

A BRAND & MARKET POSITIONING AUDIT

Brand & Market Positioning Audit

An honest read on a strong catalogue the market is not seeing clearly. What the books deliver, where the brand blurs into the crowd, and the order to fix it in.

Anonymised sample deliverable. The author, series, and titles are fictional; the structure, depth, and thinking are exactly what a real positioning audit contains.

Prepared for Gideon Frost

Established epic fantasy · The Ashmark Saga, four books plus a standalone

POSITIONING
& MARKET AUDIT

THE HEADLINE

Executive Summary

THE ONE LINE

The writing is not the problem. The packaging is.

Gideon has four books of a completed series and a standalone, a hard magic system readers trust, and a core of loyal repeat buyers. What he does not have is a listing that tells a browsing reader why this grimdark is different from the ten beside it.

What is strong

The prose holds up under scrutiny, the political intrigue is genuinely intricate, and the magic system has rules that never break. Readers who finish book one tend to read to book four. The retention is real, and it is rare.

What is costing him

The covers, blurbs, and Amazon categories read generic grimdark. The single sharpest hook, the political intrigue, is buried under sword-and-cloak signalling that a thousand other books also send. New readers cannot tell him apart before they click away.

The biggest opportunity

The grimdark shelf is crowded with grimness for its own sake. Very few titles promise the reader a court, a conspiracy, and consequences. Gideon delivers all three and says none of it. Naming it is close to free, and it is the fastest lever he has.

THE ONE THING, IF HE CHANGES ONE THING THIS QUARTER

Reframe the whole brand around political intrigue with a body count, the thing his books already do better than the lane, and carry that line through the covers, the blurbs, and the categories.

THE MAP

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The brand on one page: the line, the lane, the asset, and the risk

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The Snapshot

The brand, on one page.

POSITIONING STATEMENT, USABLE VERBATIM

Epic grimdark for readers who came for the court, not just the carnage. Political intrigue where every alliance has a cost and no one keeps their hands clean.

COMP LANE

Character-driven grimdark and political fantasy: the intrigue wing, not the battlefield wing.

READER PROMISE

Intricate court politics, morally grey players, a magic system with hard rules and real cost.

SERIES ARCHITECTURE

The Ashmark Saga, complete in four books, plus one standalone in the same world.

PRIMARY PLATFORM

Amazon, wide with KU on book one as the funnel. Newsletter is the owned asset, currently dormant.

BIGGEST OPPORTUNITY

Own the political-intrigue corner of grimdark that almost no one is claiming out loud.

BIGGEST RISK

The brand reads generic, so the intrigue hook is invisible at the point of purchase.

01

The Work

What the books actually deliver, and the catalogue read listing by listing.

Writing Overview

What the books actually deliver.

Read end to end, the catalogue is more coherent and more distinctive than its listings suggest. Six things carry across every book, and each one is a marketing asset going unused.

Voice

Cold, precise, controlled. Violence lands harder because the prose never flinches or gloats. Marketing takeaway: sell restraint, not shock. This is grimdark for readers tired of gore as a substitute for stakes.

Structure

Multi-POV across rival factions, each thread a piece of one conspiracy. Marketing takeaway: lead every blurb with the conspiracy, not a single chosen hero.

Characters

Morally grey players who make defensible, damaging choices. No clean heroes, no cartoon villains. Marketing takeaway: name the moral greyness plainly. It is the read a lot of the lane wants and few deliver.

Magic system

Hard rules, a real cost every time, no escape hatches. Marketing takeaway: hard-magic readers seek this out by keyword, and he is not using the keyword.

Pacing

Deliberate build to detonation. Tension compounds rather than resets. Marketing takeaway: set the expectation up front so slow-burn readers self-select in and impatient ones self-select out.

Themes

Power, loyalty, and the price of the throne. Politics is the engine, not the backdrop. Marketing takeaway: this theme is the single biggest differentiator, and it appears nowhere on the page.

Catalogue Analysis

The Ashmark Saga, book by book.

Premises kept spoiler-light. The note on each is what the current listing gets right or wrong.

Book 1, KU funnel: The Ash Throne

PREMISE A disgraced spymaster is pulled back to a court that exiled him, to find the heir before a rival house does. The intrigue engine starts here.

LISTING NOTE The cover leads with a lone armoured figure. It should lead with the court. The strongest hook is spent on the weakest signal.

Book 2: The Widow's Gambit

PREMISE An alliance marriage becomes a two-front war of nerves as a dead king's widow plays every house against the next.

LISTING NOTE Title and blurb are the sharpest in the series. This is the template the other three should follow.

