

Holly Lisle's VISION

A Resource for Writers

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Developing Your Talent

An Interview with Douglas Clegg
Honing Your Talent: A Workshop
Handling Criticism Gracefully
Avoiding "Said Bookisms"

More Features, Genre Articles, Reviews
And MUCH More

Holly Lisle's

Vision – A Writer's Resource

never give up on your dreams

From Holly Lisle

Talent. Right. It's harder to nail down than Jello on ice. It's nice to have . . . probably. It's might be useful – but is it necessary? You know the smartest guy in your graduating class and he's living under a bridge now; you remember the girl with the Whitney Huston pipes and she's still working at the McDonald's down the street, fifteen years after you both graduated. Meanwhile, that talentless hack Insert Name Here is making a million dollars a book.

So what is talent worth, and what you do to make yours pay off?

Read on, my fellow slogger-after-words, read on. Inside this issue, you'll find encouragement, observations, and, (this said in a George Carlin voice) practical advice . . . because some people need practical advice.

Because if Insert Name Here, the bum, is making a million dollars a book, it isn't because God gave him talent on a platter. If he can do it, perhaps you can, too.

Write, believe, and never give up on your dreams,

Holly Lisle

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Write Because...

There are writers out there -- some published, but more often not -- doing their best to instill beliefs that will stifle creativity and make certain you never enjoy the art of writing.

These people are teaching others that work and fun are two wildly divergent beasts, and that if you love and enjoy doing something, then it isn't work. In our society, if it isn't work, it isn't important. Work also equals financial gain. There must be gain that you can wave in the face of others when you're done. If you cannot, you've failed.

The art of creation is being trampled by a line heard far too often in writer's groups -- *but what if I put all this time into the story, and it doesn't sell?* How many stories have never made it from head to paper because of that question?

I have watched people subdue any joy they might have in creating stories, beating it down until writing becomes something they have to force themselves to do, whimpering about how much they hate it the entire time -- all in order to be *serious* writers. People won't take it seriously if it isn't work, you see. And it can't be work if they enjoy it.

A writer can have breathtaking, imaginative stories growing in her mind, but why bother to even try to write such a story under these conditions? *What if it doesn't sell?* What if someone walked into the room and saw you smiling at the screen while you typed? What if your first draft wasn't perfect? Why -- why the computer would know, wouldn't it? You'd be ruined, and never be able to write again for the

shame of it. And what if you got a rejection! You'd be the only person who ever got a rejection on a story they labored over, right?

Stop buying into the cultural lies that are never going to apply to authors. Writing is hard work, but there is no reason you can't enjoy doing it. We are not sitting here typing data into entry forms, so don't try to make it feel as though you are. And don't lie to yourself, and pretend that you're in it for the money. You'll make more per hour working at McDonald's. Very few writers can support themselves on their writing, and fewer still become rich.

Write for the joy of creating something that is yours alone. No one else is going to tell that story in the same way. Every voice is unique, and though some of you may still need training, you aren't going to do better by denying yourself the right to enjoy your work.

There are very few true writers out there, but there are a lot of people who tell you that they'd write that novel, if only... If only they had the time? Someone to do the work for them? A vision of the story?

If only it were fun?

I have only one true rule in my life: Write for the joy of writing.

Honing Your Talent

By Holly Lisle

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"Everyone can be more competent, but talent is innate, God-given -- you either have it or you don't."

Is that true?

Well, what is talent, first of all? Sometimes if you can define a thing, look at all of its parts, maybe take them apart and play with them a little, you can figure out how to create some of that thing -- or some **more** of it -- for yourself.

We see the results of talent every day: people who run faster, jump higher, think smarter, write more powerfully than we do. And in our minds, we know that a lot of what they do that sets them apart is training. Long hours, hard work, bloody-minded persistence in the face of downturns, embarrassments, defeats, and **failure**.

That's what we know in our heads. What we tend to believe in our hearts is that they each have something more. Some magic spark, some touch of fairy dust or the hand of God or one lucky roll of the genetic dice that makes them different than the rest of us -- and that makes what they have done therefore somehow unattainable.

Folks, there's good news and bad news. And I'm going to give you the bad news first. They have talent that you don't have. Everything they have ever done and everything they have ever dreamed has

given each one of them an unduplicatable set of special skills. They have a unique perspective of the world, and an equally unique way of expressing that perspective that you can never get, no matter how hard you work.

Depressed? Don't be. Here's the good news.

You already have as unique a background as any Gene Wolfe or Thomas Harris or Lois Bujold or Robert Parker. By the simple act of being alive, you have a toolkit full of tools that are your alone.

The trick is to learn to use them. And that is the purpose of this workshop.

So let's dig into your personal Talent Toolkit and see what you have to work with. Get a notebook and a pen, sit someplace comfortable and interesting, and brace yourself. We're going to do a lot of writing.

Tool Classification

Writers' tools break down into several basic groups:

Content Tools, Style Tools, and Presentation Tools. We'll unpack each one and play with it a little to give you a chance to see what each will do.

Content Tools:

Tools that Draw from Present Experience

- Sight, Sound, Touch, Taste, Smell

In the very broadest sense, these five tools encompass all of your writing and draw from both past and present, but we're going to be using them more narrowly, and in more detail, than in that broader sense. By being present in the moment -- any moment -- and

focusing on where you are and what is going on all around you, you gather in the details that make your writing come alive.

Right now, what do you see around you? Write it down in as much detail as you can muster, from the color of the chenille bathrobe you're wearing to the way the dust motes float in the beam of sunlight falling through the window. Get the people in, the shapes and masses and colors, as if you were telling a painter how to paint a scene he couldn't see, and your life depended on him getting it right. (Career-wise, at least, it does.)

When you finish, relax your shoulders, close your eyes (as long as you're sitting someplace safe), and listen. What sounds do you hear up close? How about a few feet away? In the next room? Outside close? Outside at a distance? What about any voices? What emotions do they convey even before you listen to the words? And what words do you hear? How about animal sounds, machine sounds, plant sounds, environmental sounds? When you think you have everything, rewrite your previous scene using only sound cues.

Now sensation -- start with the itch between your shoulderblades, the feel of clothes on your skin, the weight, texture, and temperature of the air in the room, and move outward incrementally -- the seat supporting you, the cat against your bare foot, the hair falling into your eyes, the table beneath your hand, the carpet on the floor. Move outward, being concrete, digging for the truth of the way things feel.

Taste and smell are our blind senses, but do the best you can. What do you taste right now, what do you smell right now?

Before you can write anything that captures a moment or a world, you have to be alive to the world, and to everything all five of your senses are telling you. Practice this exercise until you're used to noticing details.

Past

- Memory

Much of the real power of your unique talent will come from your memory. From memory, you'll draw and reshape the incidents that

will give your characters depth and permit them to reach others. The characters in your fiction will not be conceived or born outside of you, in people you know or watch. They'll first come from inside of you, from your hopes and fears, and will then be dressed up in other people's skins and voices so that your stories won't be monotonous.

So --

Write down the five most embarrassing things that have ever happened to you, in as much detail as you can bear.

Now write down the five biggest mistakes you've ever made. Again, go for detail, and lots of it.

The five things you most regret doing to someone else.

The five things that scare you most.

The five bravest things you ever did.

The five people who most changed your life, for better or worse.

The five places that you remember most clearly.

Your five biggest failures.

Your five best friends. (Lifetime)

Your five worst enemies. (Lifetime)

By now you've probably started wondering, When do I get to list my successes, all the good things I've done, all my happy moments.

You don't. Fiction is not born out of all the good things you've accomplished; those aren't the things people want to read about, no matter how much fun it may be to write about them. Conflict lies in the things that don't work out, so the useful moments in your life will be the screw-ups you've made. And the more public and painful the belly-flop, the better fuel it will make for your work.

And if you're getting uncomfortable little warnings about the nature of writing fiction and what sorts of people make successful writers . . . well, hi. People who do well following rules and coloring inside the lines and fitting in are the CEOs of their companies. Or middle managers. Or guys on the line Welcome to Misfits'R Us.

- Dream

Maybe I should relabel this one "Nightmare" -- but hard as I find this to imagine, there are actually people in the world who don't have nightmares.

If you have terrifying dreams -- things that wake you from a sound sleep and leave you shaking, breathing fast, and afraid to leave any stray body parts dangling over the bed -- you can get **paid** for them. As a long-time nightmare sufferer, this was a revelation to me, let me tell you.

Happy dreams are pretty worthless. Anything from finding yourself at work in your pajamas to fighting off vampires to rescue your kids, though, has a place in your fiction.

If you have bad or interesting dreams, start keeping track of them. Write down the ones that wake you up, that leave you feeling uneasy. And then look for ways that you can work them into your fiction. In **Minerva Wakes**, I used them straight out of the plastic wrap; in other books, I've drawn themes, characterization, and motive from them.

Future

- Hope & Fear

You can't live in the future, but you can write there. List the things you most hope for, and the things you most fear. Five to ten of each. When you're done, consider how you might transfer these hopes and fears to your characters.

Style Tools

Raw talent may come from the mystical etheric realms, but if you can master the technical elements of storytelling, you can turn raw talent into something infinitely better -- namely, a dependable skill. The elements you need to master include:

- **Characterization** (<http://hollylisle.com/fm/Articles/wc2-2.html>)
- **Point of view**

- **Dialogue** (<http://hollylisle.com/fm/Workshops/dialogue-workshop.html>)
- **Description**
- **Pacing** (<http://hollylisle.com/fm/Workshops/pacing-workshop.html>)
- **Plotting** (<http://pionet.net/~shangri/Issue%201/workshop.htm>)

(Links are for relevant articles or workshops I've done on the site or in Vision.)

Each of these alone requires more space than I have in a single short workshop. Multiple books exist about each of these style tools; you can be writing professionally for years and still find new facets of each to explore.

The thing you need to remember about style tools is that each of them represents a series of learnable skills -- if you're deficient at any or all of these, effort, study, and a great deal of practice can correct the deficiency.

Presentation Tools

- **Grammar**
- **Spelling**
- **Typing**
- **Manuscript formatting**

I remain flat-out stunned by the number of people who want to write (or more likely, who want to have written) but who lack basic written language skills. Here are the bleak facts -- if you don't know the difference between past tense and past participle, cannot figure out when to break a paragraph, or have shaky or nonexistent spelling skills, you have no more chance of making a living from writing than a carpenter who can't use a hammer or saw or plane does making a living from woodworking.

The good news is that basic grammar skills are learnable. The bad news is that most would-be writers are too lazy to take the time and

effort required to learn them well. If you're telling yourself, "It doesn't matter if I mess up spelling or punctuation or stuff like that -- that's the editor's job to fix," quit now. I'm not kidding. If you're not willing to learn the tools of the trade, writing for a living is not in your future.

If you're willing to learn but just aren't proficient yet, no problem. The first thing you do is read. A lot. You'll get an instinctive feel for grammar from reading the work of good writers. This means people who are writing in your genre, and those who aren't. I recommend any works by the following writers:

- Mark Twain
- Robert B. Parker
- Lois McMaster Bujold
- Roger Zelazny
- Theodore Sturgeon
- Stephen King
- Lawrence Block

There are multitudes of writers who tell good stories, multitudes who write with beauty and technical proficiency. The writers I've listed above consistently do both, and they are members of a rare breed indeed.

