Issue 01
October 2025

Indie Writer's Voice

Produced by the
Creative Commune

In This Issue

FRASIER ARMITAGE ~ CATHERINE MCCARTHY ~ SEÁN O'BOYLE
ALETHEA LYONS ~ RA SANDPIPER ~ NC SCRIMGEOUR

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 first 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. We meet online regularly, we've collaborated on a serialised webstory, Realm Raiders and now we've launched this magazine to showcase the work of indie authors!

With a new edition every two months, a Guest Editor will curate the content - inviting their choice of writers to contribute articles, short stories and reviews.

We're pleased to hand over the reins to the author of Lightfall, Ed Crocker so, over to you, Ed!

Phil Parker

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Be Our Guest: Ed Crocker

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

I remember the moment when I realised I'd read more independently published books in a year than traditionally published ones. It was 2023. I'd been reading indie SFF and horror widely for a couple of years, having discovered this brave new (well, by then firmly established) world when I joined Twitter (rest in peace) in 2021. But it was two years later when it made that strong majority move in my TBR.

Don't get me wrong, it wasn't a "where were you when Kennedy was assassinated?" moment. Or, for my Millennial generation, a "where were you on 9/11" (I was coming home from school, kids). But it did feel significant. I still read trad, don't get me wrong. I read a lot of books, as a useful alternative to a social life. But boy do I read a lot of indie (self pub and small press), and I edit indie books for my day job, and I review a lot of indie, and I am privileged to have made a lot of indie author friends throughout my chaos we could charitably call a book life. I write trad, but in many ways I live indie.

In the last ten years, but even more so in the last five, and even more so in the last three, the book world has turned on its head. In the corner of the world I read in, speculative fiction—which is all you'll see in this issue, for my speculative sins—you are now presented with a vast range of books that frequently provide equal quality to trad and often a wider range of genres and risk-taking. Whether or not the old publishing industry is slowly on its way out remains to be seen (my answer will differ depending on how much alcohol I've drunk, as in most things) but it's clear at the very least that the future will be increasingly a tough choice for authors of two paths, and often of doing both—going hybrid.

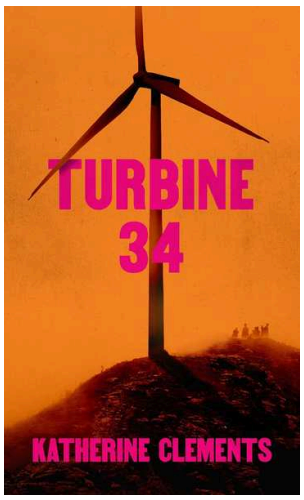
It was, therefore, an enormous privilege to be allowed to guest edit this first issue of The Indie Author's Voice, a periodical dedicated to championing this future-gilded renaissance character known as the indie author, for whom the future is theirs, probably, if we don't all get replaced by Sam Altman's noxious Armageddon machine. I should add that it's a periodical focused specifically on British indie authors with good reason; the indie scene is exciting over here and the community grows day by day.

In this issue I have bribed/cajoled/threatened a string of talented British indie speculative fiction authors to advise and entertain us (plus one talented reviewer). Reading what they sent me was a nice reminder of how genuinely honoured I am to know so many talented, kind, witty, and wonderful writers. See, they bribed me too.

The future is uncertain, but in many and significant ways which grow more so each passing day, the future is indie, and it's a privilege to be living in it.

For more of Ed's scattergun verbiage, you can find him on Insta, Tiktok, Bluesky, and Threads as @edcrockerbooks and all his author and reviewer links at his linktree here

What's Hot? New Releases

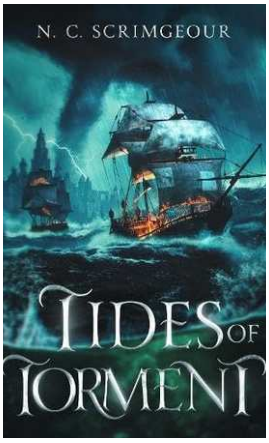


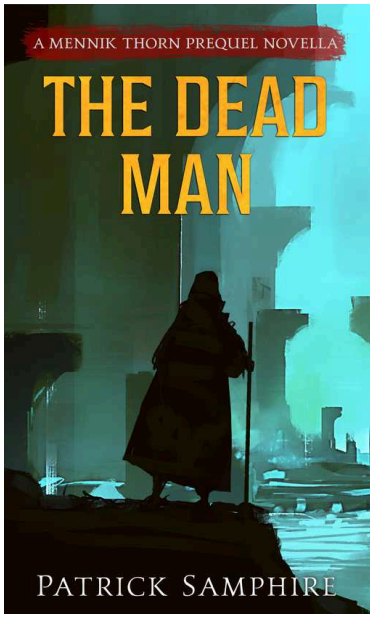
Turbine 34 by Katherine Clements

6th November sees the release of Turbine 34 by Katherine Clements. This book is part of the "Northern Weird Project" by London-based publisher Wild Hunt Books, a series of six horror novels from writers from the North of England about the North itself. Clements herself is from West Yorkshire, which is fitting as the book is about a wind farm there where something odd is happening in the peat bog beneath it, promising a blend of folk horror with Dark Matter and Wuthering Heights.

Tides of Torment by NC Scrimgeour

12 November sees the release of Scottish SFF author NC Scrimgeour's much-anticipated conclusion to her Scottish-inspired flintlock-folklore-dark fantasy saga Sea of Souls, the pleasingly dramatically titled Tides of Torment. Expect more sea monsters, emotional torment and seafaring action as one of the best indie fantasy series of recent years comes to an end.





The Dead Man by Patrick Samphire

Becoming a mage-for-hire hasn't quite turned out the way Nik Thorn hoped. Sometimes you just have to take whatever job is on offer, whether it's a missing pet, a curse to break, or tracking down a cheating husband. And sometimes it turns out to be something else altogether.

And if theft, murder, and blackmail aren't enough, there's a high mage involved.

This is not what Nik signed up for.

