

The Just Write Life



More Than One Way to Critique: Introducing Our Beta Readers Section

By Lisa Forsyth

Giving and receiving helpful feedback have been goals of Just Write since its inception years ago. We continue to do that through our biweekly critique sessions. However, a few members have expressed a desire for beta readers to review entire novels all at once. We recognize that both methods of critique have their merit and wish to dedicate a section of our newsletters to those seeking beta readers for full-length works. This section was informally included in June's edition, but as long as we have content, we will include it in each subsequent newsletter.

Here's how it works: If you're an author looking for

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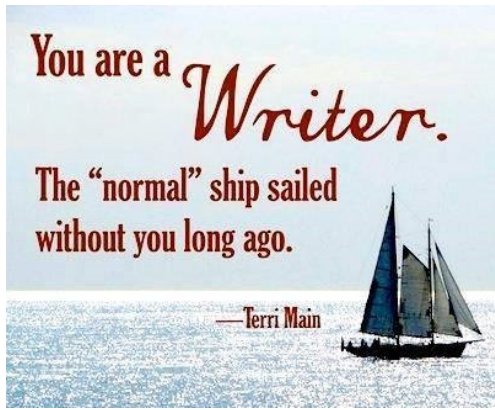
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readers, email Ann or Lisa with the title of your work, the genre/target audience, approximate word count, a short synopsis, and any other relevant details (i.e. a graphic/disturbing content warning). We will then include your information in the next newsletter.

If you're interested in beta reading, browse the newsletter section and contact the author directly to receive the file(s) and further instructions. Any in-person or virtual meetings regarding the beta read are to be planned and conducted by the author.

Whether you plan to self-publish or send queries to agents and traditional publishers, we hope adding this forum will aid you in your publishing goals.

"Your intuition knows what to write, so get out of the way." - Ray Bradbury

New Members

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

- Deborah Lambert
- Curtis Moore
- Mike Ramshaw



Member Spotlight: Aaron Wickel



Aaron Scott Wickel has been a fan of the fantasy genre since he could speak. From the realm of Disney to Lucas Arts (then back to Disney when they bought the Star Wars franchise), and across a multitude of fantastical universes, he has loved the mystifying aspects of pretty much anything fiction. As a dreamer, writing fantasy has given him a unique tool to convey art through words. He believes that this art holds the key to unlocking a door to adventures not attainable in this world.

As a member of the League of Utah Writers, Aaron has had the opportunity to meet many writers that have guided his career to this point. He spent ten years honing his craft and is excited to continue his development with the future releases of the Elements series. Aside from writing, he enjoys spending time with his family, playing video games, 3D digital modeling, and composing music. Aaron feels a very deep connection to nature and often finds the inspiration for his work while driving through Utah's winding mountain roads. Above all things in nature, however, he has a particular fascination with the elemental forces. Earth (controlled by Stone Guardians in this series) is his favorite. He loves forests and plant life in general. It's his dream to one day own a greenhouse where he can house many varieties of bonsai species. In the future you may even find a tab on his website, www.wickelwrites.com, hosting pictures of this magnificent art form.

If you would like to be featured in our member spotlight section, please let Lisa or Ann know. We enjoy getting to know more about our members.



The 2021 Quills Conference

By E.J. Murray

I attended my first Quills Conference last year, when it was totally virtual. I loved it so much that I won the Scavenger Hunt and was awarded a free ticket for this year! For 2021, they offered a hybrid event, with some sessions live and others transmitted virtually. I wasn't able to get off work and be there in person, but I really enjoyed the broadcast events. The League of Utah Writers does a bang-up job with their conference, and if you've never been, you need to reconsider and get your ticket for next year.



First of all, the Quills Conference attracts a great group of presenters. Some of them I'd "met" last year and enjoyed their sessions, while others I know from their reputations and publications. Some of the presenters were old friends from other writing groups and conferences I've attended over the years. Michael Stackpole puts on a mean workshop with a lot of solid advice for writers. Chantelle Aimee Osman is an energetic speaker who breaks down the craft well for writers. And Bryan Young's sessions are always informative. These three put on a "Boot Camp" Thursday for the early birds. The sessions cost an extra fee, but from what I learned last year, they're worth it.

The regular sessions run the gamut from the basics to advanced tips and tricks. I really enjoyed Johnny Worthen's "Morning Zen" sessions for writers and hope he'll bring that back next year. Johnny is the league's comedic genius, a tie-dyed guru whose enthusiasm seems to know no bounds. The conference offered a Q&A session with editors and agents, which is always informative and sometimes surprising. I love a good agent/editor panel session. There were sessions on writing RPGs, submitting stories to anthologies, getting audiobooks, writing comedy, and utilizing social media for writers, in addition to the more usual sorts of presentations. I saw a lot of live sessions that I wished I could have attended, but the virtual classes were a nice mixture, and I didn't have a problem finding something useful.

