The Just Write Life

Three Benefits of Writing and Releasing Short Fiction

By Erica Richardson

Some writers pen long sweeping epics, while others write short and to-the-point stories. Since publishing my first book in September 2020, I've discovered I love to write short pieces.

My first publication was a middle-grade book called Luna's Rescue. The entire book ended up at about fifteen thousand words. Since then, I've published five more books of similar length.

Here are three reasons I've come to love publishing short fiction.

Inside This Issue

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Writing and publishing a short work of fiction builds confidence.

Writing a book is intimidating, but many of us would probably agree that publishing is even more intimidating. Publishing Luna's Rescue was a great learning experience for me. Because it wasn't incredibly long, the revising and editing processes felt manageable. I gained momentum and kept it. Being able to publish a piece early in my writing career built my confidence by leaps and bounds. Soon my book was in the hands of my intended audience (children ages seven to twelve). The book received an overwhelmingly positive response. I credit this to the fact that I chose to do something simple and write for a young audience for my first publication. Having children talk to me about my characters and story lit a spark inside of me, and I wanted more of that experience. Now that I've been through the complete publishing process, I know how to format my books, design my covers, and go through the revision, editing, and beta reading processes. The whole publishing ordeal is no longer intimidating. Each time I write a new book, the formatting goes more smoothly, and the whole process is faster.
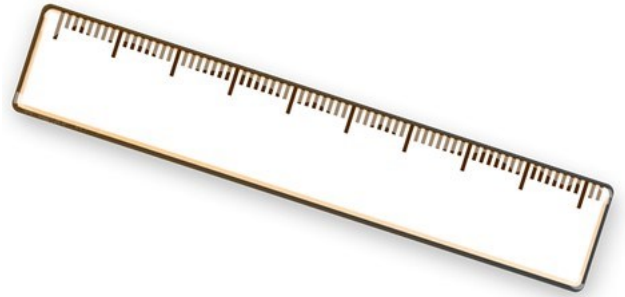
Short fiction allows readers to try out your writing with less risk.

When the first readers of Luna's Rescue received their published copies, most of them sat down and read the entire book in one sitting. It was fast-paced, exciting, and short. Because the book was brief, there was a much smaller chance of the readers starting the book, losing interest, and forgetting to finish it and leave a review.

Readers tend to feel open to reading my books when they see how short they are. Buying a fifteen thousand-word book for $7.99 from an author you've never heard of is less risky than paying $19.99 for a one hundred thousand-word book from an author you've never heard of. Once people experience your writing in a non-threatening, convenient way, you can get them hooked! Then they'll be ready to read your one hundred thousand-word novel. Once they've experienced and enjoyed your writing, they'll often read whatever you offer them next.

Short fiction can be a nice break between longer works.

I often hit a wall while writing long books. This is natural and normal, but it helps when I have a smaller project to jump to. Having multiple shorter projects helps get my juices flowing, and I find myself coming back to the larger projects with renewed creativity.

Above all, I think it's most important to just keep writing and to write what you enjoy. If you're starting to feel like you're slogging through your large piece, try taking a break and working on something small. It can be surprisingly refreshing to start or finish a shorter project. ✦

"A short story is a love affair, a novel is a marriage. A short story is a photograph; a novel is a film." —Lorrie Moore

New Members

We would like to welcome the following new members to Just Write:

- Megan Condie

- Joseph Foster

- Melanie Nielsen

- Amanda Hill

- Josef Miyasato

- Amanda Byrd

Upcoming Events

The Quills Conference

Dates: August 11-14, 2022

Location: SLC Marriott University Park and Online

Those attending in person are required to show proof of Covid-19 vaccination prior to picking up their badges. Masking will follow the hotel's policy.

Member Spotlight: Nancy Roe

If you ask Nancy what she does for a living, she'll tell you she kills people. Ah, the humor of a mystery writer.

Nancy Roe is an Award-Winning Author and Professional Formatter. She has self-published eight books and is working on ideas for her next mystery.

When Nancy Roe was twelve, she wrote an autobiography for a sixth grade English assignment. In the last chapter, Nancy wrote that she wanted to be an author. Her dreams came true when she turned 50, and she hasn't stopped writing.

After living in Memphis, Tennessee for twenty-eight years, Nancy and her husband moved to Heber City, Utah in July 2020. They had originally planned to build a home in Midway, but when the pandemic hit, they changed plans and found their forever home in Heber.