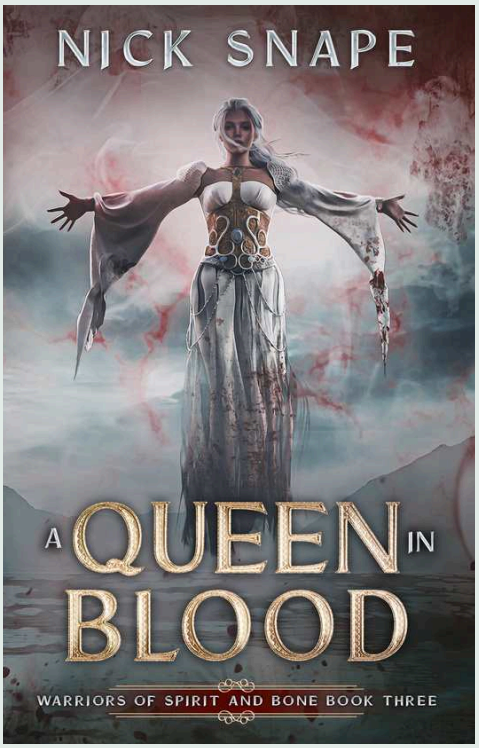
Meet Nik Thorn for the first time in this prequel to Shadow of a Dead God.

The Dead Man takes place about a month before the events of Shadow of a Dead God.

To be published: November 18, 2025.

More new releases!

Creative Commune member, **Nick Snape's** latest novel arrived last month



Not all heroes carry swords…

The invasion of Brandshold begins with the realm haunted by the Infected – the spirit-poisoned who hunger for souls to salve their pain. Under a wave of their bloody teeth and foul claws, the Constructor's Emperor strikes, shattering city walls with his newly awakened artifice dragon, and the dreaded Kraken soulship.

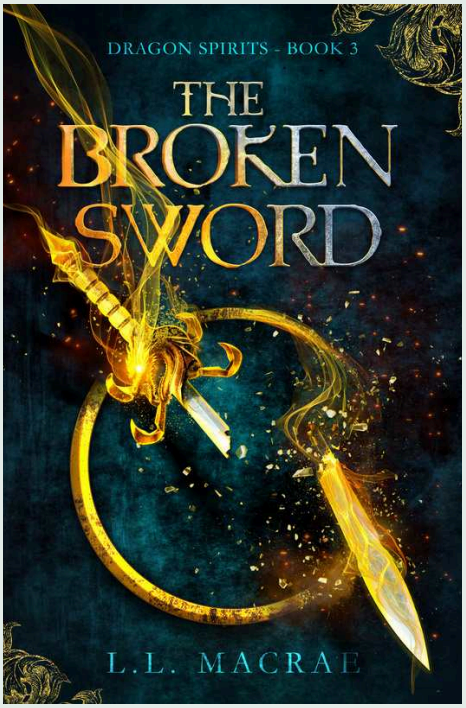
For a queen bathed in the blood of her own people, hope lies in the alchemy of the meisters, a traitorous mechanical dragon, and loyal but broken soldiers.

Yet the spirit elf Sura retains faith in Laoch, believing he will return with a weapon like no other, as the final battle for the souls of the realm nears its catastrophic end.

For peace can only be forged by the spirits of the fallen.

Available here

Creative Commune member, **LL MacRae**, has a new book out too!



Book and paperbacks available here:

The truth of Fenn's past is no longer lost—but the cost of remembering may be higher than forgetting.

With the Shadow Gate open and a tide of darkness flooding the land, Fenn must right the wrongs he unwittingly unleashed upon Tassar. He has no choice but to forge new, dangerous alliances to save those he loves, and his bond to the dragon spirit Hassen will be tested like never before.

Calidra has survived her battle with the Myr and, together with an unlikely ally, is caught in a desperate race to stay one step ahead of the coming cataclysm.

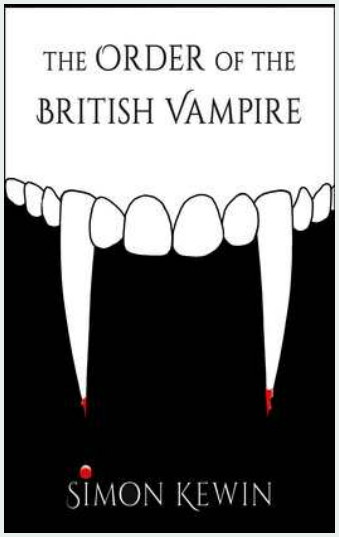
The world must unite to stand against a threat greater than anything seen before, but chances of survival dwindle as the spirits that feed on death grow in power, and even the Iron Crown's magic may be thwarted.

As war erupts and vengeful spirits awaken, Tassar's destiny will be decided once and for all. Discover the fate of the magic-drenched world of Tassar in the epic conclusion to the DRAGON SPIRITS trilogy.

Even more new releases!

His Majesty's Office of the Witchfinder General by Simon Kewin

Danesh is an Acolyte in His Majesty's Office of the Witchfinder General, a shadowy arm of the British government fighting supernatural threats to the realm. These are his stories.



Having become a hero, Danesh is also a target. The Warlock sends his most fearsome lieutenant to dispose of him. Who can he trust?
Meanwhile, someone or something is digging up graves in Cardiff and taking bones...

Find out about Simon Kewin **here**

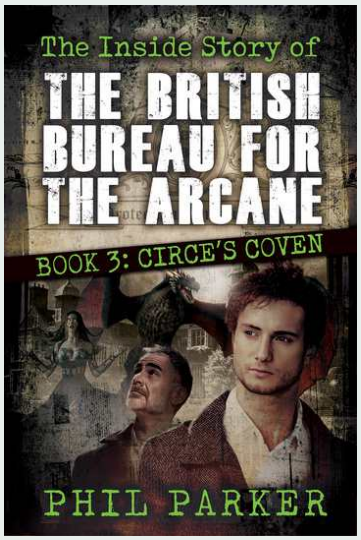
Buy the book **here**

FANTASY NOIR

Who keeps the British public safe from supernatural creatures?

The British Bureau for the Arcane by Phil Parker

Arlo Austin is a Dark Elf and an agent of the British Bureau for the Arcane, a secret government agency which monitors the activities of arcane races. These are his stories.