Keynote speakers this year were Cory Doctorow, science fiction author, activist, and journalist, Utah's Poet Laureate Paisley Rekdal, and Aminah Mae Safi, a writer who explores art, fiction, feminism, and film. Their sessions were all inspiring and entertaining, and the meals provided at the conference sounded great, too! I didn't have gourmet food on hand, but maybe next year I can sample the hotel's offerings in person. The conference also offers pitch sessions and manuscript evaluations for an extra fee—well worth it if you want expert

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opinions and the chance to get your book in front of an agent or editor.

In addition to the sessions, workshops, panels, and speeches, Quills also offers a couple of fun contests. They have their own app for the conference where you can hook up with fellow attendees, keep up with your schedule, and join in the competitions. I won a free query critique so their games are worth playing. The scavenger hunt returned this year and is also a ton of fun. You need to use your brain and take the appropriate photos in a timely manner if you want to win. Kudos to whoever thinks up the fun and games! And after hours, there are social video rooms where you can chat with attendees from all over. The live event has the hotel bar for such things, of course.

All in all, it's a great conference, and in my opinion, the price is reasonable. Get your tickets for next year now. You won't regret it.

A Call for Beta Readers

The following members would love your feedback on their full-length works.

Bonnie Moore has one project.

-*Buried Bones* (formerly *The Unknown Corpse*) is a cozy mystery of approx. 74,000 words. Maggie Anderson is a retired big-city prosecutor who becomes the private investigator representing a man accused of murdering his ex-wife. Maggie skillfully uncovers Peggy's murder through cunning and persistence. She is unafraid of local political pressures that surface when the town's most prominent citizen is suspected and doggedly pursues clues. She stumbles onto a family blackmail scheme that is hiding the actual murderer.

Contact Bonnie (sfbmoore@aol.com) if interested.

John Cullen has two projects.

-*"The Nature of Humility"* is a spiritual essay of approx. 2,800 words. John recounts his lessons learned over the years regarding what true humility is.

-Untitled cosmic sci-fi short story of approx. 4,700 words. Additional help with titles and synopses that don't give away the ending are appreciated.

Contact John (john.cullen.verseo@gmail.com) if interested.



Never Stop Believing in Yourself: A Quills Conference Experience

By Nancy Roe

Anyone who attended high school or college had to write a story for an English assignment. Some dreaded the task, others relished in the exercise. (I was the latter.) Upon graduation, a majority of people never write another story. A select few become successful award-winning authors.

I've always considered myself in the middle category. A self-published author that entered contests and submitted my books for awards, but always received the dreaded, Thank you for your submission, however . . . Ugh. I love to write. I love to solve mysteries. I love the feel of a book in my hands. I wanted a win in my repertoire.

Never give up!

My latest entries were in two categories for the annual League of Utah Writers Quills Conference. Eleven days before the conference, I received an email. Dear Quills Awards author, congratulations! This email is to let you know that your book is going to be recognized at the awards banquet.

My heart stopped for a few seconds. I was in shock and ecstatic at the same time. For the first time, my work was being recognized by a group other than family and friends. I told a few people, still unsure what the email entailed. Did I receive fourth place or an honorable mention? Not once did I contemplate a win.

At the conference banquet, the food and company (a multiple winner and writer of the year) at my table kept my butterflies in check until the awards ceremony began. I sat, listened, and clapped as fellow writers achieved success. When it was time for my first category, the Olive Woolley Burt Award for Creative Writing, First Chapter (Novel), the butterflies swirled. The League President, John Olsen, announced First through Third Honorable Mentions. Not me. Third Place. Not me. Second Place. Again, not me. I thought, better luck with my other category.

Then, the most unbelievable thing happened. John announced my name! I received First Place for the first chapter of my upcoming mystery novel, Butterfly Premonitions (due to be released in 2022). I couldn't text my husband fast enough to announce my achievement.

When the coveted Quill Awards for Published Books began, I assumed my chances were slim. I'd already received an outstanding honor. In the Novel category, John announced the four Recommended Reads and Silver Quill winners. Then, for the second time of the night, he announced my name. I had won the Gold Quill Award for my novel, The Accident. I was ecstatic, thrilled, elated, euphoric, and twenty other synonyms.



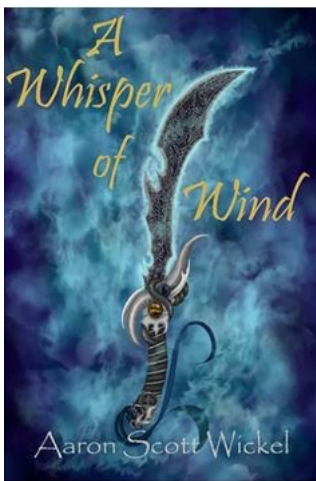
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Never stop writing. Never stop submitting your work. Always believe in yourself. The most surprising events can happen to you too!

Who's Penned What

A List of Published Works and Contest Winners



A WHISPER OF WIND

Aaron Wickel

Genre: Fantasy

When the unrelenting enemy Javalara attacks, Kinara joins her comrades in battle, but the results are devastating to both civilians and fighters. Everyone has secrets here and, as life devolves into chaos, some are exposed, some remain hidden, while everyone must do what they can to survive.

