

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR
J.T. ELLISON



Baby, it's cold outside, so let's stay in and read!

January 2021
Vol. 225

Hello GentleReader,

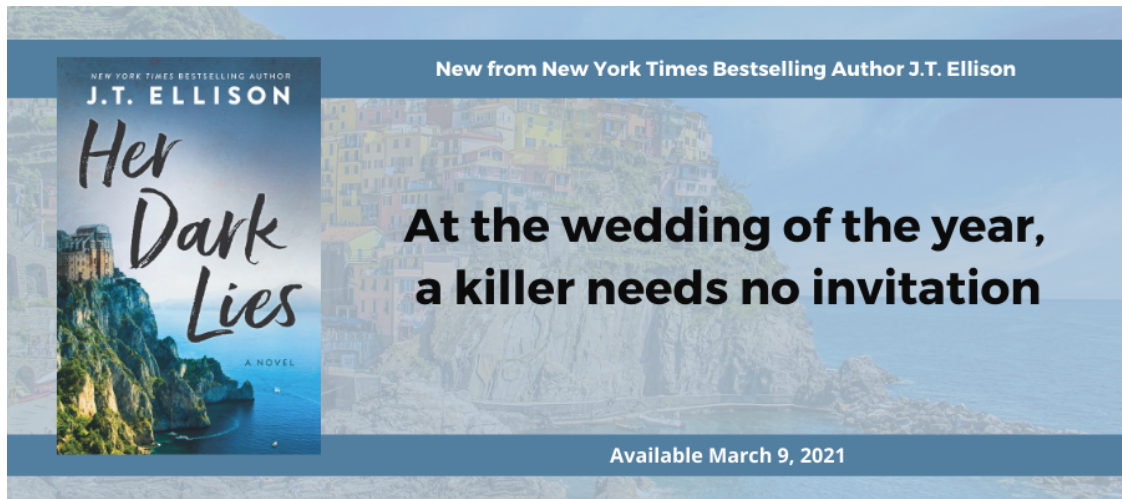
It's currently snowing in Nashville, a mystical experience. Growing up in Colorado meant a lot of snow, for months on end, which I loved. I was a snow baby, always bundled up with my parka, moon boots, hat and gloves, sledding and snow angeling and skiing my way through the winter months. And when I wasn't outside, I was cuddled by the fireplace with a book. Living in the south means seeing snow has become a rarity, so when it comes down, I get very excited. There will be cocoa with marshmallows this afternoon, and a snuggle by the fire with my latest read and the cats. As an adult, snow is my favorite, especially when I needn't go outside.

So much to discuss, so much that can't be said. I have a number of projects in the works, but none are quite at discussion stage. I'm as distracted as everyone by the events unfolding in D.C. Small tasks feel overwhelming—writing this missive being one of them. I'd so hoped that 2021 was going to be a winner, and it started off so well, only for uncertainty and fear to parade right back in.

Being a part of history is difficult. Things change moment by moment, and it feels wrong to catalog until it's over. I think that's part of why writers had such a difficult time creating last year—our job, in many ways, is social commentary, shining a light on injustices big and small, describing the human experience as we trundle through our lives. Yet no one knows when the pandemic will end, and how our world looks post-pandemic. No one knows the consequences of the political unrest, outside of the fact that a major cultural shift is underway. I predict historical novels are going to flourish in this environment, because it's a lot easier to look back on what's known than trying to write into the unknown. Of course, I heard a novel set in the 1990s described as historical fiction last week, so...

Anyway, I just wanted you to know that I'm here, thinking big things, and assimilating thoughts to get us through our collective dystopian novel.

☐ HER DARK LIES — on sale March 9, 2021



Lots happening on the new book front--we're two months and counting from the release, and great things are starting to happen. A note about touring--for obvious reasons, I won't be on the road, but I will be doing a number of online events, appearing on podcasts, and writing essays. Stay tuned here for all the details! And in the meantime, here are a few scream-worthy excitements that have been going on...

[Publishers Weekly Starred Review.](#)

Publishers Weekly included HER DARK LIES in the [Spring 2021 Adult Mystery and Thriller list](#).

Goodreads: [36 of the Most Anticipated Mysteries and Thrillers of 2021.](#)

[Crime by the Book's Most Anticipated Early 2021 Reads.](#)

And if you missed the last giveaway, [Goodreads has 10 more Advanced Reviewer Copies!](#) (US only).

PREORDER, BABY!

ADD TO GOODREADS

☐ 2020 Annual Review



For over a decade now, the first week of January, I do an annual review of my previous year. I use an adapted version from Chris Guillebeau, tracking my word counts and goals, and checking in on what went right and wrong, and setting my intentions for the year ahead.

I also choose a word every year that encapsulates my goals. 2021 is designated the Year of Content – I'm using it as both adjective and noun. (Figures I needed homonymous words for 2021...)

Setting goals and intentions are vital when you're a self-employed creative. I hope this gives you a framework for your own annual review.