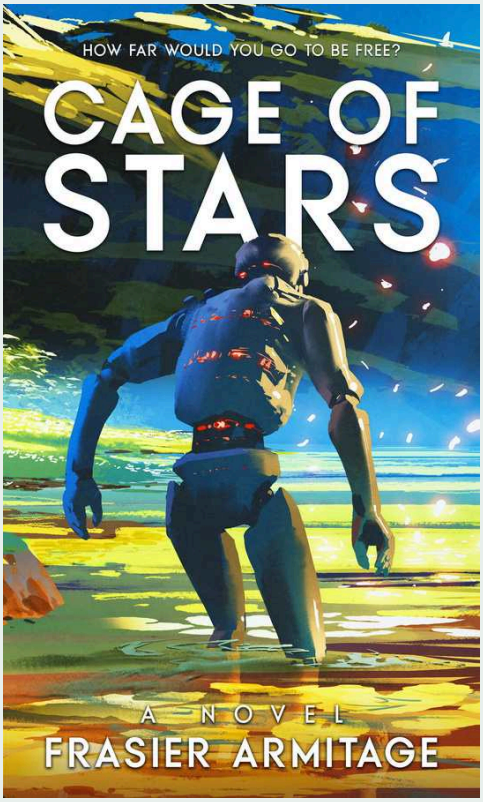
Arlo Austin, the Bureau's bravest and resourceful agent, has been abducted. Simultaneous attacks by witches from Circe's Coven cannot be a coincidence. The Bureau's political masters want answers.

Investigations connect ancient literature to the coven's ambitions. Persecuted for centuries, they seek vengeance - to enslave humanity. They tried once before, in the distant past. This time they could succeed.

Find out about Phil Parker's other books and buy Circe's Coven **here**

FANTASY NOIR

Yet more new releases!



Cage of Stars by Frasier Armitage

Winner of the SciFidea Dyson Sphere Contest and shortlisted for the Andromeda Award, Cage of Stars is the latest from Frasier Armitage, acclaimed author of Time's Ellipse and A Stitch Between Worlds.

HOW FAR WOULD YOU GO TO BE FREE?

Inside the paradise of a Dyson Sphere, artificial intelligence has been outlawed and hunted. When a robot is dug up at the equator, it will have to flee if it wants to survive.

Told from the different perspectives of the humans and creatures who encounter the machine as it crosses the Sphere to seek refuge at the pole, can one robot's struggle for freedom change the world?

Buy the book **here**

A Winter's Mercy by Phil Williams

They say if you see the Stranded, it's already too late…

Tasked with transporting a monster-hunting "ghost" to the Vulgar Division artillery unit, far from the fighting, Wild Wish is ready to take a break for the winter. Their destination, Lake Harmonial, is a place of peace and tranquillity. An idyllic, safe retreat.
Until now.
This ghost is no ordinary soldier, and Command want Wild Wish with him for a reason. When the ice comes to Harmonial, it will bring a threat that could unbalance the entire war.
One that only the Blood Scouts can stop.
These peaceful woods contain forces darker than any Wish has seen before. Win or lose, this mission is going to leave deep and terrible scars.

Return to the world of the Rocc for another thrilling, chilling chapter in the One War, as the Blood Scouts come to face the true cost of survival.

More details about the series **here**. Buy the book **here**

Reviews The Editor's Choice

In each edition, we ask our Guest Editor to review a book of their choice. Ed Crocker gives us his unique insights here.

Demon's Tear by Wales-based indie fantasy author R E Sanders is the start of a devilishly ambitious sweeping fantasy epic with a classic feel that also feels fresh.

It reminded me of a successful blind date on a runaway train: it took some risks, I wasn't sure where it was going, but it all came together beautifully and now I want more.

It combines Bernard Cornwell-style military shenanigans (Scandinavian-esque isolated kingdom obsessed with swords defends itself against a foreign invader) with Wheel of Time-style magic antics (a powerful gem an ancient demon needs to cement its comeback has been stolen by some thieves who must go on the run) but is still very much its own thing, and the worldbuilding is sharper than the greatswords its characters wield with relish.

An addictive start to a promising series. The sequel, Demon's Rise, has just come out too, so now is a great time to get in on this series.

Buy Demon's Tear here

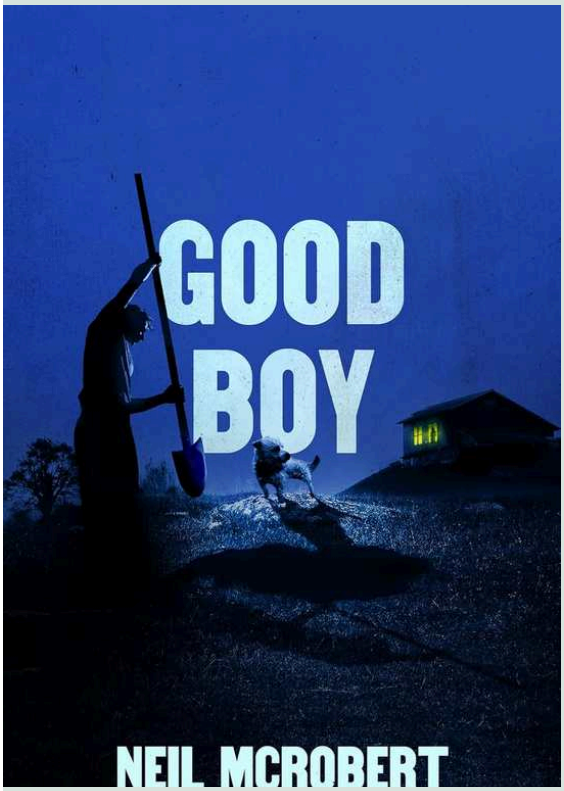
The Editor's Choice

Everything you read in our magazine is the choice of our guest editor.
Guest editors are members of the Creative Commune - they curate its content.
Choices reflect our mission - to promote and empower British and Irish authors.

www.philparker-fantasywriter.com/creativecommune

Read it, Rate it, Love it

What are people reading?



Horror reviewer extraordinaire George Dunn tackles a British indie press offering that excitingly sees the author debut of Neil McRobert (of horror podcast Talking Scared fame)

The horror genre is full of good dogs, but none good-er than the titular "Good Boy," in Neil McRobert's much-anticipated debut and the 5th instalment in Wild Hunt Books' "The Northern Weird Project." A cosmic, coming-of-age story that I chuckled, smiled and sobbed my way through, Good Boy is chock full of salt of the Earth Northern humour whilst stressing the importance of leaving our respective small towns, at risk of being left behind. Most prominently it highlights that there is no greater bond than that between man and his best friend.

Margie lives in the small town of Symester, currently plagued by the disappearance of little Andy Hoyle. Her home overlooking the patch of land where the boy was last seen, Margie is keeping vigil, and spies an old man burying something right where the boy vanished. A formidable woman, out she marches, only to find the man grief-stricken, with a different motive entirely. Concerned for his well-being, Margie invites Jim Howarth in, and, over a whiskey, the story he tells her… is one for the ages.

