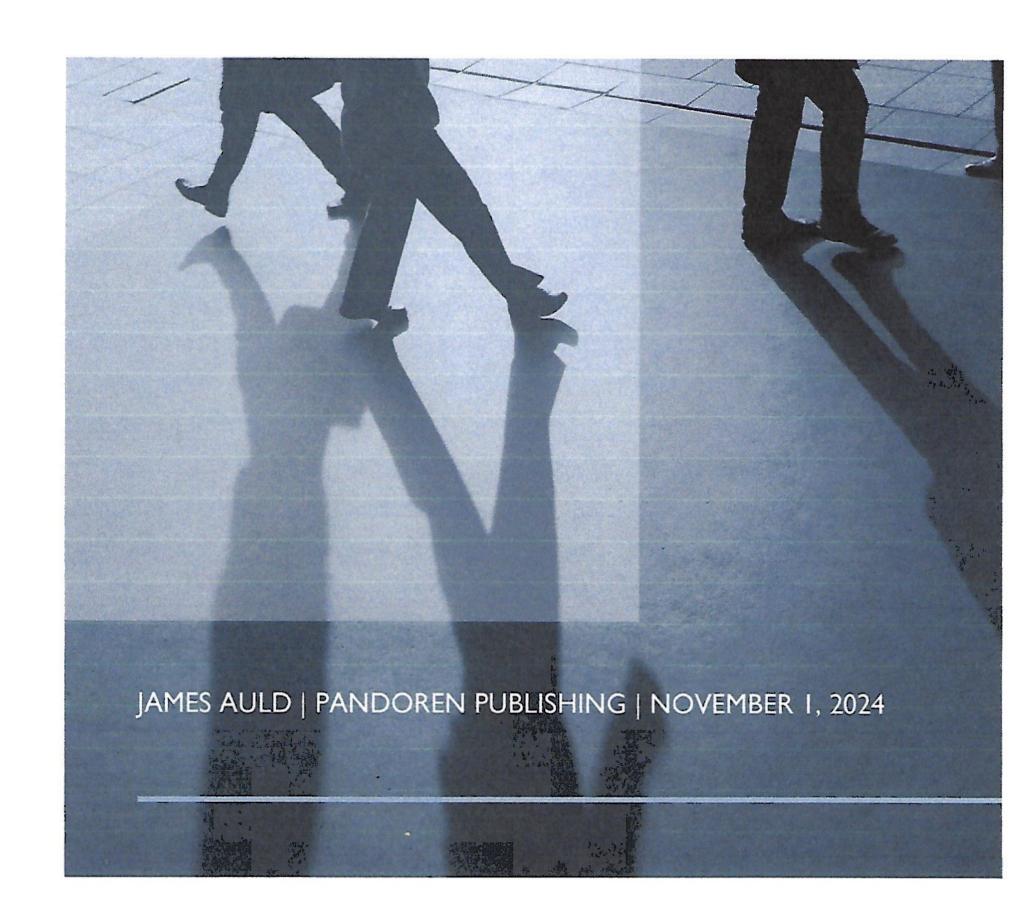# LESSONS FROM THE GRIND

PERSEVERANCE AND HACKS FOR ASPIRING, SELF-PUBLISHING AUTHORS

THE HABITS THAT HELPED ME WRITE A 600+ PAGE NOVEL IN FOUR MONTHS, TWICE.

IT STARTED WHEN I READ STEPHEN KING'S *ON WRITING: A MEMOIRE OF THE CRAFT*

These sections were particularly helpful:

- What Writing Is

  A brief but powerful section where King explains his philosophy on writing. He famously compares writing to telepathy, emphasizing the power of words to transcend time and space.

- Toolbox

  Here, King talks about the "tools" every writer should have. He covers basic grammar, vocabulary, style, and other essential skills for crafting good prose, encouraging writers to build a strong "toolbox."

- On Writing

  This is the main instructional section, where King shares practical advice on the craft itself. He covers topics like plot development, description, dialogue, and narrative style, and even gives insight into the writing process and discipline needed to create a consistent writing habit.

WHAT TO DO TO BECOME PROLIFIC (OR JUST TO GET YOUR BOOK FINISHED!)

Find a private space with limited opportunities for distraction.

- No people

- No phone

- No facing a window

Write, write, write, and write some more.

