Issue 02
December 2025

Indie Writer's Voice

Produced by the
Creative Commune

In This Issue

LL MACRAE ~ EMILY INKPEN ~ ANNA TIZARD
TANWEER DAR ~ TIM HARDIE ~ STEFAN MOHAMED

Networking
Find out about new writers, discover similar minds, learn how others address your issues

Creative Commune
Support. Networking. Collaboration.

Support
Advice and ideas from other writers to reassure you. Always free. Always honest.

From the Editor-in-Chief

Welcome to the second edition of The Indie Writer's Voice - promoting and empowering British and Irish indie authors!

Writing can be a lonely business! Even more so if you're self-published or write for a small press. We created the Creative Commune for that reason - to empower writers, to offer support and be a helpful resource. Our first edition was warmly received, thanks to everyone for your encouragement.

As we come to the end of one year and look forward to the next, we invited science fiction author, the creator of Cage of Stars, to be our next Guest Editor. Frasier has approached a number of brilliant writers to share their plans, their views and preparations for the new year.

Over to you, Frasier!

Phil Parker

The Team

Phil Parker (Editor-in-Chief)
phil@philparker-fantasywriter.com

Frasier Armitage (Guest Editor)
https://linktr.ee/frasierarmitage

Our website:
https://www.philparker-fantasywriter.com/creativecommune

In this issue

What's New?

03 Be Our Guest
Guest editor, Frasier Armitage, introduces himself

04 What's Hot? New releases
Details of newly released books to add to your TBR

05 Reviewed!
Author Tim Hardie, offers his take on two new books

23 Your Personal Goals Record

Writer's Voice

06 In Conversation
We chat with indie fantasy author, LL MacRae

15 In My Experience
Award-winning author and poet, Stefan Mohamed tells us why he self-published his new book

16 In Conversation
Anna Tizard on juggling writing with podcasting

19 The Poet's Goal
Poet Tanweer Dar tells us about his goals

22. The Writer's Goal
Tim Hardie encourages us to festivals & conventions

Writing Craft

11 Quick Tales
Stories from Frasier Armitage and Anna Tizard

08 Budgets and the Author
Alex S Bradshaw talks staying inside your budget

19 An Audio Drama Masterclass
With the guru of the sound studio, Emily Inkpen

Be Our Guest: Frasier Armitage

We've handed over the Indie Writer's Voice to author and vlogger Frasier Armitage. If you don't know our man-of-the-moment, we asked him to write about his reaction to this responsibility.

Are you looking forward to the new year? It's such a simple question and I'm sure you've been asked it a hundred times by now, but within this simple statement lies a profound truth for us creatives, and it's this — we fall into the trap of constantly looking forwards.

The fact is, us indie writers spend our lives shifting the goalposts. We all started our writing journey by trying to finish one book, and where are we now? With about a thousand other goals we need to reach before we can call ourselves proper writers! Our goals have likely lost their original shape, morphing into a monster that feeds on our time and can influence our imposter syndrome.

With a new year coming up, how are we going to slay the monster? Let's set a goal and figure out how we'll reach it, and then, let's actually allow ourselves to enjoy it! By putting it in writing, we can take control over the goalposts and fix them in the ground, so that when we score, we can celebrate the ball being in the back of the net.

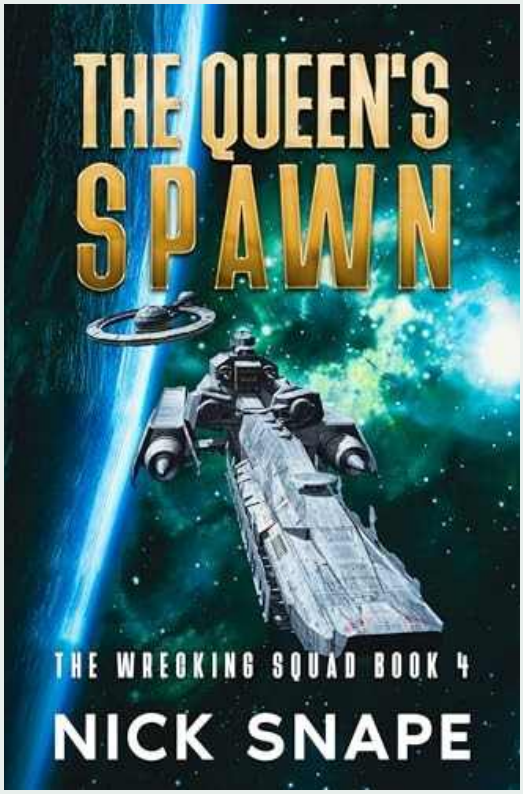
This issue of the Indie Writer's Voice is going to help us with goal-setting by examining how successful indie writers do it. Perhaps you're thinking of writing or releasing a book in 2026, or maybe you'd like to write an audio drama, try out some poetry, experiment with the writing process, launch a podcast, or something else entirely. We've collected together the opinions of indie authors who have got these same goals for the coming year, and we'll be asking them how they're planning to reach them. Hopefully, this will motivate you to set attainable goals, and will provide you with some tips you can use to reach them.

By all means, keep looking forward to the new year. But look forward to reaching your goals, and not just to setting new ones.

Fraiser's website (Planet Frasier!) is here. Or you can find him on social media etc here

What's Hot? New Releases

The Queen's Spawn (The Wrecking Squad Book 4) by Nick Snape



Ebook out November 25
Paperback out December

The Butcher hunts for a secret ... but which one?
Fear of the Butcher sweeps the Emperor's Court. Commanding a vulnerable navy and sceptical officers, Countess Segfi begins the hunt for the human/AI hybrid, risking everything as she attacks Daphene, where he first emerged as a threat.

But the Butcher shows his hand elsewhere, attempting to take Scarva's ship and uncover the secrets of Senti FTL. Desperate, the alien calls upon Rebekah and her crew for help, dreading what he might have stolen, and where he is headed next.

Drawn back into the fight, the Wrecking Squad are forced to hunt for the spawn of an alien Queen that may well be the key to Almaar's future.
Where The Expanse and Firefly meet, The Queen's Spawn launches the second cycle of The Wrecking Squad series as humanity fights for its future.