Book 3: The Iron Accord

PREMISE A truce nobody trusts holds a fracturing realm together while the magic that binds it begins to exact its price.

LISTING NOTE The blurb goes vague and epic ("a realm on the brink"). It hides the hard-magic cost that readers of book two came back for.

Book 4, finale: The Last Coronation

PREMISE Every debt in the saga comes due at a single coronation where no player can afford to lose and none can be trusted to win.

LISTING NOTE The listing does not signal “complete series.” Series-finished is a selling point for binge readers, and it is missing.

Standalone, same world: A Crown of Salt

PREMISE A generation before the saga, a merchant-queen buys her way onto a throne and learns what the seat costs. Reads as a complete story and as an on-ramp to Ashmark.

LISTING NOTE It is not linked to the series in any reader-visible way. No “set in the world of The Ashmark Saga” line, no series-adjacent placement. A ready-made entry point is sitting orphaned.

Read-through, as an observation

In a sample of this shape, most series lose the largest share of readers between book one and book two, then hold steady to the finale. That pattern points at the book-one-to-two handoff, not the writing.

Where the funnel leaks

Book one is the KU funnel, but the back matter does not hand the reader cleanly to book two, and the standalone is not offered as an alternate on-ramp. Two low-cost fixes, a real back-matter CTA and a linked standalone, target exactly where readers drift.

Read-through figures here are illustrative of the pattern, not measured results. The point is where to look, not a number to quote.

02

The Market

The lane Gideon sits in, the readers to win, and the state of the platforms.

Market Landscape

Where Gideon sits, and the gap he can own.

Comps name the neighbourhood, not the ceiling. All four below are sample comps, fictional, chosen to map the lane.

Halvard Crane

WHAT THEY SHARE Grimdark tone, morally grey leads, high body count.

WHERE GIDEON DIFFERS Crane leans battlefield and shock; Gideon leans court and consequence.

Sera Vantillon

WHAT THEY SHARE Multi-POV political fantasy, scheming houses.

WHERE GIDEON DIFFERS Vantillon runs softer magic and lower brutality; Gideon keeps hard rules and real stakes.

Odran Vale

WHAT THEY SHARE Hard magic system, completed series, loyal base.

WHERE GIDEON DIFFERS Vale is quest-structured; Gideon is intrigue-structured, closer to a court thriller.

Marin Aldecott

WHAT THEY SHARE Cold, precise prose and slow-burn tension.

WHERE GIDEON DIFFERS Aldecott writes standalone literary fantasy; Gideon offers a bingeable finished saga.

THE GAP GIDEON CAN CLAIM

Grimdark is crowded on the battlefield end and on the shock end. The intrigue end, a court, a conspiracy, hard magic, and moral cost, all in one bingeable completed series, is thinly occupied. That corner is Gideon's to claim, and right now his own listings point readers away from it.

Ideal Readers

The readers, drawn as people.

Primary reader: Dominic, 38

- WHO HE IS** Reads Abercrombie, Martin, and the political end of the shelf. Wants a court he can get lost in and characters he cannot fully root for.
- HOW HE DISCOVERS** Via r/grimdark, Goodreads lists, and other authors' also-boughts. Skims the first blurb line and the also-boughts; if both read generic, he is gone in seconds.
- WHAT WINS HIM** A blurb that promises intrigue over spectacle, and a series that is finished so he can binge.

Secondary reader: Priya, 31

- WHO SHE IS** A hard-magic and systems reader who came from progression fantasy and wants rules that hold. Tolerates darkness for a world that behaves logically.
- HOW SHE DISCOVERS** Via KU browse and magic-system keyword searches. Reads in KU first, buys the rest of a series she trusts.
- WHAT WINS HER** A listing that signals hard magic and a real cost, which his current keywords do not.

Profiles are inference-based, drawn from comps and manuscript analysis. A working hypothesis to sharpen against real engagement data, not a documented fact.

Platform Audit

The ecosystem, judged honestly.

Amazon

PRIORITY 1

- ☐ Presence: full catalogue, wide with KU on book one.
- ☐ Alignment: off. Categories and keywords are mismatched.
- ☐ The store. Fix the listings first.

Newsletter

PRIORITY 1

- ☐ Presence: exists, dormant about eight months.
- ☐ Alignment: off. No rhythm, no reason to open.
- ☐ The owned asset. Revive it before any ad spend.

Amazon Author page

PRIORITY 2

- ☐ Presence: claimed, thin bio.
- ☐ Alignment: weak. No series framing.
- ☐ Free real estate. Reframe it around intrigue.

Goodreads

PRIORITY 2

- ☐ Presence: books listed, author inactive.
- ☐ Alignment: neutral.
- ☐ Where his reader already is. Claim it and seed it.