From its intriguing start to its emotional but perfect denouement, this is an excellent novella that will make cat people quickly reconsider their allegiances. Whilst there's a whole lot packed into Good Boy it more than anything appreciates the loyalty, the dedication and the selflessness of man's best friend. It is a love story full of hope and heart and tentacled kidnappers, and I cried happy and sad tears until I had no more tears left to give. I hope you're happy now, McRobert.

A cosmic, coming-of-age, creature feature that reads like butter and hurts as bad as any John Lewis advert, it is evident from the very first page that McRobert knows what makes a good horror story. It's a pretty amazing time to be a reader, up North nonetheless, knowing that Neil McRobert is just getting started. Good Boy hits shelves on October 9th.
Buy Good Boy here

You can find George's book reviews at fanfiaddict.com and his video horror content on Insta and Tiktok @georgesreads

In Conversation: Alethea Lyons

Meeting at the interface of technology and magic

Alethea Lyons is an SFF author from Manchester and writer of the Seer of York series for indie press Brigids Gate and Legend of the Bard from Northodox Press. She is also Greater Manchester Events Organiser for the British Fantasy society.

Hi Thea! Thanks for chatting. First, please give readers a brief overview of the ever-expanding, genre hopping, spec fic-writing world of the mysterious and enigmatic Alethea Lyons.

Hi, Ed! Thanks for the intro. Everything I create is in one universe, but different worlds. I write different types of fantasy from supernatural to cyberfae to romantasy, with horror, sci-fi, and crime elements in some, and a lot of folklore and found family in all of it.

The Seer of York

Let's dig into the ongoing Seer of York series a bit, which I've read myself and have been emphatically praiseworthy about its blend of found-family, sparky Buffy vibes with its spooky, ethereal, myth-based alternate-York worldbuilding. What's the central premise, and why should people read it?

Basically, in this version of Earth, magic is undoubtedly real. England has taken an isolationist stance and the Queen's Guard (incorrectly) believe they've driven out all magic. Born with witch-powers but fostered by demonhunters, my main character has to tread the line between humans and folk. Against a 'monster of the week' type backdrop, the books delve into how the demonisation of 'difference' harms all of us, and how diversity is a strength.

Legend of the Bard

Let's move onto your new book out next year, Legend of the Bard, a science-fantasy anti-AI novel with fae romance. Every word of that is intriguing, please explain.

It started as a joke that I know a folk song for any situation and me trying to write a book on that basis. There is a real-world tendency to view the arts as less important than the sciences. This book is set about fifty years in the future and is a warning of where sacrificing our creativity and empathy can lead. It's also showing science and art can work together like my human bard and elf hacker.

"I feel like we're losing our ability to believe in magic."

Many of your stories take place at the intersection of technology and magic, just like my attempts to get good at TikTok. Talk me through what this means and why it's interesting to you.

I feel like we are losing our ability to believe in magic. People may scoff at that, but it's not just the fairies at the bottom of the garden. We're losing that spirituality and connection. I like bringing wonder and magic into our modern or future world. Plus, it's really good fun to write!

Ed Crocker chats to Alethea Lyons

The Small Press Experience

Both your current and upcoming series are with indie presses… what is that experience like of being an indie author but with a small press? What are the highs and lows?

I have cried every time I signed a contract, out of sheer amazement that someone wanted my stories. It's great having someone to validate and support me. However, it can be difficult because for most small indies it's a second, or even third, job. Their time is limited and they have lots of authors to look after.

To self-publish or not to self-publish - that is the question!

Would you ever consider self-publishing as opposed to working with indie presses? Or alternately, would you like to be a hybrid author and traditionally published one day?

Self-publishing has been tempting because I like the idea of control and visibility, picking my own editor, insight into what marketing works, etc.... On the other hand, it means a solo slog. The two big factors for me are impostor syndrome and money. If anyone's interested, I did a newsletter on indie press vs self-pub not long ago.
I still dream of having a book in random bookstores that people who aren't writers will hear about. While a lot of publishing complaints hit across all paths, there are obvious distribution and marketing benefits to big presses.

What does it tell us that three of the six nominees for the Best Debut Novel category in the BFS awards this year are indie (all self published).

I love it (I nominated and voted for some). The standard of self-publishing is rising, especially with certain 'no-no's in traditional publishing, e.g. high word count, leaving some very talented writers without other options. The fact that these books have enough popularity to gain that many votes should send a message that great stories exist outside trad pub parameters.

What's your writing process like? Talk us through your average writing session, or concoct an interesting one to please the interviewer like I sometimes do.

Given my way, my writing process is Gothic and tea-filled – music, atmosphere, a, fine porcelain cup and teapot, candlelight. In reality, it's 'Mom' – child is sleeping, jump on computer, blurt out what I can. I do have a candle and occasional music still.

If you could be any character in a book, who would it be and why?

I think I'd fail as a character. I'd be responsible for the end of the world. However, I'd really love to be Irene from Genevieve Cogman's Invisible Library series. Being a librarian who gets to have adventures across a multi-verse sounds like the best job.

Alethea's main social media at the moment is Instagram (@AletheaRLyons).

Her socials, website, and buy links are here

Quick Tales

The Great Nothing

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 in a galaxy far, far away

The first time I see a god will also be my last. At any moment, my journey will end with a glimpse of heaven itself. The great nothing.

How did I get so lucky? It's not like there's anything special about my light. I was born of dust, the same as any other star. My nebula—a standard school of three thousand. I remember my first shining as if it were a mere lightyear away. Stars crowded around, emitting encouraging rays.

You can do it, they shone. Come on! You're so close! Their glow warmed the motes that drifted near, drawn by the gravity of my birth. And then, from within my core, light erupted, joining the rays of those who had come to welcome me into the sky.

Welcome, sister, they flashed. Welcome home.

They drifted alongside my new light as the nebula swam through the tide of space. It was the pulse of others that taught me, cultivating my shining until I too could speak through a simple flare.

"We hold the knowledge of the universe."

To shine is to be, they instructed. To shine is a gift, and you must cherish it, sister. For we were not always given the chance to light the way.

What do you mean? I asked. Have we not always been stars?

We come from nothing. And to nothing, we shall return.

From nothing? What kind of place is that?

It is everywhere and nowhere. The great nothing. You feel it, don't you? The pull of gravity? The greater mass?

You mean the darkness?

Yes. The void. The great nothing still stalks the sky, and must be fed to sate its hunger. This is our purpose. Our noble right as purveyors of the sky.