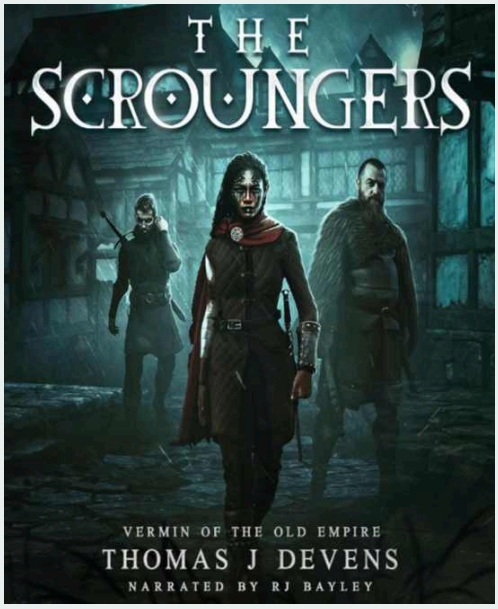
Buy it here: https://books2read.com/queenspawn

Our next issue will have an exciting collection of new releases to add to your TBR!
Don't miss it!

Reviewed!

With thanks to Tim Hardie, author of the Broken Brotherhood series

The Scroungers by Thomas J Devens



The Scroungers by Thomas J Devens is part of a series of interconnected standalone novellas, which form part of his Vermin of the Old Empire collection. I listened to the audiobook narrated by RJ Bayley, whose range of voices and overall style of delivery was a perfect fit for this material.

The story is essentially an essay about the futility of war. Despite the grim subject matter I enjoyed this tale and the various characters, especially since Devens keeps you guessing right until the end. This was a great introduction to his writing and he's definitely an author I want to read more of in the future.

Spirits of Vengeance by Rob J Hayes

Spirits of Vengeance is the third of Rob J Hayes' standalone novels which take place in his Wuxia-inspired Mortal Techniques fantasy series. I've loved every book in this setting and Spirits of Vengeance was no exception, as we follow the adventures of Haruto and his companions as together they hunt down a group of evil spirits.

A great blend of mystery and spectacular action scenes, the standout feature of Spirits of Vengeance is the varied cast of characters. As Hayes expertly raises the stakes with each dramatic set piece encounter he really makes you care about their fate. Highly recommended.

In Conversation: LL MacRae

Goal setting and the Indie Author

Lauren (LL MacRae) is a British fantasy author of character-driven stories and epic adventure. Her books contain dragons, bucket-loads of magic, less conventional characters, and are typically fun and hopeful.
She lives in a tiny village in the English countryside, has a degree in Psychology, and was a professional copywriter before going full-time as an author—swapping corporate copy for magic and dragons.

How do you decide what goals you're going to set for yourself at the start of a new year?

I kind of look at what I would like to do personally, and what I need to do commercially to keep my career afloat!

Mostly it's to do with a book - usually writing a new one, or editing an existing one - as getting from first draft to the finished product usually takes me 6 - 9 months (yay for writing epic fantasy). That is such a big chunk of the year, so any book release would always be my main goal.

What goals will you be working towards in 2026?
The cost of living is rising for everyone, and although I am a full-time author, it means I really need to be consistently releasing books/improving my ads/doing more overall. I want to keep writing for as long as possible, so all my goals are usually decided to keep that happening!

In 2026, there are two things I want to focus on: scaling up my author income, and (as part of that), releasing book one of a brand new series, as yet unnamed and untitled.

I'm taking all the lessons I've learned from previous releases and hopefully channelling them into this, to give the book (and myself!) the best chance at success.

Why do you think it's important for indie writers to set goals?

It can be so easy to lose ourselves in the creativity of the writing and figuring out concepts that we end up spinning our wheels and don't take those ideas anywhere. A goal can be a path for us to follow, and help us know what to do next.

Indie authors have to think of ourselves as businesses, not just writers, and businesses set goals. They're a useful tool to monitor what we're doing, figure out where you want to be (and how you might get there!), and measure successes by whatever your chosen metrics are.

Are we overstretching ourselves? Pushing ourselves enough? Are there other things we could be doing/more aware of?

Sometimes setting a goal can help us push past our fears and just "do" the thing - whether it's finally hitting "publish", reaching out to a book blogger, working with a designer to commission a cover - or anything else!

In Conversation: LL MacRae

What plans are you making to reach your goals?

This means focussing on a really strong launch: more ARCs than before, book/blog tours, interviews/guest posts, and essentially everything I can do to let it hit the ground running. A lot of organising, planning ahead, and getting ducks in a row.

I like to have a deadline (usually a release date) to work towards, which is great at keeping me motivated, but often leads to chaos and stress in the final third of the timeline. So my plan for this one is to have the book written (or mostly written) before announcing anything - cover, release dates etc. Taking a leaf from traditional publishing by taking my time!

Sometimes I have a tendency to rush things - so trying to push the moment it's finished instead of letting it breathe and giving myself the best chance.

As far as the book itself, I'm planning to get my notes as full as possible, plotting a very thorough outline (so my drafting should be much more straightforward without having to figure out plot holes mid-way through), and working closely with my editor and beta team should keep at least the creation of the book on track!

I've also started more of a marketing push in the final months of 2025 - a second wave of contacting reviewers (with a completed trilogy under my belt now, it's great to promote that. Plus readers will know I can complete a series, which is always reassuring when they take a chance on a new series/author!) to help push my existing books and hopefully have more readers find my series!

What have you learned from reaching previous goals in the past?

The biggest lesson is honestly going easier on myself. As long as what I've set is realistic, and allows time for stumbling blocks, that's healthier than anything else.

What tips have you got for a new writer who decides they want to achieve a goal over the coming year?

Don't keep it to yourself! Share it with someone - a fellow writer, your editor, whoever you have in your support network. It'll help keep you accountable, and they can offer help/advice if you've set something unreasonable

For example - Deciding to sell a million copies is an admirable goal but probably unachievable, but contacting 50 reviewers is probably more manageable!

We are the only ones who write our books, but there is a whole community and support network out there and you should lean on them as much as possible to help make the harder parts easier

Find the author:

Website: here.

Socials here.

Budgets and the author

Alex S Bradshaw

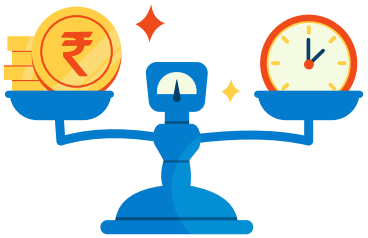
As an indie author, Alex S Bradshaw is always counting his pennies! Alex recently moderated an author panel on Spotlight Indie's YouTube site, it has some helpful tips as well.
Alex writes fantasy fiction, Windborn and Trollgrave, stories with a distinctive Viking setting.
When not writing, you can find Alex playing Dungeons and Dragons!

There's lots to keep in mind when planning your budget, so let's look at some things to consider to make the most of your treasure hoard, I mean money.
If you have published before, it will be helpful to look at the cost of your previous projects and consider whether it was money well spent. Are there any places where you've overspent or not seen a decent return on that investment? If so, how could you do things differently?

