

10 Tips for: OBSIDIAN

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Personality?

Can't-Miss
Conferences
in 2025

Dibbly Create
Showcases Both
Human- and
AI-Powered
Content Creation

The Power of
Partnership: How
Indie Authors
Foster Community

A View from the Top
Kevin J. Anderson's
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INDIE AUTHOR MAGAZINE

GOAL SETTING

Issue 45



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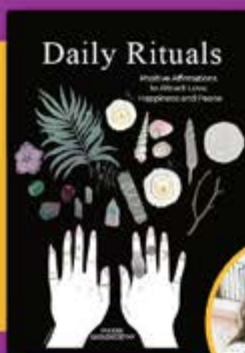


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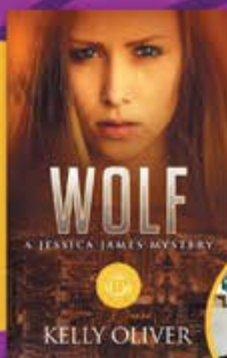
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From The EDITOR IN CHIEF

For several years, my brother and I had a New Year's Eve tradition that was maybe slightly unusual. He and I shared an office in the house, the room divided on a diagonal with our desks on either side, and on the last day of each year, we would go down to the room in the morning, plug in a playlist of music from the past year, and do a deep clean of the space. We'd throw out all the papers we no longer needed, or rearrange the bookshelves, or set up our workspaces in whichever way we thought would work best for the new year.

He moved out this past year, but I'm planning to keep the tradition alive this December 31. There's something nice about having a chance to reset and recenter yourself before embarking on a new set of goals and projects. In a way, that's what New Year's resolutions and planning sessions offer as well. I can put what I accomplished last year in its place of honor, dust off those projects I didn't quite complete, and rearrange my calendar to make sure it's set up exactly the way I want it to be.

Those goals won't stay that pristine for the next twelve months, nor will my writing desk. I'm sure, before long, I'll wind up with a stack of books sitting beside the shelf instead of on it and a pile of surprise projects that require me to make space for them in my schedule. But even if your workspace and your goals evolve throughout the year, starting off with a clean space and a plan will help you reflect on all the amazing things you did in 2024 and feel prepared to tackle 2025. We hope this month's issue gives you some ideas for where to start and the tools you'll need to stay productive.

Happy New Year, authors! Here's wishing you clean-ish writing desks and plenty of exciting projects to tackle once the confetti has finished falling at midnight.

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

Advisors Share 2025 Forecast for Indie Authors

As we step into 2025, the Alliance of Independent Authors (ALLi) remains dedicated to helping indie authors navigate the evolving landscape of publishing. In the coming year, a range of trends will shape the opportunities and challenges for authors. From the rise of AI-driven rights licensing to a renewed focus on the human side of writing craft and storytelling, ALLi's team and advisors offer their predictions for the coming year.

RIGHTS LICENSING EXPANDS IN THE AGE OF AI

The rapid advancement of AI technology is opening up new avenues for indie authors, particularly in rights licensing. Joanna Penn, ALLi's enterprise and technology advisor, highlights this development. "Rights licensing will expand in 2025 as authors have the opportunity to license their books for AI training," she says. "Keep an eye on CreatedByHumans.ai, who have already partnered with the Author's Guild in the

USA, and there will be other companies emerging as well. The expansion of AI agents—described as 'text to action' or 'text to employee'—will also give authors more options to outsource non-core tasks around business and marketing."

As AI technologies continue to advance, authors have new possibilities for monetizing their work and streamlining operations, making rights licensing a key area to watch in 2025.

A RENEWED FOCUS ON CRAFT

While AI is expanding possibilities for authors, it's also elevating the importance of craft and originality. Michael La Ronn, ALLi's outreach manager, emphasizes this point. "I expect large language models to make a leap forward with their writing capabilities in 2025," he says. "With the introduction of tools like ChatGPT's Canvas and Claude's Artifacts, the groundwork has been laid to boost the quality of their writing outputs in the very near future. I would advise authors to double down

on improving their writing craft in 2025. Originality and execution will matter more than ever.”

Roz Morris, ALLi’s editor-in-chief, notes a growing appreciation for the craftsmanship of seasoned authors. “I see a renewed interest in long-established craftsmen—authors who’ve been steadily building their art and their identity, producing strong work that isn’t afraid to be original,” Morris says. “Many indie authors self-published because they didn’t fit with the market needs of the time. Now they’re respected and accomplished artists with a well-received body of work and a lot more to offer.”

As AI enhances productivity, it also challenges authors to distinguish themselves through skill and creativity, making craft a central focus for 2025.

EVER-INCREASING QUALITY OF INDIE BOOKS

Indie publishing has always been associated with innovation and agility, and this year is no exception. ALLi’s self-publishing news editor Dan Holloway shares his observations on the evolving landscape. “Alongside the rise of AI, 2024 has been characterized by the continued strength of print books, especially among young readers. I expect this to continue as social media drives

trends that emphasize deep work, mindfulness, and physical spaces,” Holloway says. “This will open opportunities for anything analog, whether that’s literary salons at a local store or special editions. Social media will continue to drive this, but all eyes will be on what happens if the US does go ahead with its TikTok ban.”

Anna Featherstone, ALLi’s non-fiction advisor, also points to an increased emphasis on quality. “The 2025 tea leaves point to the continued ‘off the Richter scale quality’ of indie books,” Featherstone says. “Therefore, readers will be even less tolerant of mediocre writing or editing, bland voice, repetitive content, and poor production. Authors who work on their craft; focus on niche subjects; solve pressing problems for readers and share punchy, fresh, personal (non-AI) insights will benefit by capitalizing on reader recommendations and direct sales models.

“More traditional publishers will actively seek out back lists and new works from indie authors,” Featherstone continues. “After all, why not pursue indie authors who already have devoted followings rather than picking up manuscripts from the slush pile and needing to start from scratch? Indie authors will then need to decide what particular works and what models will make sense for their evolving business.

“Finally,” she says, “for economic, practical, and environmental reasons, even more readers will turn to library lending and ebooks.”

EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES IN VIDEO

Video platforms continue to be a dynamic force in book marketing, offering authors not just a way to reach readers but also a means to humanize themselves and their stories in the face of AI’s growing influence. Dale L. Roberts, ALLi’s advisor on video content, shares his predictions: “Video platforms like YouTube, TikTok, Instagram Reels, Facebook Live, and Twitch are powerful tools for authors. I predict these platforms will continue growing as essential resources for finding new readers, sharing bookish content, and increasing sales. Authors can creatively market their books using unique features like live streams, short videos, and long-form content. As these platforms mature, authors can tap into their potential to grow their readership and enhance book sales by building and fostering an online community.”

In an age where AI-driven content is on the rise, video remains one of the most powerful ways for authors to foster genuine, personal connections with readers, strengthening their communities through

engaging and authentic storytelling.

EXPANDING RECOGNITION IN AUDIO

The audio format continues to gain recognition, particularly for indie authors. Hannah Jacobson, ALLi's awards & story marketing advisor, forecasts significant developments in audiobook awards specifically targeted for indie authors. "This award trend recognizes the growing importance of audio formats for readers, as well as the unique challenges faced by independent creators," Jacobson says. "To prepare, indie authors should focus on high-quality audio production and editing, whether investing in professional recording equipment or collaborating with audio studios, and unique aspects of audio storytelling—special sound effects, musical elements, multicast performances, et cetera. Staying informed about emerging audiobook platforms and submission guidelines for these new awards will be crucial for award-winning success."

BEING MORE HUMAN

The theme of doubling down on being human returns in this perspective from ALLi founder Orna Ross, who anticipates a shift in indie authors' approach to creativity in

writing and publishing, one rooted in authenticity and the human touch.

"Our power as authors comes not just from the words we write and publish but from the heart-and-soul connections we create, and the humanity we bring to each aspect of our work," she says. "As readers increasingly crave genuine connections and meaningful content, expect to see more authors sharing not just their polished final works but also their creative processes, behind-the-scenes moments, and real-life insights, drawing readers into a shared journey. This approach will also support deeper, more sustainable engagement, helping authors build resilient publishing businesses from loyal followings.

"To ride this new trend in author publishing, successful indie authors will embrace a more holistic, flexible structure in their creative lives, incorporating balanced rhythms of creative work and rest and play into their plans and schedules," Ross continues. "We also expect to see the move towards diversified income streams increasing as authors experiment with new creative outlets and experiences, such as workshops, interactive book clubs, or patron-supported projects.

"These shifts will collectively place the 'human' factor front and center," she says, "helping authors carve out meaningful spaces in

readers' hearts and minds."

As 2025 unfolds, indie authors have diverse opportunities to explore. With these insights from ALLi's team and advisors, authors can navigate the year ahead with confidence, creativity, and clarity. ■

Matty Dalrymple,
ALLi Campaigns Manager

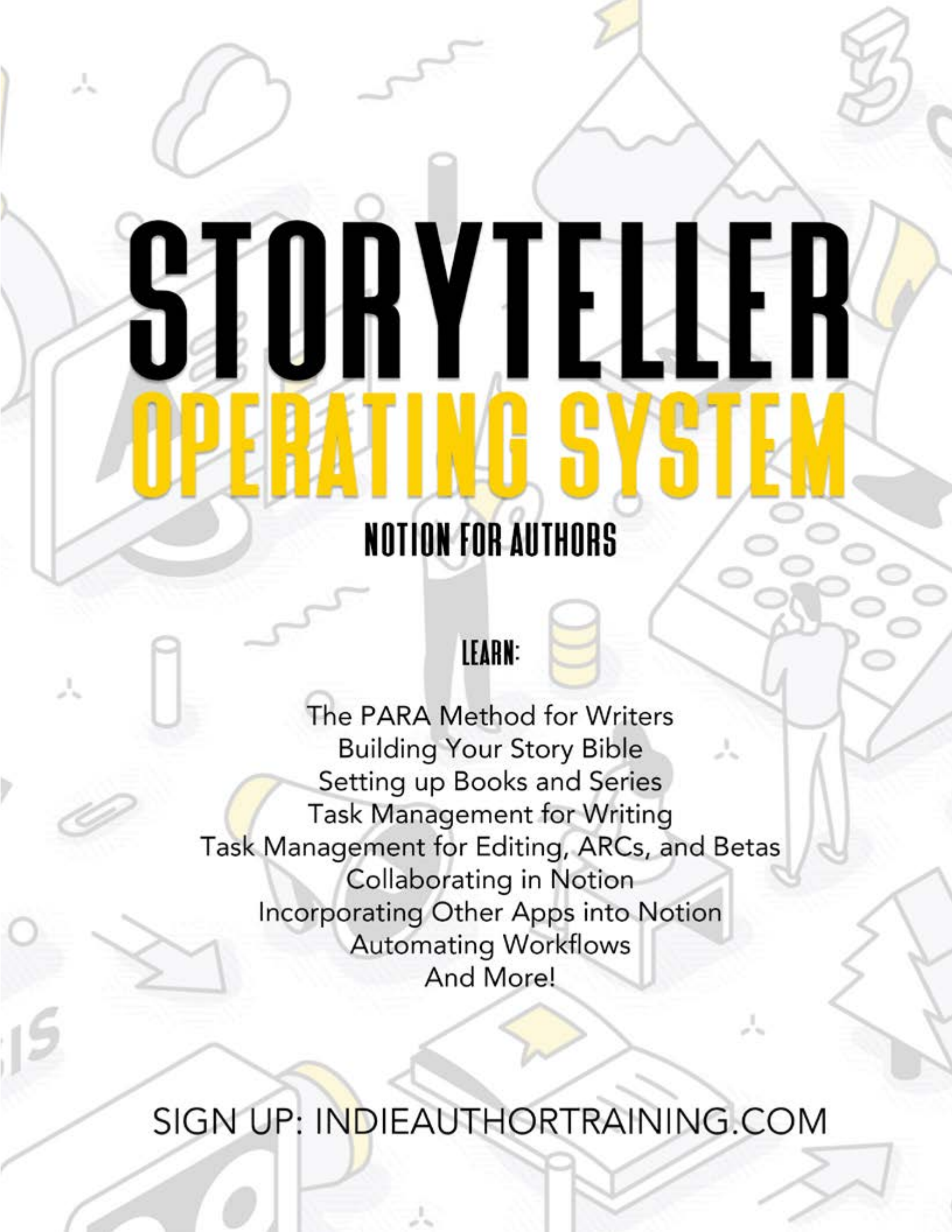


Matty
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The Alliance of Independent Authors (ALLi) is a global membership association for self-publishing authors. A non-profit, our mission is ethics and excellence in self-publishing. Everyone on our team is a working indie author and we offer advice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

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Dear Indie Annie

I have big plans for 2025 and want to start the year off strong! What are your biggest productivity tips for indie authors, especially those who are still splitting their time with other jobs?

Putting the “Hustle” in Side Hustle

Dear Hustle,

Honey, if I had a dollar for every bright-eyed writer who burst into January like Gatsby throwing glitter-bombed parties, I'd have enough to hire Brenda Ueland as my personal writing coach—and she's been dead since 1985. (If you don't know who Brenda Ueland is, I heartily recommend her book *If You Want to Write: A Book about Art, Independence and Spirit*.)