In August 2021, the League of Utah Writers recognized Nancy, receiving the Gold Quill Award for her book, The Accident, and First Place for the first chapter of her novel, Butterfly Premonitions (this book was published in May 2022).

Nancy served as a panelist at the Killer Nashville International Writer's Conference, speaking on the subjects of self-publishing, minor characters, and dialogue. She is a member of Sisters in Crime, Guppy Chapter, The League of Utah Writers, Just Write Chapter, Writer's Circle, and Newsletter Chair of the Newcomers Club of the Greater Park City Area. She is also a contributing writer on Suite T and has written stories for several anthologies.

Nancy has a variety of interests including organizing, reading, cooking, scrapbooking, and crafting. Her favorite colors are red, pink, and turquoise. Favorite foods are sushi, pizza, and pasta. The Wizard of Oz, My Blue Heaven, and Blast From the Past are her favorite movies. She's always ready to play a game of Scrabble, bridge, or Five Crowns. ✦
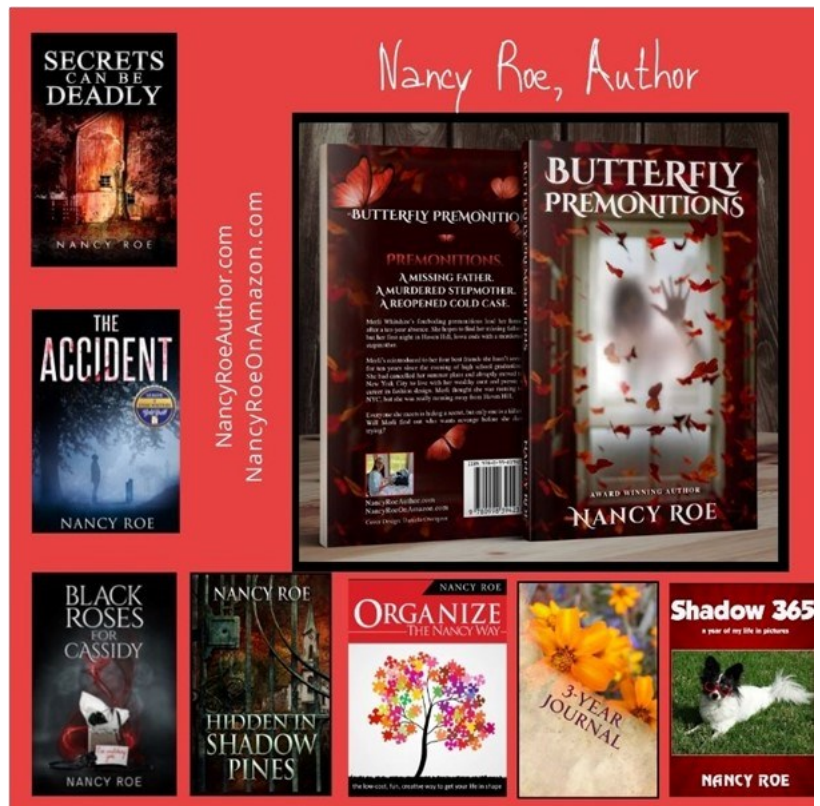
Website Review of Short-Story.Me

By Ann Gordon

Short-Story.me is an online venue for publishing and/or reading short stories and poetry. Without logging in you can access the site, pick a category, and read the short stories. In general, stories are limited to 2000 words apiece except for Flash, which for them is 850 words or less.

Authors are allowed to write a 100-word writing bio, where they can include their website or blog URL if they like. Some do this and some don't.

Readers can pick from numerous categories plus Featured Stories and Poetry. Dates the stories have been posted range from 2009 to 2022, with varying numbers of stories in each category. Back when I checked the site, these were the genre stats:

Fantasy: 156 stories

Crime: 134 stories

Mystery: 118 stories

Sci-Fi: 64 stories

The fantasy story titled "Water Witch" has a ton of reads – probably because that's a good title.

I don't know for certain if authors retain the rights to their stories. I read the Submission Guidelines, About and Terms & Conditions with no direct answer to that question. So I wrote my question about ownership in the Contact Us box and clicked Send. I asked that a copy of my question be emailed to me but I didn't receive one.

Even if you don't submit a story, this is a good place to read them for free. One story I read would not have been accepted for publication anywhere else because the author couldn't maintain a consistent verb tense. It even changed within sentences. But the other stories I read ranged from pretty good to quite good.