We crossed a barren zone—without planets or rocks. There was barely a microbe in the emptiness. And yet, this paled to the call of the great nothing. We all heard it. "Come. Heaven waits." With every lightyear, that voice grew louder.

One of us must go, the oldest star eventually declared. A pilgrimage must be made. We hold the knowledge of the universe, and so it falls to us to make an offering to the black hole.

But who? we shone together.

From all the stars, I was deemed to dazzle brightest! Was it the spectrum of my light? The zeal of my glow?

You must carry our knowledge with you, for are we not luminaries? the oldest flashed. Take it to the great nothing so that it may be satisfied. It will accept your light, and its hunger shall settle, for this is the way of all things.

You honour me, sisters, I sparkled.

Go. And may your rays brighten the darkest sky.

With that, their gravity propelled me from the nebula's swarm, and I was sent alone to swim the tide—to meet the call that resounded ever louder.

"Come. Heaven waits."

Since that time, I have journeyed so great a distance that I can't measure it, passing the countless treasures of the sky. Now, I wait alone, drifting towards that voice, towards the black hole and my chance to touch heaven.

I send my rays ahead, hoping to catch the first glimmer of it. But every time, the light returns.
"Come. Heaven waits." It beckons so loud, the vibrations threaten to overwhelm me.

I scatter my rays. And there, at the furthest stretch, I sense it. The pull. My light is sucked, my mass swallowed as if I weighed no more than a mote. I look ahead, and see it lurking. It is darkness like no other. A living, breathing creature of shadow that eclipses all. The tendrils of my rays belong to it now, and I abandon myself, descending into its open maw.

I am ready, I flare with a final burst. I am yours.
The voice cackles. I begin to dim.

There, beyond its core, I glimpse what awaits me—what awaits all things as it saps the heat from my core.

I pull against the greater mass, scattering beams in every direction, but I am powerless in its grip.

I must warn them. But all that answers is the same wicked cackle. It's already too late. Though it will take eternity to reach the centre, I know it has already happened.

How I yearn to emit one more starburst and tell the sky of what is to come. Of the plans the great nothing has made towards it. How consuming its mighty appetite has become. We should never have fed it—not even with knowledge. For all it has gained has been turned to naught, and not even the light of a thousand stars could amend its deathly course. All the while, I chill and dim as that voice begins to speak once more.

"Come," it breathes. "Heaven waits."

About the author

Find Frasier at frasierarmitage.com and for socials and other Frasier things see his linktree here

Quick Tales

It's too late

by NC Srimgeour

Scottish-based indie SFF author N C Scrimgeour, author of the dark fantasy Sea of Souls Saga and the space opera Waystations Trilogy, gives us a taste of the selkie myth that infuses the former in this original piece…

By the time he realises his mistake, it's already too late.

It doesn't stop him running. He rushes over the shells and shingle, not stopping to pull on his worn leather boots. The shore's sharp edges bite the soles of his feet until his skin is lacerated with dozens of stinging cuts, but the pain doesn't slow him.

In his hands, he clutches a pelt that doesn't belong to him, a pelt he's kept locked away behind iron and cedar. The months haven't dulled its lustrous sheen, the ripples of gold amongst the soft brown fur. It's beautiful, even under the dreich pall of rainclouds. Of course it's fucking beautiful—it's hers.

The cold morning air steals his breath, and he remembers it all: untangling her bloodied limbs from the nets, wiping clean her wounds, tasting salt on his lips as she presses her mouth to his for the first time, the tenth time, the hundredth time.

Selkie, she calls herself. Soulmate, he thinks.

But every time she returns to the waves, it's he who goes under. The fear of her leaving fills his lungs with brackish salt water.

There are only so many times a man can let himself drown.

He takes it from her when she is sleeping, when her limbs are cold and bare and entwined with his. Safe. Unsuspecting. He holds her soulskin in his hands as if it is her beating heart, and he claims it as his own.

She will understand, he tells himself. The lie tastes of salt, and when he swallows it, he knows there is no going back.

When she realises what he has done, she doesn't believe it. Oh, she's heard the tales. Her kin have warned her of the dangers of loving a human, but she never thought it would happen to her. He is not like the others. He is not cruel.

She pleads with him. She promises never to leave his sight. She weeps, she screams, she bruises him with fists and feet. None of it is enough.

Days stretch into weeks, and he begins to see the change in her. Scars of salt trail across her skin, biting into her flesh with merciless teeth. A shadow darkens her sea-green gaze, until there is little left of the woman he remembers, the woman he loves.

One morning, he wakes in an empty bed, and he knows.

His fingers fumble around the key as he unlocks the chest and pulls the soft folds into his arms. The tang of salt fills his nostrils and brings tears to his eyes. It's still damp. The sea lingers in the fur, yearning to be returned to whence it came.

But she is nowhere to be found.

His hands tighten around the pelt, and he runs. The bitter wind nips at his naked body as he stumbles over the rocks. The clouds knit across the horizon like a shroud. Already, his skin is prickled with gooseflesh. His fingers are numb and white. The rain drizzles over his shivering skin, but he holds only the shoreline in mind.

That's when he sees her.

"*Selkie*, she calls herself. *Soulmate*, he thinks."

She's waist-deep in the water, grey waves lapping at her lower back. Glistening salt scars crawl down her spine, marring her flesh raw and pink. Her arms spread wide, welcoming the swell.

"Wait!" he cries, but the wind swallows his words.

As he splashes into the shallows, the salt spreads across her back, leaving her glistening in the pale grey light. There is a fleeting moment when he thinks he might have made it; she's turning, she sees him and—

When he reaches for her, she disappears at his fingertips, scattering into spray as the waves wash around her and swallow her home.

He's too late.

The waves sigh at his feet, their hush of foam whispering a pity he doesn't deserve. The pelt in his arms is already turning dull and brittle. Part of him wants to surrender it, to place it back where it belongs, but even now, he can't quite bring himself to let her go.

Instead, he turns back to the shore, and readies the hungry jaws of his nets for a new catch.

Find the Author

Find N C Scrimgeour at ncscrimgeour.com and for socials and other things see her linktree here

Proudly Indie Seán O'Boyle

Fantasy comedy indie author Seán O'Boyle, who very helpfully introduces himself below, gives us an insight into the early stages of being an indie author.

Hello readers, my name is Seán O'Boyle! I'm the author of two books; The Ballad of Sprikit The Bard (And Company) and Checks, Balances and Proper Procedure in Monster Hunting.

If you like light-hearted, humorous fantasy with a focus on characters, then these are the books for you!