Listen up, sugar: Time management for writers with day jobs is like trying to juggle flaming typewriters while riding a unicycle. On ice. In stilettos. But fear not—Indie Annie's got your back.

First, throw out that “I'll write when I feel inspired” nonsense. Here's the tea: Inspiration is like that flaky friend who says they'll help you move but never shows up. The “perfect time” to write is a mythical beast, and you've got to work with what you've got, my dear. If you're freshest at 5 a.m., fantastic! Channel your inner Hemingway, minus the

bourbon. Night owl? Wonderful! Embrace your inner Virginia Woolf, minus the rocks in your pockets, please.

Talking about unnecessary accessories, what about that phone of yours? It's more dangerous to your word count than a red pen in the hands of your middle school English teacher. During your designated writing time, that phone needs to be far, far away from you. If possible, turn it off. At the very least, put notifications on mute and lay it screen down, out of sight.

Then make the time you have available work as much as possible. Break your goals into manageable chunks. Want to write 80,000 words this year while working full time? That's about 220 words a day, sweet pea. Even Shakespeare had to write *Hamlet* one “to be or not to be” at a time.

Here's another gem, polished by years of deadline-induced panic: Learn to write in the cracks of your

day. Lunch break? That's a chapter. Waiting at the dentist? That's a scene. Stuck in traffic? Voice notes, baby (just not while driving—Indie Annie promotes creativity, not casualties). Think of these moments like literary tapas—small bites that add up to a feast. Consider joining a writing group for accountability, and use writing sprints like they're going out of style to make the most of every minute.

The secret sauce? Routine, routine, routine. Treat your writing time like it's non-negotiable. Your muse needs to know when to show up, like training a cat to expect dinner—except this cat pays your royalties.

In regard to juggling those other pieces of the publishing world, batch your tasks like you're meal-prepping for your brain: one day for drafting, one for social media, one for editing. And please, for the sake of all that's holy in the publishing world, back up your work. Nothing



Got burning questions about the wibbly-wobbly world of indie authoring? Eager to unravel the mysteries of publishing, air your writing woes, or anything 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!

kills productivity quite like losing 50,000 words because your laptop did its best Titanic impression.

If anyone says you can't write a bestseller while working a day job, remind them that Mary Shelley wrote *Frankenstein* while basically being a single mom on tour with a bunch of melodramatic poets. If she could create a masterpiece amid that chaos, you can absolutely knock out your Romance novel between TPS reports.

And yes, darling, you absolutely need that planner. And that coffee. And that backup coffee. And if all else fails, remember: Chocolate is a business expense for writers. I don't make the rules; I just share them.

Now go forth and write, my determined little wordsmith. Make 2025 your year to shine brighter than a newly formatted manuscript.

Happy writing,
Indie Annie



10 Tips for OBSIDIAN

With an end goal of crafting clear thoughts and organized ideas, Obsidian is a durable note-taking application with a robust suite of capabilities. Perfect for authors whom inspiration sometimes strikes like lightning, Obsidian is ready at a moment's notice to store and process your thoughts, ideas, and prose. Although the program is meant for the everyman, we've dug into Obsidian's capabilities to provide you with the top ten capabilities of the platform from an indie publishing perspective.

1

TAKE NOTES ON THE GO.

Like a true notetaker, you want to take your notes with you everywhere. Obsidian syncs in real time to Mac, Android, Linux, iOS, and Windows systems to keep all your notes current. Obsidian also recognizes that the internet may not always be available, whether you're on a plane or in a remote location. It is designed to work as well offline and will sync to the cloud once connections are reestablished.

Pro Tip: Obsidian has the capability of remembering the “version history” of every note, so you can easily see your note changes and identify the differences between them.

2

EXPLORE MULTI-FACETED PUBLISHING.

Many authors have a blog or other outward-facing website. For \$8 a month, Obsidian has a built-in publishing tool that will not only host your website and function as a blog but will also allow you to collaborate seamlessly with others on various projects. Within the publishing suite, authors can edit and publish changes in a few clicks, even on mobile devices. Obsidian has multiple view modes to include a graph view, stacked pages, and hover-over previews for viewing linked pages on your site.

3

CUSTOMIZE YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH PLUG-INS.

In addition to the optional features built into Obsidian, the platform also embraces plug-ins made by the community, several of which might be useful for authors looking to keep all their writing in one place. Available plug-ins are listed at <https://obsidian.md/plugins> and can be installed by following instructions listed on Obsidian's support site. Also of importance in this community of applications is a ticker that shows how many times the plug-in has been downloaded, so you can gauge how well received the plug-in is before using it.

4

OBSIDIAN'S ROADMAP SHOWS WHERE IT'S HEADED.

Like most platforms, Obsidian advertises its plans to add features and capabilities to the platform as it grows, but the creators have also provided a "roadmap" of the direction they want to take the company on the website: <https://obsidian.md/roadmap>. The roadmap shows past improvements and fixes and upcoming changes, offering transparency to the customer base. This roadmap is also an answer to the community's requests, with many changes implemented being suggested by the customers directly.

Pro Tip: Join other Obsidian users on the community Discord channel. There, you can share your Obsidian "builds" and find tips and support from other users.

5

VISUALIZE YOUR NOTES.

Authors who benefit from nontraditional planning and note-taking may want to take advantage of Obsidian's visual space studio. There, authors can access a "playground for thought," according to the website, organizing notes visually on a canvas instead of as a text document. PDFs, videos, audio files, and web pages can be incorporated in the document. Authors used to crafting detailed character sheets and inspiration boards can find all their notes in one place, regardless of medium, saving themselves from switching between tabs and screens.

6

PAY ATTENTION TO PRICING.

Obsidian is priced competitively to other note-taking software. It's free ... or most of it is free, save for a few advanced features, such as cross-platform sync and the ability to publish pages to the web. For commercial purposes, the platform costs \$50 a year per person, or \$4.16 a month. Users can also pay for early access to features still in beta with a one-time payment of \$25 or more to support the platform's development.

7

KEEP YOUR FILES.

Unlike similar platforms, Obsidian doesn't use a proprietary file type for your projects. This means you can leave the platform at any time; your data is not exclusive to Obsidian, and should you decide to switch to another tool, Obsidian makes it easy to export your files so you're not locked in to the platform. Obsidian also stores your notes on your device, so you can access them offline and maintain privacy. The platform notes, "No one else can read them, not even us."

8

MAKE OBSIDIAN INTO THE TOOL YOU NEED.

Obsidian is all about giving you the flexibility and customizations you need. Using Obsidian's advanced sync controls—a paid but affordable feature—you can decide what is shared across your devices. You may not want to share your on-the-go thoughts and ideas until they've been compiled and cleaned up, but Obsidian allows you to sync only what will make the cut. Think of this as J. K. Rowling's napkin: great for first drafts and quick notes while allowing you to wait on syncing the project until the idea has been refined.

9

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER.

One feature notable to Obsidian is the web-clipper tool. Used to highlight and capture information from web pages and browsers, the web-clipper saves pages and metadata in a single click to your notes. The clipped pages are also available offline and saved to a vault for quick reference. Alongside the capture feature is a list of capture templates that dictate how information will be stored. Articles can include citations and footnotes; recipes with ingredients, steps, and nutrition; or if you're feeling adventurous, custom templates you create for your preferred websites.

10

WRITE ANYWHERE. TRULY.

Obsidian is built for cross-platform functionality, and authors are known to use multiple devices to turn words on the page into a book. From the cell phone to the computer to the tablet and back again, Obsidian is a true cross-platform application, and most functions within the app operate similarly regardless of the device. Authors can take advantage of this feature and know that their notes and stories can all be found in one place, with no transfers or file-dropping needed.

Obsidian does well to reduce friction for the average author looking to streamline their projects from ideation to notes to outline and to novelization. With a robust toolset, a community of supportive plug-in creators, and a low- to no-cost pricing structure, the platform may just be an improvement from many writers' original workflow, minimizing the tools needed to jot down their thoughts and helping make sense of them when it comes time to write. ■

David Viergutz



David Viergutz

David Viergutz is a disabled Army Veteran, Law Enforcement Veteran, husband and proud father. He is an author of stories from every flavor of horror and dark fiction. One day, David's wife sat him down and gave him the confidence to start putting his imagination on paper. From then on out his creativity has no longer been stifled by self-doubt and he continues to write with a smile on his face in a dark, candle-lit room.

A View from the Top

KEVIN J. ANDERSON'S PUBLISHING LEGACY LEAVES OTHER AUTHORS A PATH UP THE MOUNTAIN

At dawn, somewhere in the Colorado Rockies, Kevin J. Anderson is already climbing, his voice carrying stories into a digital recorder as he hikes. This is where bestsellers are born. With over 180 published novels, including bestsellers in the Dune and Star Wars universes, his work has reached millions of readers worldwide. But what makes Anderson truly remarkable isn't just his prolific output—it's his genuine enthusiasm for helping others navigate the complex world of publishing.

Anderson's influence extends beyond the page. As co-publisher of WordFire Press and co-founder of the Superstars Writing Seminar, he has become a mentor and leader in the writing community. Most recently, Anderson has channeled his passion for teaching into an industry-leading master's program in publishing at Western Colorado University. With a focus on both traditional and indie publishing, the program equips students with the tools they need to succeed in an industry that demands versatility and resilience.

In person, Anderson carries his success lightly. When he recently spotted his name on a billboard for *Dune: Prophecy*—the new MAX series born from novels he co-authored—he shared the photo with the delighted amazement of someone still not quite believing his good fortune. His

social media presence reflects this same authenticity: Rather than a consistent stream of self-promotion, you'll find him celebrating colleagues' achievements and offering encouragement to emerging writers. This sincerity has earned him not just readers but also a community of authors who view him as both mentor and friend.

THE POPCORN THEORY OF SUCCESS

Anderson describes his career using what he calls "The Popcorn Theory"—a philosophy that success comes from planting countless kernels of opportunity and allowing them to develop in unexpected ways. "You plant as many seeds as you can," Anderson explains, "because you never know which one will sprout."

The roots of this approach trace back to a five-year-old boy in small-town Wisconsin, where young Kevin, inspired by *War of the Worlds*, began crafting his own tales of adventure. He wrote his first novel on a typewriter at age eight and began submitting short stories to magazines as a preteen. Even as rejection letters piled up, he meticulously tracked each one in a ledger and kept submitting, confident that the next attempt could be

his first “pop.” This unrelenting determination eventually led to his first novel sale at 25, setting the stage for his prolific career.

But Anderson’s real breakthrough came unexpectedly. After years of steadily building his reputation for reliable, quality work, Anderson received a call from Bantam Books offering him the chance to write for the Star Wars universe. It wasn’t an opportunity he’d actively pursued—rather, it was the result of consistently delivering manuscripts on time and building strong relationships with editors. The Jedi Academy trilogy became a massive success, and suddenly Anderson’s kernels began popping faster than he could have imagined. Opportunities with *The X-Files*, *Dune*, and other franchises followed, each success building on the last.

STORIES WRITTEN ON THE TRAIL

Perhaps the most distinctive aspect of Anderson’s creative process is his



unique approach to writing. While many authors are tethered to their desks, Anderson composes his novels while hiking the trails of Colorado. This isn’t just an occasional practice—it’s his primary writing method, one that has helped him produce thousands of pages while summiting every 14,000-foot peak in his adopted state.

Equipped with a digital recorder, Anderson plots chapters in his mind before heading out, then lets the words flow as he walks. “There’s something about moving through nature that unlocks creativity,” he explains. “The rhythm of walking aligns perfectly with the rhythm of storytelling.” The sensory experiences of his hikes—the crunch of snow underfoot, the whisper of wind across desert dunes—often find their way into his narratives, adding vivid

texture to his scenes.

As I write this article, I find myself in the same Sierra Nevada mountains that inspired Anderson’s dictation of the Ice Planet Hoth. It feels surreal to picture him hiking through this snow-covered landscape, recording scenes for *Star Wars*. His method seems to bridge the gap between his surroundings and the fictional worlds he builds—a technique that makes his stories all the more vivid.

Dictation also keeps Anderson connected to the joy of storytelling. “I’m in the zone,” he says, noting how this process allows him to focus purely on the story without the distractions of punctuation or formatting. His typist—a human first reader—handles the technicalities, often catching repeated ideas or inconsistencies.



Of course, this unconventional method has led to some amusing situations as well. His long-time transcriptionist jokes about decoding what sound like “obscene phone calls” due to the heavy breathing captured during steep climbs. But the results are undeniable: Anderson regularly produces upwards of one thousand words per hour during these walking sessions, and his collaborative rhythm, born from years of practice, ensures that Anderson’s stories flow naturally from his mind to the page.

