

**NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR**  
**J.T. ELLISON**



**Let's talk about the magic of writing**

**October 2020**

**Vol. 222**

Hello GentleReader,

Happy Fall, y'all! I hope you're safe, healthy, happy, and settled in for some cooler nights and shorter days. By the time you read this, we will be broadcasting from the new house. Most of the renovations are done, and it is now ours. This is an exciting, terrifying time, but one I'm very grateful for. I'm ready to hang up my contractor's hardhat and get back to writing full time.

I was at physical therapy for my knee this week—yes, still—and I was thinking about how magnificent it must be to be able to heal people. My therapist is a true magician. He massages and probes and realigns, finding the spots that are painful with simply a touch. He seems to know without me telling him exactly where the problems are. It's a gift, and I have been blessed to be in his capable hands. I don't think I would have gotten back to my physical life without him.

Oddly enough, on my way home from that appointment, the audiobook I'm listening to, Diana Gabaldon's [VOYAGER](#), was queued up to the scene where Claire explains to Jamie how she's become a surgeon in her own time, and looks for the best way to explain the concept to him. She says "a surgeon tries to effect healing...by means of a knife."

Without the excellent surgeon who repaired my first botched surgery and my exceptional PT, the healing I've experienced would not have happened. What a remarkable talent.

Writers aren't magicians. We aren't able to cut someone open and fix them from the inside out. We can't hit pressure points or massage tired muscles.

But we can heal people with our words. With our stories. With our compassionate observation of humankind.

And of course, we can hurt with our words, as well. Spend two minutes on Twitter and you'll see people gutted, flayed, excoriated, mocked. Though spend

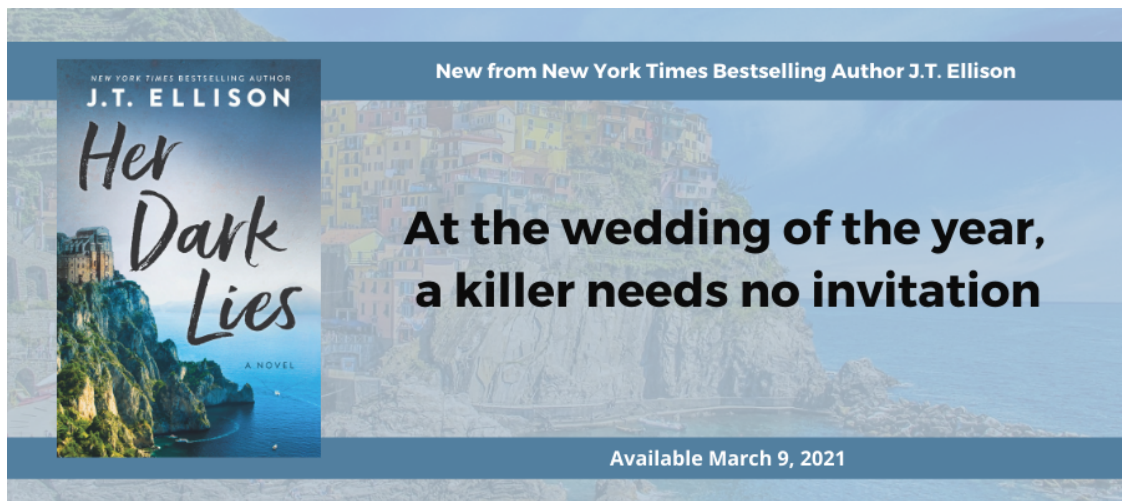
two more, and you'll find beauty, and hope, and friendship. The seesaw of emotions I experience in a five minute Twitter check-in... But I won't give it up. I can't. It is a front-row seat to the epochal shift we're experiencing. It is the train wreck that is shaping our future.

Personally, I want to focus on the magic of healing. My activism as a person and my mandate as a writer have been merged for quite some time: I have always looked for ways to bring joy and happiness to my readers and friends. It sometimes feels naive and meek in a time of great change and chaos, this optimism, this faith in my fellow humans. Like I am standing at the base of Everest, and the mountain has sprouted flames concealing iron spikes.

But it has its own magic, nonetheless.

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## ☐ **HER DARK LIES — on sale March 9, 2021**



The galleys for [HER DARK LIES](#) are making their way into the world! If you're a reviewer and would like to read an advanced copy, you can request it on [NetGalley](#).

