As the Author Learns

Bits & bites about publishing & writing from

J L Wilson

Author of mysteries, time travel, romances, & other books that defy categorizing

What's Happening?

I've spent a relaxing summer reviewing some of the manuscripts I've written, fiddling around with promotional opportunities, and investigating Next Steps in terms of audio for some of my self-published books.

I can never know exactly if something promotional is working because it can take at least three months for me to see sales figures (sometimes more). Here's how it works for books with my publisher: first, they receive sales figures from the outlet (Amazon, Barnes & Noble, etc.). Many outlets can take up to three months to report earnings and many take longer.

That sales figure is what remains after the outlet takes their cut. So proceeds go to the publisher and once all the sales info comes in, the publisher figures their payout (a percentage goes to the cover artist, the editor, the publishing house and others). This all happens four-six months ago. So when my latest book came out in June, I will see the sales figures for that maybe in September but probably in December.

That's why it's hard to tell if a promotion that I set up in July had any impact on sales. I can go back and look at specific sales reports for a quarter, but it can be time-consuming to figure out what book sold in what outlet at what time. That's why I just toss out those promotions and hope for the best!

This is why most authors don't make a good living at writing unless they can sell quantities of books. And that's why most of the big publishers will only take on established authors who they know can sell quantities. That is what makes the money.

I'm lucky. I do make money on my books and I enjoy writing. If this was my full-time career I would be in despair (and many authors do feel that way). I know of more than one author who's given up because there just isn't a good return on their time.

I think, too, that's why there is such an endless repeat of promotions. Authors are responsible for doing their own marketing, and they feel they have to sell-sell-sell when all they'd like to be doing is write-write-write.

My attitude is "I like doing this and if I can make some money at it, then, yay!"

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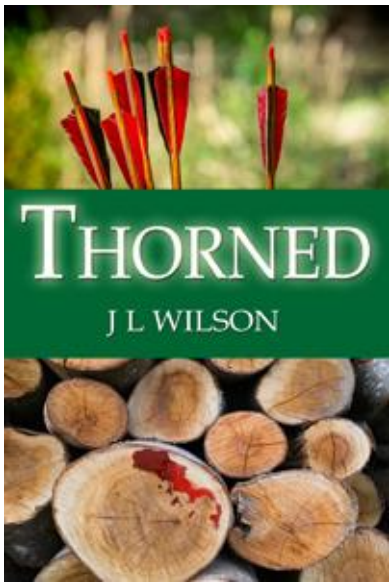
In Other News

And with that in mind, I am pleased to say that I will have another book coming out with my publisher next year (probably next year; *maybe* this year if the edits go fast).

Yes, I signed a contract for *Thorned*. This is my book that was set after the derecho that devastated the town where I lived. In an ironic twist, I got the contract the day before the anniversary of the storm and I returned it on the 5-year anniversary of the storm. Is life imitating art?



I knew when that storm came through that I could find a story in it. After the storm there was so much clean-up. For us, it was all the trees that came down (we had 42 trees damaged on our acreage with two or three trees that landed on our house).

We were lucky -- a crew from Texas came to town to participate in the aftermath (they apparently just follow storms because they were going to Alabama after they were done in Iowa).

Anyway, the crew came, dragged all the trees to the curb where a HUGE truck came through a couple of weeks later to pluck up the downed trunks and toss them in an enormous bin to haul to the site the city set up for debris (you should have seen it -- the city set aside several areas for debris and the sight of acres and acres of damaged trees…amazing).

We had a huge stack of trees sitting near the roadside and our neighbors had almost as many. It was like driving in a tunnel of trunks (very dangerous because of narrow roads and curving hills).

When I saw all those logs stacked up I had the idea that maybe somebody could hide a murder by putting a body among the logs. Really, they were stacked so tightly it was quite possible that the loader could pick up the log (and the body), toss it in the bin, and nobody would be any the wiser that a murder had happened.

I just received my cover art and I am pleased -- there are the logs and there are the arrows, both items of which figure heavily in the story.

Now on to editing and getting the book ready for the world!

What's Next?

I'll be leading workshops this fall at the local library and I'm prepping for winter classes at another library. I'll also be gearing up for a few trips in September and October -- my getaway to brainstorm books and a few other outings. And, of course, I'll be writing. I'm not sure what I'll tackle next, but I think it might be a Goldilocks story.

Now how can I find a mystery there…?

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