Following that, pick up a copy of *Strunk & White*. Read the book; learn the rules. And for grammar practice, you can visit:

- Guide to Grammar and Writing --
<http://ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/>
- The Fundamentals of Critical Reading and Effective Writing
<http://www.critical-reading.com/grammartoc.htm>
- Common Errors in English --
<http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~brians/errors/index.html>
- Punctuation Made Simple --
<http://chuma.cas.usf.edu/~olson/pms/>

- (and one of my personal pet peeves) -- Using the Apostrophe --
http://www.users.bigpond.com/J_fersOffice/sample.htm

It can seem overwhelming. There's so much to learn, you can't get it all in one workshop or from taking one course or from reading one book. The more you learn, the more you discover remains to be learned.

But writing isn't something to do in a day. It's a life course, a path. A journey, not a destination. You'll never be as good as you want to be, and every book you write will be the failure of a perfect idea – but as you progress, every day will also bring its rewards. You'll get closer to expressing your perfect idea.

Your talent is everything about you that makes you unique. With effort, you can shape and sharpen it. So to answer the statement at the beginning of the article – yes – talent is innate. You're born with it. Everyone is. However, not everyone chooses to pursue it.

Do you?

An Interview with Horror Writer Douglas Clegg

By Shane P. Carr

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For this issue we managed to track down best-selling horror & dark fantasy author Douglas Clegg for a quick interview. Mr. Clegg is best known for his bone-chilling novel *The Halloween Man* and his anthology *The Nightmare Chronicles*; recently he published the dark love story *Naomi*. He was more than happy to answer questions in an email interview, and offer insight regarding his influences and views on writing and publishing.

Vision: When did you first realize you wanted to be a writer? When did you realize you had achieved becoming a professional writer?

Doug Clegg: Sometime around the age of 9, I was a pretty serious little kid in many ways, and figured I'd be an artist of some sort by the time I was six or seven. I drew and painted a lot. But just about the age of 9, I was given a typewriter as a present, and then there was no stopping me. I loved writing stories, and I taught myself to type. I wrote continuously from about that age onward, but kept most of it to myself. Regarding being a professional writer, I'm still not sure what that means. I wrote nonfiction in my early 20s for publication, and then I sat down to write my first novel at 27 or 28 and finished it, revised it, and sent it out to publishers. It was bought about a year or so after I sent it out, by Simon & Schuster and brought out from Pocket Books in 1989, two years after I had turned in the final draft to my editor. I've written more than a dozen novels since then, but I think sitting down to write each novel is very much like writing from

scratch again.

Vision: What writers do you feel influenced you the most?

Doug Clegg: Too many to list, but I'll put some of the dead ones down here:

Shirley Jackson
Nathaniel Hawthorne
Herman Melville
William Shakespeare
Mary Shelley
Ernest Hemingway
F. Scott Fitzgerald
Ford Madox Ford
Arthur Machen
M.R. James
H.P. Lovecraft
Virginia Woolf
Isak Dinesen
Marcel Proust
Guy de Maupassant
Fyodor Dostoevsky
Henrik Ibsen
Geoffrey Chaucer
E.M. Forster
Beatrix Potter
Christopher Marlowe
Charles Brockden Browne
Jane Austen
E.B. White

V: What is your educational background in writing? Do you feel a college education is important for up-and-coming writers?

DC: First, I have to say: I think that for jobs in general, it's good to have the highest education you can afford and stand. There is some great education to be had at the university level, as well as some

complete b.s. You've got to discern where the great stuff is, and avoid the lousy stuff. I don't believe college education is necessarily good for up-and-coming writers -- but since I wasn't sure if I was one, I'm glad I got a college education.

I have a bachelor's degree in English literature from Washington & Lee University. They had -- back in the late '70s when I went -- a rather strict curriculum, which primarily emphasized British literature, although I managed to sneak in some American and Russian, German, Scandinavian, and other world literatures when I could. I feel that some kind of education in literature can be good, but my first ten years out of college were basically spent overcoming the kind of dissection that you feel literature is about when you study it academically -- and then, now that I'm older, I really appreciate what I consider to have been a classical education. Knowing Beowulf, having read Chaucer in the original, discovering Isak Dinesen, who I may never have run across if I hadn't been in a class, and having taken a very liberal arts area of study -- including comparative literature, biology, art history, and even the dreaded physics -- all helped give me a sense of the world I probably would not have gotten at the age of 22, when I graduated.

Basically, I think some writers are naturally creative, which is pretty much what I was, but are ungrounded in where literature has come from -- and others are already devouring the classics and developmentally advanced at a young age, which I was not. So, any education is going to be good. I would guess the worst kind of college education is where there's no sense of humor about what you're studying -- the kind of dry education I didn't get, but heard about. I also studied in England during college, and I have to admit, seeing Shakespeare and Marlowe done well or interestingly with good actors and great theater companies, changes the nature of how you feel -- as a young person -- about it.

So, despite the fact that I was depressed through some of college because I really wanted to be out in the world then, I think it was a good place for me. I also learned a lot about male bonding, the world of social climbing, and alcoholism from college, too, which was its own form of education. But it was a lively campus back then -- Sally Mann, the photographer, worked on campus, and her mother, a really

wonderful soul, ran the campus bookstore; the professors were hilarious and very warm, or else so cold and off-putting that they made Bartleby seem like Mr. Personality. It had a really lively literary bent, that university, and the late James Boatwright helmed the writer's program, of which there wasn't a lot, but there was, and is, a great literary magazine called Shenandoah, and a nice arts group in town. I was a co-founder of an International Film Program, which meant we got to see something other than the latest blockbuster movie now and then.

It was also a place full of southern eccentrics, and the history -- owing to both Washington and Lee having connections to the school -- added another slant on the place. I discovered radio and was a morning news deejay there, and have to admit that I generally enjoyed it. Terry Brooks came out of the law school there, and Tom Wolfe had his past there, as well, among others. There was a great book about the university, called *The Foreign Student* several years ago, by a French novelist. So I have a great fondness for Washington & Lee University, and I'm proud to have skated through it and glad to have survived its outrageously painful exit exam, which was eight hours long, and which all English majors had to take. It was a unique place, and since it was then an all-male college, a unique perspective before really getting out into the world.

Okay, having said that: I think, for writers, college is one experience. If a writer is a voracious reader and hungry for the world, perhaps college is unnecessary. Certainly I know a lot of people who never went to it who are exceptional in their work. But I'm glad I went. It also helps when you're about 22 or 23 and need a job that requires a Bachelor's Degree. If I had really been a bit more together, I probably would've gone on for a master's degree, mainly because I've always found school is the easiest way to learn something. In life, it takes years. On the other hand, in life, one might value the self-education more. Who can say?

V: You have gained considerable success through e-publishing. What are your feelings on e-publishing as opposed to print publishing? Do you feel it is a good medium for beginning writers seeking publication?

DC: First off, I love print and e-publishing. Print is a wonderful way to make a living and have books out there in the world and gain credibility as a writer. But e-publishing is beginning to move into those areas as well, and I've certainly enjoyed pushing the envelope a bit in the e-end of things.

To your question about e-publishing being a good medium for beginning writers to seek publication, I'd say no, sometimes, and yes, sometimes. And that sounds crazy, since I've done well with e-publishing. But if a writer wants to make a living, you have to go where someone pays you decently, and I know of few e-publishers who pay at all, let alone decently, particularly with the beginning writer. However, having said that, e-books and Print-On-Demand books are making it viable for writers to self-publish, and, if the writer is willing to promote and market her or his work, make some money.

For self-education, I see nothing wrong with publishing online, and getting critiques, either. Let me tell you, when I was in informal writing groups, those critiques can be tough. But it was quite a group -- in one incarnation, Sheryl Anderson, now producer and writer for the tv show *Charmed*, and Don Mancini, who wrote all the *Child's Play* movies, were in the group. I grew up with or knew a lot of people, when I was young, all of whom seemed to have a great deal of talent for writing fiction or movies. That can be tough going when you're just trying to learn and develop at your own pace, but it really makes you get smart.

It's tough to get published, no matter where you are with your so-called writing career. So, anything that helps -- including electronic formats and POD -- is great for writers.

V: I just finished reading *Naomi* and I thought *The Nightmare Chronicles* was a brilliant way of doing an anthology. In each I noticed you display your characters' emotions incredibly well. How do you get inside each of your characters' heads to empathize so well? It is a talent few writers can pull off so vividly.

DC: I make the story or novel come to life for me. It's a kind of insanity, and I just go there -- it's sort of a flow state, I guess. And then, when it happens, it feels like I'm composing with words, not

manually thinking of writing, but that it's somehow coming through my hands from someone other than me. It's not mystical -- I think it's just a way of focusing the imagination to such an extent that for the short periods of time in the day when I need to write the story, I'm "there." Thanks for the compliments. The hardest part in all this is making sure that the life of the story comes through in the translation of words.

V: The common question ...Where do you get your story ideas? Or more accurately, how do you tell which ideas can grow into stories?

DC: They just do. Basically, if they don't, they don't; if they do, eventually, a novel or story comes out. A few of my novels, like *Naomi* and *Bad Karma*, I knew were stories I basically was going to live in from the moment the first images came to me. Others took a bit longer. *You Come When I Call You* took nearly 12 years to complete itself, with me feeling like I was in prison the whole time.

V: Your current novels are classified as horror. Do you plan to write in any other genre in the future?

DC: I don't actually think about genre at all. I write what I write, and sometimes it's horror -- most of the time -- but I usually see my novels as love stories. Sometimes it's my love for the world; sometimes it's a character's love for another character; and sometimes it's my love for a place. Then the stories arise or get excavated from this mess in my head, and voila -- it's a horror novel. I've certainly worked on stories that are more fantasy and more suspense than horror, and I'm open to writing any story that captures my imagination. Basically, my retreat, my special place, in life, is in storytelling, and I really enjoy it, and can sort of move away from regular life, which I find limiting in many ways, and into "story." It's a good thing I get paid for it, or else I'd probably be living in the street, scratching stories out on the sidewalk.

V: Speaking of the future, what can your fans expect next from you?

DC: My novel, *The Infinite*, comes out September 18, 2001, from Leisure Books as their first hardcover ever. I'm pretty excited about it, and I'll be touring bookstores in various parts of the country to promote it. I'm also going to be launching a new e-serial from my newsletter list sometime in the fall (to subscribe, send an email to DouglasClegg-subscribe@yahoogleroups.com) -- to be announced, but it will be slightly different than a contemporary horror novel. More fantasy-oriented to some extent, although decidedly dark fantasy. And I'm working on a novel for Tor, as well as revising my novel for Leisure Books for 2002, called *The Hour Before Dark*.

V: As you know Holly's community is for aspiring writers. If you could offer one piece of writing advice to them, what would it be?