[LET'S REVIEW!](#)

▣ Best of 2020



I didn't read as many books as I wanted this year, but so many of the ones I did were so good I had a hard time singling out a top ten. I watched a lot of TV, and listened to many, many podcasts. So I put together a list of my favorites of

2020 – the books, movies, TV, and podcasts that got me through our difficult year.

BRING ON THE FAVORITES!

□ What I'm Reading and Watching



[SWEET WATER](#) by Cara Reinard

SWEET WATER is a remarkable tale of family loyalties and lies set in a fresh new world. Fans of DEFENDING JACOB—both the book and the television show—will relish this sinister story of the lengths two parents will go to in order to protect their child.

[WHEN YOU SEE ME](#) by Lisa Gardner

When I was writing [HER DARK LIES](#), I was having an issue with POV. So I turned to one of the greatest masters of suspense to sort myself out. It took exactly two pages before I realized where my problems were coming from. If you haven't read ALL of Lisa Gardner's books, you need to get on it, because this one brings together her finest series characters to chase a sinister killer from the past – and the present. Utterly superb!

[THE AWAKENING](#) by Nora Roberts

The first in the doyenne of fiction's Dragon Chronicles trilogy is so much fun. Set mostly in Ireland and the alternate reality land of Talamh, it is a wonderful adult coming-of-age tale – with dragons! I'm halfway through and can't get enough of it.

[Bridgerton](#) on Netflix

What magnificence has been wrought from Julia Quinn's novels? With Shonda Rhimes at the helm, you know it's going to be wonderful. And this adaptation

more than delivers. Part love story, part social commentary, 100 percent perfection. It's definitely full of sexy times, so not for the younger set, but the costumes and settings are spectacular, and the push and pull of Lady Daphne and the Duke of Hasting's relationship is exactly what I needed to start the year. Just wonderful.

□ **Writers On Writing**



This month's question – What are your best tips for revising a novel?

JT: Change the font

Revision is truly the art of writing. It's a learned skill, and not an easy one. Editing your own work, finding ways to enhance the prose, stripping away the unnecessary, tightening, removing throat clearing words like "that" and "just," fixing timelines, all are necessary components of revision, and what makes a manuscript into a novel. But if you're talking about HOW to revise, my favorite trick is to change the font and line spacing of the manuscript. This shocks my brain into a new place where I can see all sorts of typos, lines out of sequence, repeat words, and other little annoyances.

Patti: Read it aloud

When you think it's all said and done and the last singer has exited the stage, when you're ready to hand over that manuscript, take one more step: read it out loud from beginning to end. Listen for places where you're reading too fast, or bored with your fascinating historical detail, or listen for places that take you out of the story and into a research book. Then after you've taken those pieces out that don't serve the story or the ear, be consoled my friend because you know that those facts, your favorite ones, serve your story in a way the reader might not ever see. You'll secretly be aware that somehow your story is better and richer for having found the obscure information you removed from the narrative. Without dragging it down, it's still there in the quiet space between the lines where the knowledge enriches your story.

Ariel: Two Tricks that Save My Sanity

Like both JT and Patti, I agree that revision is where the magic happens. I rarely enjoy the drafting process, but I LOVE the revision process and I have two tricks that save my sanity:

First, I edit standing up. I keep one wall in my office blank and once I have a draft, I print it out one chapter at a time and tape the pages to the wall. Then I begin to read it out loud. Something about seeing my words at eye level and hearing them read aloud enables me to not only notice typos and poor word choice, but it helps me find my voice and keep it consistent throughout.

Second, once the book is done and I've taped the pages to wall, read them aloud, and marked them up with red ink, I identify the weakest scene in every chapter. My goal is then to make it the strongest scene. Then I repeat the process over and over until I can no longer identify a weak scene or a weak chapter. Only then do I feel confident sending the book on to my agent and editor.

I really do have brilliant friends. Interested in more from Ariel and Patti? Sign up for their newsletters!

ARIEL LAWHON

PATTI CALLAHAN HENRY

👩👧👦 January Recipe: Classic Lasagna



A surefire winner for all, lasagna is one of those dishes that looks so complicated but with the invention of noodles that bake in the pan instead of having to be boiled beforehand, voilà—it's a simple, easy dinner staple.

This recipe can be adapted for GF (noodles), vegetarian (marinara and spinach), and lactose intolerance (skip the ricotta).

But for this, we're going with the classic. A Bolognese base is your BFF. [Here's one I like.](#)

LET'S EAT!

You can find all of my recipes [here](#). And if you want some wine to go with the meals, [The Wine Vixen](#) has you covered.

A reminder: Everyone who opens the newsletter is automatically entered to win a **\$30 gift card** to the bookstore of your choice. It's my way of saying thanks for being here. Congrats to last month's winner: Penny M!

That's all for now! Get cooking, get reading, get warm, and I'll see you next month.

peace and hugs,



PS: Do you get my blog posts in your inbox? Sign up for as it releases (usually once or twice a week), as a weekly digest, or by RSS feed. You should also join my Facebook book group, **the Literati**.

DAILY

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Are you still here?

Here are some kittens for your troubles.



Did you like this month's newsletter? Share it with a friend!



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