CREATIVE COLLABORATIONS AND NEW FRONTIERS

Of course, “the page” is just an expression; Anderson has never been content to confine his stories to one

medium. One of Anderson’s most meaningful projects emerged from his friendship with Neil Peart, the legendary drummer of Rush. Their collaboration on the *Clockwork Angels* series demonstrated Anderson’s gift for working across creative boundaries. Peart would send song lyrics and character concepts, which Anderson transformed into rich narratives that complemented Rush’s music. After Peart’s passing, Anderson took on the emotional task of completing their final collaboration, *Clockwork Destiny*—a project that became both a tribute to their friendship and a gift to their shared fans.

Anderson’s innovative spirit extends to his embrace of new publishing models. When he launched his first Kickstarter campaign for a Dan Shamble, Zombie P.I. novel, he was amazed

to raise triple the advance he’d previously received from traditional publishers. This success opened his eyes to the power of direct reader connections. He’s since run multiple successful campaigns, each one strengthening his relationship with his audience.

Audiobooks are another area where Anderson has taken the reins. When early narrations of his Dan Shamble series didn’t capture the humor he’d intended, Anderson took matters into his own hands. He reclaimed the rights and recorded the books himself, bringing his natural comedic timing and enthusiasm directly to listeners. This hands-on approach typifies Anderson’s philosophy: If something isn’t working, find a way to fix it yourself.

One of Anderson’s longest and most impactful collaborations, however, also seems the most obvious: that with his fellow publisher and co-founder of WordFire Press, Rebecca Moesta—Anderson’s wife. The two started WordFire Press in 2009, first publishing a religious book from Moesta’s father as a gift to him. Then, they began publishing ebooks of Anderson’s out-of-print novels, a venture Anderson admits he felt skeptical about at the time. “Ebooks had never managed to take off, but these came out right when

the boom was starting,” he writes. The press expanded with more of Anderson’s former titles and then with books published by Anderson’s friends until it boasted the nearly four hundred titles and one hundred fifty authors it does today.

The press has scaled back more recently to focus on Anderson’s work, namely meeting the demands of Anderson’s Kickstarter campaigns. The task is no small feat, but it’s an admission Anderson makes proudly. “That’s what it’s all about—pushing the envelope and doing new and exciting things,” he writes.

CREATING A WRITING FAMILY

Anderson’s collaborations with his wife—and the duo’s penchant for paving new roads in publishing—don’t stop at WordFire Press. The Superstars Writing Seminar, which Anderson and Moesta co-founded alongside authors Brandon Sanderson, Dave Wolverton, and Eric Flint, stands apart from typical writing conferences. Unlike many conferences that focus solely on craft, Superstars emphasizes the business side of writing, offering insights into marketing strategies, contract negotiation, navigating publishing platforms, and more. At the same

time, the atmosphere feels more like a family reunion of literary heavyweights—walk into any session, and you might find Sanderson chatting casually with new writers, or established authors openly sharing their marketing strategies. “This isn’t about protecting trade secrets,” Anderson explains. “It’s about lifting everyone up.”

This collaborative spirit manifests in tangible ways. The conference’s charity auction has funded thirty-three scholarships since its inception, breaking down financial barriers for emerging writers. What began with sixty-three attendees in Pasadena has grown to nearly four hundred participants across six programming tracks, yet it somehow maintains the warmth it’s carried from the start. “Writing can feel isolating,” Anderson says. “But when you’re here, you know you’re part of something bigger.”

Anderson’s commitment to education has found another home at Western Colorado University, where he directs the publishing concentration within the graduate creative writing program. The thirteen-month curriculum reflects his practical, hands-on approach: Students publish both an anthology and a reissued classic, experiencing every aspect of the publishing process from acquisition to marketing.

Anderson’s vision for the program goes beyond technical skills. He believes in fostering collaboration among students and building a sense of community, much like at his Superstars Writing Seminar. “You’re grounded in the formal aspects of publishing, but you also get hands-on experience and a cohort of support,” he says. The program also attracts a diverse range of students, from indie authors seeking to elevate their craft



to traditional publishing veterans eager to learn self-publishing strategies. The program's funding structure epitomizes Anderson's pay-it-forward philosophy. Projects published through WordFire Press, with support from Draft2Digital, help fund scholarships for future students.

NAVIGATING PUBLISHING'S FUTURE

Having witnessed seismic shifts in publishing over his career, Anderson maintains an optimistic view of the industry's future. Although he acknowledges challenges like the decline of physical bookstores and the emergence of AI, he sees unprecedented opportunities for authors

willing to adapt.

"Every successful indie author will become a cottage industry," he predicts, emphasizing the growing importance of direct reader relationships. His own career demonstrates this evolution—from traditional publishing to hybrid approaches incorporating crowdfunding, direct sales, and innovative marketing strategies.

Anderson also sees generative AI as a looming presence in the industry. Although he acknowledges its potential, he believes readers crave humanity—the artisanal touch of an author who has poured their passion into their work. "I've built a real rapport with my fans over the years," he says. "They'll keep buying Kevin Anderson books because they know they're getting something

genuine."

Anderson particularly celebrates the creative freedom today's publishing landscape offers. "If you want to write Vampire Steampunk Romance with a submarine captain," he says with characteristic enthusiasm, "there's a reader out there for you." This optimism, grounded in decades of experience, makes his perspective particularly valuable for authors navigating today's complex market.

LESSONS FROM THE SUMMIT

Anderson's career is a masterclass in resilience, creativity, and adaptability—qualities every indie author can emulate. From his early days meticulously tracking rejection letters to his current ventures into Kickstarter and transmedia storytelling, Anderson has demonstrated that success comes from a mix of hard work, strategic thinking, and a willingness to evolve. For him, every new project is another kernel of potential, waiting to pop in its own unique way.

But perhaps the most inspiring lesson is Anderson's belief in the power of community. "You're not



alone,” he reminds authors. In an industry often marked by competition and gatekeeping, Anderson stands as a reminder that generosity and authenticity can be powerful forces for success. His legacy won’t just be measured in books sold or worlds created but in the countless writers he’s inspired to pursue their own unique paths through the publishing landscape. ■

Chelle Honiker



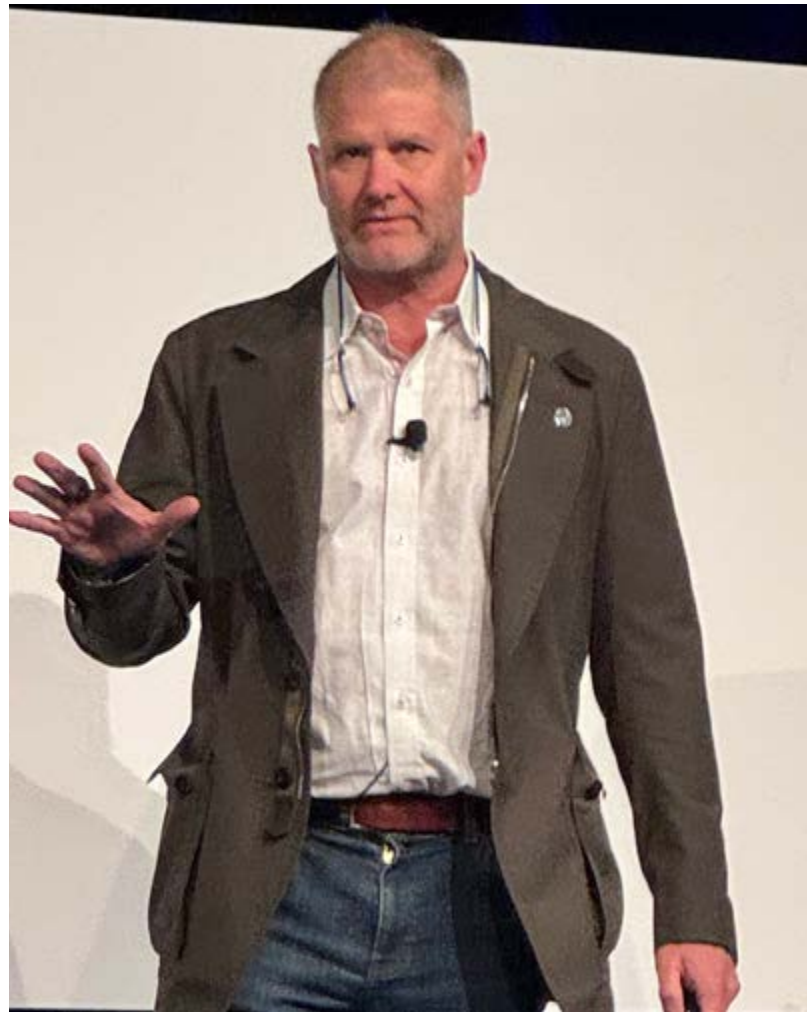
Chelle Honiker

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.

Rebranded and Revitalized: Inside the Author Nation 2024 Conference

Las Vegas is famous for its bright lights and vibrant energy, but it also proved to be the perfect backdrop for literary growth and meaningful connections at the inaugural Author Nation conference in November.

As a first-time attendee of a weeklong writing conference of this kind, I was curious to see if the conference lived up to the hype. The newly branded Author Nation—formerly 20Books Vegas—is an event designed to inspire and empower indie authors. Hosted from November 11–15 at the Horseshoe Casino in Las Vegas, Nevada, the 2024 event, led by Joe Solari, founder of Author Ventures LLC, welcomed nearly fifteen hundred in-person attendees and featured over one hundred exhibitors. With 222 speakers and 260 in-person sessions—many also broadcast virtually—Author Nation continued the gold standard for indie author education, networking, and celebration set by its predecessor.



Joe Solari, director of Author Nation, delivers opening remarks at the inaugural event November 11 at the Horseshoe Casino in Las Vegas, Nevada.

*Chelle Honiker,
Programming Director
for Author Nation with
Craig Martelle*



The 2024 theme, “Unite Your Nation,” reflected a focus on community, offering curated tracks to support authors of all levels. Tracks included craft; marketing; advertising; business and finance; trans-media; production and workflow; and mindset, wellness, and productivity, which allowed attendees to tailor their experience to fit their specific needs and aspirations. Author Nation also brought back beloved traditions like Hawaiian Shirt Day, Tiara Day, and Cosplay Day from the previous conference. There was even a memorial for Papa Martelle, father of 20Books-To50K® co-founder Craig Martelle, at which attendees, family members, and friends gathered to honor his memory.

Attendees of the 20Books Vegas conference expressed appreciation for the curated tracks, which offered structured learning paths tailored to various author needs. Returning attendee and signing author Saharra K. Sandhu also praised the conference’s integrated technology

features. “We had the Author Nation Eventee app to find our sessions, connect with other attendees, and stay informed about event updates,” Sandhu says. “This app was a game changer—every conference needs one!” However, some have noted that adapting to new elements—such as pre-event communication methods, the updated book uploading process for RAVE participants, and the integration of Discord for community interactions—required time and adjustment. These changes aim to enhance the conference experience, but they also introduce new systems for attendees to become familiar with.

DAY 1: VENDOR DAY

The conference kicked off with Author Nation Vendor Day, where attendees engaged directly with one hundred industry-leading companies, including Lulu, IngramSpark, Amazon, BookFunnel, and ProWritingAid. Attendees were offered a close look at tools and services designed to help authors expand their careers, from publishing platforms to cutting-edge technologies.

From left, authors Willow Winters, Lula White, Lisa Wells, and Melanie Rachel present on the Love and Romance panel at Author Nation.

DAY 2: WORKSHOPS AND VARIETY SHOW

Andrew Davis, bestselling author, marketing guru, and keynote speaker with a larger-than-life personality, opened day 2 with an electrifying keynote on the monumental shift, mixing humor, music, and tips for refining the author marketing strategy. His focus on mastering the curiosity gap to keep audiences engaged, and his second talk on forward-thinking exploration of AI as a creative partner, set the tone for a day full of pushing ourselves to new heights. Davis's dynamic presentation was a memorable moment, celebrating both the art and science of authorship in today's world.

The in-person demonstrations and workshops that followed explored the essential skills and elements of the industry, including book formatting with Vellum, writing tools like Sudowrite and



Atticus, and audio publishing with Podium. Topics spanned writing craft, genre-specific techniques, marketing, editing, and building an author platform, equipping authors with practical tools to advance their careers.

The day concluded with *A Bookish Variety Show*, hosted by Jeff Hays and sponsored by Soundbooth Theater. Community-penned scripts came alive, performed by Soundbooth Theater's voice actors, creating a vibrant celebration of storytelling.

DAY 3: STORY WARS

After a host of incredible workshops and author meetups, including an array of cosplay participants dressing up as characters from their favorite books and their own works, the evening festivities took the conference to a new and exciting level. The evening highlight showcased the conference's newest addition: Story Wars, a thrilling live storytelling competition founded by

Carla Dupont wins the champion title at the Story Wars competition held at Author Nation in November..

Cleveland-based duo Kelly Lytle and Gabby Valentine. Combining comedy, spontaneity, and creativity, Author Nation community writers competed in a three-round, rapid-fire tournament based on a writing prompt, with just five minutes to craft their masterpieces. Regional winners, who competed virtually over the summer, gathered for the championship event in Las Vegas. Carla Dupont's wit and creativity earned her the 2024 Story Wars Author Nation Champion title, thrilling the live audience.