- Schedule enough time daily to write at least 1,000 words - hopefully 2,000 if you're serious

- It won't be elegant

- It may not be grammatically correct

- You will fix it in rewrite

- Just stream it from your mind each day

- It will become second nature and improve quickly

WHAT I DID:

1. Made a writing space in the tiny, creepy attic in my 100-year-old family vacation home

2. Wrote 5 days a week, between 5 AM and 10 AM, minimum 2,000 words. Plotting and rewriting were in addition to this daily word count requirement.

3. I followed King's suggestion to do minimal plotting, and instead let the story write itself, being revealed as I wrote it. This process was fantastic for me.

This seems so basic and simple, but the 2,000 words a day process is truly a miracle. Using this methodology I finished 2 600+ page novels in 8 months.

GAIN AN EDGE BY HARNESSING AI (JUST NEVER TO DIRECTLY WRITE YOUR BOOK!)

*AI is like having the world's fastest, smartest research librarian, idea consultant, and ad copywriter working for you 24x7. It offers a significant edge as an author whose **business** it is to write and sell books. Those who don't learn to use it are at a disadvantage compared with AI-friendly authors.*

AI IS GREAT AT:

- Deep dives into complex subjects. For example my having a back-and-forth discussion to decide if my series genre is **suspense thriller**, or **urban fantasy**. We (haha!) concluded my series is dark urban epic fantasy. It was quite informative.

  https://chatgpt.com

- Brainstorming anything. For example brainstorming book titles after giving the AI information about book themes and content. AIs now have memory, so when you keep adding information they retain and use it thereafter even in later conversations.

  https://chatgpt.com

- Generating and improving writing *related to the **business of the author***. Generating ad copy. Book blurbs. Email correspondence. Website copy. It saves a huge amount of time and ensures high-quality output.

- Generating images and artwork for website content, social media, and ad copy.

  https://openart.ai

- Generating video content for book trailers, websites, and social media reels.

  https://runwayml.com

MY FAVORITE AIS ARE:

- ChatGPT, located at https://chatgpt.com and also available as an app. You get a great deal of usage at the free level. It has a great memory across multiple conversations.

- Gemini, located at https://gemini.google.com, and also available as an app. With the Gemini app on your smartphone, you can even have remarkable back-and-forth voice conversations.

- Openart.ai (https://openart.ai) for image generation.

- Runway Gen-3 (https://runwayml.com) for cinema-quality video generation.

PUBLISHING YOUR BOOK 1: AUTHOR AND BOOK BRANDING, MANUSCRIPT WRITING AND FORMATTING, COVER DESIGN

AUTHOR AND BOOK BRANDING

I believe that branding should be a major theme of just about everything we do as authors.

What is branding?

- My name

- My headshot

- My series and book titles

- My genres

- The look of my website, my ad images, my book covers, my blog entries, my ad copy, my writing style.

- All of this should come together with a consistent look and feel and tone. All of this should boil down to answer the reader's questions: "If I invest my time and money reading his books, will I enjoy them? Is this my kind of tone and subject matter? Will my philosophical ideas be a match for his? Is his attitude at all similar to mine? If I end up liking his books will he keep writing more of them so I can continue the enjoyment?

- If I develop a consistent look, feel, tone, etc., then the reader will know whether they like it - or not. The consistency allows the reader to trust their decision to read it or not, and to trust that I am being genuine.

MANUSCRIPT WRITING AND FORMATTING

Some common questions authors have:

- Where does my manuscript live?

- What software would I use to do my day-to-day writing?

- How and when do I format my writing into different eBook and print book editions?

For me, through trial and error, I've discovered some important considerations.

Option A (which I do not prefer)

- An author writes their book directly into Word or another popular "word processing" software like Google Docs.

- At some point, it's time to format the book into eBook, paperback, and hardback formats, so the manuscript gets duplicated: one file for each format.

- Each file is then formatted, which is a lot of work. In each file, the manuscript source text becomes forever connected to the format (because this is how word processors work)

The drawbacks of Option A

- You now have multiple copies of your book. Every time you change anything, you must change it in EVERY one of the formatted files.

- This Is a huge time waste!

- This process is prone to human error - you will undoubtedly end up with your manuscript being out of sync.

- Every time you make a change, you have to figure out which are the latest files to update. The latest eBook source. The latest 6x9 paperback source. The latest 7x10 hardback source.

- This is a mess.

Option B (I do prefer!)

Write once, then export to multiple book formats.

Here is a list of some writing software tools that adhere to the "write once" model:

- Scrivener

- Atticus

- Vellum (Mac only)

Here's how Write Once works:

- You purchase and install one of the book authoring software tools, possibly one I've mentioned above. There are many others.