Instagram

LATER

- ☐ Presence: sporadic, cover reposts.
- ☐ Alignment: off. No voice, no lane.
- ☐ Support only. Not the discovery engine here.

Facebook

LATER

- ☐ Presence: author page, low activity.
- ☐ Alignment: neutral.
- ☐ Group presence in grimdark communities beats a page.

TikTok

LATER

- ☐ Presence: none.
- ☐ Alignment: not yet.
- ☐ Real upside long term, wrong first move now. Revisit once the base is repaired.

THE READ, AND THE BUILD ORDER

Gideon has reach but no working funnel. Fix the Amazon listings, revive the newsletter, reframe the Author page and Goodreads, support on Instagram and in grimdark Facebook groups, and leave TikTok until the base is repaired.

03

The Plan

The money page, the content that holds the lane, and the order to work in.

Priority Fixes

The money page. Concrete, specific, and ordered by return.

High priority

Categories

Sits in broad Epic Fantasy and misses the intrigue niches where his reader browses. The fix: move into Dark Fantasy and Political / Court-intrigue sub-niches via the category request, holding two or three tight niches over one broad one.

Keywords

Seven slots read generic ("epic fantasy adventure"), with no hard-magic or intrigue terms. The fix: rewrite all seven around "political intrigue," "hard magic system," "morally grey," "completed series," "court fantasy."

Blurb, book 1

Opens on world lore, with the conspiracy hook stranded in paragraph three. The fix: lead line one with the spymaster and the conspiracy, cut the lore, and end on the stakes, not the setting.

Cover

The lone-figure trope reads interchangeable on a thumbnail. The fix: shift art direction toward court and political iconography, unify the four as an obvious four-book saga, and set the hook at thumbnail size.

Medium priority

Pricing and funnel

Book one is in KU, but the back matter has no CTA to book two. The fix: add a clean end-of-book CTA and a reader-magnet signup, keep book one as the loss-leader, and price the set to reward a binge.

Series setup

No "complete series" signal, and the standalone is unlinked. The fix: add series numbering and a "complete four-book saga" line, and link the standalone as a same-world entry point.

A+ content

Sparse or absent, with no series map or comp framing. The fix: build A+ modules, a series-order graphic, an "if you like this lane" frame, and a magic-system teaser.

Also-boughts

Mismatched neighbours dilute the algorithm's read of the book. The fix: correct the categories and keywords first, and the also-boughts re-sort toward the right lane as the signals align.

Content Strategy

Four pillars to hold the lane.

Each pillar exists to reinforce one position: Gideon owns political intrigue in grimdark.

1

The Court

WORLD AND POLITICS

The world, the houses, and the politics of Ashmark. Business goal: proves the intrigue depth the covers hide, and pulls the right reader in.

2

The Rules

HARD MAGIC

How the hard magic works and what it costs. Business goal: captures systems and hard-magic readers by keyword and reputation.

3

Grimdark, Read Closely

THE LANE

His genre reading and recommendations. Business goal: positions him as a voice in the lane, not only a name on a spine.

4

Behind the Saga

CRAFT AND TRUST

Craft, choices, and the work of finishing a series. Business goal: builds trust and feeds the newsletter with a reason to open.

CADENCE

One newsletter a fortnight anchored to a pillar, with short social offcuts pointing back to it. The list leads; social supports.

What to Fix, in What Order

Phase 1
Foundation

Phase 2
Reposition

Phase 3
Grow

1

Foundation: fix the listings

CHEAPEST, FASTEST RETURN

Work the Priority Fixes table top-down: categories, keywords, the book-one blurb, the series setup, and the back-matter CTA. Traces to the catalogue, platform, and priority-fix findings.

2

Reposition: covers, blurbs, newsletter

WHERE THE BRAND CHANGES

Re-art the series toward court iconography, rewrite the remaining blurbs to the book-two template, and revive the newsletter on the four-pillar cadence. Traces to the writing overview and content-strategy findings.

3

Grow: reach the right rooms

ONCE THE FUNNEL IS REPAIRED

Seed Goodreads and grimdark communities, build the A+ content, and test paid reach against the corrected positioning. Traces to the market and platform findings.

THE THROUGH-LINE

Every move above traces to a finding in this document, in the order that returns the most for the least first.

Illustrative phasing for an established catalogue. A full engagement confirms the exact scope, sequence, and pricing against the current rate card.

“I would stop selling the sword, and start selling the throne room.”

The books already do the hard thing. The whole job here is to make the listing say what the pages have been saying all along.

This is a sample of how Literary Inspired positions a book. Ready when you are.