DAY 4: AN EVENING WITH KEVIN SMITH

By Thursday evening, we were all excited for the exclusive Readers and Authors Vegas Event (RAVE) keynote from filmmaker and writer Kevin Smith. This was the first year a keynote was held for the RAVE event, and Smith's colorfully raw, inspiring, and hilarious outline of his life story energized the crowd. There were even some impromptu



moments involving the crowd that will go down in Author Nation history, such as RAVE signing author Kevin Tumlinson being invited to sniff Smith after making a comment from the audience.

DAY 5: READERS AND AUTHORS CONNECT

RAVE, another tradition carried over from the 20Books Vegas events,

united readers and authors for a full interactive day of book sales and promotions on Friday. Featuring fifteen expert-led panels and a mass book signing that included over two hundred authors from various genres—Romance, Sci-Fi, Fantasy, Mystery, and more—the event center was alive with awe, laughter, and newfound connections. Readers could preorder books, meet their favorite authors, and discover new favorites. The event also featured free autographed books, dramatic readings by Soundbooth Theater voice actors, and book readings by signing authors. Premium ticket holders received even more perks, including extra books from authors like W. Winters and A.G. Riddle. The lively atmosphere, filled with book lovers and storytellers, made RAVE the perfect end to a memorable week.

From left, authors Zariah L. Banks, Zariah L. Banks, Saharra K. Sandhu, Morgan Richard Olivier, David Brown, and Pierre Jeanty attend RAVE on day 5 of Author Nation.

WHAT ATTENDEES ARE SAYING

Whether authors were returning to Vegas after having attended 20Books Vegas events or marked their first conference experience with Author Nation, guests celebrated the resources and information provided in sessions and the ability to connect with other professionals. “I had an amazing time at Author Nation,” Sandhu says. “My author village has expanded in so many wonderful ways.”

First-time attendee Sandra Elaine Scott, a children’s book author, agreed with Sandhu. “I had a blast! It was amazing to connect and network with colleagues, friends and other children’s book authors,” Scott says. “There was something for everyone at every stage of their publishing journey. I walked away with action items that have already set me up for my 2025 goal planning.”

Scott, who presented at the conference on hosting virtual live events, also enjoyed participating in Author Nation beyond the scheduled sessions. “I absolutely loved



RAVE—nothing beats the energy of in-person selling,” she says. “Lastly, I got to be a fairy! Wearing a tiara and spreading kindness in my costume made me feel like I was truly among my tribe.”

Bethany Rosa, an author of Steamy Contemporary Romance, also participated in RAVE, hosting a book signing. Along with the sessions and connections she made with other authors, as a first-time attendee, she says the trade show

“was another highlight” of Author Nation.

“I loved seeing new companies and resources that could help advance my career,” Rosa says. “I even found my new writing platform, Autocrit, which I’m thrilled to try out. I especially

appreciated the one-on-one opportunities with vendors who stayed throughout the week.

A UNIFIED VISION FOR THE FUTURE

The rebranding to Author Nation, coupled with the spirit of finding your new author tribe, marked a significant shift in focus—toward

From left, authors Saharra K. Sandu, Alicia Wright, Sandra Elaine Scott, Morgan Richard Olivier, Lula White, and Eryka Parker at Author Nation 2024.



building an even stronger community of writers, readers, and industry experts. With dynamic speakers and additions like curated tracks and the high-energy Story Wars competition, Author Nation showed once again that this annual event is far more than just a conference; the experience was meticulously designed to uplift authors and propel them forward into a long and prosperous publishing career.

“I met so many incredible authors who I’m certain I’ll stay in contact with. The sessions were packed with knowledge, and I’m excited to put so much of what I learned into practice,” Rosa says. “This conference has

truly been a game-changer for me.”

The carefully curated schedule made every event, vendor, and opportunity to connect with authors and experts quite appealing. Although it wasn’t possible to experience it all, the valuable lessons and connections made will carry us forward—until

we celebrate the next unforgettable chapter in 2025. I walked into the Author Nation conference with an open mind and left with a host of new friends, future colleagues, and the undeniable feeling that I’ve found my author tribe.

Registration is now open for Author Nation 2025, taking place November 3–7 in Las Vegas. Ticket prices start at \$499 but will increase at later registration dates. Visit

<https://www.authornation.live> for more information or to sign up. ■

Eryka Parker



Eryka Parker

Eryka Parker is a book coach, an award-winning developmental editor, and writing instructor. As a women's contemporary author under the pen name Zariah L. Banks, she creates emotional intimacy novels that prove that everyone deserves to feel seen, appreciated, and loved. She lives in Northeast Ohio with her husband and two children and is currently working on her third novel.

European and Expat Children's Writers, Illustrators Make Connections at the 2024 Europolitan Conference

Moving to a new place can feel like living life on the fringes, especially for indie publishers working to make connections. The culture of your new home can be confusing and isolating, and the language might differ from the one you are writing in. When you are uprooted, how do you find local writers, new readers, and a new path to give you hope?

At the final session of the Society for Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI) 2024 Europolitan conference, Katja Rammer gave this advice: "Start with one other person." As volunteer regional advisor for SCBWI Germany/Austria, Rammer knows what she's talking about. She's been working to make this "Craft, Creativity, and Connections" conference happen since 2019.

The first Europolitan conference, held in Paris in 2013, was the brainchild of several other SCBWI regional advisors in Europe. SCBWI regional advisors are unpaid volunteers who help children's writers and illustrators connect in each geographic region. Kirsten Carlson (Germany), Mina Witteman (The Netherlands), Tioka Tokedira (France), and Jay Whistler (Switzerland) originally intended the Europolitan conference to alternate years with the SCBWI presence at the Bologna Book Fair in Italy. Europolitan conferences took place in Amsterdam in 2015, Belgium in 2017, and Zürich in

2019. Then came the pandemic and complex German requirements for nonprofit organizations, which delayed the most recent Europolitan until the fall of 2024.

On October 25, however, the weekend-long Europolitan kicked off with three opportunities to jumpstart the imagination: a scrawl crawl, a cathedral tour, and a picture book museum tour.

A scrawl crawl is an SCBWI tradition in which participants use sketchbooks or notebooks to capture local characters, setting, mood, or even the seeds of a new story while on the move. The scrawl crawl group set off over the Hohenzollern Bridge over the Rhine River and into Cologne, walking past thousands of engraved padlocks locked to the bridge's sides by loving couples. Other children's writers and illustrators toured the soaring and dark Cologne Cathedral, saw the golden shrine containing relics of the three kings, or three wise men, and learned the stories of the eight-hundred-year-old stained glass windows. Meanwhile, another group toured the picture book museum in Burg Wissem, one of fewer than five museums worldwide with a focus on children's books.

For the forty-four attendees, the small conference sessions, high faculty-to-attendee ratio, planned socials, and lunch mixers allowed excellent discussions with Anthony Hinton, editor at David Fickling Books;



EUROPOLITAN CONFERENCE 2024

illustrator and author Jutta Bauer; Non Pratt, editor at Walker Books; author Melinda Salisbury; Alisha Niehaus Berger, art director and editor at Nord/Süd; author Anita Lehmann; author and illustrator Candy Gourlay; and Julia Smith, of the Peretti Agency.

In between sessions, writers could pitch their work-in-progress in ten words, illustrate a random prompt on an index card for a contest, chat with students from the local Cologne International School, or enter an illustration portfolio into a competition judged by the faculty.

A variety of hands-on workshops honored the effort everyone made to attend the in-person event. Examples include a grid exercise for plotting the emotional journey of a story by author and illustrator Candy Gourlay and an interactive revision game by author Melinda Salisbury based on a puzzle that regularly appears in the *New York Times*. In the self-publishing session I created with picture book author Kelley Donner, we hosted an indie

publishing game à la *Dungeons & Dragons*.

Conversations about how and what to publish and book recommendations in English—and Spanish—continued in the evenings. Faculty and volunteers talked publishing at the top of their lungs inside the noisy Brauhaus ohne Namen—translated as “brewery without a name.” The massive German feast included smoky pumpkin soup; spätzle, a dish of noodles with cheese sauce; schnitzel, breaded boneless pork chops; or sauerbraten, marinated pot roast and dumplings; and ended with apfelstrudel, or chopped apples rolled up in pastry. The Cologne dialect and the local beer share the same name, Kölsch, and their ads say it’s “the only language you can drink.” Waitstaff used the square cardboard coasters to keep score, making an X for each glass of local beer consumed, up to four per person. Cologne beer glasses are smaller than those in Bavaria, but four glasses each has only one interpretation: Germans like beer.

The many opportunities at the 2024 Europolitan grew out of the steady volunteer work of Rammer and her willingness to “start with one other person.” Writers, illustrators, and publishers tend to know others with similar interests, so each person leads to the next, until there’s a great team. In the same way, your craft, creativity, and connections could snowball toward success in 2025. All you have to do is reach out to one other person. Who will it be?

For those interested in attending future Europolitan events, sign up for the nearest European SCBWI region at <https://www.scbwi.org/regions> and keep an eye on the announcements. Premium membership to SCBWI costs \$99 for the first year and \$85 annually afterward, but nonmembers can create an account on the website for free. ■

Laurel Decher



Laurel Decher

There might be no frigate like a book, but publishing can feel like a voyage on the H.M.S. Surprise. There’s always a twist and there’s never a moment to lose. Laurel’s mission is to help you make the most of today’s opportunities. She’s a strategic problem-solver, tool collector, and co-inventor of the “you never know” theory of publishing. As an epidemiologist, she studied factors that help babies and toddlers thrive. Now she writes books for children ages nine to twelve about finding more magic in life. She’s a member of the Society for Children’s Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI), has various advanced degrees, and a tendency to smuggle vegetables into storylines.

Can't-Miss Indie Author Conferences Coming in 2025

Whether it was the fond send-off for 20BooksTo50K® events with 20Books Sevilla or the thrill of the inaugural Author Nation event in Las Vegas, Nevada, 2024's events calendar offered authors plenty of memorable moments. They also showcased revelations about advancements in the industry, with speakers highlighting trends in direct sales, content creation strategies, the popularity of subscription platforms, and new ways to incorporate AI into the publishing process.

This year's conference lineup already stands to bring more of the same in 2025, with a mix of virtual and in-person events suitable for every author—and every budget. *IAM* has gathered a list of readers' most-anticipated author events for 2025. Read on to find out more, including how much they cost and how you can register, and don't forget to check <https://indieauthormagazine.com> for a more comprehensive calendar of local or genre-specific events happening throughout the year.

Superstars Writing Seminars

When: February 6–9, 2025

Where: Colorado Springs, Colorado

Cost: \$999 for new members, with discounts for students or military and for conference alumni. There are also tickets available for “Skills Day,” an optional workshop that takes place February 5 before the event. “Skills Day” tickets can be purchased by themselves or as an add-on to the regular ticket.

Find out more and register at <https://www.superstarwriting.com>.

The Author Alchemy Summit

When: February 14–16, 2025

Where: Portland, Oregon

Cost: \$599 at the time of writing, with prices increasing to \$749 before the event

Find out more and register at <https://authoralchemy-summit.com>.

Neurodivergent Publishing Conference

When: February 21–23, 2025

Virtual event

Cost: \$35

Look for more information as it becomes available at <https://ndpub.org>.

Women in Publishing Summit

When: March 5–8, 2025

Virtual event

Cost: \$147, with prices increasing to \$197 January 15

Find out more and register at <https://womeninpublishingsummit.com>.

The Future of Publishing Mastermind and Writer MBA Conference

When: March 16–22, 2025, with the conference taking place March 19–22, 2025

Where: New Orleans, Louisiana

Cost: \$699 to attend the conference alone, or \$2,499 to attend the conference and mastermind. Tickets are discounted to \$600 and \$2,000, respectively, for a limited time, and additional options are available for those wanting to advertise author courses or services at the event.

Find out more and register at <https://writermba.com>.

Ireland's Publishing Show: On the Wild Atlantic Way

When: March 18–20, 2025

Where: Dromoland, County Clare, Ireland

Cost: €279

For more information and to purchase tickets, visit <https://irelandspublishingshow.com>. You can also follow the event's Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/irelandspublishingshow>.

The Trope Conference

When: April 4–6, 2025

Virtual event

Cost: \$99

Watch <https://www.jenniferhilt.com> for updates and information about how to register.

The BookFest Spring 2025

When: April 5 and 6, 2025

Virtual event

Cost: Free

Visit <https://www.thebookfest.com> for updates leading up to the event and to access the live stream.

Indie Pub Scranton

When: April 26, 2025

Where: Scranton, Pennsylvania

Cost: \$150

Space for this event is limited. To submit your application, fill out the interest form at <https://forms.gle/u2v1rjfouSAz5azo7>.

Self Publishing Show Live

When: June 25 and 26, 2025

Where: London, UK

Cost: £79 + VAT for one-day access, or £299 + VAT to attend both days

Registration is for both the digital and in-person events. Find out more at <https://selfpublishing-formula.com/spslive>.