This is your last chance to enter the [Goodreads giveaway of 25 Advanced Reader Copies!](#) It ends today October 15. (US only.)

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## ☐ **What I'm Reading**



### **THE LAKEHOUSE by Joe Clifford**

THE LAKEHOUSE has everything I love in a crime novel--complex characters, small town dynamics, secrets simmering under the surface, and a fresh, unexpected conclusion. Clifford's raw, edgy voice makes him the heir apparent to Chandler. An excellent must read.

### **THIS SECRET THING by Marybeth Mayhew Whalen**

A deeply satisfying story of secrets, scandal, and the repercussions of the decisions we make, THIS SECRET THING is brimming with menace and hope, and showcases Whalen's talent for bringing her multi-layered characters to life. An impressive page-turner with heart and soul.

### **LEGENDBORN by Tracy Deonn**

What a magnificent book. I've spent the past week recommending LEGENDBORN to everyone I know. It's got everything: a complex new magical system, grounded in Arthurian legend; a sassy protagonist who is destined to become an iconic hero in her own right; important, thought-provoking themes; and a burgeoning love triangle that feels inevitable but right. Seriously, y'all, this book is a blast! Tracy Deonn is now on my always pre-order list.

### **VOYAGER (Outlander #3) by Diana Gabaldon**

Seriously, what could be better than opening an audiobook and seeing it's going to immerse you in a favorite world for 44 hours?!? Davina Porter does such a wonderful job with this narration. I am continually swept away (and keep finding excuses to listen, always the mark of an excellent book.)

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## **□ A New Feature: On Writing**

I spend a lot of time talking with NYT bestselling author pals Patti Callahan

Henry and Ariel Lawhon about the craft of writing, about theme and plots, and character development. We send each other articles, inspiration, encouragement...and questions. Lots of questions.

We realized that we each responded to the same question from different perspectives and personalities, influencing and deepening the answers with our varied outlooks.

And we thought—why not answer some thorny questions for you?

So now we are starting a monthly ASK US ANYTHING about the craft of writing and the writing life. Each of us will answer two questions every month in our newsletters.

Feel free to send questions to [jtellison@jtellison.com](mailto:jtellison@jtellison.com).

**For our first installment of Writers on Writing, why don't we start by discussing the elephant in the room:**

**How do you write consistently in the midst of a pandemic?**

**JT:** Honestly, writing consistently at all times is vital to your career longevity. There is always distraction lurking in the shadows, ready to leap from dark corners, sink in its teeth, and drive you off course. It usually comes at the absolute worst time, too, a critical moment for your story, or even your career. In truth, writing is an inherently selfish act. We must tell those who love us to step aside and give us the space to create. Partners, children, friends, all are subject to our neglect. Writing during a crisis amplifies this need. To combat this distraction, I've tried very hard to segment my day and stick to a routine. I'll indulge in news or research in the morning, but when 10 am rolls around, Freedom app turns on, eliminating my access to the internet across all my devices, and I can't distract myself, even if I want to. It's the only way I've ever found to work, this self-enforced digital isolation from the world. Even if it only lasts an hour, if it's done daily, you will make progress on your work.

**And the second query:**

**If you knew that the book you are currently working on would be your swan song, the last book you ever published, how would you approach the story itself and the daily work?**

This is a much harder answer for me. I can honestly say if I knew this was the last book I'd ever write, for starters, I'd make it something different. I might create a sci-fi/fantasy world with a complicated magical system that would guarantee me at least 1000 pages and years of work. Or a sweeping family saga. Or a classic philosophical romance. I'd certainly attempt something completely new for me, and I would give it as much time as it needed, with no deadline and no pressure to make sure it works for a specific audience.

**Interested in Ariel and Patti's answers? Sign up for their newsletters here for their insights...**

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## 👁👁👁 October Recipe: Taco Soup



I'm repping a fan favorite (and Ellison favorite, too) for this month, especially for Halloween . For the spookiest night of the year, I love to make a huge pot of Taco Soup. I discovered this recipe at a book club years ago, and as it is naturally gluten-free, immediately added it to my repertoire. It is quick, easy, filling, and delicious, and works with any ground protein you like. Versatility, thy name is taco soup!

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.

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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: Joyce!

That's all for now! Enjoy the cooler weather, 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

WEEKLY

RSS FEED



### Are you still here?

Here's a kitten for your troubles.



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