Preorder [here](#).

Watch the book trailer [here](#).

Coming soon to Amazon and most major retailers.

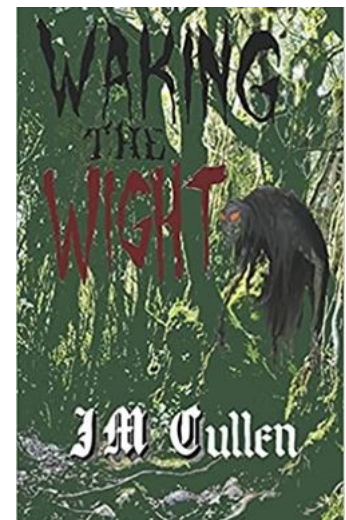
WAKING THE WIGHT

John Cullen writing as JM 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. After a gypsy woman cursed him, he experiences, then writes about his first ghostly encounter. Set in the near future, the nuances of the mystical arts collide with Artificial Intelligence and self-driving cars. Believing his past is haunting him, he must find his 'other half' to prevent the Merciless One from tormenting his soul forever.

[Buy it on Amazon.](#)



Quills/Woolley Award Winners

David Armstrong

Gold Quill Award, Adult Non-Fiction: *Flooding My Life with the Book of Mormon*

First Place, Prose Media Article: “How Retraining in IT Saved My Marriage, My Sanity, and My Life” (Established Writer)

First Honorable Mention, Prose Spiritual Essay: “Thrilling Comeback” (Established Writer)

Nancy Roe

Gold Quill, Fiction: *The Accident*

First Place, First Chapter (Novel): *Butterfly Premonitions* (Established Writer)

Peter Steele

Third Honorable Mention, Poetry: “Waves” (New Voices)

Third Honorable Mention, Creative Nonfiction: “The Hijacker” (New Voices)

Third Honorable Mention, First Chapter: *On the Mating Habits of the Giant Squid* (New Voices)

Josie Hulme

Third Place, Prose Poem: “Absence” (Established Writer)



Tamara Copley

Third Honorable Mention, Media Article: “Empathy for Christmas” (Established Writer)

Well done, Just Writers! If you have published a novel, story, article, poem, etc. or won a writing contest within the last six months (and it hasn't already been featured in our newsletter), please let Lisa or Ann know so we can include your accomplishment in the next edition of The Just Write Life, expected December 2021.

Upcoming Events



KB Wagers
SCI-FI NOVELIST

Speaker Series with KB Wagers

Topic: Fighting Burnout and Writing with a Day Job

Date: September 16, 2021

Location: Online (link in LUW newsletter)

The Pre-Quill Conference

Date: April 23, 2022

Location: TBA



Tips for Completing My Novel This Year

By Ann Gordon

I'm a writer who can't seem to stay with a project long enough to complete a whole novel. I've determined to finish at least one of my languishing projects before 2022; to that end, I composed a list of 20 tips for getting it done.

- Develop a writing routine—even a loose and flexible writing routine is better than none
- When you sit down to write, let out a breath and relax
- Avoid perfectionism
- Don't compare yourself to other writers before or during your writing time—maybe not even when you aren't writing—not until you get this book done
- Be genuinely excited about completing your book
- If you don't have a detailed plot, a general roadmap should work; at least you'll know where you're going—within reason
- Set weekly goals—if the terms “goals” and “deadlines” push your buttons, then look at word count and page goals as “guidelines”—missing some guidelines won't riddle you with guilt
- That said, if you tend to diss those guidelines, then treat yourself with tough love; self-control is

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not a bad thing

- If you need assistance, then get yourself an accountability partner—preferably someone you can stand
- There's only one way to complete your book: by adding words
- Resist the urge to insert everything you have ever done or thought into this book; it's not the only book you'll write
- Buyers still judge a book by its cover, at least on the first pass, so don't wait until you complete the book to locate a good book cover artist
- Be clear about the book's genre—your readers will appreciate it
- Resist the strong urge to edit; just don't do it until you complete the first draft—of the book, not that page
- You need to write, that's how the book gets done—understand that writing then editing, then writing then editing again, is a good way to not finish your book
- If you really want to finish this book, unplug from Social Media several days a week; you'll get used to it
- Face it: your first draft is not going to be perfect; but if it has a beginning, middle, and end, that's real progress
- When you start to get stuck, don't dig in...you could become more stuck; instead, go outside, walk around the block, pull weeds, organize the silverware drawer, do a batch of laundry—then sit down and try it again
- Listen to your characters—they often know more about what's going on than you do
- That said, don't be afraid to have bad things happen to your characters, even the ones you like—it not only ratchets the tension, but feels more like real life

Write on!



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

**"It looked like the world was covered in a cobbler crust of brown sugar and cinnamon."
—Sarah Addison Allen**

Happy Autumn :)