DC: I say this a lot, but aspiring writers need to remember it: Publication is not the goal. Writing a good story that comes to life is the goal. Publication is a symptom that you may have reached that goal.

V: In the Forward Motion community we have daily writing exercises to help spark the imagination. Is there any particular exercise you use to spark the mind that I can offer our members?

DC: Well, literally, exercise: I've discovered that a long walk or a good bike ride can really get both the circulation and the imagination going. Other than that, my mind just seems to spark by itself. Sometimes, I wish I could stop it.

V: Thanks again for agreeing to the interview. It's much appreciated...and Holly thanks you for being a fan...it was a great ego boost for her.

DC: I am a huge fan of Holly's.

V: I know she appreciates it. Thanks again Doug.

Watch for Douglas Clegg's forthcoming book *The Infinite*, available September 18, 2001 from Leisure Books. Also look for *Naomi*, available now in paperback, from Leisure Books.

Fans can also subscribe to the Douglas Clegg newsletter at: DouglasClegg-subscribe@yahoogroups.com or visit the Doug's web site at <http://www.DouglasClegg.com>

Handling Criticism Gracefully

By Vicki McElfresh

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The bane of every writer's existence isn't long, sleepless hours in front of a blurry monitor, bouts of writer's block, depression, or even a story that simply goes nowhere. The bane of every writer's existence is *criticism*. Criticism is the final stage of the writing process, the moment when all the long hours have been spent, the sweat wiped away, and only the words and pages remain. It's the most vulnerable moment in a fledgling writing career, or even an established one. Criticism, and how a writer handles it, can make or break a career.

Handing any piece of writing to a friend, spouse, or teacher, is frightening, especially when the work is something the author takes great pride in. In a face-to-face setting, there are certain rules to follow. Don't interrupt the reader with questions like, "What do you think so far?" or "Have you gotten to the part where my character falls in the river? It's my favorite." Comments like these won't make the critic like the story any better. They will likely annoy him. Likewise, don't comment on every laugh, muscle twitch, or sigh. When the critic is done reading, he will gladly explain what the strengths and weakness were. But not while he's reading.

Once the reader has begun his comments, listen carefully and don't interrupt. Take notes. When all the commenting is done, ask questions on comments that don't make sense or aren't agreeable.

Be polite. If someone has been kind enough to take an hour or so to read and comment on a piece of writing, don't tell the critic he simply didn't understand the story when the comments aren't agreeable. Explaining the story to the reader won't change his opinion, but it will change his mind about the writer. When asked to read future piece,

he'll probably decline. After all, why bother when the writer didn't appreciate the service the last time?

Online groups have made the critting process easier. Readers are faceless entities whose existence is bound to a login name. There are no laughs or sighs while a piece is being read, but there are posted comments. The same rules apply online as in person. The number one rule, even online, is *be polite*.

Comments that consist of "I liked this," could be responded to with the simple reply: "What did you like?" Sometimes, the online setting frightens prospective critics, so their comments are terse. A little prompting can give the critic courage and also elicit a more helpful response.

Some online readers take the opportunity to criticize pieces so harshly that their comments discourage the writer. Don't respond to such a crit with anger. Don't call the critic an idiot, moron, or other choice term. Don't reply at all. But do read his comments carefully. Even a harsh crit can have helpful advice.

Other readers take the time to carefully plan their criticisms. These crits usually contain encouragement and helpful advice, but honest crits can also sting. Before replying, consider the comments carefully, skim the story, and think about what the reader has said. The critic whose spent time reading a story and writing a crit isn't going to appreciate being told, "Well, author X read this story, and his comments are completely opposite of yours. I don't think you're qualified to comment on my work." Or, "I don't care what you say, I like the plot to be ambiguous. It gives the story ambience."

No matter where a piece is being reviewed, thank the reader for his time and comments. Offer to crit one of his pieces if he is a fellow writer. Ask questions if a comment is unclear, or if there is something the reader didn't catch.

How a writer responds to the comments of well-intentioned friends and family will likely determine how a writer will respond to prospective editors and agents. Editors aren't concerned about helpful comments. They will rarely comment on submissions. If an

editor doesn't understand a story he simply return a rejection letter that says, "Not for us."

Think of family, friends, and online critics as future editors. Listen closely to what these people say, and hopefully, an editor will one day say, "This is exactly what we were looking for."

But I Don't Know How to Critique!

By V. Anne Arden

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You're ready for some feedback on your writing. You're tired of the nice but unhelpful "Good story!" you hear from relatives and friends. You want to hear some real criticism from other writers. Maybe you've even investigated the options available in your area, from live writers' meetings to Internet communities like Holly Lisle's Forward Motion, and have one in mind. But you hesitate to join the group or post that first story because, as in all such peer-based groups, to get feedback on your work you need to give critiques to other writers in turn. It's not that you don't *want* to give critiques. You're perfectly willing to spend the time and effort. Yet you hesitate and mutter to yourself, "But I don't know *how* to critique."

Critiquing is something that it seems you're just supposed to be able to do. We spend lots of time on improving our writing. We talk about plot, characterization, setting a scene, and all of the nitty-gritty details that go into the skill of telling a good tale. But critiquing is a skill as well. It needs to be learned and developed. Your first impressions were correct: there is a *how* to critiquing. But don't despair. The skill of critiquing is improved in just the same way as the skill of writing: by doing it. If you've ever read for enjoyment -- and since you're a writer, you have -- then you already have the basic foundation on which to build your critiquing ability.

The Reader's Perspective

As a beginning writer you may feel you don't have anything to say about a piece because you're not versed in the skills of writing. How can you tell other people how to write when you're not so sure how to

yourself? But there is important feedback for any writer that has nothing to do with the nitty-gritty of writing techniques. Instead, it has to do with the reader's reaction to the work.

After reading a piece for critique, stop and think. If you had just read this story in a magazine, or this chapter in a novel, what would be your reaction? Go beyond "Hmm, nice story," or "Ah, not very interesting." Why do you feel this way? Did the characters feel alive? Were you concerned about what would happen as you read? If it's a novel chapter, do you want to read the next one? Why?

Forms like the critique template at Forward Motion (<http://network54.com/Hide/Forum/message?forumid=69237&messageid=962680132>) are good guides for what to consider at this stage. The important thing is to go beyond the "Great story!" type of response. You don't need to know detailed writing techniques to comment on things like character, dialogue, setting, and plot. For characters, do you feel you know the people well enough that you can imagine meeting them? For dialogue, can you imagine real people saying those things? For setting, can you picture it? For plot, what is it? Telling someone what you thought the plot was can be important feedback, especially if the author meant it to be something else!

You are able to provide the writer with something he or she cannot get themselves: reaction to the piece by someone who *doesn't* have these characters running around in their head, and who *isn't* immersed in this world and knows so much more about it than ever would get to paper. The ultimate audience for any writer is the readers, and you can provide invaluable insight into a reader's reaction.

Going Further

As you develop your critiquing skill, you can go beyond the reader's perspective. If the setting was unclear, try to figure out why. Is not enough information about the surroundings given? Is a word used that was ambiguous and doesn't allow you to picture the scene? If a character seemed particularly immediate and alive, what details made this so? Be constructive. Suggest where more information

about a scene might help and what type of information it might be. Is it important to know at the start of a scene if the characters are inside or outside, or can something like a tree be mentioned later? Did you assume the characters were on earth, and they turned out to be on another planet (or in a fantasy world), and that threw you? Where was your initial feeling formed, and what kind of details would steer you toward the correct impression?

This is where critiquing helps your writing. As you learn to look for the *how* of another person's piece, you can apply it to your own work. If you read a story and think the characters seem flat or not real, and then determine it was because there was never any clear motivation given for their actions, you can look at your own writing and apply that same reasoning. You know why your characters did something. But did you tell the reader?

You can make a conscious effort to further develop your ability to critique. Read other people's critiques of a work you also critiqued. If you're in a live writing group, take notes when people are critiquing other pieces. Did they say anything you had not thought of? Go back to the original work and find what they commented on. Do you agree? If someone makes a constructive suggestion, can you think of a different suggestion that would work just as well? If someone commented on a detail you missed, look for similar things in other works. By improving your critiquing skill, you are honing your critical sense, and this will ultimately improve your own writing.

What If It's Great?

It is important to remember that critiquing is not necessarily about finding something "wrong" in a piece. If it's great, say so. This is something the author needs to hear. Why is it great? Go into detail. From the reader's perspective, mention how well developed the characters were, how you cared about the plot, what feelings the work evoked, etc. Then look for the *how*. What details really brought the characters alive? How was the plot laid out so well? What evoked those feelings?

If you don't tell the writer what you think is good, he or she may not know. If you think the first and last lines in a story make a wonderful

frame, say so, or the writer may change it in a revision! In a critique, it is as important to say what works as what doesn't work. This both helps the author of the piece know what he or she is doing right and improves your own writing skills. By telling others that something is good, and analyzing what makes it good, you can learn to put the same type of technique in your own writing.

What If I Hate It?

On the other side, what if you read a piece and think it's just awful? First, remember that there is always good in any work. Second, remember to critique the work and not the person. It is important to adhere to basic critique etiquette. Never attack a writer or say something to the effect of, "You can't write." Putting a piece up for critique is making a statement that this person wants to improve his writing skills. You may think the piece is particularly bad, but that doesn't mean the person is a bad writer. As a critiquer, it is your job to let the author know what doesn't work, and suggest how to improve it (see Holly Lisle's "Schrodinger's Petshop Members' Handbook" for good guidelines about critique etiquette, <http://hollylisle.com/fm/Articles/group1-a.html>).

Depending on the type of writing group you are in, you may hate the piece because of its general form or genre. It's apocalyptic SF and you hate apocalyptic SF; it's epic fantasy and you hate epic fantasy; it's first person stream of consciousness and you hate that kind of story. If this is the case, be honest. Tell the writer that you are not a fan of this particular type of writing. Then do your best to get beyond that bias. Look at the story, knowing you dislike the general idea, and treat it like a normal critique. Consider the characters and the plot. How is the story crafted? Critique it from within the framework of the type of writing that it is. Don't tell someone writing horror that the story shouldn't be scary because you don't like scary stories. Find out why the story is scary, and suggest how it could be scarier. You can address the skills necessary to craft a good story in a form or genre you don't like, even if you never enjoy reading such a tale.

If the form of the piece isn't the problem, and you just think the writing is poor, the message is the same: treat it like a normal critique. If the characters are flat, say so and suggest how to flesh them out. If the

plot is uninteresting or nonexistent, suggest how to make it more interesting or the mention the type of information that needs to be given in order for the plot to be clear. Constructive criticism is the key. And in any piece there is something to praise. Find it. The basic idea may be wonderful but hasn't been developed, or the words may flow well but the story isn't interesting.

If you're going to be making constructive criticism, and you're afraid of hurting the author's feelings, there are some things you can do to alleviate the impact. Always be polite with your criticism. Don't say, "This story has no point." Say, "The plot of the story is not clear, because..." Try to find something in the work to illustrate what you mean for your positive suggestions. If you suggest more details about the characters, find a detail the writer does give, and say to give a greater quantity like that. Frame your critique with the good points. Start off with something you thought worked, go into the constructive criticism, and finish with another positive comment.