- For your book, you write it in one place only, without consideration of the output formatting needed.

- Later, when it's time to format, you create output format definitions. One for your eBook. One for your 6x8 paperback. One for your 7x10 hardback.

- These formats are separate from your manuscript source writing. They don't care about the content of your book.

- When the formats are done, you simply "compile", or "export" your manuscript into each of the formats that were created. These output files end up as .epub for eBook, and Word or PDF for print books.

- Going forward, you ONLY update the original writing - NEVER the formatted output files.

- You always know where to make your changes. When done changing, you re-compile them to the output files, which only takes a few minutes.

TIP RECAP: Don't write your manuscript in Microsoft Word. Instead, write it in a dedicated book authoring system like Scrivener, and then later you will use that system to format the eBook and print books, and then compile/export your book into Word.

- This way you have ONE SOURCE FILE, where you ALWAYS make content changes, and you have the formatted OUTPUT FILES, where you NEVER make content changes.

- For example, if you have three output formats, one eBook, one 6x9 paperback, and one 7x10 hardback, you don't have to make your content changes in three separate formatted Word documents, which is time-consuming and error-prone. You have one non-formatted place where you make all your content changes, and three format export setups. So you make your changes in one non-formatted place, then export the formatted output to eBook, to paperback, and to hardcover. Simple, organized, and safe.

- Creating the formats for each edition type can take some time. Hiring someone familiar with formatting books in the writing software you use, can be a lifesaver.

TIP – BACKING UP: Create a folder within your Microsoft OneDrive area on your hard drive, so EVERYTHING you write is ALWAYS backed up and versioned online.

- I made a "Writing" folder in my OneDrive area, under which I made an "Invasion Hell" series folder, underneath which I made my two book folders: "Final Remains" and "Infernal Remains".

- Scrivener (.scriv) folders were under each book's folder.

- You could use other cloud drives like Google Drive, Dropbox, etc., whichever cloud drive is familiar to you, or a friend.

- Save your work OFTEN. I save at the end of every paragraph. In Windows, a quick CTRL-S makes an app save. If you use an authoring software that auto-saves, for example, Word, this tip isn't as important.

COVER DESIGN

Emulate, emulate, emulate.

Find commercially successful books with covers that you like and that have the right look and feel for your book. Then you, or a graphic artist, emulate that cover but with all new imagery and text copy. Do not rush it or cut corners. Your book needs to pass as a commercially successful book, or you will lose readers.

TIPS using KDP as an example:

- Use AI to create your unique images, or use stock images from services like Shutterstock or Getty Images

- Choose fonts that are good for your genre and subject matter (I ask ChatGPT and it suggests a number of fonts that are common and well-liked)

- I use Affinity Photo and Affinity Designer to layout the text and images for my covers

- Kindle eBook covers work well as a JPG image at a resolution of 2814 pixels by 4500 pixels.

- Paperback or hardback covers must be a PDF at 600 dpi (dots per inch) which is a large file. Images on the web are typically 72 dpi, for example.

- For print books, start with a template generated through KDP, it comes as a PNG at 600 dpi already and is the exact size you need for your book size and number of pages in your manuscript

  Go to https://kdp.amazon.com/cover-calculator to generate your template

- Here is a demonstration of how my covers are put together

PUBLISHING YOUR BOOK 2: KDP AND INGRAMSPARK, TESTING YOUR EBOOK AND PRINT FORMATS, ORDERING AUTHOR PROOFS AND COPIES

KDP AND INGRAMSPARK - THE TWO MAJOR PLATFORMS WHERE YOU WILL RELEASE YOUR BOOK.

Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP) is how you get your books onto amazon.com, and where you can also buy printed author copies which you can sell anywhere you want.

For KDP you'll need to:

- Create your KDP author account. Each account has to have a unique phone number attached. Your KDP account is joined to your Amazon shopping account and uses the same login information.

- Add your book to your author bookshelf. For each book, you can have one Kindle eBook, one paperback, and one hardcover.

- For each eBook or print book format, you fill out the book details and upload your manuscript and cover art.

- The books are in draft mode until you publish them. KDP support will notify you if there are any issues to fix before they will set it to published.

- Here is my bookshelf page: https://kdp.amazon.com/en_US/bookshelf as an example.

KDP Gotchas

- There are a few things you CAN NOT change after you publish a book on KDP.

    Title, Subtitle, Author Name, Trim Size (6" x 9" paperback, for example)

- Usually to change any of these you have to unpublish the book by setting it to draft mode, and then create a new book. However, then you risk losing your reviews. I have been told that if you're just changing the trim size, you can ask them to link the former reviews to the new book, however, that seems like a big risk.