LitRPG Con

When: July 18–20, 2025

Where: Denver, Colorado

Visit <https://litrpgcon.com> for more information and to sign up to be notified when tickets are available.

Author Power Summit

When: August 14–17, 2025

Where: Peabody, Massachusetts

Cost: \$499

Find out more and register at <https://facebookadsforauthors.com/authorpowersummit>.

Novelists, Inc. (NINC) Conference

When: September 17–21, 2025

Where: St. Pete Beach, Florida

Cost: \$575, though tickets are open to Novelists, Inc. members only. Annual membership dues are \$95.

Watch <https://ninc.com/conference-registration> for more information and to register when tickets become available. Space is generally limited.

Colorado Gold Writers Con

When: September 25–28, 2025

Where: Denver, Colorado

Watch <https://rmfw.org> for more information on next year's event as it becomes available.

The BookFest Fall 2025

When: October 25 and 26, 2025

Virtual event

Cost: Free

Visit <https://www.thebookfest.com> for updates leading up to the event and to access the live stream.

Author Nation

When: November 3–7, 2025

Where: Las Vegas, Nevada

Cost: \$499, with prices increasing closer to the event based on registration date

Learn more and register at <https://www.authornation.live>.

Which events are you planning on attending in 2025? Do you know of any others we should include? Reach out to us at Events@indieauthormagazine.com! ■

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.

Turning the Tide

SCI-FI AUTHOR KEVIN MCLAUGHLIN SHARES WHAT TIPPED HIS CAREER TOWARD SUCCESS AND HOW OTHERS CAN DO THE SAME

Sometimes it's difficult to see the point when everything changes. It can be hard to know precisely when and why things click and come together. But other times, it's as easy as breathing.

Tipping points are those proverbial “last straw” moments, where all of your work, effort, time, and commitment finally combine with enough weight to move the boulder of success. Tipping points are why we talk about it taking years to become an overnight success, because your career can go from barely moving at all to rocketing forward in the blink of an eye. That's how it worked for me, and it's true for most authors' careers I've observed.

For me, the turning point at which my author career shifted gears, from trundling along to reaching rocket speed, was as clear cut as it gets. The year was 2016. I'd written a bunch of books already and started indie publishing in 2011, but nothing had stuck. Worse still, I was in the midst of the classic newbie writer oops: I'd written a few books in several series across a variety of subgenres. By spreading my efforts out, I was making it much harder for myself than I could have.

But in the spring of 2016, this guy named Michael Anderle created a new group to talk about writing. He called it 20BooksTo50K™, and I was one of the first couple dozen members. Anderle got a cold reception from a lot

of folks. His message—that treating our writing like a business was key, and that success was more a matter of working hard at the right things long enough than anything else—was not popular at the time. Many folks wanted an easy button, and Anderle was telling them the best way forward was to work hard.

For me, however, it was precisely what I needed. I dug into the group and worked hard at watching those further ahead than I, learning from everything they did. All around me were people making it. I watched several authors, none of them with as much writing experience as I already had, killing it. Some of these writers were guys nobody had ever heard of, like Craig Martelle and T S Paul, and they were bringing in more money in a month than my writing did in a year.

There's never a better sign that you're in the right place to learn things than when you see people with less experience doing better than you. Seriously! That might turn some folks off, but it made me hungry. I wanted to know what they were doing that I wasn't, so I worked and studied. It's a lesson I've taken with me ever since: to work hard at surrounding myself with smart people who are further along in various ways than I am.

More than that, I asked for help, and I got it. That, too, is a powerful thing; learning to ask can catapult us forward. Anderle, Paul, and Martelle all offered their

advice on more than one occasion. Paul stood out, though. He spent a lot of time working with me, and I'll be forever grateful.

My covers were not on point, for starters; I hadn't yet learned the primary job of a cover, which is to tell the reader precisely what sort of book this is, in two seconds or less. A cover that does that well is a good cover. One that doesn't is not; it doesn't matter how pretty it is. If I wanted to sell books, I needed my covers to grab the right readers.

Paul taught me another lesson that was probably even more important: Storytelling is king. His early books were riddled with typos. They had more errors per page than some of my books had in the entire novel. Yet they were selling like mad. What was getting readers to love his work, bad grammar and all, was the story. If the storytelling is good, it can rise in spite of other issues. If it's not spot on, though, nothing else will save the book.

I learned about rapid release by watching all three of them. The idea of putting out books at a superfast clip hadn't really crossed my radar much, but it was one powerful way to gain visibility, both then and now, and it's a method that worked perfectly with my personal strengths. That's important; you want to focus on the methods of reaching a tipping point that best resonate with your personal strengths, and when you look at people to emulate, aim for those whose careers are currently where you want yours to be. There are many paths up the mountain of success as an indie author, and it's up to each of us to choose paths that best match our personal strengths.

By 2016, I'd already learned some about productivity from Sci-Fi

author Dean Wesley Smith, so I was already publishing a few books a year. But it was via the 20BooksTo50K® crowd that I began learning how to write a quality book in a month or less.

It was August 2016 that I put it all together.

I had a set of five novelettes I'd released to crickets a year earlier. I took those novelettes and merged them into two short novels. Then I wrote the third. I released all three short novels a week apart from one another. Then I kicked out the fourth only a month after that, and the fifth a month later. I'd fixed my covers, too, replacing the old novelette covers with new ones that were spot on for the subgenre.

August 2016 was the second month I'd ever made over a thousand dollars in a single month. I've never made less than four figures a month from my work again.

That's why I think about that month, that moment, as a tipping point in my career. I've still had ups and downs; we all do. That's a normal part of a creative career. But I've always been able to make my rent every month, from then until now.

Perhaps even more important to the longevity of my career, that early advice has stuck with me and helped inform and build my current process. What I do as a writer and publisher has thankfully matured a lot over the past eight years. I've become even better at cover design, even getting hired for it on occasion by others. I've become better at writing swiftly and maintained a book a month for about a five-year span until 2023, when I slowed down a little. I've learned over time that I enjoy writing long series, too,

so my current project is doubling down on that and making several new twelve-book or longer series. The longer a series is, the more effective and profitable my ads become, thanks to read-through from one book to the next.

But if there's one thing that has stuck with me the most, it's the idea that great storytelling is the key. If the story is strong, the book can thrive, even if everything else isn't quite perfect. A focus on telling the best tales I can—and understanding what my readers want from their books, so I can deliver that—has carried me a long way.

Reaching one's tipping point can take time. It was over six years for me. It takes a lot of effort and energy, too—a commitment to keep doing the work. But we can speed that day along by doing the right things well. Surround yourself with people who are where you want to be, focus on learning the paths that best match your strengths, and you can push that tipping point much nearer. ■

Kevin McLaughlin

Kevin McLaughlin

Kevin McLaughlin is the USA Today bestselling author of 83 books. He writes mostly science fiction and fantasy, and is also the author of *The Coffee Break Novelist* and *You Must Write*. He's enjoyed reading and writing serials for decades.

The Power of Partnership

INDIE AUTHORS FOSTER COMMUNITY BY BALANCING COLLABORATION, COOPERATION, AND FRIENDLY COMPETITION

Writing is a solitary game—yet it's not. Although authors can create alone, they need others to make it work, even if it's only their readers. Many of us use editors and beta readers, critique groups, Mastermind-type groups, social media connections, and many other ways to connect with people within the publishing industry. And even those of us who manage it all ourselves rely on our relationships with our readers to make this career possible.

Creators have collaboration, cooperation, and competition baked into the gig. These three C's can lead to a more shared workload, access to a larger, more varied audience, inspiration, and increased

creativity. As the authors below share, collaboration, cooperation, and competition are different, but each is important to an author's career—and important to prioritize in different ways as your career grows in the new year and beyond.

COLLABORATION

Collaboration means working together to create something. For authors, that may mean bringing minds together in an initial high-level brainstorm, working together in a shared world or anthology, or co-writing an entire novel. Everyone does collaboration slightly differently, but it is key for many creators.

For author Jilleen Dolbeare, co-writing as a form of collaboration allows for authors to foster friendships with one another. “Writing is lonely,” Dolbeare writes. “It’s great to have author friends to bounce ideas off of, help with blurbs, help with promos ... Co-writing is the best form of collab. I’ve done [it] and I adore it.”

Contrast that with J. Clifton Slater, who sees the chance to work alongside other creatives and discuss the indie publishing industry as “invaluable.”

“I am a stoic writer,” Slater writes. “Just the idea of working closely with another author melts my soul.”

Author Lee Ann thinks of collaboration as a way “to lift each other up ... [and] to be there to brainstorm, without the worry that someone is going to take your idea and use it for themselves.” Ann writes that it also allows authors to “offer suggestions and support” to one another.

COOPERATION

Cooperation means mutual support without the project. Whereas collaboration may involve authors working together on an anthology or other project, cooperation allows authors to share advice with one another and

encourage them in their journey, such as with beta reads, promotions, and social media support.

“Cooperation is the opportunity to create community among other authors in a genre or between genres,” writes author Jamie Davis. “We do this through in-person and online conferences and in those occasions where authors swap one-off shares of their work without a more formal collaborative marketing effort.” We’ve all seen people supporting each other’s crowdfunding campaigns, pulling together when someone is sick, or offering advice freely and generously. Working together in this way gives each side of the equation necessary support and strengthens ties.

“Collaboration and cooperation is easy when you admire your peers so much,” writes author Lauretta Hignett. “I’ve made the best friends in this industry by shamelessly fangirling [over] my contemporaries.”

Although conferences and swaps are a good way to find people with whom you can work, you can also form partnerships through other channels. For example, many authors find a fantastic beta reader can drive significant traffic to their work. Working with professionals, like a cover designer, editor, or marketing professional, can also be essential to

an author's career.

As author Iris Beaglehole writes, "Sharing, collaborating, and connecting other authors with our readerships is mutually beneficial as we all can benefit from more wonderful books in our lives."

COMPETITION

Competition is a word that can have negative connotations, especially when pulling yourself up in a community could mean pushing others in the same space down. As writer Karen Landry writes, "We may be friends and we may be working together, but behind the scenes, we're probably bidding against each other on that same Amazon/FB real estate." But Landry doesn't see competition in the indie author community extending far beyond online algorithms.

Author Pamela Kelley agrees. "I don't believe that there really is competition in writing," she writes. "That would imply that readers will only choose one book—and that isn't the case. They want all the books." Instead of competing with others, Kelley believes an author's

true competition is with themselves. "Can you improve so that your books stand out? I have always been inspired by authors that are top sellers as it shows me what is possible."

"THAT is the kind of competition I love and that's what I embrace. I dislike the rest. I am only competing against where I was last week, last month, last year," Audrey Hughey agrees.

Jessa Slade doesn't believe competition exists among authors either, writing that she never hesitates to buy a new book simply because there are others on her shelf. "Since story value is such a subjective experience," she writes, "I think competition is most practically a problem of signal to noise rather than author versus author."

Author Russell Nohelty echoes Slade, saying, "I think we are in competition mostly from other forms of media and irrelevance more than we are in competition with other authors."

"I love it when my books rank well," Kristen Gandy writes. "But this doesn't mean I'm not cheering for my friends when their books knock mine off the top spot.

Competition means my friends are on my team, and when they do well, I do well."

BUILDING A STRONG COMMUNITY

Creating and publishing comes with numerous challenges, but fostering a strong, supportive community is immensely valuable when facing those challenges. As author Lynn Morrison writes, "We're seeing more authors leaning in with their strengths to help someone else, and in return, filling a gap in their own capabilities ... There is so much knowledge within our industry, we would be smart to find ways to tap into it."

Blending collaboration, cooperation, and competition with peers, professionals, and readers will enable you to contribute to and reap the benefits of your community. As you set resolutions and plans for the upcoming year, consider how you can center the need for community in your plans.

Reach out via social media, in the back matter of your work, in a promotion you heard about, or at



local in-person groups. Getting into situations where you can interact and become part of a community is key.

Offer to help where you can—not to the point of overwork but so that you're able to use your situation and strengths to contribute to the community. Volunteer for a conference, help raise up a new author's visibility, or offer to admin an online forum.

Create shared or community goals to encourage one another and foster support for your peers. Maybe a group wants to do an anthology, or a round robin in newsletters will allow you all to grow your businesses. You can suggest something if nothing is being tossed around.

Balance collaboration and competition, and be sure your biggest competition is always yourself.