Whether you think the piece is good or bad, whether it's in your favorite genre or one you loathe, the same critiquing approach applies. We all have the ability to give a critique from a reader's perspective, and this is immensely useful to the author. Just like writing, critiquing is a skill that is improved by doing. And you can learn as much, perhaps more, from critiquing others' works as you do from feedback on your own writing. You have the base on which to build to your critiquing skills. The next step is clear: join that group or post that story.

Overcoming the Fear of Writing a Synopsis

By Vicki M. Taylor

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If you noticed, I didn't title this article "Overcoming YOUR Fear of Writing a Synopsis." I don't think you own the fear anymore than I do or any other writer. We all share a common emotion, a reaction to a task that can be summed up in one word: formidable.

What is it about this particular piece of writing that brings more moans and groans from writers than from a roomful of sixth graders getting a surprise math test?

What Is a Synopsis?

Look at the word. Synopsis. Say it with me. "Sin-op-sissss." Even the sound of the word emanates dread.

What is a synopsis? Webster's defines it as "a shortened statement or outline, as of a narrative. Abstract."

Nothing sounds particularly evil in that definition. Let's look at it a little closer – "shortened statement or outline." Hey, look at that. "outline." Now there is a little word we're all familiar with. Does "outline" make you cringe as much as "synopsis?" What about "shortened statement?" Not me. Probably not you, either.

Start with a Simple Sentence

Let's start with the shortened statement. I'll use the popular children's story *Lady and the Tramp* to help demonstrate my points.

What is our story about?

"Lady and the Tramp is a story about dogs."

True, but this portrayal is dry and uninteresting. Would you want to read a story just about dogs? What makes this dog story different? Let's see if we can add some more information to better describe the story.

"Lady and the Tramp is about two dogs from different sides of the track."

Good. Now we know that there are two main characters. And we know that these two characters are different in some way. Let's see if we can do a little bit better.

"Lady and the Tramp tells the adventures of an upper-class, well-bred cocker spaniel and a roguish mutt from the wrong side of the tracks."

Okay. Now we have some description and a hint at a story. We know that these two distinctly different characters are going to have at least one adventure.

Describe Your Story in 25 Words or Less

So now we need to think about our audience. The synopsis generally goes to an editor, agent, or publisher. So we must capture their attention. Give them something to grab onto and not let go. This is where you can really get creative and meet the "describe your story in 25 words or less" challenge.

"*Lady and the Tramp* is filled with exciting adventures of Lady, a lovingly pampered cocker spaniel, and Tramp, a roguish mutt from across the tracks."

Whew! There it is – 25 words exactly. We've just written a strong hook for the opening of our synopsis.

Every synopsis should start out with a statement that describes your story in approximately 25 words. However, don't be a stickler about trying to hit the "magic" number. There isn't really a magic number. But keeping your description to approximately 25 words helps to focus your writing on the key elements of your story.

Key Elements – Not That Difficult to Identify

Speaking of key elements, those are what we now need to identify so that we can create our synopsis.

Wait, wait. Stop groaning. I promise we'll go slowly. Okay?

I think I've read every article and book written on creating a synopsis, and even though every writer has her own formula for creating the "perfect synopsis," I admit that authors agree on one thing – you need to practice. So my suggestion is that you do what I've done here. You find some simple stories and practice creating the synopsis for them. Once you're able to pick out the key elements easily, you're ready to create a synopsis for your own story.

So back to our story, *Lady and the Tramp*.

First Element - Structure

The basic structure of the synopsis should be a complete summary of your story from beginning to end, written in present tense. Simple, right? So far. Let's see how that helps us with our story.

"*Lady and the Tramp* is filled with exciting adventures of Lady, a lovingly pampered cocker spaniel, and Tramp, a roguish mutt from across the tracks.

Lady's owners love her but ignore her when their baby arrives. The owners leave her with a cat-loving aunt who locks Lady out of the house.

Lady runs away and straight into a street-wise mutt named Tramp who shows her how good he has it being free from owners.

Lady is caught by the dog catcher and spends time in the pound learning some of Tramp's secrets. Hurt and jealous, Lady is returned home and exiled to the doghouse once again.

Lady discovers a rat making its way into the house and is helpless to defend her home. Tramp helps her by getting into the house and killing the rat. However, he's accused of attacking the baby and is placed in the dog catcher's wagon to be taken to the pound.

Lady's owners return home just in time to see how Lady has been treated and have Lady show them the dead rat."

More Key Elements – Setting, Main Characters, Conflict

Not bad for a first draft. We're missing a few items that would make the story more dramatic and compelling for the editor, but those can be added easily. First, we should make sure that we've established the setting for the story and identified our main characters.

We'll have to identify real conflict between these characters and their motivations. Then, we'll have to show the resolution of the conflict. It isn't as important to name every character in the synopsis, but you must name your main characters.

Final Key Elements – Tell Your Ending

Finally, we must make sure that we've wrapped up our story and told our ending. Yes, that's what I said, we tell our ending in the synopsis. You must never, ever tease editors and leave them guessing about the ending of story.

As a side note for romance writers: if your story is a romance, make sure you always establish the love relationship between the two main characters by showing how they met and why they're fighting against their attraction.

With that advice, let's see how our synopsis shapes up after adding these key elements.

"*Lady and the Tramp* is an early twentieth-century story filled with exciting adventures of Lady, a lovingly pampered cocker spaniel, and Tramp, a roguish mutt from across the tracks, in New England.

Lady's owners lavish attention on her until a new baby arrives that takes all their attention. Ignoring Lady's needs, they go away on a trip, leaving her and the baby with a callous aunt and her two Siamese cats that wreak havoc. Lady, wrongly accused of the mischievous cats' pranks, ends up in the backyard doghouse and eventually fitted for a muzzle.

Fearful, Lady runs away and straight into a street-wise mutt named Tramp, who shows her how good he has it being free from owners. He treats her to a night on the town, complete with a romantic Italian dinner from his favorite restaurant.

Unfortunately, even though he protects Lady from a vicious dog attack, Tramp can't protect her from the dog catcher. Lady spends time in the pound learning some of Tramp's secrets from his other wayward, albeit intimate, friends {"intimate acquaintances" is an oxy-moron}. Hurt and jealous, Lady returns home and is once again exiled to the doghouse.

Lady's other neighborhood dog-friends advise her to forget this scoundrel and chivalrously offer to take care of her.

Tramp returns, hoping to change Lady's mind about him. She rejects his advances and sends him on his way.

Moments later she's alarmed that an ugly rat enters the house, but can't do anything about it because she's chained. Tramp comes to the rescue by finding a way into the house and killing the rat before it can harm the baby.

However, the heartless aunt accuses Tramp of attacking the baby and calls the dog catcher who places him in the wagon to be taken to the pound.

Lady's owners return home just in time to see how Lady has been treated and have Lady show them the dead rat. Lady's friends run to stop the dog catcher's wagon and everyone is reunited after a thrilling chase scene.

When the commotion settles, Tramp chooses the family life and abandons his drifting ways to stay with Lady and her owners."

And there you have it. Your synopsis. Was that so painful?

This synopsis is rather short when compared to the synopses for the longer books you desire to write. Don't let that intimidate you. The concept is still the same.

Final Advice

Editors have specific requirements when it comes to the length of your synopsis. Unfortunately, just like snowflakes, no two editors are the same. One editor requires a ten-page synopsis while another may only want two pages.

My advice to you is that you follow the requirements of the editor and make sure you include enough information in your synopsis to tell your story but not so much as to slow it down. Focus on the story's

development from beginning to end and make sure you emphasize the resolution of the conflict and/or romance.

If you're having trouble writing your synopsis, don't beat yourself up about it. Go back to your story. Have you developed the plot completely? Do you understand your characters and their motivation? Is your conflict believable and resolvable? If you can't answer those questions, the problem isn't with your synopsis. If you don't understand your story, how do you expect an editor to?

Good luck and remember to practice, practice, practice.

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The Quest for the Quintessential Query Letter

By Vicki M. Taylor

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The Query Letter -- the elusive quarry. We know near perfect ones exist. Editors expound on those that come across their desk. Writers rave about their flawless recipe of words that caught an editor's interest.

Everywhere you go in the writing world, someone offers you tips or advice to create a query letter. Ever since I realized I could sell my writing, I've been on a quest, searching for the perfect formula to create the quintessential query letter.

What I've discovered is that if you go to any resource website or read any writing resource book, you're guaranteed to find at least one article, probably more, about query letters. It's overwhelming to say the least.

Did you ever wonder why there are so many articles? Because there isn't just one perfect format. Nope. You can stop searching for the magic formula. It doesn't exist.

However, even though I've discovered that there is no **ONE** perfect query letter, there are specific qualities of the query letter that can come close to perfection. We all know that for as many editors there are in the publishing world, you'll find that many types of query letter. Each one was created to catch an editor's eye. What did it?

What I've found in common in every article written about query letters is the basic structure. It doesn't matter whether you are pitching an idea for an article, short story, novel, or non-fiction book, the structure of the query letter is still the same.

For simplicity's sake, we'll break down the query letter into its essential parts. Some of them may look as if they are over-simplified and obvious, but you'd be surprised at how often they are forgotten in the rush and excitement of production.

Overall Look

Start with a professional look to your letter. Use stationery imprinted with your name and address. Now, this doesn't mean spending a load of money for printed stationery. Just make sure your letterhead format is professional.

Make use of your word processing software to give your letter a little touch of class. You'd be amazed at what a header and footer line can do.

IMPORTANT: Study the publisher's guidelines. Follow them to the letter. No exceptions! Don't waste the editor's time if your book, article, or short story doesn't meet the publisher's needs.

TIP: Use the publisher's guidelines to adjust any nuances in your query letter. Don't get stuck in a generic format that can't be adjusted for each editor. They can pick out a standard format at twenty paces. Make that editor feel as if you're writing this letter just for them.

Address and Salutations

Always address your letter to a real person rather than a generic department title. Reading "Dear Acquisitions Editor" is akin to reading "Dear Occupant." Don't do it. Use the correct address and don't forget suite numbers.

TIP: Make sure you have the correct spelling and gender titles.

What's the best source for getting the correct name and spelling? The publishing company or magazine you want to send your query letter to. Call and ask the person who answers the phone. It's that simple. Use the Writer's Market to get addresses and telephone numbers. Look in the magazine for the credits section. You'll find names and numbers there.

IMPORTANT: Now is not the time to be shy.

Don't make the mistake of addressing your letter to an editor who no longer works at the company or use the wrong title. No one likes to be addressed as a Mister if she is a Miss or vice versa.

First Paragraph

Make sure you know where your book, article, or short story fits in the publishing world. This means you must know the tone, length, story line, and market. If you are expecting the editor to figure this information out for you, don't hold your breath. That's your job.

Your first paragraph should describe your book, article, or short story, the tone, word length, and where it fits in the market. Make sure you use a title when describing your work, even if it isn't the exact title you want. Preface the title with the word "working."