Perhaps you sent some physical copies to bloggers, but none of them posted about it. Next time, you could be more selective with the bloggers and use a digital gift box instead of sending physical books. This could include an ebook, wallpaper featuring your book cover for their phone or computer, and a link to YouTube videos with a book reading and a personal thank you video. There will still be some cost involved, but making the content digital rather than physical will reduce it drastically.

There's lots of software and services that claim they will make our lives as creators easier, but will they? Before you buy something, think about exactly what you need from it. There's no point in paying for software that has forty thousand features you'll never use when a simple word processor is all you need. You're better off using something more basic and free and saving yourself the money (and hassle of learning new software)!

"Consider where you may have overspent in the past - where you've not seen a decent return on your investment. What do you need to do different from now on?"



Budgets and the author

Alex S Bradshaw

Open Source Software

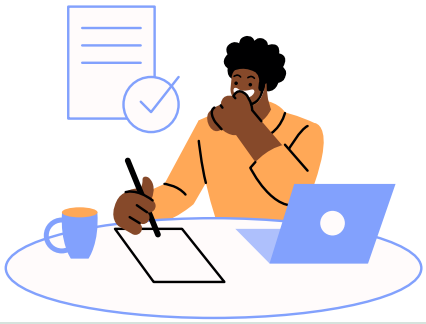
Open source software is a great alternative to paid options. For example, **Libre Office** and **Open Office** offer you the same basic functions as Microsoft Word and cost nothing.

I use **Scribus** for my PDFs as it's an open source version of InDesign. But, be sure to think about your preferences and goals.
I like to use Scribus to have a bit more control over my PDFs, but it is a more involved process. You may prefer to use something that will create a PDF for you quickly and without hassle.

Reedsy Studio is a free online writing platform that can also export a PDF or an epub (useful for the actual publishing part!).

"Carefully consider how you will spend your time or money and whether you will see a return that justifies that spend."

Find the author here:
https://alexsbradshaw.com/



Paid Services

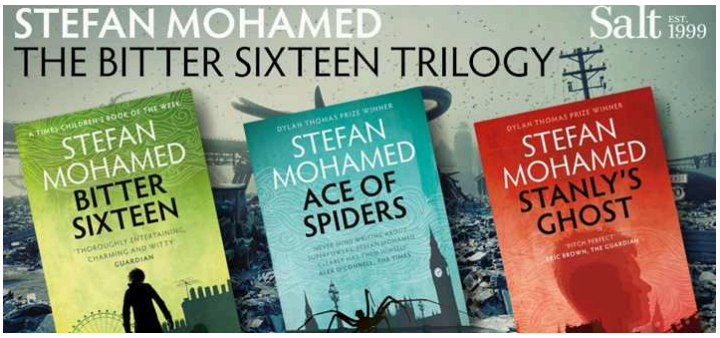
Paid services should not necessarily be avoided. You simply need to make sure you're balancing the cost against what it's saving you (which is most often time).

Vellum, for example, does a great job formatting books quickly and well. It does have a hefty price tag, but it's a one-off cost and you only need to pay when you want to export your file.
That brings us neatly to the next thing to consider: free trials! If you can spend time with the tools before you part with your money, you're more likely to make sure it's something you'll actually use rather than buying something only for it to gather dust on your hard drive.

The key is being intentional with your budget. Carefully consider how you will spend your time or money and whether you will see a return that justifies that spend.
Keep all this in mind and you will create something amazing that will not only keep your fans clamouring for more but will also keep your coffers groaning with cash!

In my experience... Stefan Mohamed

We asked Stefan Mohamed to share his experience of self-publishing. What goals did he set for himself? Did he achieve them?



With any creative pursuit, things get sticky once you professionalise. As soon as it begins to represent more than just creativity for creativity's sake - when it starts having implications for your career, your reputation, your finances - it's very easy to tell yourself you've failed. To invent increasingly arbitrary metrics to back up the snide commentary from that treacherous little voice at the back of your mind.

At the end of 2024, when I decided that I was going to self-publish my surreal cyberpunk detective novel The House on Utopia Way, I had to work through a few things. I'd come close to securing a traditional publishing deal, which was my original goal. And while I certainly wasn't disdainful of self-publishing, it did take me a while to silence the nagging feeling that by abandoning the traditional route - having had four previous novels published that way - I was somehow giving up.

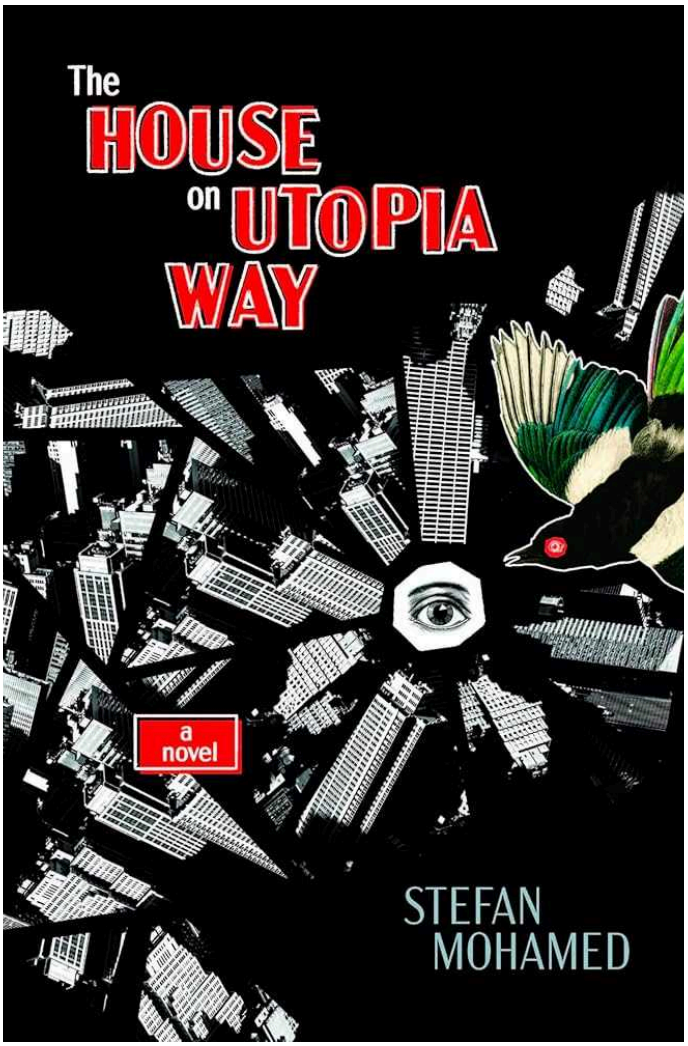
Stefan Mohamed is an award-winning author, poet, spoken word performer, creative writing tutor and freelance editor based in Bristol. He has been known to make videos. He's also a DJ.