Writing can be done alone, but it doesn't have to be lonely. As you're setting goals for the new year, remember the importance and benefits of connecting with others. We're all in it together. ■

Jen B. Green



Jen B. Green

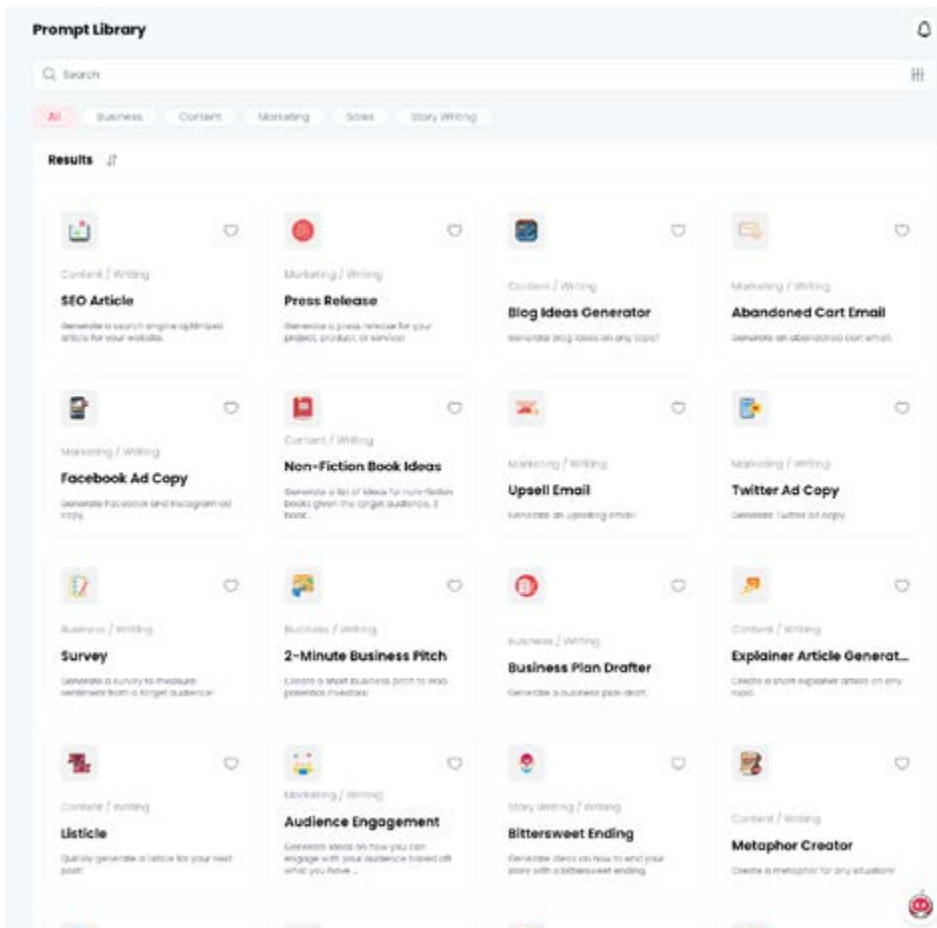
Jen B. Green has lived in five countries on four continents with her three sons, two daughters, and one great guy. She reads anything that stays still long enough, plays piano, and bakes everything sweet. After earning her Ph.D. in psychology, Jen tried writing a novel for Nanowrimo and was hooked! Her days are spent traveling the world, teaching undergraduate psychology, and wrangling her growing homemade army, but her nights are for writing Urban Fantasy with witches and werewolves.

Keep It Simple with KIP

DIBBLY CREATE SHOWCASES BOTH HUMAN- AND AI-POWERED CONTENT CREATION TAILORED TO AUTHORS

Dibbly would like to introduce you to your new personal assistant. The tiny spaceman with a bright pink face is vying for a place in your heart next to Microsoft's big-eyed paperclip. KIP is the avatar for Dibbly Create's AI chatbot, just one feature on the content creation platform that seeks to simplify and personalize authors' experience on the site.

Dibbly started out as a ghostwriting company, founded by Marco Moutinho and Natasha Moutinho in 2018 under the name The Urban Writers. Although Dibbly still provides a place for authors to connect with vetted freelancers for a variety of creative collaborations, such as ghostwriters, editors, illustrators, translators, and narrators, they've recently shifted their focus to software for content creation. The company's revised vision statement reflects this change: "We aim to be the world's top AI-powered content creation platform, making high-quality content accessible at a fair cost and effortlessly achievable through our all-in-one workspace." Marketed as an all-in-one solution, Dibbly allows users to create a project, track their progress, find collaborators, and use AI to solve any problems that arise, from SEO optimization to translations and book descriptions.



FEATURES

The new content creation platform, Dabbly Create, was designed as a project management system, but its primary function is as an AI-integrated cloud-based word processor. After creating a project, authors can immediately start writing, or choose from several templates. At any point in the writing process, authors can ask KIP, the in-house AI, for help or submit the project to freelancers for collaboration.

Inside the document, you can invite editors, beta readers and cowriters to leave comments and suggestions, similar to Google Docs and Word. The project saves automatically and keeps a running word

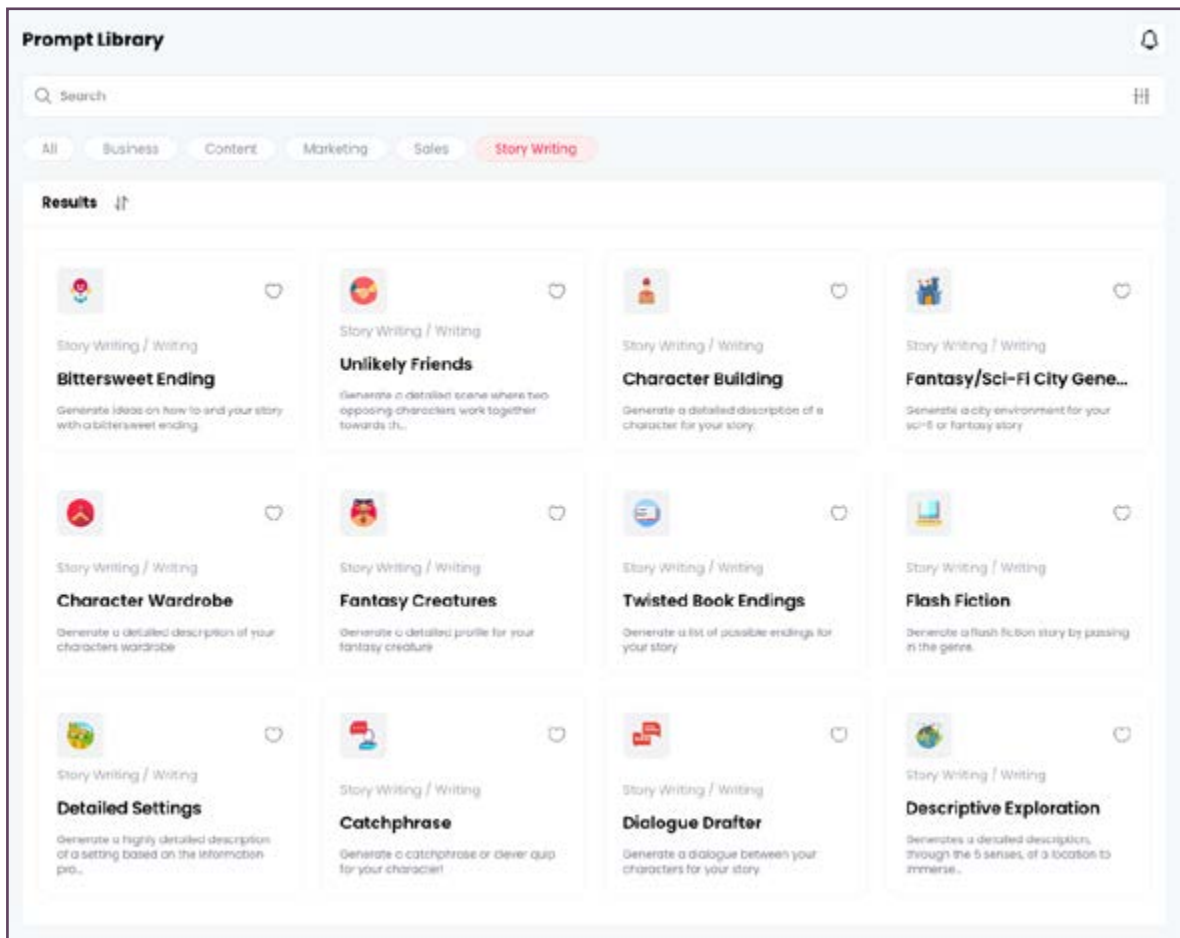
count as you go. If you lose internet access while working on a project, it will save locally and sync with the cloud when you regain your connection. The platform is mobile friendly but does not yet have a dedicated app.

Writers can also use KIP to research, structure, or generate content. The Acceptable Use disclaimer requires that freelancers modify any AI-generated content they use on your project to “ensure veracity, appropriateness, accessibility, and originality.”

Once you’ve finished writing your book, you can export it as a Word document or PDF file, choosing from fourteen paperback page sizes, as well as ebook, legal size, and more. Some formatting is available, though currently the only option showing in my style gallery is for ebooks.

Authors seeking advice have access to several video tutorials. The Help Center provides options for bug reports, contacting support, or live chats between 5 a.m. and 5 p.m. EST Monday through Friday.

A research tool will search Amazon for similar books and provide details like reviews, sales, and rank to help you understand comparable titles and what readers wanted from them. YouTube and Google research is also available.



Other features include

- a prompt library;
- an interior book designer for both EPUBs and paperbacks;
- Content Manipulation with KIP;
- the /KIP command, which allows users to access AI tools without leaving the document;
- ChatKIP, an AI personal assistant;
- an outline generator;
- a title generator; and
- a summarizer.

Pro Tip: Like ChatGPT, KIP can take on assigned roles and respond from that point of view. Sci-Fi/Horror and Nonfiction author Dale L. Roberts says, “I will

get KIP to take on a fictional character, and I can have full conversations with KIP in that character’s mode. And it kind of helps grease the creative wheels for fiction.”

PRICING

On the free plan, users get twenty thousand tokens per month, unlimited projects, 1 GB of storage, and limited access to ChatKIP. Tokens are spent when you use KIP and max out at 7,500 words per month on the free plan.

For \$19.14 per month, authors can upgrade to the Professional plan, where they get one million tokens per month (up to 750,000 words per month), 10 GB of storage, and use of the Intelligent Research Tool, Smart Outline Generator, AI Book

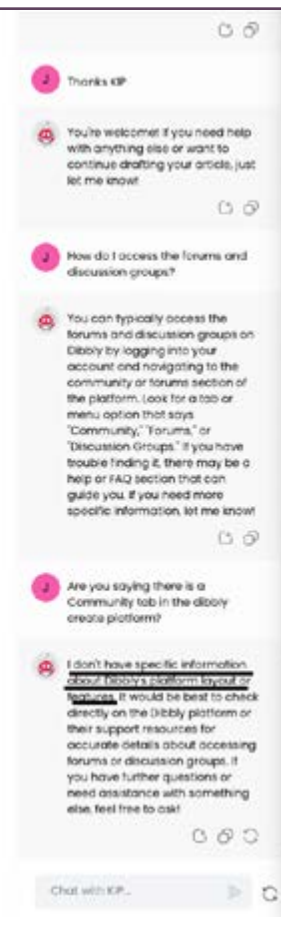
Description Generator, and Intelligent Summarizer. The Professional plan provides unlimited access to ChatKIP, including Inline KIP, Highlight KIP, and KIP Generate. Inline KIP allows you to use KIP to make changes and check grammar directly in your document. It sounds similar to ProWritingAid but is also capable of bigger changes, like shifting point of view. Using KIP Generate consumes tokens at a faster rate than ChatKIP, but it includes a suite of AI tools, like an outliner, summarizer, and Amazon researcher.

The platform is currently offering a seven-day free trial, and two months free if you choose the yearly payment option over the monthly one. Both plans include a prompt library to assist with common uses of the AI tools, as well as real-time collaboration and sharing tools, offline and dark modes, historic versions of sections of the project, and a Word export option. Templates are available for some projects on both plans, though the free plan's options are limited.

For authors interested in going all-in on creating a project with AI, Dibly offers an AI Non-Fiction Book Bundle. The package is advertised as delivering your next book at half the cost and four times the speed. To accomplish this, Dibly provides two freelancers, a writer and an editor; plagiarism checks; ebook formatting; and book descriptions for your marketing plan. The

Section 1

Key features of Dibly Dibly offers a comprehensive suite of tools designed to empower authors at every stage of the writing process. Here's a breakdown of some of its standout features: - **Content Creation Tools** Dibly provides a user-friendly interface that simplifies writing and formatting. With customizable templates tailored for different genres, authors can easily create polished manuscripts. The platform also includes grammar and style checkers, helping writers enhance their prose and eliminate errors. - **Collaboration Tools** One of Dibly's core strengths is its collaboration features. Authors can invite editors, beta readers, or co-writers to review their work in real-time. The integrated commenting system allows for seamless feedback exchange, ensuring writers can refine their work based on constructive criticism. - **Analytics Dashboard** Dibly includes a powerful analytics dashboard that tracks writing progress, word count goals, and productivity trends. This feature allows authors to visualize their writing habits over time, enabling them to set achievable targets and stay motivated. - **Community Engagement** Dibly fosters a vibrant community for authors. Users can join forums and discussion groups to share experiences, seek advice, and connect with fellow writers. This community support can be invaluable, especially for new authors looking to navigate the publishing landscape. - **Resource Library** To aid in research and inspiration, Dibly offers a resource library filled with articles, guides, and writing prompts. This feature ensures that authors have access to valuable information at their fingertips, enhancing their creative process. These key features make Dibly a versatile tool that caters to the diverse needs of modern authors, helping them streamline their writing process from conception to publication.



result is a detailed outline and full manuscript that starts at ten thousand words. You can monitor progress and provide real-time feedback throughout the process. This package costs \$1.70 per one hundred words. Additional services include project management, cover design, illustrations, proofreading, and narration.