TIP: If someone has referred you to the publisher, don't forget to mention that important fact in your opening sentence. If you met the editor at a conference and he/she asked you to submit, mention that also.

Second Paragraph

Use the second paragraph of your query letter to hook the editor. This is where you tell the editor about your book, article, or short story.

Be sensitive to the editor's needs and time. Now is not the time to spend pages explaining your idea in excruciating detail. Be succinct and brief.

IMPORTANT: Practice putting the basic premise of your book, article, or story into twenty-five words or less.

If you can't explain the gist of your book, article, or short story in twenty-five words or less, you may not have a good grasp of what you want to write about. If you can't explain it, how can you expect an editor to understand it?

Third Paragraph

The third paragraph should describe you, your writing experience, and any publishing history.

TIP: Don't forget to mention any relevant information such as memberships, career, or other expertise you have to help you write your article, book, or short story.

Final Paragraph and Signature

Always end your letter by asking the editor if you can send him your entire article or manuscript, or outline in the case of a non-fiction book.

Don't forget to thank the editor for taking the time to read your query and let the editor know that you look forward to hearing from her at her earliest convenience.

SASE

Don't ever, ever forget to include a self-addressed stamped envelope (SASE). Use a postage stamp rather than a metered stamp. The editor may not get to your query for up to a month or more. The metered stamp may have expired by then.

IMPORTANT: Make it easy and convenient for the editor to respond to you!

Clips

Some editors ask to see “proof” of previous publishing experience. Others don’t. Read the guidelines carefully so that you know if you should include them or not.

TIP: Make sure they are clean copies (either a tear sheet from the magazine or printed from the internet). Don’t ever include them in the body of your query letter.

Secret Ingredient

So, what makes the query letter perfect to an editor? You. Only you can add that one special ingredient that will make or break your query letter. Your unique voice. That’s what the editors are looking for.

Of course, good grammar and spelling help too! But, most of all, you must leap from the page or screen and grab the editor’s attention. It’s your first chance to make the editor notice you. You know the old saying, “First impressions count.” Make this one count the most! Don’t blow it.

IMPORTANT: However, don’t get so caught up in the structure that your personal writing voice doesn’t shine through your query letter. Be unique.

Be yourself and let your writing speak to the editor. That’s what counts.

The Art of Collaboration

By Dawn E. Greenlee and James Kenneth Mills

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The Art of Collaboration – Part 1

By Dawn E. Greenlee

A fine art indeed it is. One might equate collaborating to a juggling act,. Jim and I are a well-balanced team with our skills supporting each other. For example, I am very good at world building, plotting, and characterizations, but my prose is at times not sufficient to the task. Jim is weaker than I on world building and plotting, but he is an outstanding writer -- at least in my opinion. He is able to turn my mumbled, scrawled and fragmented ideas into a readable whole.

But you need more than complementary technical skills in collaboration, whether in writing or anything else. You need individuals who are flexible and able to handle the criticism that is required in order to work together. You have to be willing to accept your flaws and grow from your mistakes. For our novel, *Lord of Change*, we did one major rewrite and a host of editing sweeps where we deleted or changed things in our book. This was, at times, cause for heated discussions on the why's of it all. But out of this I have seen improvement in both my poor writing skills and Jim's ability to develop plots and world build. For both of us it has been a learning experience.

There are additional difficulties that make this a juggling act. You also have to consider personal relationships between the collaborators, as well as their working conditions, because you are going to spend a lot of time with your collaborator, and this can be stressful on your personal relations. For Jim and me, our biggest challenge in this is that he is married and I am not. So I have very careful not to impose on his time with his wife -- either directly or indirectly. By this I mean, you have to be able to force a quitting time when you know that you've been at it too long, even though you are on a roll and don't want to stop. Or, since I work a day job from 6am to 2pm and am on call 24/7, there are times I have to stop, since I don't have the luxury of a partner who can support me while I write.

So as you work with your collaborator, consider these issues, because all of them will impact your ability to work together -- some in a positive and some in a negative way. I personally think that collaborations are an excellent way to work because, as it is said, 'Two heads are always better than one'.

-- Dawn Greenlee

The Art of Collaboration – Part 2

By James Kenneth Mills

Jim's #1 rule of collaborating: Friendship first. Don't let conflicts over the story destroy your friendship with your collaborator. Always, always keep in mind that you are working with a friend to tell a story and the story is not (usually) as important as your friendship. You will have disagreements about how to handle things. Always consider your partner's points fairly, and that if one of you feels very strongly about something, then that's the way to go. You need to consider and understand the reasons for wanting to 'do it' a certain way. Most disagreements fade when the reasons are examined and understood.

Holly has an excellent article on "How To Collaborate -- And How Not To"

Here's the link:

<http://hollylisle.com/fm/Articles/wc3-1.html>

Scroll down to the list of the seven absolute minimum number of things you need to agree on, in writing, before you start your project. Review the list often. And make sure you and your partner understand and agree on each point. Get it written down and sign your names to it.

As examples, here are how Dawn and I have our collaboration agreement (the numbered paragraphs are from Holly's article):

1. Who owns each character and the universe you have created (or each part of it), and whether either of you has the right to do solo works in the universe or whether it can only be used for collaborative ventures.

Jim has exclusives to characters Jack (Chance/Kesu in Dragons of the East) and to Kim (Secret Psychics) and Dawn has exclusives to Astra (in Dragons of the East) and Garth (Secret Psychics). Other characters are for both writers, though each of us has some voice in whatever happens to them. LoC and SP universes are shared. We have often written scenes involving our characters; many such scenes will never see print — they were written for character and/or plot development as we worked on ideas.

2. What each of you may and may not do to characters owned by the other?

Anything we do (to characters owned by the other) has to be agreed on before doing it. For example, the main character in Lord of Change is Chance, a shape shifter. Part way through the book, he dies... and is reborn (hatched) as a dragon.

3. Who gets final edit on the manuscript or manuscripts, or if this will change from book to book, how you will determine in advance who will get final edit each time. (And I'm telling you right now, you cannot both have final edit. Only one person can ever have the last word. Figure out before you type the first word who that person is going to be.)

Jim normally gets final edit, but Dawn gets to comment, which may result in more changes.

4. How you will divide the work itself.

We agreed to share expenses and any income 50-50. Dawn handles much of the character, plot and world building. Jim puts the words down on paper.

5. What will happen to the universe and its characters if one or both of you want to drop out.

We have agreed that if one of us drops, then the other may continue.

6. How you will resolve differences if one of you does work that the other deems unacceptable, inappropriate, or simply wrong for the world.

We agree to discuss differences, our reasons for wanting things certain ways, and we agree to work to find ways to resolve disputes in a friendly manner.

7. Whose name will go first on the cover. It's going to have to be the same one every time, so figure it out now.

Originally, we were going to write as "Dawn E. Greenlee and James Kenneth Mills" but, in light of how big corporate bookstores handle book purchases (a topic for another article), we have recently decided, at Holly's suggestion, to write our collaborative books under the pseudonym of "Mills Greenlee".

We recently held a workshop on collaborating. The log for that workshop is on:

The Class Transcripts Board:
<http://network54.com/Hide/Forum/69237>

Transcript: Collaboration Workshop 07-23-2001:

<http://network54.com/Hide/Forum/message?forumid=69237&messageid=995938048>

I hope this article clarifies some things and helps you in any collaborations you undertake. Good luck and keep writing!

-- Jim Mills

<mailto:Jim@HollyLisle.com>

"Stop Using Those Said Bookisms," the Editor Shrieked: The Use and Abuse of Dialogue Tags

By Anne M. Marble

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"What happened to the word 'said'?" the editor shrieked as she read the manuscripts in the slush pile.

Today, a lot of authors think that the word "said" is boring. So they decide to substitute it with lots of different and exciting verbs. For example, right in the middle of an important love scene, they'll throw in something like this. *He whispered, "Let me hold you."*

That's all right, isn't it? Most of the time, it's *not* OK. Readers accept the words said and asked; in fact, they barely notice those words as they read. However, words such as "hollered" and "bawled" often draw their attention away from the dialogue and yank them out of the story.

Editors and critics often refer to melodramatic dialogue tags as "*said bookisms*." They know that these phrases give your story an amateurish look. Your readers might not know what the darn things are called, but chances are that they'll notice them, too. Especially if you use said bookisms every other line.

In most cases, the word "said" would work just fine, and using said bookisms detracts from the dialogue. Avoid drowning your dialogue in phrases such as exclaimed, murmured, shouted, whimpered, asserted, inquired, demanded, queried, thundered, whispered, and muttered. These words make it sound as if you have fallen in love with your thesaurus. If the dialogue is strong enough, "she said" and "he said" will do. If the dialogue is not strong enough, rewrite the dialogue instead of using said bookisms to bolster it.

You can use said bookisms once in a while. Think of them as those little silver candies you use for decorating cookies. If you put dozens of them on one cookie, the cookie looks silly and is hard to eat. Like the silver candies, use these phrases carefully and use them only on special occasions. Characters can *occasionally* shout or murmur something.

That said, you should still avoid said bookisms that sound extreme, such as cried, shrieked, snarled, barked, growled, and sniffed. Is it really necessary for your heroine to "shriek" something to the hero or to "cry out" a plea to the villain? Probably not. Phrases like "she shrieked" make the heroine sound strident. Phrases like "he snarled" make the hero sound like the domineering "alpha heel" heroes that went out of style in the 1980s. Besides, when you start writing said bookisms that remind you of animal sounds, it's time to back away from the computer very slowly and take a break. These "extreme dialogue tags" make your story seem melodramatic, even silly.

Yes, I know, lots of best-selling authors use said bookisms, sometimes to excess. That doesn't mean it's all right to use them. That simply means they are so good at telling a story that can get away with it.

And of course, avoid the dialogue tag "he ejaculated." At the very least, don't use that as a dialogue tag during a sex scene – unless you want a laugh.

Put your energy into making sure your characters' words are strong enough, and you won't need to lean on the said bookisms.

"Get out," He Hissed: Dialogue Tags That Look Silly

Now let's go another step and explore said bookisms that should be avoided in almost all cases. Overly potent said bookisms can create the dialogue tags that are melodramatic.

If you decide to use a said bookism for a dialogue tag, make sure it's physically possible. Can somebody really laugh a line of dialogue? Or

cry a sentence? Here's an example: *"Go away," he laughed.* Can he really speak that line while laughing? Maybe – but it might be painful. It is, however, perfectly acceptable to use an action tag instead of a dialogue tag. For example: *"Go away." He laughed.*

Don't use a verb used to describe an expression and then try to force it into becoming a dialogue tag. It won't work. People don't grimace, grin, smile, and frown their sentences. Consider this line of dialogue: *"You'll never get away from here," her evil guardian sneered.* Even the most notorious villain doesn't know how to sneer a line of dialogue.

"But my villain has to sneer," the writer said. Of course. It's in his nature. So try this instead: *"You'll never get away from here." The evil guardian sneered.* Don't worry about the attribution. As long as the action is kept with its dialogue, the reader will figure out who said what.