Both books have been published in the last two years, so I'm certainly still quite new to the self-publishing experience. I have to say it's been one of the most fulfilling of my life. When I started putting virtual pen to virtual paper on a Microsoft Word in early 2022, I never thought in my wildest dreams that I'd have one book out in the world, let alone two!

That's not to say there haven't been some bumps in the road along the way. The easiest part of the process for me was writing the first draft, which may make those of you currently in the mid-draft slump want to throttle me. The real hard work is getting feedback from beta readers, re-drafting based on suggestions (including killing many darlings), copy-editing, proofreading, getting a cover and then eventually the cumbersome process of turning a Word doc into a book itself.

All these things come with a cost, so if you are considering this route please set a budget. Some people pay up to £10,000 to get their book self-published. Others spend £1,000. Only pay what you can afford. Putting yourself into debt over this is unnecessary stress. You can limit what you spend by doing much of it yourself. You can do beta-read swaps, design covers on Canva, and format a book for publication through Word. At an absolute minimum, I'd recommend spending on copy-editing and proofreading. Readers won't put up with shoddy spelling, or poor syntax, no matter what masterpiece you've written.

Now that I've bombarded you with the boring practical stuff, I'll bookend this column with the positives of self-publishing. There is no greater joy for an author than finally holding that book in your hands after you have soldiered on through it all. Then when people start to actually read your book and begin posting reviews online—hoo boy! Then naturally comes the question of "When's the next one out?". Then you know you have a readership.

The self-publishing community is an incredibly welcome one, and you'll make many friends through the various social channels. I've been very fortunate in joining an indie author collective called The Secret Scribes. It's a great safe haven to troubleshoot writing problems, air our woes or just have a chat. Finding authors who will champion you and your book is worth its weight in gold.

Well that's all from me. I can feel Ed's editorial glare as I near the wordcount limit. [Ed: I'm always watching]. If you are a self-publishing novice and want more advice, please find me on Twitter as **@OBoyleWrites** or Instagram as @seanoboyleauthor. You can also email me at **seanoboyle1993@gmail.com**. If you are interested in reading my books, you can find them on Amazon in e-book and paperback form.

MasterClass RA Sandpiper

Book marketing for Indie Authors

This masterclass offers indie authors insights on navigating the notorious marketing minefield so that it works for them.

Dark fantasy and romantasy author R A Sandpiper, published her acclaimed Amefyre trilogy in one year. Her new dark romantasy duology The Bride of Eavenfold begins with To Touch a Silent Fury which was released last month.

Why is everyone so pessimistic about marketing?

On every reddit thread with the question of "What's the worst part about being an author?", 9/10 the top voted answer will be "Marketing".

Most writers (that I know, anyway) are introverted and have crippling imposter syndrome. Most become authors because we enjoy the act of writing, and tolerate the act of editing. Sometimes you'll find a weirdo (cough, me) who prefers the editing, but you will very rarely find an author who suffers through writing and editing an entire book, or series, because they are really passionate about marketing. Honestly, given how hard it is to sell a book, I am not at all surprised by this. Therefore, most of us find our way to the question of "how do I market my books?" accidentally. We get here because we've realised if we want an audience, we need people to know that our books exist.

Choose Your Approach & Set Goals Accordingly

Are you trying to make this your full-time job? Will you commit time to your marketing or, is your aim to get more eyes on something, but overall you're content for it to stay as a hobby?

Decide this, and then design your goals.

When I say goals, I'm not saying sales goals, because honestly, you cannot predict or control that. I mean content goals.

Goals for 'Full Time' Approach:

- Share 25 items of content this month (an Instagram story counts, in my books)
- Write 1–2 newsletters
- Take part in one Bookfunnel swap
- Attend a webinar/watch a video on how to use Facebook ads
- Write at least 25,000 new words, or edit at least 50,000 existing words

All your goals should be something which ideally only relies on you, but can move the needle forward for your social media following, your next book (e.g. your next product to sell), or your knowledge.

If you're more of a hobbyist, this might look like:

- Share 5–10 items of content this month
- Write 15,000 words or make progress on book edits

Neither guarantees you will reach your audience but the more you do, the more likely that becomes.

Shift your Mindset

Do these affirmations with me:

"You aren't bothering people by talking about your book."

"You aren't an egotistical maniac for recommending it to others."

"Talking about your own work in a positive light doesn't make you a bad person."

You don't have to tell everyone your book is the best thing since sliced bread or the next [enter blockbuster film/book franchise here].

This isn't about having to have a massive ego either. All you are doing is trying to tell an audience that your book exists.

I also hate to declare my books are any good, so I don't say they are. Instead, I focus on the plot, and what makes my characters unique. I focus on the tropes, or how I've subverted them.

Start seeing your books as products you are trying to raise awareness for, rather than an extension of your soul, and it does make it a lot easier.

STRATEGIES

You can't avoid social media

The latest figures from datareportal.com indicate that

- 95.7 percent of the world's internet users regardless of age now use social media each month
- the typical social media user actively uses or visits an average of 6.84 different social platforms each month
- spends an average of 18 hours and 46 minutes using social media each week.

This is your easiest and cheapest way of getting people to see your book. Use it.

But Don't Attempt to Catch 'em All

Choose two social media spaces to focus on based on what you write and the target demographic. I use TikTok and Instagram primarily, as I write romantic fantasy aimed at 21-35 year olds.

A friend of mine writes thrillers based on the Templar Knights, and he mostly uses Facebook, which works great for him as his audience leans older (40+).

(X has a decent contingent of authors, so that can be good to make connections and friends with other people in your genre, though I would say it has fewer readers.)

"95.7% of the world's internet users visit social media sites each month."

Consider Putting Your Face Out There

People like to connect to a real person, and feel like they know the author. A picture on your profile or a video of yourself talking about your books goes a long way to starting a connection between you and the reader.

You can start small. Try posting a meticulously crafted selfie holding up your book on social media. Then, if you feel comfortable, consider filming a short talking head video and posting this to either Reels or TikTok.

You might be surprised at the results.

Paid Marketing Strategies

Ads. Don't do it! Please, don't waste your money on any paid ads, be that on social media, via Amazon's ads or on Facebook/Meta ads.

UNLESS you have 3+ books in a series out. Only then will I permit you to spend money on (probably Meta) ads to promote the first book.

These notoriously lose money, so unless you have the readthrough of the other books to recoup your loss, ideally a 4–5 book series or more (but 3 minimum), then I would not recommend using them.