"Continuing to hang on indefinitely – six months, a year, more – waiting for somebody to reply to an email, hoping I might get lucky? Unhealthy! And not terribly proactive!"

That was absurd, of course. Continuing to hang on indefinitely - six months, a year, more - waiting for somebody to reply to an email, hoping I might get lucky? Unhealthy! And not terribly proactive! Deciding that my book deserved to be out in the world, and choosing a new, exciting, somewhat intimidating avenue to get it out there? Much more hands-on! Arguably the opposite of giving up!

Nearing the end of my first year as an independently published author, it's easy to focus on the negatives. I haven't sold as many copies as I would have liked. The positive reviews and reader responses - for which I'm incredibly grateful, don't get me wrong - haven't translated to a life-changing evolution in popularity. I'm still very much plugging away, trying to get people to notice the book. One of many, many voices competing for people's understandably limited attention.

In my experience... Stefan Mohamed



But let's take a step back and ask an important question - what was my main goal? Now things start to look a little bit different. Because my main goal was to get my story out there.

I first started working on it in 2016. It's gone through many drafts, multiple agents and editors, several periods when I considered giving up entirely.

I didn't give up, though. Because I'm proud of it. I think it's my best work. And it exists now! A tangible object, out in the world, ready for people to find it.

They may not find it, of course. There's only so much I can do on that front. But it's out there, and I think it's worth finding.

So if you're unsure about self-publishing - if you're coming up with endless reasons not to do it - I get it! It's hard. There's a lot to learn. There are many things I'd do differently next time. You probably won't smash every self-imposed metric.

But if you have a story that you know deserves to be read?

It's worth a try.

Stefan also offers services for writers:

- ***One-to-one mentoring*** (usually online but alternatives are available
- ***Talks, readings and workshops*** for your literary festivals or books groups
- ***Editing support*** and proof reading for novels, short stories and poetry

Details can be found on his website.

Find the author

Website: https://www.stefmo.co.uk/

Buy here

BlueSky here and Instagram here

Quick Tales

The Ten Second Time Machine by Frasier Armitage

Indie science fiction star Frasier Armitage, author of titles including Times Ellipse and A Stitch Between Worlds, the latter longlisted for the BSFA Award for Best Collection, brings us an original piece about the foolishness of changing time.

I should've known something was off about the guy when he asked me if I wanted a Time Machine.
"Two hundred," he said. "It's a fair price."
My eyes screamed, What's the catch? louder than words.
"It'll only send you back ten seconds." His yellowed teeth crusted his smile. "But there's a lot you can do in ten seconds. For some, it's a lifetime."
I was tempted to take him up on the offer just to erase the stench of his breath. But instead, I shrugged and turned away.
"Alright. One fifty," he said.
I stopped. Ten seconds — was it really worth a hundred and fifty bucks? What was I going to use it for?
Portable time machines held their value second hand. If I couldn't use it, maybe I could sell it?
"Okay. Deal." I flicked the cash to his phone and he slipped me the unit. He'd housed it inside a watch. Tacky — how cheesy was this guy to put a Time Machine inside a watch?
I strapped it on and by the time I looked up, he was gone.

*

"He just disappeared?" Rashid asked.
"Yeah." I snapped my fingers. "Just like that."
"Weird. And you're sure it isn't a scam?"
I rolled my eyes.
"Look," he said, "I'm just saying — you know how those portable units work, don't you?"
"They send you back in time. What else is there to know?"
Rashid dropped his egg mayo sandwich on his lap and placed his hands over my wrist, covering my new watch. "It monitors everything in real time. Like. Everything. That way, it can take you back from the present — point B — to point A in the past. What if . . ." Rashid lowered his voice. "What if that guy is somehow . . . monitoring it. To collect data on you. Stuff he could use against you later?"
"You think he's gonna blackmail me over my search history and boring lectures? Rashid. The guy looked like a hobo. I doubt he knew his way around the watch, let alone a Time Machine."
"Fine. Suit yourself. But don't blame me when it blows up in your face."

*

I dragged my feet as the crowd walked from campus, Carly a few paces in front. I should just talk to her. Get her to acknowledge my existence at least.
The watch dug into my wrist.
Maybe that's what I can use it for? Try building the courage to approach her and say something, live my opening gambit as many times as I needed, and keep reli—
The wagon came out of nowhere. It smashed Carly's body, sending her through the air to collapse in a heap of blood, crunching on the tarmac.
"Carly!" I yelled. Ran over to her broken body. Pulse racing. Head a storm of denial.
No. No, I can fix this.
I flipped open the watch's face and activated the machine.

*

I dragged my feet as the crowd walked from campus, Carly a few paces in front. I should just talk to — Carly!
In a few seconds, she'd step into the road and get mowed down by that wagon.
"Carly!" I called.
She didn't react. Headphones. Duh!
I reached out to tap her shoulder, but she was one pace too far when she stepped into the road and—
The wagon came as before. She flew through the air.
I ran to her side. Reached for the flip. Pressed the button.

*

I dragged my feet as the crowd walked from cam—
Carly!!!
I ran and nudged her elbow.
She spun and looked at me like I'd grown a second head.
"Hey, Carly."
She took out one of her headphones. "Do I know you?"
"We're in the same . . . you know what? It doesn't matter. Can you help me with something?"
"I guess."
"Can you just stay right here and not move?"
Her forehead crumpled into a scowl.
"I know it's weird," I continued. "But trust me. It'll be worth—"
The wagon tore through the crowd and mushed Phil into the concrete.
Carly gasped.
I exhaled.
"That could've been me," she whispered.
She looked at me with soft eyes. She smiled. She actually smiled!
And then — and then, the watch activated. Even though I hadn't pressed anything.

*

I dragged my feet as the crowd walked—No!
No, this wasn't right! I'd saved her. Saved her.
Sure, Phil had copped it, but who cared about Phil? The guy was a bully.
And here Carly was, walking towards her end. Again.
I ran forward, but I'd delayed too long.
She stepped out and—
Carly!
I couldn't move. Frozen. What was going on? I'd stopped this. And then, the watch lit up and sent me —

*

.I dragged my feet as—I stopped.
Carly.
Wagon.
Dead.
Machine.