So, if you have an interest in short stories, give it a try . . . Remember what Stephen King said (paraphrased): *You have to read to write.* ✦

Who's Penned What

A List of Published Works and Contest Winners

BUTTERFLY PREMONITIONS

Nancy Roe

Genre: Mystery/Thriller

Premonitions. A missing father. A murdered stepmother.
A reopened cold case.

Buy it on Amazon.
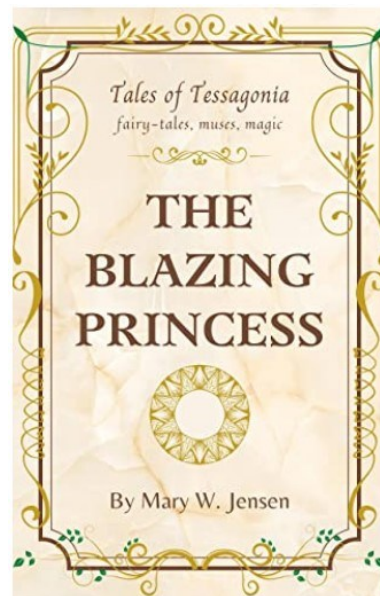

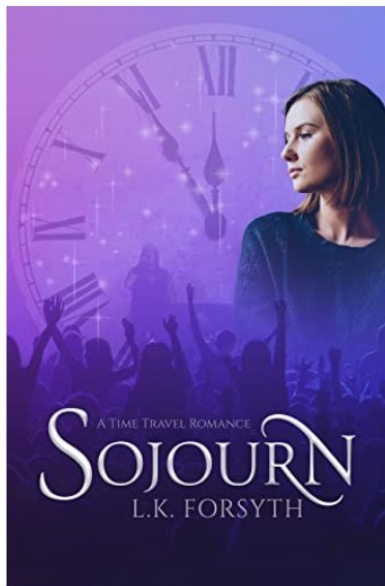## THE BLAZING PRINCESS

Mary W. Jensen

Genre: Fairy Tale

When the muses bicker about whose gift is greatest, it's
the mortals who suffer.

Buy it on Amazon.

Who's Penned What

(continued)

SOJOURN: A TIME TRAVEL ROMANCE

Lisa Forsyth (writing as L.K. Forsyth)

Genre: Romance

Two broken hearts. A one-way ticket to 1986. Sometimes the most profound healing comes from revisiting the past.

Buy it on Amazon.

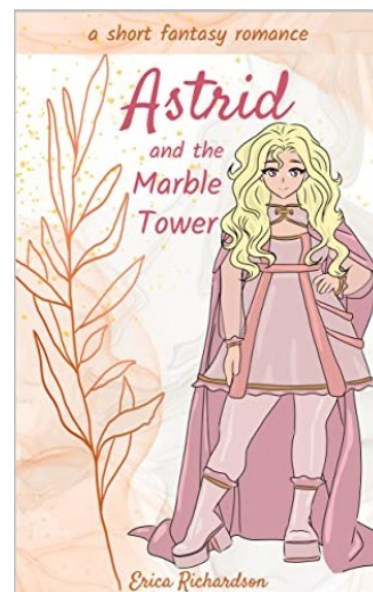- -

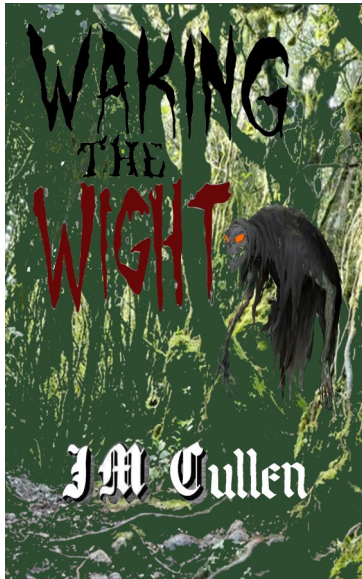## Astrid and the Marble Tower

Erica Richardson

Genre: YA Fantasy

A princess with an unusual power. A young man to whom she owes her life. A bloodthirsty ruler. A chance for true love.

Buy it on Amazon.

Who's Penned What

(continued)

Waking the Wight (Audiobook)

John Cullen (writing as J.M. Cullen)

Genre: Sci-Fi

Ghost story novelist Eskil Godek, the legendary Voice from the Dark, is haunted by a Wight unleashed from his own pen. He must find his "other half" to prevent the Merciless One from tormenting his soul forever.

Listen on Audible.