There are a number of individuals who run free classes to teach you the basics of how to set up these ads. You can pick up good advice for free!

CONTENT IDEAS FOR INSTAGRAM AND TIKTOK

- **Carousels: Quotes from the book or "Would you read a book where…"**

HOW TO: Go to an app like Pixels, or Dupe, and search for images for backgrounds that fit the aesthetic of your book. You can download these for free. Then pop these into TikTok/Reels and impose text on top of them giving a hook of your book spread out across the images (maximum of 10 words per slide works best!).

- **Video of you reacting to a line in a book, write out the quote on screen**

HOW TO: Take a video of yourself reading your own book and reacting. Add an appropriate sound and the quote you are reacting to. For example: Maybe the text would read: 'When their plan is about to succeed, but then someone says… "You didn't think it would be that easy, did you?"'

- **When he's a [xyz] and [insert barrier] but then…**

HOW TO: This works great if you have artwork of your characters, because you can use this to show immediately the conflict the characters are facing and get readers wanting to know how it will resolve.

- **Just hold up your book and give a 30 second pitch of your book to camera.**

HOW TO: This one is easy. Film yourself, make a point about how it'll only be a 30 second pitch at the start, and go! If you can work in a 'visual hook' into the first few seconds to grab people, that can help (could be sipping a drink, showing an item, applying lip gloss or moving into shot right at the start). Keep it SNAPPY and cut out the ums and uhs.

PRICE TIPS

- If you're advertising a free book, you will often see a LOT of downloads, I'm talking thousands. Some readers just download anything BECAUSE it's free. If the book is 99p the chance of people reading and reviewing your book, is far higher
- Use your first book in the series as a hook, priced at 99p - then subsequent books can be priced higher. If people enjoyed it, they may want to continue the series
- Consider promo 'stacking' - st up multiple promos on the same day/slot

PROMO VIDEOS

Try promotion videos instead of a still image, the optimum time is around 10-15 seconds.

- Try holding your book so the audience only sees the pages for 5 seconds, then turn it and show the cover for 5 seconds.
- Overlay the video with text that explain the tropes, plot hooks or reviews then 'reveal' the cover
- Test with various different tag lines: Facebook lets you put in 5 pieces of copy, and then it will select the one they think will perform the best. You can look into the analytics and see which one they are showing and close off the ads which aren't performing.
- Set the aim to 'sales', and ensure the page you are directing people to is a direct purchase page, e.g. a 'mybookto' link straight to the product page on Amazon. If someone has to click three times to get to a place they can buy, you will lose customers.

You can catch up with R A Sandpiper at www.rasandpiperbooks.com and at her linktree here

Author Notes Catherine McCarthy

The acclaimed Welsh dark fiction author Catherine McCarthy offers some invaluable tips for self-editing.
Her work includes novellas in the horror genre: Mosiac, A Moonlit Path of Madness and The House at the End of Lacelean Street.
She's also written the dark fantasy novel Death of a Clown. She has been published with indie presses Nosetouch Press, Sobelo Books and Dark Matter Ink. Her short fiction appears in Gamut Magazine, Dark Matter Magazine and Haven Spec Magazine.

At the beginning of my writing journey I self-published, therefore my path has been paved with newbie errors and lessons well learned. Since those early days I have worked with a variety of publishers and editors, and in doing so I've learned a lot. I'm happy to share my tips with those who are new to writing and hope you find them useful.

I want to begin by stating that while the ability to self-edit is vital it does not in any way undermine the benefits of hiring a good editor or proof-reader. Having said that, there is a lot you can and should do yourself before handing your work over to a professional. Self-editing skills are a vital part of publishing. No reader should pay for something slapdash. Not only is it unfair, but you run the risk of gaining a reputation for putting out poor quality work, and that's the last thing you want.

We all have our own methods when it comes to writing and editing. Some people write several drafts, and that's fine. Personally, I only ever write one draft, but I work on improving that draft over and over again before handing it to someone else.

Now for my personal tips:

1. Be prepared to do a minimum of four or five rounds of editing and revision. During each round, focus on something specific, e.g. line editing, weak sentences, grammar and punctuation, repetition etc.

Be mindful of those words you tend to overuse!

Be prepared for a minimum of 4 - 5 rounds of editing and revision.

Be aware of how qualifiers can lead to the adoption of the passive voice

Change your normal font to see the manuscript afresh, it may highlight easily missed errors

Help your brain to see things differently - review on a different device!

2. Be mindful of words you tend to overuse (often referred to as filter words). Collate a list, then during one of your editing rounds use the 'find and replace' tool and highlight those words in different colours. Delete those you don't need and change those you repeat too often. Repetition and overuse of filter words such as saw, could, wondered, that, then etc. can slow the pace of your story and substantially weaken it.

3. Be aware of adverbs. I'm not in the camp of a total ban, but if you use them make sure they earn their place. The same goes for qualifiers (for example: that, very, so etc.). Overuse of such words can result in passive voice. There are lots of great online articles that deal with passive voice. Well worth a read!

4. Our eyes get used to seeing text in one particular format, so if you're using Times New Roman and font size 12, for example, change the whole manuscript to a different font and font size, then read it again. Alternatively, change the colour of the font. It's a visual trick for the brain.

5. If you always edit on the same device, e.g. your laptop, then for one round of editing use a different device. It's all about encouraging the brain to stray from its comfort zone. Better still, if you can afford the ink, print it out.

6. Once you're happy, email yourself a copy and do a final run through on Google Docs.

7. Last but not least... READ YOUR MANUSCRIPT ALOUD!
Yes, the whole thing, and preferably twice, once to yourself and once to an audience. It's vital you do so with expression. Imagine you've been invited to read your story to a live audience.
Have a notepad and pen or phone memo at hand and note all the changes you want to make, then, while they're still fresh in your mind, go back and do those edits. Please, I urge you, do NOT be tempted to skip this stage, and do NOT be tempted to use a voice app in place of your own.

You can find Catherine on her substack and on her X account

Writer's Craft

Self-publishing: the statistics

The Alliance of Independent Authors conducted detailed research in 2024 into self-publishing trends. The results make for exciting reading for all of us indie authors.

Phil Parker takes us through some of the findings.