*

Carly.
Wagon.
Dead.
Machine.

*

Carly.
Wagon.
Dead.
What had Rashid said? It sends you back from point B to point A? But what happens when the present becomes point B again?

*

Back to point A.
To point B.

*

To point A.
To point B.

*

To point A.
Oh no!
Why didn't I choose a better moment than this? Why couldn't I have chosen a sunset? Or a time I was eating ice cream? Or a moment I noticed the breeze brushing against flowers in the kitchen window when Mum was using the oven?
I guess we only ever choose to relive the moments we think matter. But why are they moments like this? Why couldn't I have chosen something beautiful instead?
To point B.

*

To point A.
I should've known something was off about the guy when he asked me if I wanted a Time Machine.

Find the author

Website: frasierarmitage.com
Socials here

Quick Tales

A Storm Brews

by Anna Tizard

Anna Tizard had a unique method when it comes to writing. She plays the Exquisite Corpse game, where random words are drawn to create sentences, and then she uses that sentence as a writing prompt for her stories.

This story was inspired by the Exquisite Corpse game result:

"The frightened teapot watched as the boat sailed past, carrying the lightweight juggler." (From episode #87 of Brainstoryum.)

If you'd like to experiment with your writing process, check out Anna's Brainstoryum podcast for ideas and inspiration. And if you'd like to find out more about Anna's writing and her podcast, just keep reading!

What do humans feel? Everything, and nothing.

Even those who seek numbness at the bottom of a glass will feel the call again. It's inevitable. Anaesthetised by a glass of wine or whiskey, the next flutter of excitement is a heartbeat away, and when it comes, they will follow like children jumping after bubbles. A smile, a kiss, the promise of a kiss, will pull them harder than ropes steering a ship, tilting them after.

And who is the captain of this ship?

What? Are you looking at me? I'm just a dear old lady running a tea shop.

The door jangles. Here he is again. Jim, the old sea captain, is restless. He haunts my tea shop of an afternoon, donning that cap of his, shirt sleeves rolled up to show the tattoos that smudge and bleed into his wrinkled arms. His eyes, though they crinkle at the corners in a smile, are still the same black holes, empty, roving over my shelves for something new, or perhaps something old; remembered.

My booking for the afternoon left not five minutes ago, ladies tugging birthday balloons after them, their laughter whipped away by the sea breeze as they clattered out. Perfect timing. It's as if he knew.

I think he senses there's something different about my tea shop. He likes to sample different teas—no, that's not it. He's searching for something.

We are alone. Leaning his elbows on the counter he asks, what else do I have? What has he not tried?

Though he likes something new each time, it's always the same story he tells. I turn my back on him to consider my array of jars.

That night on the sea, when his cruise boat went down. Visions he cannot shake. And he the only survivor.

Why does he tell me? Done with drowning his grief in a pint glass, is he looking for another solution, a non-alcoholic one? Does he think I have the answer?

He would be right.

I scour the shelves. The poor man has tasted so much guilt in his life—I would never suggest those curl-leafed blends behind resentment and remorse, oh no, not for him. He's tried blends that inspire joy, contentment, bliss (a zingy variety, you have to keep the lid on tight and scoop quickly, for the leaves tend to float of their own accord), but nothing. Nothing satisfies this man. Still he returns to my shop, the way he returns to the same story, the same old regret. It holds him in its jagged-toothed maw. A maw I know only too well.

If a story will not let go, well then. Let's tell it again. Let it stir the waters of memory, hunger and hope, until we can find a fresh ending.

I reach for an unlabelled jar. I will not tell him that it contains fear. For if we must face the truth once more, let us swallow what frightens us, lest it swallows us.

I unscrew the lid, spoon the leaves into the teapot and set the kettle boiling.

As Jim begins to tell the tale, the croak of his voice melds into the creak and snap of wood collapsing. I let my thoughts drift through his words, back through time, and remember it, in my own way.

The boat rumbling its propellers, deep into the water. The engine in its underbelly pummelling jagged vibrations. And the rabble on board, laughing and clinging to their hats. Such silly, frilly arrogance, to think they can ride the waves like that, sitting on top of it all in their best shirts and dresses, sipping cocktails. Looking down on it. As if it were their domain. Behind the laughter, their eyes were glazed with their own distractions: delusions, longings. A barman in a waistcoat, juggling limes for a few tips. If only they'd stepped onto shore, into my café, I could have taken them deeper. A teapot can brew something more wondrous and terrible than you will ever find at the bottom of a glass.

But what am I saying? That was before I had a tea shop. Before I could even hold a teacup.

I was younger, then. Hungrier.

The rumbles of the ship juddered through my skin. An awful din. Softly, from the bottom of the ocean, I unfolded. Pumping my limbs, I drew closer to the surface, scattering fish either way, tasting the sun's rays. A black shape blotted the light. Propellers thundering, chopping the water. I wriggled to the end of the vessel, reached a long tentacle over it.

Screams slipped over my skin, their hot, delicious trails quick as ice-cream melting. Pain leapt into my exposed limb as those idiots began hitting and stabbing me with whatever they could find. Smashed glasses, fists, fire extinguishers, chairs.

I dug in, levered my weight. The bubbles rumbled as the screams turned to shrieks, grew hoarse.

They say the sea never stands still.

*

Jim, the old captain, has swallowed enough regret ever since, no matter what beverage he was nursing. The only one to swim to shore when there was no-one left to be saved. He watches me pour the tea, then takes what he wants. A sip, a gulp, and more. Setting down the cup with a crack that breaks the handle—snap—he is gone, wrenched out of his seat, my shop, the world. He joins the churn of the ocean with the rest of them.

He goes where his guilt takes him, not once looking back. To where he'll find peace; where he can take my place at the bottom of the ocean.

I've taken to brewing gentler blends these days. Tea is not for everyone: the gentle brew that warms the heart and the fingertips, nor the one that makes you gaze out the window and wonder. Those who are restless, unforgiven, may hanker for something stronger.

Seek what you will at the bottom of a glass. But only lift the lid off a teapot if you want to know what's inside.

Find the Author

Anna's website:
https://www.annatizard.com/

In Conversation: Anna Tizard

Writing and Podcasting

We've already mentioned the Brainstoryum podcast in Anna's short story. We sat down with her to talk about creating her podcast, and her experiences juggling both writing and podcasting.

Anna, hi! You're both a podcaster and a storyteller, so you're very busy. How do you decide what goals you're going to set for yourself at the start of a new year?

It's often challenging, making time for both podcasting and writing. But the nature of what I do on Brainstoryum means the two activities feed into each other, so it's easier to keep the balance.