The big kahuna of dialogue tags to avoid is "hissed." It's used a lot, but quite often, it's used where it's unwelcome. We've all seen this dialogue tag abused. For example: *"Get out," she hissed.* OK, you try it – hiss that line. Something's missing – the sibilants. I suppose the Snake Creatures of Tilolaca could hiss that line, but that's about it. Your characters shouldn't have to be forced to hiss their words.

Remember, the overuse of said bookisms will only serve to remind people that they are reading a story. If the person reading your story is an editor, yanking him or her out of the story can be fatal to your chance of making a sale.

"Run Away," He Said Evasively: Adverbial Dialogue Tags

Another problem that can trip up writers is the overuse of adverbs in dialogue tags. Do you remember those jokes called "Tom Swifties"? For example: *"The temperature is going down," he said coolly.* Those jokes were named after a series of boy's adventure books that became notorious for abusing adverbial dialogue tags.

What a way for a writer to be remembered! You don't want to be remembered as a writer who didn't know when to stop inserting adverbs into dialogue tags, do you? That's why you should drop adverbs into your dialogue tags with caution.

The first rule is to leave out the adverbial dialogue tag if it adds nothing to the dialogue. If the character's words are already angry, there is no need to insert the word "angrily" after the "she said" and "he said."

Conversely, the second rule is to use an adverbial dialogue tag when readers would be confused about how the dialogue is said. This is most often used when the dialogue is said with sarcasm or irony. Let's say somebody hands a subpoena to your heroine. And he responds with the following line of dialogue: *"Thank you," she said.* That doesn't tell me much. Was she *grateful* for the subpoena? Or was she being excessively civil? On the other hand, let's say she responds with the following line of dialogue: *"Thank you," she said crossly.* Ah-ha! That tells me a lot more.

One last note. Do **not** let your hero say something "cockily" during a love scene. *Please.* I'm not kidding here. I've seen that word used during a love scene, and the results weren't pretty. Do you really want your readers laughing hysterically during a passionate love scene? I didn't think so.

Fiction Writing: A Labor of Love

An Overview of Developing Your Craft

By Shane P. Carr

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Writing is an art form. Most folks who choose fiction writing as a career do so because of a compulsive need to write. Others choose writing as a way of expressing themselves. I was drawn into writing at an early age. It was one of the few things I enjoyed in school, and the only thing in school I wasn't intimidated by. I felt it was the one thing I had control over. I could create any story I wanted, and the only rules I had to follow were those of English grammar. At the time I was a voracious reader of anything from vintage science fiction and fantasy to literary classics. These stories would help spawn ideas for stories of my own, and I would write them in my spare time. As I moved through high school, guidance counselors tried their best to focus me on a career path, but I found none that really sparked my interest. One counselor finally asked me what I was interested in. I was stumped. I really had no idea. I told her I would think about it and get back to her the next day.

That night I went home and thought about what career I would enjoy in life. I liked to help people, so I considered the emergency services field. It seemed exciting enough. I sat down that night after thinking about it, and began writing a story about a mystical healer in some far off land. I went to bed with the characters and world I created for that story dancing in my mind. When I got to school the next day I told my counselor I was interested in the emergency services field. She was happy to hear that and helped guide me toward my goal.

The point I am trying to make is that I never actually thought of writing as a career. It was something I did to pass time and escape a rather mundane life. It was something I enjoyed immensely, but I never considered actually making money from it. It wasn't until I was in my

late teens that I discovered people could actually make a living from writing stories. I had read an article on Stephen King in which he mentioned that a publishing contract had been signed that included a six-figure advance. Even though I had read Mr. King's work and considered myself a fan, for some reason the thought never entered my mind that he made a great deal of money off these fantastic stories.

I was ready to beat my head against the wall. I had been making up stories for years and never once thought of selling one. It was at that moment I first considered writing as a long-term career goal. I immediately found a creative writing workshop to fine-tune my skills. On the first night of class, the instructor asked us why we wanted to write. I explained how I had been writing my whole life, and just discovered that I might actually make money doing it. She seemed impressed with this statement, and asked me if I knew for a fact I would never make a dime, would I continue writing anyway? My answer was that I always have been writing anyway. She smiled and told the class that I had the most important quality needed to be a professional writer—the simple desire to write.

That is the real key to becoming a professional writer. You must sit down and seriously ask yourself what your reasons are for wanting to be a writer. If it's money and fame you are seeking...forget it. Choose another career, because to be honest ninety-eight percent of us will never see that six figure advance Stephen King receives from publishers. In fact, even if you do manage to get lucky and publish a novel, you may still have trouble paying your rent on your studio apartment.

Now if you're like me, and have been writing anyway, and think that a royalty check will be a nice fringe benefit, then maybe writing is for you. Writing is a labor of love, and as with any loving relationship, it involves a strong commitment and some sacrifice. The first step is to make sure you have a reliable day job or career to help keep food on your table and coffee in the coffee pot. The next thing is to schedule time around your job, family, and friends to actually sit down and write. Chances are, if you've been writing for the fun of it, you already have this time set aside. Now comes the really fun part-- write

something. Whether it is a short story or the first chapter of a novel, start writing it.

Once you have a tangible piece of work, you can move on to a more humbling experience: getting your story critiqued. You can go to just about any bookstore, college campus, or library and find a writer's group. You can also find about a million or so such groups on the Internet. These groups consist mainly of people like you who like to write and are trying to fine-tune their skills for publication. Basically, you trade pieces of your writing for critiquing purposes. You read each other's work and discuss how to improve it. It is a very humbling experience but is also very enlightening. Since most writers are avid readers as well, they are perfect for finding flaws in your writing. They can tell you if your story is paced too slow, if the characters are boring, or if your grammar is horrible. Listen to the advice no matter how brutal it sounds, even if you don't agree with it. Nearly all critiques are useful, and you will get to see how some readers might view your work. Although the critique might sound rough, most fellow writers aren't being malicious. So take all critiques into consideration, and you may even find something useful in the one you completely disagree with. Trust me -- it is better to get a harsh critique in your writer's group than to hear it from a new agent, editor, or publisher.

Once you begin getting some feedback in your writer's group, considering taking a class to help improve the areas fellow writers keep pointing out as weaknesses in your work. There are plenty of places on the Internet that offer free workshops, as well as paid classes in all aspects of writing. You may also find some great classes at your local community college, and some of the major bookstores often have seminars or workshops to help you fine tune things.

Finally, educate yourself with books about writing. As with any subject, there are good books and bad ones. Read as many as you can. Even if it's a bad one, you may come away with some good advice that you haven't found elsewhere. I have numerous books I have read that cover every aspect of writing and publishing., I have always found something useful in each.

I also found that reading author biographies and memoirs is very useful and enlightening. They give you a first hand view of what the writer's life is like. Most also offer advice to aspiring authors. In fact Stephen King's 'On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft' is a fascinating look at the writer's life that also offers a section full of advice on writing and getting published.

Once you have compiled the mass of advice from your writing group and books, and fine-tuned things with a writing class or two, you will be ready to type out that final draft. Next, you have to take that plunge and actually submit it to an agent or publisher. (If it's a short story for a magazine, it goes directly to the editor. Check the magazine for submission guidelines). Ironically, for a lot of writers this is the hardest part. I have countless stories I have never submitted anywhere, mostly out of fear of rejection. This fear is something that is most frequently encountered by writers considering submitting for the first time. The fear of rejection can be almost paralyzing. Yet you will never get published if you never submit anything. The best thing you can do is to be persistent. If one editor doesn't like your work, submit to as many others as you can find. If you end up with a huge stack of rejection notices for the same story, maybe its time to consider that this story isn't going to sell. Maybe you did everything right, but it just wasn't the story that was going to catch an editor's attention. The best thing you can do now is start writing the next story. You are a writer; chances are you've already started that next story. Remember, you write because you like to write, not because you want to sell. Selling is only a fringe benefit. As long as you keep that in mind you'll be content.

The real key is to keep yourself motivated to sit down and write the best possible story you can each time. Convince yourself that each story will be your best. Pour your heart and energy into the story; love it like it's your child. If you can do this each and every single time, eventually you will achieve publication. Editors can tell when a story has that much devotion. It comes across in the writing. It will make them look deeper into the story and find what brought out such devotion from the author. When the editor finds it, you will get published. So go on...start writing...and give it your all.

More Than Words

By Matthew Cranford

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Words. Where would writers be without words? Okay, yes, that is a seemingly pointless rhetorical question, but the trick is in how words are used, both in phraseology and in any given character's vernacular. The imagery of a story, including the setting, the attitude, and the background of each moment, is critically impacted by the author's choice of words. Including subtle imagery in every line can mean the difference between a short story and a long novel, but more importantly, it can mean the difference between comprehension and confusion to the reader.

To avoid either boring or confusing the reader, the writer must make an effort to keep every line of text easy to understand without dumbing it down or omitting crucial adjectives and details. It would be extremely pretentious of me to assume that I can point out good and bad examples of effective phraseology in existent writing, so I'll just make some up.

When the Prince saw the Princess, he was surprised to see her in such disarray.

So, that gets the point across, but in a sentence like this, the reader should already be familiar with the Prince's and the Princess' names, and the trite usage of Prince and Princess could and should be avoided. Beyond that, the structure, although understandable, is redundant in the use of see and later the use of saw. In a sentence such as this, the comma does more to take away from the readability than it does to add to it. A more effective phrasing might be:

Prince Kirby was caught off guard when he saw Morella in such disarray.

Now we have taken care of the comma without changing the meaning of the sentence. However, commas can also work for the writer, creating more opportunity to add imagery. This sentence is easily understood, but can be still better with more descriptive words and some helpful insights into the mind of the character.

Partially out of shock, but mostly out of utter disgust, Kirby vomited at the sight of the ravished remains of Morella.

When one adds detail, it is important not to go overboard. A sentence that is too wordy can be more distracting than a sentence that is as bland as butterless popcorn. An example of **overkill**:

Out of disgust, shock, and utter horror, with a touch of vehemence thrown in there for good measure, Prince Kirby—a man of great reputation and fortitude—displayed his human foibles by vomiting profusely at the sight of his once cherished and beautiful Morella--now nothing more than a ravaged and lifeless body.

Actually, after I read over that rather lengthy sentence again, it doesn't seem so bad (minus the whimsical comment about vehemence). However, it is entirely unnecessary to mention that Morella was once cherished and beautiful, as that should have already been established earlier in the story. The same can be said of the description of Prince Kirby.

In examining the progression of the example sentences above, it is important to note that the attitudes and expressions become clearer with every sentence. The more detail that is added, the more the reader will feel as if he knows exactly what the characters are going through. Details make it easier for the reader to relate to the characters and to their situations. But again, too many details, especially those of the unnecessary variety, will lose a reader's interest; all the hours spent putting those words on paper will have been in vain, if the reader chooses to read something else—something that will keep his or her attention.

Attitude and tone are also developed by the vernacular and vocabulary of each individual character. For example, a comical character may have a limited vocabulary with very predictable yet irrational dialog, or he could have an unusually expansive catalog of terms at his disposal, and may chose to display this vocabulary without warning at the worst possible time. Likewise, indicators of background -- such as morals, temperament, and education of a character -- are often displayed by his choice of words and ability to communicate with other characters.

