS A CREATIVE

We often think of work-life balance as an aim to keep work separate from our personal time. But as writers, our stories are almost always on our minds. For us, the traditional work-life balance might not exist; instead, aiming to separate our creative time and non-creative time may help us better transition between these two states.

MENTAL FATIGUE: MORE THAN WRITER'S BLOCK

Our brains are a cluster of neurons and synapses constantly firing in a whirlwind of activity—and that is when we're just existing. A 2022 study in the *Journal of Current Biology* revealed that just as lactic acid builds up in our muscles after exercise, the brain can build up excess levels of glutamate in the prefrontal cortex. This area of the brain controls decision-making and cognition. With overuse, we

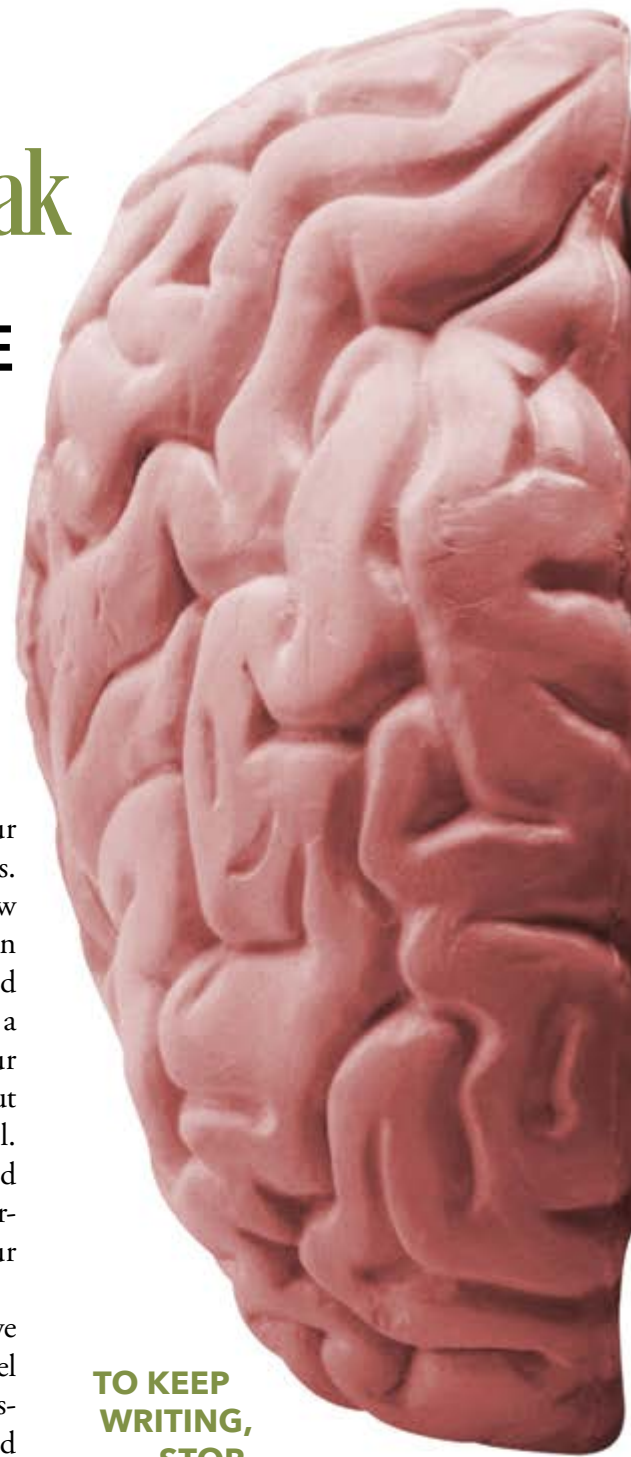
experience brain fatigue. To simplify the medical jargon, when the brain is overworked, it will slow down until it can recover.

Brain fatigue affects our decision-making processes. When our minds are in a flow state, we are biologically driven by the rewards of dopamine and other feel-good chemicals. In a nutshell, we feel good, and our story is flowing effortlessly. But at some point, we tend to stall. Our rewards have run out, and our prefrontal cortex is overwhelmed with glutamate. Our body requires rest.

During this slowdown, we may stop thinking clearly and feel our brain lag from mental exhaustion. It is only through sleep and other meditative experiences that the brain clears up. This is why writing first thing in the morning is so effective for many writers—and why providing ourselves a regular break from creativity can be so important.

TO KEEP WRITING, STOP WRITING

As writers, being in overdrive can do several things to stop our progress: we can end up stuck in the muddy middle of a story or a thought, find ourselves





jumping from project to project, or run into a wall that goes on for days. It can impact our interaction with the outside world as well—our families, friends, and co-workers can feel our mental absence or our grumpiness. But if, as the study states, our thinking brains are overworked, how can we help them recover?