I prefer not to set goals at the beginning of the year. I know it works for a lot of people, but for me, mid-winter is a time for rest, chocolate, and reading under a duvet. Whenever I reach a decision about what I want to do, or realise I need to make a change, that's when I make those plans.

Even if you don't quite know how you're going to achieve what you want, working that out can be the first goal. The moment you've made a start, you're on that path—no matter what time of year it is.

What goals will you be working towards in 2026?

My main goal in 2026 is to finish, edit, and release a new collection of short stories. This will be the fourth in my series, The Book of Exquisite Corpse, although each volume is standalone. What connects them is their source of inspiration: the bizarre word game of Exquisite Corpse which I play on Brainstoryum.

Listeners send me word suggestions which I pull out of the Socks of Destiny during the show to generate bizarre sentences. Many of these are laughable at first—that's part of the fun—but after some probing, I usually manage to find a story in the strange, evocative word combinations, which never cease to fascinate me.

The theme of the new collection will be weird creatures. Yes, this is a strange target to set, because who can predict what words will come up? But this theme has emerged organically over several months, and it seems to be the direction my imagination is taking, so I decided to go with it. The magic is less in the words themselves but in the connections between them, and the interpretations these inspire.

In Conversation: Anna Tizard

One of my favourite things about reading is being surprised by the twists and turns of a story. I love that feeling when you are glued to the page because you just cannot guess what is going to happen next. Since all the word combinations that crop up on Brainstoryum are unpredictable and unexpected, the stories will inevitably contain an element of surprise before I even get started. In fact, my personal publishing policy is that I will not release anything that doesn't surprise me at least twice. (If the next book has, say, 15 stories in it, that will be 30 + surprises.)

This does mean that surprise and spontaneity are baked into my goals, which is a bit paradoxical if you think about it: my objective is to capture the unexpected. I've made firm plans to discover and develop ideas I cannot possibly predict!

Then again, this is the very essence of discovery writing. I'm striving to "find" stories that have never been written before and tap into the mysteries held in my subconscious mind.

What plans are you making to reach them?
I've been working towards this goal for some time already, so it's just a case of keeping going. With Brainstoryum being fortnightly, it's quite handy to have this built-in, self-imposed deadline to meet (one new short story, or at least a good chunk of one, drafted for each show). Not all of them will end up in the collection, but it's a never-ending, rich ground of inspiration.

At the time of writing, I have more than half the stories I need for the next book, in draft form. But I'm definitely not rushing this. I'm taking my time, finding the right stories and being really selective about what goes into the final anthology. As far as the end result goes, I'm not strict about timing and I'm generally looking to release it somewhere around spring-summer.

This really sums up my personal stance on goals and discipline: I love to dedicate a twenty-minute slot to try and crack open an idea, and I get excited about trying this, thriving on a little pressure. But as for the release, I'll be happy as long as it's out by the middle of the year. I want it to be the best it can be, and give it the time it needs.
You have to find out what works best for you, and where to apply—or soften—the pressure.

Why do you think it's important for indie creatives to set goals?
I think goals should ideally be smallish and achievable steps on the way to the big, glowing aim in the sky. Don't stare directly into the aim, it may hurt your eyes!

But seriously, if I'm going to wear out this metaphor, let's do it properly, now: it's only practical to look down, see what's going on around us at ground level, and work out the steps to get there. We need to focus on what's possible, to reach what may seem impossible and beyond our reach.

"I think goals should ideally be smallish and achievable steps on the way to the big, glowing aim in the sky."

In Conversation: Anna Tizard

One of the main advantages of setting achievable goals is that it sharpens your focus, and (hopefully) prevents you from getting drawn in to other projects that will soak up your time and creative energy. Simply typing up a list of things you want to do, with a timescale, helps firm up your resolve. About a year ago I jumped at an opportunity that sounded great but, if I'm honest, didn't feel quite right to me. It ended up not working out. I like to say that nothing is ever wasted, but at the same time, this stalled project set me back a couple of months as far as my pre-set goals went.

"Simply typing up a list of things you want to do, with a timescale, helps firm up your resolve."

Then again, how many times have we heard it said, "I wrote this (classic, bestselling) book while I was meant to be writing something else"? So I think it's good to be open to opportunities that crop up, as and when they feel right. It's important to have some flexibility.

Also, if you get stuck on one project, I have learned from (long, gruelling) experience that bashing away at it is not going to solve the issue and may even crush the spark out of your idea. Often, you just need a little time away from the page—that particular page. Working on another story, preferably a short piece, can give your inspiration the energy-boost it needs, so don't be too strict with yourself if the solution itself requires a bit of creative thinking outside the boundaries of your goal.

(When writing the last sentence, I mistyped 'goal' as 'gaol'! Does this say something about my train of thoughts here…?)

What have you learned from reaching previous goals in the past?

That I don't know how to celebrate my achievements! This is something I need to learn. I'm inclined to be a bit relentless, and I'm not good at taking breaks.

I always imagine that people who complain about procrastination must have a better life balance than I do, and know how to relax, although this is probably not always the case.

We are all built differently and have different tendencies. Know thyself: recognise the way you are, what excites your inspiration or switches it off, and find a way work with that (or around it).

I think it helps to develop a sort of sneakiness (a sort of gleeful sneakiness!) about making time for writing. After all, half an hour spent writing is never "just" half an hour, in the normal sense of it. The same amount of time that would usually flash past when you're doing chores or working, can blossom with a myriad of ideas and details.

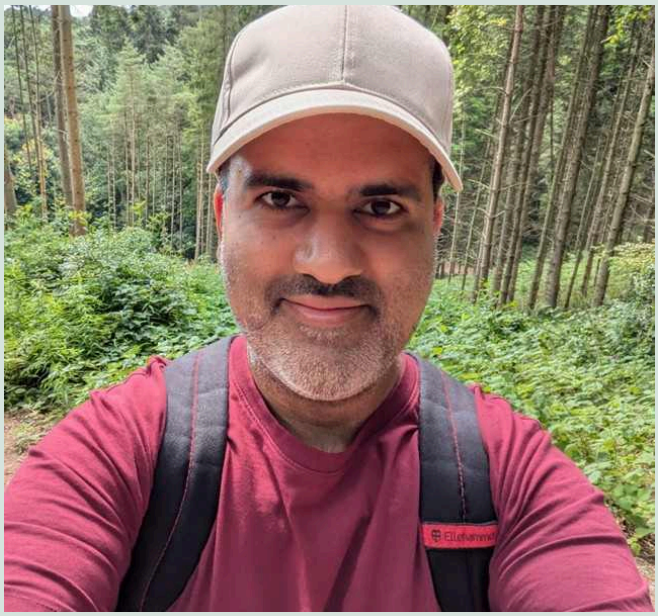
It makes me think of that phrase, "If grass can grow through cement, love can find you at any time in your life." (I think it was Cher who said this.) That's true of writing, too—which is also a thing that's born of passion, with an urge to grow and become. If you hunt for the gaps between other duties and responsibilities, you will find them.