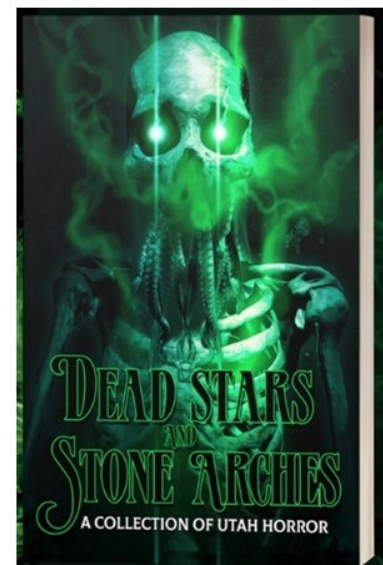- -

Dead Stars and Stone Arches: A Collection of Utah Horror

John Cullen (writing as J.M. Cullen)

Genre: Sci-fi/Horror

An anthology of cosmic horror stories and poems set in Utah. John is a contributing author.

Back the Kickstarter.

Who's Penned What

(continued)

The Distracted Lifeguard/An Imperative Duty

David Armstrong

Genre: Inspirational

As a guest contributor to a blog called "The Weekly Parable," David has written a story that illustrates a principle, along with a separate article interpreting that principle.

Read "The Distracted Lifeguard"

Read "An Imperative Duty"

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Getting the Most Out of Microsoft Editor

By Lisa Forsyth

Since upgrading from Word 2010 a few years ago, I've utilized Microsoft's built-in editor to catch many of my writing mistakes. While the AI software isn't perfect, its benefits far outweigh turning it off completely. For a long time, I'd relied solely on spellcheck and those red squiggly underlines to tell me if I'd made a mistake. That was helpful. But Microsoft Editor does so much more than check for spelling errors.

To get the most out of Editor, you'll need to customize your Editor experience. Go to File > Options, then click on the Proofing tab. Here you'll find a plethora of check boxes and options to turn off and on. For example, you can tell Editor to flag frequently confused words and show readability statistics. You can also fine-tune the grammar section to suit your project and needs. If you're writing nonfiction and would prefer to keep unintended cliches and slang out of your documents, you can have Editor highlight those problematic words and phrases. Just click on the Settings button next to Writing Style: Grammar & Refinements. I recommend scrolling through the many options this menu gives. By familiarizing yourself with all Editor can do and customizing it to your preferences, you can increase your chances of penning that error-free manuscript while decreasing your frustrations if there are items you don't want Editor to look for. ✦
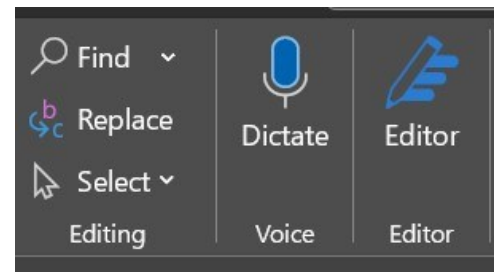
There's No Such Thing as a Pantser, Part 1

By Josie Hulme

"I don't use an outline. I'm a pantser." I've heard people say it with pride, as though somehow an outline stifles creativity and 'real writers' are above them. I say hooey. Everyone uses an outline—even the people who write by the seat of their pants. The only difference is how detailed that outline is. If you sit down with an idea of where you want to start and a vague sketch of your character, that's an outline. Not a very detailed one, I grant you, but an outline, nonetheless.

I'm a huge fan of outlines. Not only do I think that they don't stifle creativity, I think they enhance it. I'm also a huge fan of keeping a detailed spreadsheet of characters and places. And a timeline. Those of you cringing at the 'rigidity' of such things perhaps aren't using them correctly, or perhaps haven't even tried them. The first novel I wrote to the end (edited and polished and ready to market) had seven drafts. I kid you not. It was a good book, but it took me years to write and rewrite and what felt like a million read-throughs to get all the details consistent. Does this describe your own work? Does your protagonist start out blond and blue-eyed and end up with dark hair, a scar through their eyebrow, and melted-chocolate eyes? That's pretty typical. Most of us write in our spare time because we love it. I don't know about you, but my spare time is more 'spare' than I wish, and, by the end of a book, I have often forgotten the names and descriptions I started with!

Outlines and spreadsheets to the rescue!!