Much of the advice we receive from the collective writing world says to take a walk, exercise, and do things to support other facets of our existence. In moments of transition, we are advised to seek activities to boost our creative spark: reading in our genre, watching YouTube videos on other authors' success, exercising or taking walks as we think through our book's troubles. These are all good for our creativity and for shifting our minds around the matters at hand. But none of these give our mind its needed rest. To recover, we need to truly turn off and allow the neurons and synapses to quiet.

SIMPLIFY FOR SUCCESS

Many writers use tools and timers to give themselves a

five-minute break every twenty minutes. However, for a more productive mind, a shift into a non-thinking state for fifteen minutes every ninety minutes would be even more beneficial. This could be a dance party to music you save for this moment—just not the same music that you use for writing. It could be mindlessly stretching, or petting the cat while only letting your mind contemplate the softness of their fur. Try taking your dog for a walk with nothing but the breeze and falling leaves in mind. If you hike mountains while you dictate, make sure that you stop when your mind needs a break, and smell the roses, so to speak. Find a boulder and take in the smell of the pines until your mind reconnects with your story.

Whatever you do to give yourself a break, focus only on that moment. When we are present with an activity that is relished for its simplicity, our minds relax. You'll soon find yourself ready to get back to writing with a recharged brain and a refreshed system. ■

Heather Clement Davis



Heather Clement Davis

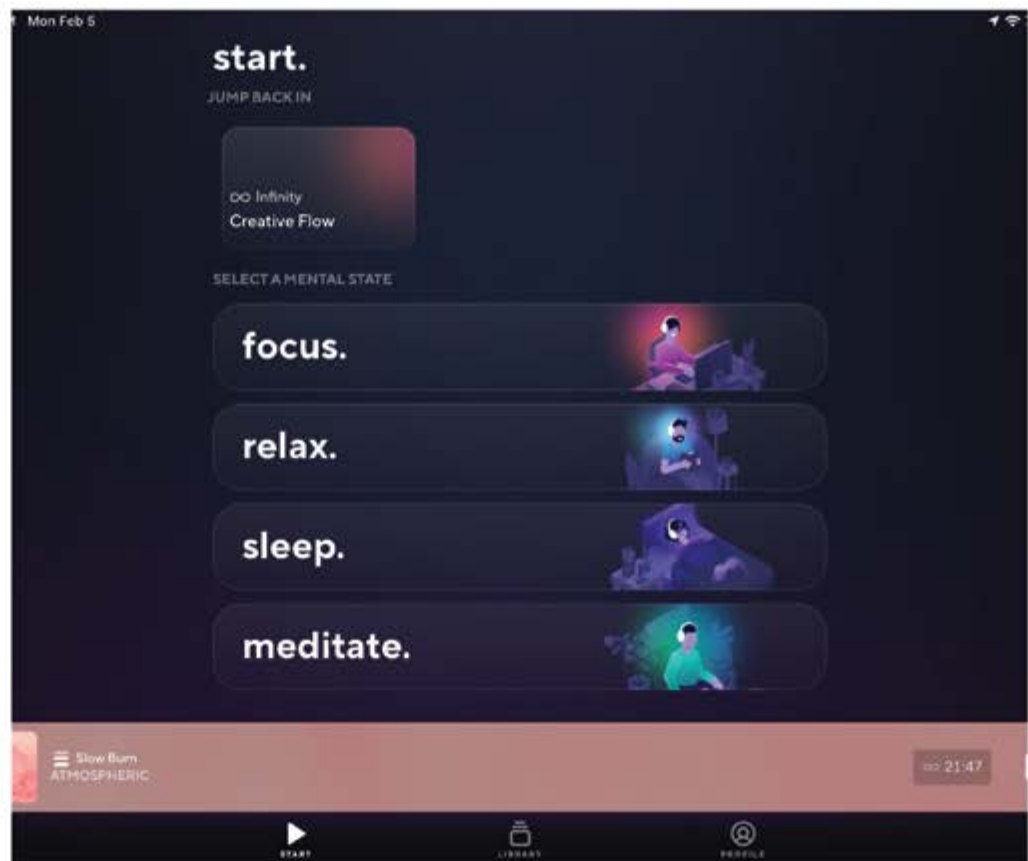
Heather Clement Davis has twenty-six years' experience in museums, archaeology, art, counseling, art therapy, creative writing, and nonprofit management. She holds enough graduate work to make a Ph.D. cry as her neurodivergent brain is hooked on learning everything. She's currently a masters candidate in Arts Management. Her paintings and pottery are in galleries and collections worldwide and her poetry and her nonfiction and fiction has found its way to literary journals around the U.S. When not writing or making art, Heather can be found playing Catan or watching Star Trek with her family.

Unleash Your Creative Juices: The Science Behind Brain.FM for Authors

Facing the blank page, with the cursor blinking like a beacon of wasted time, writers often find themselves in a silent standoff with their own creativity. The challenge goes beyond simply putting words on a page; it's about summoning the muse, maintaining focus, and breaking through the barriers of writer's block. This is where Brain.FM steps in with its own novel solution.