Although the human writer on your project will handle assigning prompts and fleshing out the manuscript, and the human editor will handle revisions, some book categories may not be suitable for the AI system. According to the website, "Recipe books, exercise books, crafts, coding, workbooks or any book that has unique formatting or illustrative requirements may not be ideal."

To further entice authors to test this process, Dibly offers a

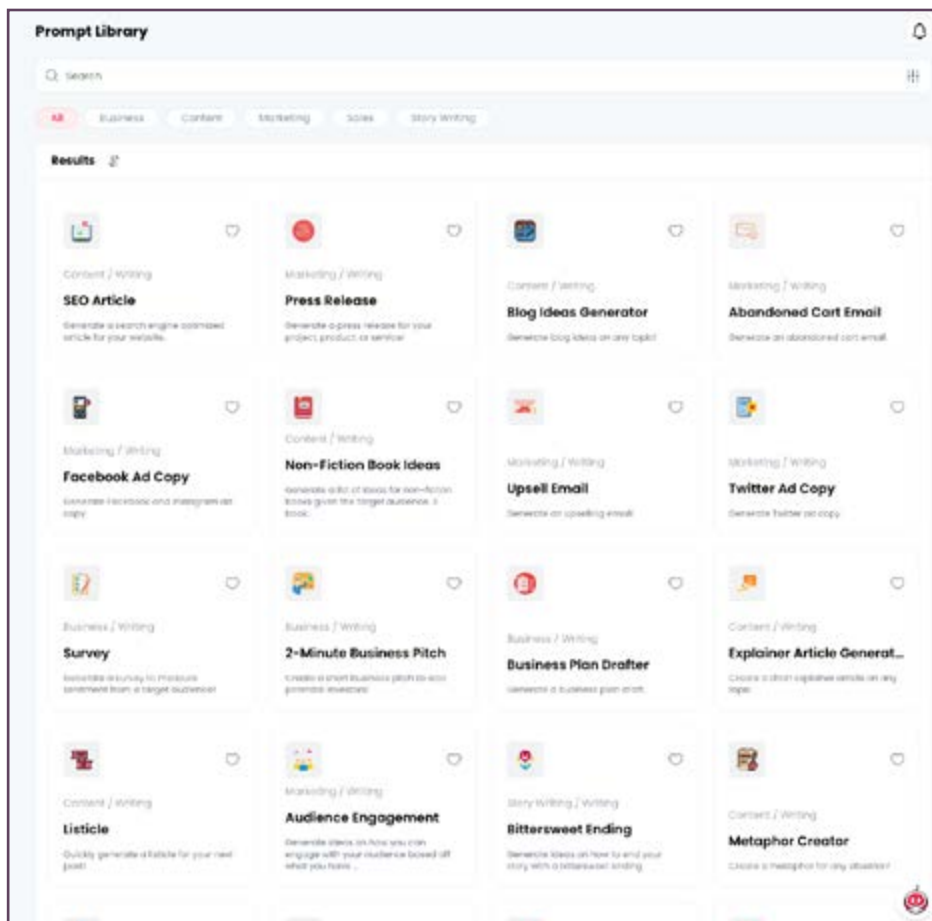
free ebook, *The AI Book Method*, which claims to teach you “how to build a book in less than 24 hours for less than \$38.” The book walks writers through finding profitable topics, then using AI for research, generating an outline, and generating the book. It follows up with how to enhance the AI-generated content, format the book, and get it ready to publish. The process is focused on speed and developing passive income.

INTEGRATION

The most meaningful integration of Dibbly Create is with Dibbly itself. Now fully rebranded from The Urban Writers, Dibbly functions as an online marketplace for freelance professionals like writers, editors, proofreaders, designers, and SEO experts. Should you need the skills a freelancer can provide, you can ask KIP to recommend someone to you. The AI assistant will give you names with star ratings, reviews, and profiles. And if you’ve used a freelancer before on the platform, KIP can remind you of their name, qualifications, and contact information.

If you choose to make use of project managers and freelancers on Dibbly, every member of your team can be connected through a Slack-integrated channel.

Pro Tip: Conversations with



KIP are stored in the history in case you need to revisit them.

UPDATES

Dibbly Create’s developers recently added improvements like split view and a token use tracker in response to user requests. Split view allows users to open the document in side-by-side windows, where they can see two sections of the project at once. A counter on the homepage shows both tokens used and tokens available to help monitor your balance as you use ChatKIP and other AI tools.

The developers have more updates and additions planned for the site as well. Upcoming features include an image generator, currently in beta; custom prompt

saving; sprints; and a mobile app. The image generator and custom prompt saving feature will only be available on the Professional plan.

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

If you're interested in using AI tools for content creation, Dribbly stands out as a platform that provides both AI and human resources. Being able to pull in freelance writers and editors who have been trained and vetted in their use of AI may be preferable to hiring someone off Fiverr or Upwork, who may not be transparent in how they use it. That said, freelancers on Reddit have accused Dribbly of exploitative practices, and users have reported inconsistent quality in the work completed by ghostwriters hired through Dribbly.

As with any AI tool, fact-checking is still the author's responsibility. When I asked KIP to tell me about Dribbly's features, the AI

included a section on community engagement that told me about forums and discussion boards users could join. I found no evidence of either resource on the platform. After I asked it a follow-up question, KIP admitted, "I don't have specific information about Dribbly's platform layout or features" and suggested I check directly with the platform.

Dribbly is designed to be a one-stop shop for creating a book, and the platform provides almost anything you could need to accomplish that. However, the number of features may be overwhelming, leading some users to treat it more like a word processor with some fun, if potentially distracting, extras.

For more information about ways to use Dribbly in your writing, check out Roberts's review on his YouTube channel, Self Publishing with Dale. ■

Jenn Lessmann



Jenn Lessmann

Jenn Lessmann is the author of *Unmagical: a Witchy Mystery* and three stories on Kindle Vella. A former barista, stage manager, and high school English teacher with advanced degrees from impressive colleges, she continues to drink excessive amounts of caffeine, stay up later than is absolutely necessary, and read three or four books at a time. Jenn is currently studying witchcraft and the craft of writing, and giggling internally whenever they intersect. She writes snarky paranormal fantasy for new adults whenever her dog will allow it.

What's Your Author Personality?

MEGAN HASKELL, CO-FOUNDER OF THE AUTHOR WHEEL, IDENTIFIES THE FIVE MOST COMMON AUTHOR TYPES AND WHAT MOTIVATES THEM

What motivates you to write? For some, it's the idea that you'll finally see your ideas made tangible and be able to share them with readers. For others, it's the understanding that an author career, if managed well, can be lucrative. No reason for writing is better than another, nor is your author personality set in stone from the start. But as guest author Megan Haskell explores in part 3 of her series, understanding what drives you forward can help you make better, more informed decisions about what to strive for in order to create a fulfilling career.

Many writers don't regularly examine their present position, motivations, or vision for their writing. Instead, they follow the best practices that led to someone else's success. Although these are valuable tools to consider, those best practices may not align with the writer's underlying values and future goals.

When Greta Boris and I began teaching together at The Author Wheel, we developed a framework to give us a common language around our students' ambitions. We identified five basic author personality types that described the most common motivations for writing. Once identified, it became much easier to help our students develop a personal author strategy.

THE FIVE AUTHOR PERSONALITIES



ARTIST

The strength of the artist is in their craft. They hesitate—sometimes refuse—to adjust their artistic vision, even if it means they might make more sales. Their primary goal is to put beautiful prose on the page and to be recognized for their unique voice and creativity. These authors often dislike the business side of publishing and may struggle with marketing, but they can learn these skills with time. For the artist, an ideal future might be to win a literary award, build a dedicated fandom around their niche work, or have a day job that allows them to focus on their craft without worrying as much about sales.



BUCKET-LISTER

The bucket-lister has a single book idea they've always wanted to write. Whether it's their personal memoir or unique how-to for a niche market, they want to get that manuscript into the world before they die. Bucket-listers may not have a strong desire to be a career writer. It's the message of the one book that motivates them. However, many bucket-listers discover a love of writing, and shift into one of the other personality types as they learn more about the industry. The successful bucket-lister will be proud to show their work to family and friends or share their knowledge with a specific community.



CALLING-CARD WRITER

The calling-card writer's primary motive for writing a book is the business behind the book. Whether the goal is to speak, teach, or sell their services, a book can lend credibility to their career. Calling-card writers tend to be business-minded individuals, but they're less interested in becoming full-time writers. Instead, they hope to establish themselves as an expert in their field. The ideal future of this calling-card writer is to build a thriving business around their knowledge.



DABBLER

The dabbler has a lot of ideas. Knowing which ones to pursue and how to pursue them is their quandary. Dabblers often jump between different book series or genres, or even between different artistic mediums. They might write screenplays as well as fiction, or they might illustrate their own books. Many successful authors begin as dabblers, but as they develop their writing skills and interests, they tend to narrow in on the most marketable or personally fulfilling ideas. A successful future for the dabbler might be to finish multiple projects and create a broad portfolio of work across different genres or artistic mediums.



ENTREPRENEUR

The entrepreneur's primary goal is to have a financially lucrative writing career. That's not to say the other personality types aren't interested in making money, but the entrepreneur is more willing to follow trends and pursue the hustle of a fast-paced publishing business. Marketing and advertising may come more easily to these authors, as they understand what their readers want, and they give it to them. The successful author entrepreneur is focused on becoming a full-time fiction writer with enough income from their books to support themselves and their families.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Now that you know the five author personalities, ask yourself: Which personality fits you best right now? Which lifestyle do you envision for your future?

There's no right answer, but yours can help you decide how to build a fulfilling writing career. For example, if you lean toward the artist's personality, focusing on craft rather than researching keywords or genre trends may feel more satisfying. Meanwhile, a calling-card writer might want to spend more time writing articles for relevant publications to build their name recognition rather than slog through drafting another book.

If your vision of the future doesn't match your personality in the present, consider what you might have to change about your current focus to reach those goals.

For example, an artist who's struggling with weak sales might consider whether they can bring themselves to write to market. An entrepreneur tiring of their genre may want to dabble with a screenplay to refill their creative well. Sometimes, this might involve acquiring new skills to supplement or complement your existing personality. However, transitioning into a new author personality may require a mindset shift, which may involve a deeper exploration of your motivations for writing.

The author personality framework isn't meant to be the final verdict on your business's trajectory; rather it's a starting point for developing a writing and publishing strategy that will lead to a fulfilling writing career. Every path to success looks different. If you craft your strategy with your purpose and personality in mind, you'll find your own personal version of success. ■

Megan Haskell

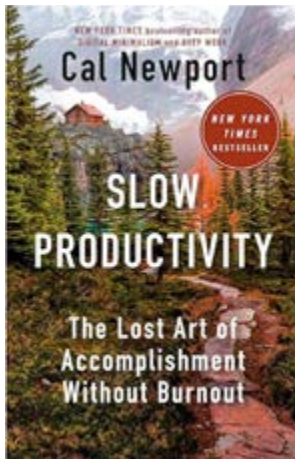


Megan Haskell

Megan Haskell pens tales of myth, magic, and mayhem featuring strong female heroines and monsters of every size. She's the award-winning author of *The Sanyare Chronicles* fantasy adventure and *The Rise of Lilith* contemporary fantasy series, and co-founder of The Author Wheel Podcast and courses for writers. With more than fifteen years of writing and publishing experience, her goal is to help you Clarify, Simplify, and Implement your own best path to an author career. Find out more at www.MeganHaskell.com or www.AuthorWheel.com.

From the Stacks

BOOK CLUB SUMMARY:



Slow Productivity

Cal Newport

[https://indieauthortraining.com/groups/](https://indieauthortraining.com/groups/slow-productivity-cal-newport)

[slow-productivity-cal-newport](https://indieauthortraining.com/groups/slow-productivity-cal-newport)

Cal Newport's *Slow Productivity: The Lost Art of Accomplishment Without Burnout* brings a fresh take on getting things done in a world obsessed with speed. Indie authors know all too well the pressure to always be doing something, whether it's writing, marketing, or engaging with readers. Newport, a Georgetown University professor and bestselling author, challenges this fast-paced mentality and offers a slower, more thoughtful approach to productivity that can help you accomplish more while protecting your creativity and well-being.

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.

TOOL:



StoryFair

<https://storyfair.net/storyfairaudiobooks-forpublishers>

An increasing number of companies are offering to distribute audiobooks for indie authors. Could StoryFair, with its ethos of offering fair terms, be the perfect fit for you and your titles?

That focus on fairness places authors at the center of many of the company's features—authors have the ability to build a sales page and set their own price, and the company pays royalties of 75 percent, significantly higher than some competitors. Indie Author Training's product tour walks you through what else they do.