- My takeaway is since branding is so important, spend a good deal of time finding the right pen name, book title and subtitle, series name, paperback and hardback trim sizes, pen name, etc.

IngramSpark is a platform that distributes your books to libraries, schools, and a large number of retailers like Barnes & Noble, Target, Walmart.com, and independent bookstores. It isn't tied to one specific bookstore in the way KDP is tied to Amazon.com. IngramSpark also has many more types of paperback and hardcover options, including full-color dustjackets. IngramSpark has launched a new option where an author can make URLs that they can send or post to customers so that customers

can purchase books directly from IngramSpark without going through another retailer, thus increasing the author's royalty.

For IngramSpark:

- It helps to have chosen a paperback or hardback trim size that both KDP and IngramSpark support. This way the same manuscript Word .docx or PDF file you upload into KDP will most likely work for IngramSpark without change.

- For print book covers, choosing the same trim size as KDP allows you to use the book cover graphic with only minor tweaks instead of having to recreate the entire graphic in a different size.

TESTING YOUR EBOOK AND PRINT FORMATS

I find that when I'm formatting a book for eBook and print books, it helps to test the formats even before the book is done and before the formats are complete.

- For Kindle eBook, use the Kindle Previewer tool (https://kdp.amazon.com/en_US/help/topic/G202131170) to test the .epub file.

- For print books, uploading the manuscript and cover image periodically, can validate your format, as it will let you know if your text is outside the printable area, for example.

ORDERING AUTHOR PROOFS AND COPIES

Both KDP and IngramSpark offer author proofs and author copies. You can visit your bookshelf in KDP and add an author proof to your Amazon cart, and purchase. Since a proof is for testing the book cover and manuscript format, it has a watermark indicating it is not valid for sale. The author copies, however, are used by authors to sell their physical books anywhere they like and are of production quality.

Ordering proofs and author copies usually takes ten days to receive shipment, so plan ahead.

PUBLISHING YOUR BOOK 3: THE WONDERS OF RUNNING TARGETED FACEBOOK ADS

Facebook ads have turned out to be quite good. Here are some tips and ideas on using them to drive customers to Amazon or your own website.

- Start analyzing the book ads you see in your Facebook feed. Click them and see what the image looks like, what the post says, and what the headline at the bottom is. Click into the ad so you see what webpage it takes you to. Sometimes it takes you to amazon.com to their books, and

sometimes it leads you to their own website where they offer their books directly. Also, take note of how well the post is doing. Pay particular attention to post ads that have many likes and comments.

- Create a Facebook "page" for you as an author. I named mine James Auld. It is linked to your personal Facebook page, but there is no way for a user to see your personal page.

- From your author page, create the ad by selecting "Advertise" and then "Create a new ad"

- It will generate you an ad that you'll need to change. Remove the image it used for you, and replace it with your own ad image.

- Select your "audience". It starts with the United States, Age: 18-65+. But you can modify it until you've narrowed it down to specific criteria that define who would be very likely to want your book. Who would be very likely to click on the ad. My audience is:

  > Interests: Speculative fiction, Supernatural fiction, E-books, Horror fiction, Amazon Kindle, Motorcycle club, Supernatural Thrillers, Sons of Anarchy, Books, or Supernatural (U.S. TV series)

- My ad image and ad copy, combined with the above audience target, brought my ad cost down from 19 cents to just 9 cents per click through to my book page on Amazon. That is considered a well-performing ad.

THINGS I WILL BE TRYING SOON:

- Book Funnel
- A book landing page on my website

FINAL THOUGHTS

A Free Book for You!

If you'd like to read my 545-page book *Final Remains: Dawn of the Knights Errant*, use this link to grab it!

> https://jamesauld.com/getbook1

Book Funnel will send you an email and you'll be able to do any of these options:

- Send the book to your Kindle, Kobo, NOOK, or Play Books
- Use the Book Funnel reader app on your device (which is actually great)

- Download or email the .epub file to your device and use it with any reader in the known universe

- Even just read the book in the web reader

The book has chills, thrills, action, quiet moments, friendship, love, battles, lots of twists, and loads of humor!

If you're interested in picking up my books on Amazon, just search for:

"Auld Invasion Hell"

Additionally, the pandoren.com website is being built and we plan to post this document there, as well as add new sections and information to it going forward.

Finally, please email me at author@jamesauld.com and ask any questions you may have!