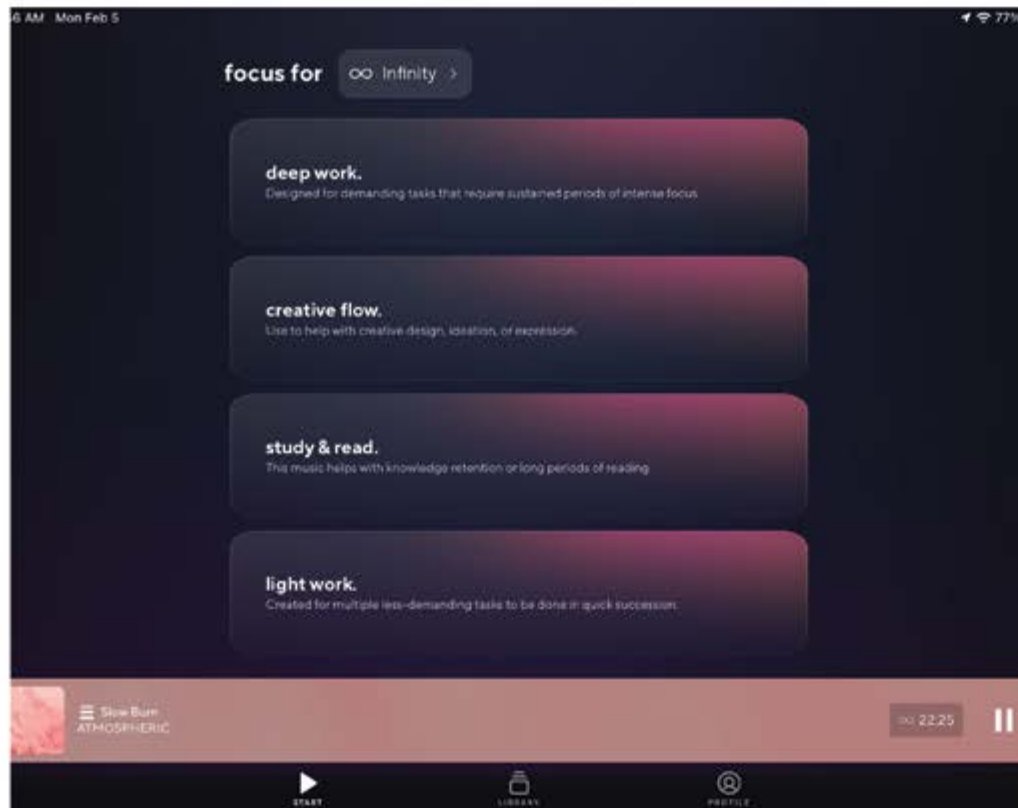
Brain.FM is a science-based music app that offers users different channels of background noise meant to make it easier to focus, relax, sleep, or meditate. Subscribed users select what they're hoping to achieve, then set timers in thirty-minute increments to listen for up to two hours or choose the infinity setting for uninterrupted listening. The premise of Brain.FM is not just to provide a background soundtrack for your writing sessions but also to enhance your cognitive functions, allowing for deeper focus, creativity, and productivity.

At the heart of Brain.FM's effectiveness is a technique known as active brain-state modulation. This method leverages a blend of musical compositions and soundscapes



designed to influence the listener's brainwave patterns. Studies have shown that different brainwave patterns are associated with various states of consciousness. Alpha waves predominate during periods of relaxation, promoting a reflective and calm state of mind. But when a task demands attention and cognitive engagement, the brain generates beta waves, which are linked to alertness and focus.

Initially, the concept sounds similar to binaural beats, tones played at specific frequencies that are said to help your brain relax—but Brain.FM relies on a variety of different sound designs and techniques other than binaural beats, according to its website, and even offers a host of neuroscientific studies to support its claims. Scientific evidence for the benefits of binaural beats, by comparison, is limited.



Brain.FM is available on the iOS App or Google Play stores for mobile devices or via the website and costs \$9.99 per month or \$69.99 per year. As a productivity tool, it may seem to blend in with other apps available to authors that provide background music, block out distractions, and provide focus timers. But the added science behind this one may just make it worthy of your attention—as long as it's not when you're supposed to be writing. ■

Chelle Honiker



Chelle Honiker

Chelle Honiker is an advocate for the empowerment of authorpreneurs, recognizing the importance of authors taking charge of both their craft and careers. In response to this need, she has founded a media and training company dedicated to supporting these creative professionals. As the co-founder and publisher of Indie Author Magazine, IndieAuthorTraining, Indie Author Tools, and Direct2Readers.com, Chelle's team of more than 80 writers, editors, trainers, and support staff provides resources and insights that help authors navigate the complexities of self-publishing. Her role as the programming director for Author Nation, an annual conference in Las Vegas, further exemplifies her commitment to fostering a community where authors can grow and succeed. With a career spanning over two decades in executive operations and leadership, Chelle has honed her skills in managing complex projects and delivering impactful training programs. Her experience as a speaker and TEDx Organizer has taken her to many countries, where she has shared her insights with diverse audiences.

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