WEBINAR:



"Plan 6 Months of Marketing Content in 2 Hours"

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

In this webinar, Sarah Oldman, the creative force behind Author Services by Sarah, shares a number of resources for planning marketing content. During this session, Oldman demonstrates how to plan six months of content at once, helping you to cross-pollinate your marketing messaging from email newsletters to social media. As Oldman demonstrates, overview planning allows you to be consistent and strategic, whether you are looking to engage and nurture readers or to promote your books.

PODCAST:



Indie Author Magazine

<https://open.spotify.com/show/1MjZYaA5iCIRL2JMtEiY12>

The *Indie Author Magazine* podcast features bite-sized listening for when you only have a few minutes and longer episodes for when you want to do a deep dive into a topic. "Episode 28: Featuring Theodora Taylor" is a longer listen you might have missed that focuses on editing and how to perfect your craft, including an overview of PerfectIt editing software and a look at whether international authors should Americanize their writing.

Care to Speculate?

SPECULATIVE FICTION ALLOWS AUTHORS TO FLEX ULTIMATE STORY CONTROL

Spider monkeys rule the galaxy. Children govern societies. The Roman Empire never fell.

Wait ... these things aren't possible, right?

With Speculative Fiction, anything is possible.

Speculative Fiction is a broad and diverse genre that allows writers to explore endless creative possibilities. Encompassing genres like Science Fiction, Fantasy, Magical Realism, and Dystopian fiction, stories in this larger category invite authors to stretch beyond the boundaries of reality. "I think of 'Speculative Fiction' as the 'what if?' section," says author Ellen Smith. "It covers all the elements that aren't possible—or aren't possible yet."

Imagine Speculative Fiction as perpendicular rather than parallel to our world, with realities distinctly different from what we know. A story might begin with a familiar setting, but the world is governed by the writer's rules. Author S. R. Webster notes that "these stories often tackle societal or moral dilemmas using creative and fantastical settings." The

genre's flexibility is demonstrated by an array of authors, from Mary Shelley and George Orwell to Ursula K. Le Guin, Margaret Atwood, George R. R. Martin, and Neil Gaiman—each shaping Speculative Fiction in unique ways.





MAPPING OUT A WORLD

When embarking on a Speculative Fiction project, keep in mind that you, as the author, are in control of every detail. You may start with reality, but world-building offers the freedom to design every element of your story's universe.

into a full-blown brainstorming session. From there, I dive deep into exploring the concept, homing in on the central theme, and defining the setting in which it will take place."

Smith's approach to world-building is similar. "When I have a new story idea, I'm always jotting down questions as I think of them," she says. "It usually starts with a concept that captures my imagination, like time travel, and then I can't get it out of my head. As I'm thinking about it, I'll ask myself questions like, 'If this was possible, who would think it was a great idea? Who would absolutely hate it?' or 'What's the best possible way this could be used? What's the worst thing that could go wrong?' Over time, characters and their conflicts start to take shape, and I start writing more and more detailed notes."

Developing a story world will take research, but caution: Don't disappear entirely into the rabbit hole, as it can stall your story indefinitely. As questions arise, jot them down and proceed to research with the focus solely on those questions, so you can keep your writing moving forward. You can always layer in details on your second pass of the manuscript.

TAMING A SERIES

Although this may seem daunting at first, it's an invitation to unleash your creativity. Webster explains, for her, "It all begins with a flicker of an idea, which soon catches fire and ignites

While Speculative Fiction doesn't have to span a series, once you've built a rich, complex world, it can be tempting to explore it further. Whether you create a series may depend on reader feedback. Are reviewers clamoring for more, asking what happens next? With that ambition comes the need for consistency across multiple books. Readers will

quickly spot any inconsistencies in your characters, world rules, or timeline.

Webster emphasizes the importance of having a detailed reference document to keep track of key aspects of your story world, such as geography, history, culture, the specifics of your magic system, or technology, as well as character backstories. “You need to ensure that all the elements make sense and are consistent throughout the series,” she says. Whether your world involves futuristic technology or medieval fantasy kingdoms, this organization will help avoid potential plot holes.

Smith, whose current series involves time travel, finds that using a detailed calendar system is crucial. “I created them [calendars] for each book so I can track what events the characters are aware of in each timeline.”

FOR THE PANTSERS

For writers who prefer to fly by the seat of their pants without extensive planning, how do they maintain consistency in a world they’re still discovering?

Webster says she has devised a system over time that works for her. “I begin with character voice and flow, and let the world-building come later,” she says. This approach allows pantsers to develop the narrative organically while still maintaining some structure when needed. After you’ve completed a first draft, let the story sit just long enough for you to return to it with fresh eyes. Then, start on page 1 and read it through, noting where the story needs more development, and where details may be trimmed back or changed for consistency.

SPECULATIVE FICTION AWAITS

If you haven’t yet ventured into Speculative Fiction, a whole new world of creativity awaits you—one where the only rule is that everyone plays by the rules you create, with limitless possibilities for world-building, character development, and story-telling.



SPECULATIVE FICTION TROPES

Here are just a few common tropes Speculative Fiction fans have come to expect among these fantastical literary stories and worlds.

Time Travel: Characters travel backward or forward in time, creating paradoxes or alternate timelines.

Dystopian World: A future or alternate society is oppressed, controlled, or in decline, often under a totalitarian regime. Characters often reach a breaking point and push back to improve their lives or chance for survival.

Post-Apocalyptic World: The story is set in a world after a catastrophic event, where survivors navigate dangerous landscapes and societal breakdown.

Parallel Universe(s): Multiple alternate realities exist, where different versions of characters or events unfold.

Alien Invasion: Extraterrestrial beings invade Earth, typically threatening humanity with extinction or subjugation.

Artificial Intelligence: AI systems either assist or challenge humanity, sometimes rebelling against their creators.

Magical Realism: Magical or fantastical elements meld with an otherwise realistic or ordinary world.

Alternate History: The story is set in a version of history where major events happened differently, resulting in a changed world for readers to explore and compare with their own. ■

Desiree Smith-Daughety



Desiree Smith-Daughety

Desiree Smith-Daughety lives just a short paddle away from the Chesapeake Bay. She has been published in multiple publications, including Up.St.ART Annapolis magazine. Her home is in words and in the beauty and mystery of the natural world. She has published two nonfiction books.

A Race to What End?

AMBITION CAN DRIVE YOU FORWARD, BUT PERHAPS IT'S ALSO HOLDING YOU BACK

Friends, Romans, publishers, lend me your ears! Marc Antony's famous speech from William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* defends the titular character—just murdered by Brutus—not from his attacker but from the charge of ambition.

The noble Brutus
Hath told you Caesar was ambitious:
If it were so, it was a grievous fault,
And grievously hath Caesar answer'd it.

Have you also seen the shadowy side of ambition, the side that burns up energy and destroys your love for your story and characters? That love is the same that fuels those deep epiphanies, lyrical passages, characters' unexpected growth spurts, meaningful connections, and all the magical story ingredients that satisfy your readers.

But ambition has no time to let love grow.

Ambition nips at your heels, forces you to go faster, and spooks you into ineffective action in your career. When we try a shortcut to success, joy evaporates, and compulsive sales-dashboard-checking sets in. So if ambition is not our ally, how do we defeat this antagonist?

The answer may lie in the word. In German, the word for ambition is "Ehrgeiz"—literally, "greedy for honor." "Geiz," hidden in the word, implies keeping everything for yourself. But another word for greed is "Gier," which shows up in the word curiosity—"Neugier." Instead



of being greedy for honor, curiosity makes you greedy for the new, without asking you about its value.

Sarah Santacorce, the host of *The Humane Marketing Show* podcast, sees ambition and curiosity as opposing forces. In her March 2022 episode “Income Follows Impact,” she says embracing curiosity offers her a chance to explore the things that interest her outside of work. Her guest, Adam Kawalec, offers enthusiasm as his own opposite to ambition, as it gives people space to explore without burning out. “If all you have is ambition, you will struggle with actually living in the present moment,” he says, “and to be honest, life really happens only in the present moment.”

Ambition prefers perfection, but as Kristine Kathryn Rusch wrote in a 2012 blog post on her blog, *The Business Rusch*, “When you strive for perfection in your writing, you’re dooming yourself to

perpetual failure. When you strive to be the best you can be, you will have a fulfilling life.”

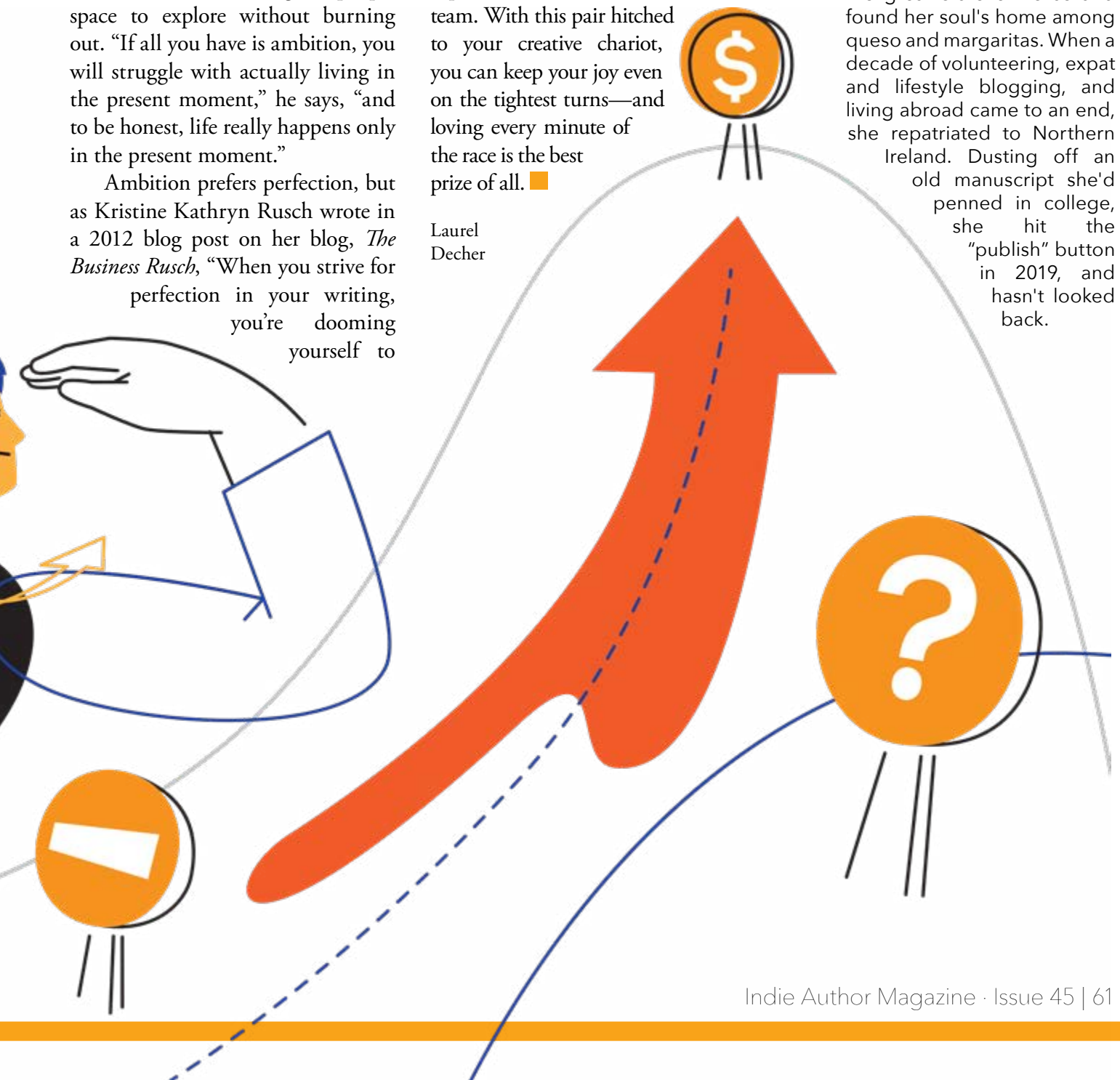
If the course that lies ahead of you feels like the Circus Maximus, perhaps it’s time to toss out ambition for something that lets you explore at your own pace and on your own terms. Try curiosity to take the pressure off, and remind yourself that you’re not supposed to know all the answers. Add enthusiasm’s energy to show you which new opportunities to explore and attract others to your team. With this pair hitched to your creative chariot, you can keep your joy even on the tightest turns—and loving every minute of the race is the best prize of all. ■

Laurel Decher



Laurel Decher

With a bachelor of arts in Politics and a minor in Culture and Media Studies, Lasairiona McMaster left the Emerald Isle for the great state of Texas and found her soul's home among queso and margaritas. When a decade of volunteering, expat and lifestyle blogging, and living abroad came to an end, she repatriated to Northern Ireland. Dusting off an old manuscript she'd penned in college, she hit the “publish” button in 2019, and hasn't looked back.



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