I'd been using an outline for a while, but a few years ago, while preparing for NaNoWriMo, I paired it with a spreadsheet and was blown away with how quickly my book pulled together and how easy it was to write 2,000+ words a day. Now, this does take some front-end work. Maybe even a lot. But it's like teaching your kids how to do the dishes: it's a huge pain and takes twice as long as if you just did it yourself. But it pays off in spades later, when your older kids get them done without a hassle and without any work from you. (Yay! More time for writing!!)

So how does it work?

The first thing I do is start what I call a 'note catcher'. I do this with all the story ideas that float around my brain and well in advance of actually writing anything. I usually have two or three note catchers for different projects going on while I write whatever I'm currently working on. This is a place for me to jot down ideas, bits of conversation, plot twists, descriptions, funny lines I think of, etc and keep it all in one place. While not an actual outline, it is the start of my next story.

Now we move on to outlines. There are lots of different programs out there that offer to help you plot your book. I've used some, but I'll admit that my favorite is good old Microsoft Word. I turn on the outline feature and start to create. Now here's something that people who feel that outlines are

too rigid might not know: you can erase stuff, even in an outline. That's the beauty of modern technology. The delete key is one of the most used buttons on my keyboard! And I refuse to believe that you can't be creative while writing an outline. I have descriptions, conversations, jokes, twists, emotions, tears, laughter… I can rearrange chapters, discover the best place for backstory and exposition, find the true start to my book, realize that I need another character or that this one is superfluous, and all while having a bird's eye view of my plot and without having put my heart and soul and time into something that ultimately doesn't work for the story anyway.

Timelines are critical. Before I was using them, I could start a book where my protagonist was picking spring flowers in one chapter and bundled up against the winter rains two chapters later. Even if the time of year isn't critical to your story, I still encourage you to choose an actual date and keep track of the big events on a timeline. You'll usually use this information in your setting as you describe the scene your character is in. I usually use Excel for this, although, when I wrote my last high school novel, I printed out the local high school's calendar so I knew what sports were playing, when homecoming or the winter ball was, A and B days, etc. It was indispensable.

And what about spreadsheets? I use Excel here, too. This is where I organize all the details. I find pictures of people who my characters look like and paste them in, I come up with descriptions, floor plans, side characters, back stories, maps of the town, and historical details. My outline is very detailed and complete before I start writing, but my spreadsheet is incomplete. I add a ton to it while I write my first draft. If I've written a paragraph of description, I copy and paste it into my spreadsheet. I'll admit that it's a little annoying to keep this up, especially in the beginning, but it saves time later when I can't remember the shopkeeper's name or when I can't remember what my protagonist's bedroom looks like, and it is absolutely essential if you're writing a series. It saves hours of time scrolling back through your MS looking for details. Your readers will notice inconsistencies—they're reading it in a day or two where you've taken a year to write it—and a spreadsheet eliminates them. Organization = speed.

The last thing I use to help me write faster is a research sheet full of all the interesting things I've read about and the source where I found it. This is critical for any historical writing you're doing, but even if it's not historical, putting factual details into your work makes it feel more real. Even fantasy worlds have research you need to keep straight. I don't reference it often, because I usually find that if I've written it down, I remember it better, but it's there if I need it. ✦

Critique Sessions and Submission Guidelines

Critique sessions run twice a month. Invitation emails are usually sent the first and sixteenth of each month; these invitations include an RSVP deadline. Once the deadline has passed, the spreadsheet with current group information is sent. Each session is generally divided into two or three groups with three to six participants each, depending on how many members participate.

Submissions are then emailed to each member of the participant's group and returned by the end-of-session deadline, usually the fifteenth or the last day of the month. If you want to read a submission from someone in a different group in addition to those in your own group, you may request their work, but please do not expect them to read yours in return.

Fiction and non-fiction chapters, short stories, articles, and poems are all welcome in our critique sessions…query letters too.

Submission Guidelines

- 3,200 words or less (not including any synopses at the beginning)
- Include a synopsis if there are chapters/sections prior to your current submission
- 12-point or larger serif font (such as Times New Roman or Cambria)
- Double or 1.5 spaced lines
- Word document format (.doc, .docx)
- Include your name or initials in the filename
- Submit within two days of receiving the group spreadsheet

Critiquing Guidelines

- Please make at least six suggestions or comments in your reviews
- Be honest, kind, and encouraging
- Corrections and comments are made using the "Track Changes" and "New Comment" features under the "Review" tab in Word
- Include a note at the end of the document with an overall review or comment
- Ideally, return your reviews by the last day of the session

"There's no place like home. Except the beach."
—Unknown

Happy Summer :)