Hey everybody, my name is Andrew Peterson. I am glad to be—well, virtually be—with you today. I am broadcasting from Nashville, Tennessee, which is where I have lived for the last twenty...three or four years, something like that. I came to Nashville all those years ago for a career in music. I’m a singer/songwriter and—touring singer/songwriter—and so I have made my living as a musician. And one of the questions I’ve gotten over from quite a few people over the years is “How in the world did you go from being, like, a folk singer to being a fantasy novelist.” And the simple answer is that I wanted to write books before I ever found a guitar. When I was a kid, I remember getting the Dragonlance Chronicles for Christmas when I was in the eighth grade. I don’t know if you guys remember those books, but it’s just like the most like gritty, classic, nerdy fantasy that you can imagine. And that, of course, launched me over into Forgotten Realms and David Edding’s Belgariad and I don’t even know what else. Just book after book, I was hungry for anything that would kind of take me out of the little town I was living in and give me this flutter in my stomach of possibility.

And so, I just love those kind of books. I remember trying to write books a lot when I was in school and, you know, harbored this secret dream of one day writing this epic fantasy tale. But then around my senior year I guess, I got serious about music, I joined a rock band, and never looked back.

But about the time I made my third record, my kids were then old enough for me to read to them. And remember I read Watership Down to them, I read the Narnia books to them, and it was The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe that really did it. When I read that to my kids, it just woke up in me, all over again, this desire to write fantasy. And so I talked to my wife, I said, “Hey you know that book that I’m always talking about wanting to write? I think it’s finally time to do it.” And so I knuckled down, probably fifteen years ago, I guess. So in between records, I’d work on these books.

So it’s just been one of the great blessings of my whole life to get to meet the readers and to share that chunk of my imagination with other people and have them resonate with it—it’s just, it’s the best thing. So that makes me very, very grateful that Random House is releasing these special editions years later. And, man, just having all the new readers and sharing the new artwork with them has been just wonderful.

So the first two books came out earlier this year, right as quarantine was hitting, and I read them aloud on Facebook Live. And it was just a blast to kinda relive these stories because now my kids are grown-ups, basically, they’re out of the house now. So to relive these stories that I wrote for them when they were little has just been awesome.
And so, these are the first two books that just came out. We have these new wonderful covers by Nicholas Kole. And Nicholas was the art director for the short film of the Wingfeather Saga, which you can watch on Amazon. We’re kind of in the process of working toward either a series or a feature film. And so, he was there, he knew the story so well, and just nailed the covers. And I haven’t seen the physical editions of books three and four yet, but they release on September 15th, I guess.

But here’s the first edition of book three, it’s called The Monster in the Hollows. It’s wrapped in mylar, I don’t know if you can tell, but I do that with books. Anyway, I wanted to talk to you for just a second about world building because that was one of the things that I realize was possibly the most crucial part of beginning to write a fantasy novel. Like, you know, when a kid sits down to write a story, a lot of time—I was this way when I was a kid—I meet kids who are like, “I’m going to write a giant 900-page epic fantasy.” And what usually happens is that they get 30-pages into it and they realize that it’s work and that it’s really—it takes more than sitting down and making stuff up as you go.

And so, for me, I remember having all these false starts. And I had these general characters in mind, I had the general idea for at least the beginning of the story, but just I kept running into all these walls. And those walls oftentimes were world-building problems. For example, in the first chapter, I think, the first couple chapters, the main character Janner wants to buy something at the market, and I realized that I didn’t know what kind of currency he needed. I was like, “Does he have jewels? Like do they pay with sticks or stones with holes in the middle or coins?” And if they are coins, then that raises all these questions about, like, the technology that is available to them, like is there a mint somewhere? It also raises questions about government, because if it is a coin, is there someone’s face on the coin? And if so, whose face is it? Is it like an emperor, or a king, or a governor, or a president? So, I just was like all I want to do is have him buy a sugarberry bun at the market, and he can’t do it until I build the world.

And so kind of put the brakes on the whole story and got out my sketchbook, the ones that I’d kinda put away since high school, and started building the world, drawing map after map, and filling in the names of places. The names of the oceans, the names of the continents, the rivers, the plains. And then towns, you know, I’d draw a little dot and be like “I wonder what the name of that town is?” And then across the river, I put another town. And then all of a sudden my imagination starts to fill in all these blanks about the relationship between these two towns on opposing sides of the river.

And so, I just think it’s huge. And so, I spent so much time building the world before I really started doing the story. So I’m a gardener, and the best analogy I know for it is if you want to raise vegetables, then you have to prepare the soil. It’s like I have these raised beds and I can’t just put the seeds in the ground, I have to prepare the soil, I have to get compost and mix the soil correctly. And then, after I’ve done all that work, then I can start to grow something real. And so, starting with a map is like starting with good soil when you’re raising your vegetables.

So, in closing, I just wanted to show you the final map. This was painted for my by Justin Gerard, who illustrated a few of the first editions of the books. And Justin is an
amazing, amazing painter. And he painted this for me. This is not—this is way cooler than the map I drew in the beginning. But there’s all these dragons and sea monsters floating around in the ocean. You can see Glipwood Township, which is the name of the town the story starts. And that usually hangs over my piano and reminds me of the great joy of world building.

So I hope that’s helpful. Y’all have a good one. Thank you!