It is important to include subtle differences in dialect, whether the story is based in reality or in the realm of fantasy. It goes without saying that in works of a fantasy author has more liberty in the language of the writing, including the creation of new languages, the nuances and particulars of dialects, and even the in's and out's of the grammar and dialog structure. But this liberty can become a burden when the author is trying to convey a message to the reader. It is very easy for a writer to become too involved in those very same nuances and particulars, and lose the focus of the story he is trying to tell.

Here's something else that goes without saying: if the characters are to have impressive and varying vocabularies, the author is going to need to have at her disposal a much more comprehensive knowledge of words than the sum of the characters they have created.

And so here we have another example of bad form--in two consecutive paragraphs I have stated that which goes without saying. If these things truly go without saying, which they do, then I am just exercising my right to lengthen this copy with pointless words, a right which is devastating when employed, as it serves only to lengthen the appearance of the copy without actually adding anything of substance or relevance. Be aware at all times of what is being written to avoid rambling and to keep the reader reading.

One guideline you should follow above all others: When it comes to your own work, don't listen to anybody else until you've listened to yourself. Do what seems best for your own characters and your own writing, and then see if it fits in what the rest of the literary world deems acceptable. And if it's not in sync (damn that boy band,

they've destroyed a perfectly good phrase!) with the worlds standards, who cares? It's yours; enjoy it.

Your Modern Hobbies, Your Ancient World

By Valerie Serdy

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Before our heroes and heroines became the adventurers we needed them to be to make our stories interesting, they had some occupation. Despite what I keep seeing in fantasy novels, not all of these characters need to be warriors looking for work, mages looking for magic items, or youngsters running away to discover fortune. By looking at your hobbies and interests, you may discover an unusual occupation for your main character: an occupation made more real because you already know many of the small details that translate to believability for your readers.

It may be easier to see how hobbies like sewing or pottery translate to a fantastic world. After all, these occupations have all been around for centuries. So, we'll start with my hobby. I'm a scuba diver. I got certified a year ago and since then have logged just shy of 50 dives in the Puget Sound area. I've seen the most amazing things underwater: anemones waving in the current, octopus hiding, starfish mating. I've been stung by a jellyfish and attacked by a cabezon guarding its eggs. I've been buffeted about by strong current. I've stood on the edge of the shore and watched the tide roll out, leaving crabs stranded on the beach for the seagulls to pick over. I've smelled the ocean throughout the year, noting its changes. And I've anxiously anticipated the start of a dive whenever I'm trying something new. In short, diving has given me wonderful sights, sounds, and experiences that would make great fodder for a story.

But how do I do it? I wear a dry suit made of latex and nylon. I carry a steel cylinder on my back filled with a mixture of compressed gases to help avert decompression sickness. That gas is delivered to me by a regulator that carefully delivers the same amount of air when I

breathe in regardless of the ambient pressure. I am using equipment and materials that were not available, would not have been dreamed of, in a world with a technology level matching that of the ancient Greeks and Romans. What's a girl to do?

I had to first remember that I wanted to use my diving experiences in my story: the creatures I'd seen, the sound and smell of the ocean, the numbingly cold water. The equipment I use is hardly interesting in a fantasy story, but it allows me to stay underwater for an hour at a time. I didn't know how long people with no equipment could typically stay underwater or how deep they could dive or whether they were still at risk for decompression sickness.

I wanted believability, so I cracked open a few books. I started with the book we used during our certification course. It began with a brief history of man's desire to get underwater, including the type of equipment that became the precursors to my steel and nylon and latex. In less than a page of text, I discovered breathing tubes, however inefficient, have been around practically forever. Early divers created breathing bags out of goat or sheepskin. Diving bells have been around since 330 BC, invented by Aristotle and used by Alexander the Great to destroy the underwater defenses of his enemies. In fact, ancient Greeks often used divers in warfare: they smuggled supplies past blockades, cut enemy mooring lines, sank ships. Those same divers later plundered the ships they had earlier sunk.

In addition to warfare, divers were used for the more obvious task of collecting sea creatures; much of it was used for food, though sponges were collected to cushion the heavy armor soldiers wore. A little more research using a general encyclopedia showed divers in the Caribbean and Japan making hundreds of dives a day, some as deep as 50 feet to collect lobsters, shellfish, and seaweed.

And there, an occupation was born. My main character, Shara, is a diver providing for her family by gathering shellfish for food, sponges for cushions, seaweeds for dyes and medicines. She can hold her breath a maximum of four minutes, chooses not to use the breathing bags others use, and will help develop a rudimentary diving bell when the need arises. Now I can use my hobby.

Then I ran into another problem. For Shara to see the same things I've seen, the water needs to be cold, say around 55 degrees in the summer time (this is why I wear a dry suit). So, in order to stay warm, Shara uses magic to warm the water around her, using the same principle wet suits use. Not such a problem after all. Shara will now be able to see the wonderful creatures I have seen, smell the ocean I have smelled, feel the anxiety I have felt when diving in strong current. Write what you know.

Those hobbies I mentioned at the beginning of this article (sewing and pottery) are wonderful resources to make everyday scenes more believable. Do you make your own clothes? You probably use a sewing machine. But if you've chosen to stitch a small hole closed by hand, or sew on a button, you've a pretty good idea how it feels to hold a needle for an extended period of time: how the needle leaves indentations in your skin if you grip it too firmly, how your hands and fingers can cramp up, how hard it is to thread that needle if you're tired or your eyes are bleary.

Are you a potter? Your kiln and wheel may be more advanced than that of your world, but you know what the clay smells like, what it feels like, the anxiousness you felt as a beginner when you placed that first attempt into the kiln and prayed it would come out unharmed. Research the history of the potter's wheel and kiln to determine what tools people in your world might use.

Perhaps you're reading this article and saying to yourself, this won't help me, I play soccer. Most ancient peoples, and this includes those of the European Middle Ages, had more free time, more holidays than we do in America. Perhaps your world also has free days and festivals: some variant of soccer could become the game of choice. Perhaps over time your character is a referee or an excellent kicker. Your character could be a spectator gambling on the outcome or an entrepreneur looking to sell drinks or snacks to tired players. If your world disapproves of either occupation, you've already provided trouble for your character. A short scene like this allows you to show some richness in your world and lets us know your characters a little better.

You can place your modern hobbies into your fantastic world to allow you to write what you know. By adding a bit of research to the visceral experiences you gain from your hobby, you can add reality and depth to your world. And as each individual is different, your hobbies could provide a new occupation for your main characters that we, as readers, haven't seen many times before.

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About 40 Words

Valerie Serdy recently left the software industry after 6 years. She's now staying at home and devoting time to her writing and her husband, who's willingly agreed to support her during this time.

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The Cheap Adventurer

By Justin Stanchfield

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Write what you know.

As writers, sometimes it seems these words are plastered across our foreheads. But how can you “know” the imaginary worlds we create when writing science fiction or fantasy? Obviously, research is the key. Yet, no matter how much you read, no matter how deeply you delve into other people's accounts, there simply is no substitute for the real thing.

What's a poor writer to do?

While most of us can never truly live the adventures we thrust upon our unwitting characters, we can still get a taste of what they experience if we just use our imaginations and a bit of creative searching. Here are some suggestions offered by various members of the community, suggestions which most of us can take part in without serious injury to either ourselves or our bank accounts.

Finding Aliens at the Zoo

If you are fortunate to have a zoo near you, you have a wonderful opportunity to find background material to use in SF stories -- and perhaps even horror stories. There are aliens in this world, if you just take the time to go and look at them. Unfortunately, the two zoos that are closest to me are both 100 miles away in opposite directions. Nevertheless, I take what opportunities I can to go and visit them, especially the much larger Henry Doorly Zoo in Omaha, Nebraska. A zoo with a good aquarium -- or a good aquarium all by itself -- can

offer a wonderful array of strange and exotic creatures. TAKE YOUR CAMERA! You will want to have pictures to study again, later. Buy one of those one-use cameras, if nothing else. (Beware of using flash on glass windows, though -- most often all you will get is the bright reflection of that flash.) A digital camera is (in my opinion) the best bet because it's easy to manipulate the "creatures" right away. If you prefer to draw, you might want to take a sketchpad. But be ready to find the exotic, unusual, and bizarre. Look for it. Watch how the creatures move. Try to catch them feeding, if you can. Study primates for behavior, cats for grace and fur patterns (imagine them in jungles, deserts, brush), and birds for the odd, sinewy grace with which some move on land. And always remember that if you want an alien to resonate with your readers, there must be something on which the reader can grasp and understand. Making your aliens "too alien" may not always suit your story.

Lazette Gifford

Scuba

I'm sitting on the edge of a little boat that's wallowing in the swell. I've got a steel tank strapped to my back and forty-two pounds of lead hanging from my belt. I place one hand over my face, holding mask and regulator in place, and lean back. There's a moment of free fall and then the water closes around me. My dive buddy is signaling to me. I give him an OK and we deflate our jackets and begin to descend. One foot per second, no more, gives our ears time to adjust. Within a minute we're swimming freely, heading for a sunken barge that sits in the sand, twenty-five feet down. It's full of fish, packed nose to tail in its rusting interior. My buddy sets off over the decks, looking at the groupers, assessing them for the table. He'll be back with his speargun on the next trip. We keep in touch, checking each other every minute or so, exchanging gauge readings in quick hand signals. I'm on the sand now, still in sight of my buddy. I'm looking for damselfish and as I catch sight of two under a rotting hull plate I smile. I have a theory about fish populations, and these velvety black specimens are exactly what I expected. My buddy has moved to the other end of the barge. I turn and swim straight up a vertical wall to meet him. We compare watches and pressure gauges; it's

time we were heading back. We swim slowly and effortlessly back to the boat, add a little air to our jackets and drift slowly to the surface. As I hand my gear up to the boatmaster I realise the significance of what I've done. I've been weightless, sucking cold, sweet air from a regulator. I've trusted my life to a *life support system*. And that's probably as close to working in a space suit as I'll ever get.

Bob Billing

Shopping for Ideas

One of my favorite hobbies is going to antique stores, malls and flea markets. Unlike going to a museum, going to these places lets you touch and handle the furniture, clothing, jewelry, etc. Some vintage clothing shops will even let you try on the clothing. What does this have to do with writing? It helps with description, for one. If I can actually touch and sample items, I can see how a tool, an article of clothing, or a piece of jewelry would affect my characters. For instance, I know that the types of clothing worn by women in the 1800's were not comfortable and limited movement in many ways. Dealers usually don't care if you sketch an item of furniture, and many times they can tell you stories behind their merchandise. I'm an avid collector of cabinet cards, old photos taken in the late 1800's and early 1900's. I probably have close to 300 of them. They're great for costume information and character descriptions. Some of them have names and histories written on them and are helpful for brainstorming character backgrounds. The photos make me wonder what the subjects were really like. Were the women really as dour as their photos made them seem? Was the guy with the waist-length beard a bad person? My picture collection makes me ask, what if . . .