- Average incomes of self-published authors are rising. There was a 53% increase from 2022. The average that year for indie authors was US$12,749. In 2024 the average for authors with third-party publishers was US$8,600.
- Younger authors are making self-publishing their first choice: 'Less than half of authors under 45 years old would prefer to have their next book traditionally published.' (Source: Author's Guild, 2023)

"Self-published authors make up over 50% of Kindle's Top 400 Books for 2023" (Source: K-Lytics, 2024)

- More than 2,000 self-published authors have surpassed $100,000 in royalties. (Source: Amazon, 2022)
- Gen Z maintains strong and regular reading habits with nearly 40% reading daily or a few days each week, and 55% still reading once a week or more. 79% say they are looking for better diversity in the stories they read. 'More than four out of five (83%) Gen Z readers (aged 18 - 25) (are) turning to online sources like webnovels, e-books, and webcomics for diverse stories.' (Source: Wattpad, 2023)
- According to Written Word Media, success for an indie author meant generating a minimum of EIGHT books. These authors spent an average of 15 hours per week writing. 27% sold their books from their own websites, the rest from **BookFunnel** (40%), **Shopify** (25%), **PayHip** and **WooCommerce** (20%).

"According to Bookstats self-published authors captured 51% of overall e-book sales, compared to 31% in 2021"

- Kingston University surveyed 800 self-published authors, they were asked if they would recommend the experience to other writers. 86% said they would, 14% said maybe and under 1% said no. 58% said they liked retaining control over their material, 50% wanted higher royalties and 42% had chosen self-publishing after hearing good things about it
- Kindlepreneur surveyed 876 authors who were selling direct and found that 40% had only been doing so for under a year. 1-2 years = 22%, 3-4 years = 14% and over 5 years = 22%. Two factors emerged from this survey: 44% had written 10+ books (and therefore had a body of work that readers could engage in) and the successful author had an email reader list of 15,000+ which generated over $6,000 in revenue

What is obvious from this research?

- It takes time and plenty of content to get "established", 10 novels is a good benchmark
- The best markets, according to Draft2Digital, are USA (58%), Canada (9%), Australia (7%), Germany (6%) and Great Britain (5%)
- The indie author must be an entrepreneur. No surprise there but mastering marketing, having a business mind when it comes to sales, all feature in the role. You're not just an author.

What's Coming Up?

Spotlight Indie's Big Weekend: 3 - 5 October

Join Spotlight, the platform that celebrates the joy and impact of indie writing, art and creativity and organises events that help indie creators connect with their audiences.
Head to spotlightindie.co.uk and their socials - @spotlightindie - for details.

Friday 3rd October
Predicting the Future panel at 1pm - techniques for crafting future-set stories
War, Wounds and Battle Scenes at 3pm - authors chat about the challenges and the skills
Realm Raiders at 6pm - authors from the Creative Commune talk about their serialised saga
No Such Thing as a Stupid Question at 7pm - live chat with a panel of authors
Graham Austin King Interview at 8.30- author of the Riven Wyrde Saga chats about his work
Phil Parker: Live Launch Party at 9pm- the book launch of a new book is always exciting
Saturday 4th October
The Fusion of Fiction and History at 3pm - what role does history play in shaping fiction?
Assembling the A Team at 7pm - what professionals does an indie author need around them?
Building a Platform at 9pm - assembling people who offer support and advice for indies
Sunday 5th October
The Legacy of Dragons at 1pm - why do dragons retain their importance in fantasy tales?
Only Rich People Write Books, Right? at 3pm - exploring self-publishing costs & strategies
Four Beardsmen of Spotlight Indie at 7pm - finding your unique voice in the indie community

There are lots of other events too. Check out spotlightindie.co.uk for details.

BristolCon: 25 -26 October

The event which celebrates all things Science Fiction & Fantasy - at the Doubletree hotel, Bristol. Guests of Honour are John Higgins, Ben Jeapes and JE Hannaford.
More details found here: https://www.bristolcon.org/

FantasyCon: 30 October - 2 November

Fantasycon, the annual convention of the British Fantasy Society, is joining forces with the World Fantasy Convention in Brighton. Why is this interesting for indies? Well apart from all the indie authors who appear annually at the convention who will be in force again, this year the British Fantasy Awards are particularly interesting for indies as three of the six shortlisted nominees for Best Debut Novel are self-published authors, an omen among many others of the changing times in which we live.

Soap Box With Ed Crocker

Guest editor Ed Crocker puts on his columnist hat and takes a no-nonsense look at one of the big issues authors face: to go trad or to go indie?

Trad versus indie. Traditional publishing or self-publishing. Which is a better route? It's the argument that spins round social media like a chaotic washing machine, sometimes helpful, offering a useful load of information, sometimes divisive and inaccurate, splurging out its contents in heaps of desultory underwear. Sorry, that analogy went wrong somewhere.

The unhelpful version is this: You should try trad first. That way lies prestige, money, and attention. Or no, you should go indie. Trad books are unoriginal, you'll never get a deal, and even if you do you'll have no freedom.

The real answer is that both are viable paths more-suited to some and less-suited to others.

For those with limited budgets, trad can be better. Even if you make shrewd savings, if you want a decent shot at an indie career, you need to invest in a good cover, editing, marketing. That's not me, a trad author, saying that. That's all the indie authors who have explained the process transparently on their blogs and SM platforms saying that. I couldn't have gone indie, I'm only just coming out of my completely broke era, the less well-known Taylor Swift era. Also, trad currently offers the best route to bookshop distribution, and it frees the author from work some people (like my unskilled self) aren't suited to (business, formatting, design, marketing).

But equally, to get into trad requires years of patience in a lottery-style system. It took me a decade to get my first published. And what you want to write might not be welcomed in trad, which favours overstimulating genre bubbles. Epic fantasy has died a death, for example. The most original books are often found in indie, not trad. Even if you make it, the unfair marketing approach can mean that a midlist author may be starved of their publisher's attention, looking jealously on smaller presses with more author care. And it still has a lacklustre (depending on the ethnicity, terrible) record for BIPOC authors. Plus, indie gives the freedom to do what you want, perfectly suited to many creative's temperaments.

Don't miss our next issue with guest editor: **Frasier Armitage**

So: let's not punish those who made the trad path. But equally, let's kick those clinging to the snobbery against indie into the history bin, along with the "asbestos might not be that bad" crowd. After all, soon this argument will be moot—the age of hybrid publishing is imminent, the old divides falling like alcoholic dominoes.

And let's remember it's only the loud minority making this a binary argument. Most of the indie and trad authors I know like their nuance; it's hard to write a good book without it.
To go trad or indie is a big choice. Let's not make it a divisive one.

Signing off,

Ed Crocker

Issue 01
October 2025

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