Find the Author

https://www.annatizard.com/

The Poet's Goal Tanweer Dar

Tan was born in Birmingham, in the United Kingdom. He studied Ancient & Medieval History at university and is a qualified teacher.
He loves nature, walking, gardening, house plants, history, art, poetry, and books and films of all kinds (especially horror).
He has written and published science fiction, horror, poetry, fantasy and children's books. Alongside his writing, he is also an enthusiastic and experienced pencil and digital artist.



Shoot for the moon and you may reach the stars
So goes the maxim about reaching goals
Pursue not vanity, houses and cars
Don't worry about walking on hot coals

Judge not yourself against any other
Destroy not your peace for a bag of gold
Voices of doubt, ignore and then smother
But onto your dreams, tenaciously hold

Keep always burning the candle of hope
Work hard, with patience, and make yourself proud
Enjoy the challenge, but hold onto rope
Think not so much about pleasing the crowd

Success is not measured by fortune, fame
But rather by works which bear your good name

One of the best pieces of advice I've ever heard with regards to writing poetry is, 'You must cage them to set them free'. This was said by a children's poet before doing an activity with a class of Year 1 children during my teacher training year. I have never forgotten it. I even remember the task he set the children: to compose two lines joined together by 'even though'. I also remember the little girl who said, 'I believe in God, even though I cannot see Him'. All the adults in the room were moved almost to tears.

Free verse is all well and good, but if you are struggling to get going, it is not particularly helpful. The moment you have structure, rhyming patterns and syllable restrictions, you suddenly find you are able to choose just the right words and cadences to compose poetry. That's why I love writing sonnets so much. Haiku, couplets and quatrains are a pretty good way to start before moving on to something as daunting as a whole sonnet.

The most important thing, in my humble opinion, about poetry is feeling. You should feel something when you are composing it, and it should make the reader feel something when they read it. 'Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thoughts,' said Percy Bysshe Shelley in 'To a Skylark'. Not only is poetry imbued with sadness extremely powerful, it is also a great catharsis for the poet. That doesn't mean you can't write good poetry when you're happy, but it means you should reach for a pen when you're feeling unhappy, frustrated or mad at the world. It can not only help you, but you might pen something special, too.

Find the Author

https://tanweerdar.com/

MasterClass Emily Inkpen

Writing Audio Drama

This masterclass offers indie authors insights on how to approach storytelling from a different perspective - writing for audio - and the goals needed.

Emily Inkpen is a science fiction novelist and the writer/co-director of the globally successful BSFA Award-winning audio drama, The Dex Legacy, and the hit spinoff show, Wasteland: A Dex Legacy Story.
In her head she occupies a futuristic world of sleek integrated technology, outside her head she is a Hobbit.

How do you decide what goals you're going to set for yourself at the start of a new year?
I'm one of those writers who always strives to do more and has "never done enough", so for me the end of the year is all about looking back and giving myself credit for what I've achieved. The fact is, I've always done plenty.
A classic example of this would be 2024, where I felt like I'd wasted my life (I was unemployed and all levels of anxiety). I looked back and realised I'd written, directed, and released the Dex Legacy spinoff series, Wasteland: A Dex Legacy Story, finished writing the first Dex Legacy novelisation, run a successful Kickstarter for Season 3 of Dex, and written a whole new novel I wasn't even planning on writing. That's a lot. But that was a key learning for me. Even if I do all of those things, I'll never feel like it's enough… and that's given me permission to do a bit less!

What goals will you be working towards in 2026?
My main aim is to get both of my current WIPs out. The first novelisation of The Dex Legacy is on sub now, and I'm editing my fantasy book. In 2026 I need to write some honest prose. So that will be the second Dex Legacy book – in all likelihood. I've already started it.
In addition to that is another season of Wasteland: A Dex Legacy Story – the spinoff series that's doing so well despite only having a handful of episodes. Oddly enough, that one's intimidating because I think Season 1 was some of my best writing so far, and now I have to follow it.
Season 4 of Dex… well Chris and I have agreed that we need a bit of time before going for another season. It's such a huge thing to make and release and the next seasons need to be really focused. So towards the end of the year I'm hoping to have a full outline for the remaining Dex Legacy story arc. And then the real work can begin.

"I'm one of those writers who always strives to do more and has "never done enough". For me the end of the year is all about looking back and giving myself credit for what I've achieved. The fact is, I've always done plenty."

What plans are you making to reach them?
Nothing structured. I know that with so many projects overlapping, it's important not to put too much pressure on myself. There are plenty of deadlines later on in a project, so at the drafting phases I try to keep it loose. I guess I want to get a first draft of Wasteland ready by end of March-ish? That makes sense. Then we have time to edit, record, and produce ready for a summer release. I should really discuss this with Chris (producer) before promising anything!

Why do you think it's important for indie writers to set goals?
Goals are all about taking control of what you can in a wide-open sea of creative maelstroms, and what they look like really depend on what kind of writer you are. If you're the kind who is liable to tinker with a book forever and never get it over the line, set a clear goal and aim for it or you'll never release. If you're the kind to lose momentum, a goal can keep you motivated. If you're the kind to overwork, a goal can help you to chill out a bit – as long as you keep it sensible.
Goals are important. Deadlines are not. Deadlines are what trad publishing is for and the joy of indie is that it's not trad. I mean, yes, later on in a project, setting a deadline is a good idea. A release date is a deadline and once you've started your marketing you'll need to keep to it.
For me, goals are purely for the things that are in my control, like drafting audio drama and planning production and release. If I'm throwing a book into the trad maelstrom, a goal is somewhat arbitrary because I can't control how long I'll have to wait for a response.

What have you learned from reaching previous goals in the past?
That it's important to look after yourself after you've achieved what you set out to achieve. Especially if it was ambitious. Allow yourself a couple of weeks to let the dust settle and do a "retrospective". This can be a very loose exercise. List out what worked and what didn't. Was the goal too much? Were you able to maintain a level of balance throughout the project? Should you approach it differently next time? Answer all of these questions before setting a new major goal.

How do you plan on celebrating if you manage to achieve everything you set out to do?
Normally I crack on with the next thing… though on the final Dex release day I did open a bottle of prosecco. I was tired and anxious and drained and had a permanent thousand-yard-stare… but I drank some prosecco because it's important to do that. Regardless of how you feel. For me, having that glass in my hand reminded me that I'd *done a thing*, a big thing. And it was worth celebrating.

As an award-winning audio dramatist, what tips have you got for a new writer who decides they want to write an audio drama over the coming year?
Presuming you want it to be a series, know your heading.
Knowing roughly how it will end will help keep your story on track. Writing to fit episodes can throw things off, so you need to put guard rails in place.
So know where the series will end, but also work out where every episode will end. That's how you bake-in your cliffhangers.
Do yourself a favour at the outset and use a spreadsheet to map out episodes, including a column for "end line". It's taken me three seasons of Dex Legacy, plus a season of Wasteland to work out this method, so have a headstart on me!

Find the author

Website: www.emilyinkpen.com
Socials: @emilyinkpen

Writer's Goal: Tim Hardie

Have you ever been to a literary convention? As an indie author, it can be a challenge as we usually have to fly solo. However, the rewards often far outweigh the costs. If you've set a goal to attend a book convention in 2026, you won't find a more indie-friendly one that what the team at Spotlight Indie are planning for later in the year.
We invited Tim Hardie to tell us more about it . . .

Tim is the resident book reviewer for Spotlight Indie and the author of The Brotherhood of the Eagle dark epic fantasy series, the standalone novel A Quiet Vengeance and the short story collection A Roll of the Dice. He has also contributed stories to The Anatomy of Fear and The Advent of Winter anthologies.

What is Spotlight Indie?
Based in the UK, Spotlight Indie is a growing inclusive community of independent authors and keen readers of speculative fiction. Whilst writing is a solitary occupation, there's a huge benefit in authors coming together to support each other. Spotlight Indie is a place where you can discover your next favourite read, dive into the writing process, connect with the indie community and feel truly welcomed and supported. You can find out more via their YouTube channel, website and on social media.
As part of its wider mission to be inclusive and accessible, the Spotlight Indie gang are now gearing up for their largest ever in-person event, which will take place on **23rd May 2026 at Shrewsbury Flaxmill Maltings** (save the date!). In keeping with the focus in this issue of Indie Writer's Voice on setting and achieving your goals, the key thing behind any successful event is planning and preparation. So, what does that entail?

Why hold an in-person event?
Well, for one thing they're massive fun! They provide you with an opportunity to meet new people in a relaxed and welcoming environment. It's also a chance to build on friendships which have been made online. Without events like this the opportunity for writers to be able to come together and encourage each other is limited. I've always found that after attending something like this I'm fired up creatively and ready to tackle the next project.
For readers there's the opportunity to discover new authors and their books. The indie writing scene is one of the most vibrant and innovative creative places you can find. Whatever your tastes, the perfect indie book is out there, waiting for you!
What kind of an event will it be?
Spotlight Indie is all about inclusion, connection and community. It's also a hub for learning, so there are going to be plenty of panels and workshops to pique your interest and get you thinking.
We're also planning on having traders tables. This gives attendees the chance not only to meet authors in person but also pick up some brand new books – at a very reasonable price!

Spotlight Indie:
https://spotlightindie.co.uk

Set your goal!

In this issue, we've explored how indie writers are planning to reach their goals in 2026. Now it's your turn!
Below is a list of questions to complete at your leisure. Have fun with it! Remember to enjoy reaching your goals over the coming year.

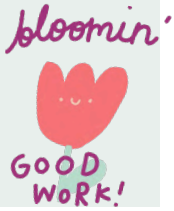
Make sure you let us know how your getting on - via our account on BlueSky: https://bsky.app/profile/creativecommune.bsky.social

What goals will you be working towards in 2026?

What plans are you making to reach them?

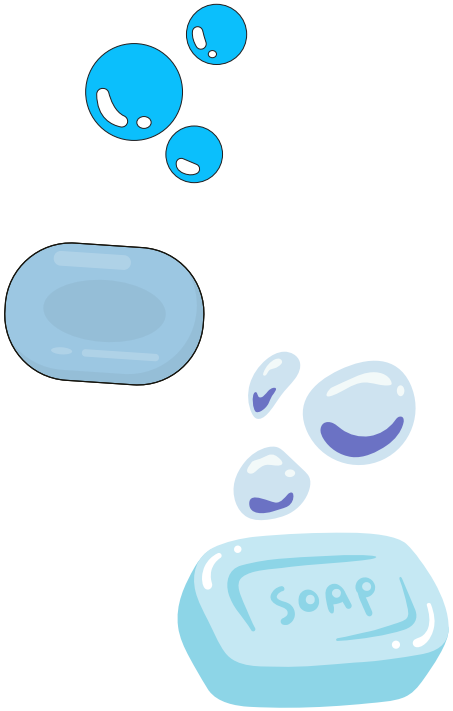
Why is it important to identify this goal - and stick to it?

How do you plan to celebrate if you achieve everything you set out to do?



Soap Box With Frasier Armitage

Guest editor Frasier Armitage puts on his columnist hat to explain why an author needs to set goals - which has been his theme for this issue.



There may be some writers who are reluctant to set goals for themselves out of a fear of failure. Nobody likes to feel as though they've failed in something. I'm sure you've heard it said that if you never set a goal, you never have to experience disappoint. What a loophole, right?

The problem that comes with this mentality is that you also never get to experience a sense of accomplishment. Achievement enhances our sense of self-worth and confidence. It makes us happy.

That means every time you set a goal, you take a risk. But it's a risk that's rooted in the pursuit of your own personal joy. And that, in itself, is worth celebrating.

Whether you end up reaching a goal or not, you've been courageous enough to take a step towards satisfaction. You're on the path that will lead you to your best life. Walking that path makes you a success, regardless of whether you end up reaching the goals you've set for yourself.

Every time you set a goal, you've already achieved success. You are not a failure. If you adopt this idea, you'll hopefully rid yourself of any fear that's holding you back. I'm sure you agree this makes for a much better loophole!

So, enjoy reaching for your goal, and celebrate the fact you're reaching, because the attempt of a creative endeavour is the greatest form of success any of us can ever hope to achieve.

"Every time you set a goal, you take a risk. But it's a risk that's rooted in the pursuit of your own personal joy."

Signing off,

Frasier Armitage

Issue 03
February 2026

Enjoyed reading this issue?
We'd love it if you'd share the good news on **BlueSky**
Click **here**

Look out for our next edition in **February** at
www.philparker-fantasywriter.com/creativecommune

Creative Commune
Support. Networking. Collaboration.