Vicki McElfresh

Go find Some Ruins

Picture this: You are sitting on the edge of a massive stone slab. Your

feet dangle--you needed a boost just to climb up here. The slab is as big as a city block, surrounded by scrub brush and chipped stone, covered with brake dust and soot from the nearby expressway. Tall columns rise up from it; one of them has fallen and split into the discs it was formed from, like the spinal column of a giant. Each disc's diameter is more than your height. This building was enormous, but it is not the ruins of some modern marvel, felled by an earthquake. This is the Temple of Zeus, and while you stand on it, you are in ancient Greece. I found the experience of visiting the Greek ruins inspiring. The huge buildings, the beautiful carvings, the rooms with running water and sculpted gardens, all of them manufactured without our modern conveniences. And they stank of age, of a culture that flourished and created in a time completely different from our own. They filled me with awe, and with wonder. What was life like then? I will never truly know--their culture is not mine, and never will be. Going to ancient ruins can give you a sense of what a truly alien culture might be like. But you don't have to go to Greece to experience this. There are architectural and historical wonders everywhere, from Revolutionary War forts to Indian burial grounds to Stonehenge to the great cathedral at Notre Dame to the Buddha carvings in Tibet. Take a minute to look around the wonders that man created without computers or technology--you might find something there that moves you

Venus

Sailing

The sun is high in the azure sky. Billowy clouds drift lazily. The wind from the ocean rushes over me. My feet dangle over the bow of the small sailboat. There is a continuous slap of the bow as we get the incoming waves of the motorboat that just sped by. I listen to the gulls squawk their protest of the boat disturbing their hunting ground. With the wind pushing us along I feel the freedom, the freedom of flight.

Our boat is small in such a big ocean, but we are protected. The water is my friend. I know that down below in the depths that I cannot see are the merpeople. Their watery melody drifts along the waves calling to all that will listen. With them are all the wonders that the sea

can hold, sunken pirate ships, sea serpents, and of course The Cave of Wonders. In my child mind I knew that these all existed. I often talked to the waves; they carried my message to the merpeople.

One day I knew that I would swim with the dolphins, ride upon a sea serpent's back, and become the merking's bride.

Shelby

Genealogy

If you look back in your family tree, you'll soon find strange people with odd customs. You'll learn about history and geography in a way that no course could teach you. Then there are the investigative skills. A recipe may be the best indicator of what region your family came from. An immigrant might have one name in most records, another name on the immigration documents, a third name in ship's records.

Dan Goodman

Spaceflight on a Shoestring

A panel full of complicated gauges and indicators lies in front of you. Your pulse races as you snug the harness tight across your waist and shoulders, anticipating the ride ahead. The pilot beside you nods, and you push the throttle forward. The noise and vibration is intense as slowly, almost imperceptibly, you begin to move...The launch of the next generation space shuttle? Hardly. Most likely you are sitting in the left-hand seat of a tired old Piper Warrior or a Cessna 152. Most FBO's (Fixed Base Operators) who provide flight instruction offer an introductory package, a reduced-rate hour or half-hour of hands-on flying, to let prospective students enjoy the thrill of flight without spending an arm or a leg. For the science fiction writer this can be one of the best forty or fifty dollars ever spent. And, while cruising out to the practice area in a light-plane is hardly a ride on a Saturn V, you

will experience the same sensations an astronaut does: movement in three dimensions, communication with air-traffic control, atmospheric buffeting, even brief periods of weightlessness if you ask the instructor to demonstrate a couple stalls. (Not nearly as terrifying as they sound. I promise.) If you are interested, simply call around the local airports and explain that you would like to take an introductory lesson. Look in the Yellow Pages under flight instruction, airports, or general aviation to find the listings. You might even mention that you are a writer to the instructor. Chances are the instructor will be more than willing to give you exactly the kind of first ride you want. One warning: Flight can be addictive, and if you're not careful, you might wind up going on to get your license!

Justin Stanchfield

Exploring

I was lucky enough to have spent the past few days in Alice Springs (relatively near Ayers Rock/Uluru in central Australia), and here are a few ideas it inspired...

1. Geography. Flying over the country gave me a fantastic idea of how the land is laid out, and how one biome/environment merges into the next. Seeing the underground rivers by the lines of the trees, and different geological formations.
2. History. Exploring the town, learning about the history of the area in general and the history of the town itself gave me a huge insight into why towns are founded and what contributes to their success, and also how remote communities might have coped without today's technology.
3. Exploring unknown lands. Hiking in the West MacDonnell Ranges, meeting few people other than the group I was with, allowed me to imagine being an explorer or traveler on a quest.
4. Geology/ecology. Guides, park rangers and information displays are a mine of information about their local area and can give ideas

for how such country came to be, how the flora and fauna have adapted to survive. Although I travelled some distance for this experience, it's something you can do in your hometown. Take the time to explore your town, its history and that of the land around it. What is the geological history of the area? What kind of plants and animals do you get and why? Why is there a town there? Flying is not necessary to see the land from above. Aerial photographs are good, and can probably be found at the local council offices (check the walls for pictures), libraries, tourist information centres or geological/geographical survey organisations.

Jehane

And, if these aren't enough to shift your imagination into overdrive, don't forget the following idea.

The Simple One

The greatest skill you can learn as a writer is to look through someone else's eyes. So, take a walk around your block. Look at the place. Try to really see it. Okay, now 'become' a medieval baron. Take another stroll. Do things look different? What does the baron see that you ignored? Or, walk around as a homeless person, or an alien, or a dragon -- whatever strikes your fancy. The important thing is to look with new eyes at the plain old ordinary things outside your window. If you can't walk around the block, you can do this exercise from a lawn chair in your front yard, or from your balcony, or in the college library, or at the mall. This is the easiest 'research' you'll ever do in terms of time and money. But it can have profound effects on your understanding of fundamentals like Point of View.

June Robertson

Getting Organized: A Writer's Perspective

By Jennifer St. Clair Bush

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I've always been organizationally challenged. When I lived at home, there was a path through my room to my bed, the bathroom, and my desk. And sometimes even those paths vanished. I always intended to organize; I knew my life would be easier if I organized, but I never quite got around to doing it. Oh, I'd start one weekend and get a pile or two done, but I'd always get distracted. You see, there was always something else to occupy my time. In the early days, it was writing, or walking in the woods. Later, after I got a computer, it was email, or chat.

Then I got married, moved, and started a new job. You'd think I would have decided to get organized about the same time as well, wouldn't you? Again, I made promises to myself, promises I didn't keep. I wanted to have everything organized and in place before the wedding. I wanted to have all of my credit cards paid off before the wedding. I wanted to be able to unload my car at the townhouse and put everything away in its proper place.

It didn't happen.

And it was all my fault.

I made promises to myself and procrastinated until I had no time left to organize. My possessions ended up in a pile in the basement, scattered and cluttered. My husband started talking ominously about dumpsters. And I never quite got around to cleaning out my room at home. In fact, it's still a mess, almost two years after I moved out.

Lately, though, I've been thinking about my eventual goal to write full time from home. I began to realize that if I didn't organize now, I'd never realize my goal. I got into that trap a few years ago, thinking that just saying I wanted to be a full-time writer was enough, and that the library job I took after high school was just a transition until I could afford to write full time. If I had been organized then, I might never have met my husband, for one. And I might have already realized my goal. Instead, seven years passed, I got married, moved, started a new job, and came to the realization that I was shooting myself in my own foot by not taking my dream seriously.

One of my New Year's Resolutions was to have a book contracted or published by the end of the year. We all know what usually happens to New Year's Resolutions; they get dropped by the wayside and forgotten. This year, though, I made the conscious decision to try my best to turn my life around and fulfill at least one of my resolutions. Well, to date, I have one e-book out, and three more contracts outstanding. Even by my standards, that's a pretty good fulfillment.

So, with that in mind, and thinking more and more about the future (and the fact that I'd love to be my own boss), I decided that if I could give writing my undivided attention, I could also make a conscious effort to get organized. So with that in mind, I posted the Organizational Dare in mid-June on the Forward Motion site, and then conveniently forgot all about it until I discovered 'Organizing from the Inside Out', a course at BNU (Barnes and Noble University <http://www.bn.com> .) The course is based on the book 'Organizing from the Inside Out' by Julie Morgensturm. I got my copy at the library.

In the book, it says that before you begin an organizing project, instead of jumping in and ending up with an even bigger pile, you should Analyze first, Strategize second, and then Attack. After spending one weekend organizing and rearranging the downstairs (which wasn't all that bad, really), I decided to start with the office and use the book as my guide to organizing it as effectively as I could.

I began by making a list of what Chris and I do in the office:

"What do I do in the Office?"

Bills
Write
Internet

"What does Chris do in the Office?"

Get dressed (clothes are kept in office)
Internet
Classes/Online Training

"What else is the Office used for?"

Guest bedroom (maybe 6 times/yr)

So, with that in mind, I looked at the current setup, made some notes, and decided I needed to rearrange, starting with the guest bed, which was previously sticking out into the room. To place the bed against the wall, I needed two inches of extra space, which looked to be available if I moved Chris' desk over.

To make a long story short, expect delays if you're working with rounded inserts to L-shaped desks. I moved every piece of furniture in the office at least four times (except for the bed; it stayed against the wall. I'm planning to get some pillows and pretend it is a couch. Good thing: We can watch DVDs on Chris' computer while sitting on the bed now. I can also sit on the bed with my QuickPad and use the IR receiver to write in complete comfort.) But I eventually got a configuration I rather liked. And, as a bonus, I get to sit next to a window, the office looks more efficient, and my new monitor fit quite nicely without taking up all my desk space. I also had room to set up my old computer so I can transfer files from it to the new one with ease.

I wrote down a list of things I wanted to change in the office (WIP file space, room for a corkboard, room for desk shelf, empty desk space for projects, room for a set of Rubbermaid drawers) and what I thought Chris would like to do in the office (hang up RedWings banner, keep computer books and software boxes together, have clothes put away in drawers or hung up, be comfortable.)

Not only was I able to end up with a pleasant arrangement for both of us, I also realized that if I care enough about a particular task, I can accomplish it. With that in mind, I'm going to continue implementing the suggestions from the book, and I'm not going to make empty promises to myself anymore.

My husband was right. A year ago, he told me that if I got organized, everything else in my life would fall into place. I didn't believe him then, but I do now.

The Tale of Two Teachers

By Lazette Gifford

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I'm sure most children grow up at least thinking about what they want to be: A doctor, an actress, a train engineer... usually offered from the same child, depending on what week a person happens to ask him.

As far as I can remember, I had no such plans for my future. There was nothing, really, that interested me in what little I understood about careers and work. It wasn't until after I had turned twelve that I found writing. Actually, I had written little stories for my mother for years, but it wasn't until this later date that I learned people really wrote things for a living. I was amazed to realize that people were paid to write all those books I took home from the school library! And even more amazing, other kids thought it was really neat to read about schoolyard antics, or animals running wild through the streets.

I wanted to be a writer. At last! I had a goal!

Enter a grade school teacher whom I'll call Mrs. Smith (partly because I really can't remember her actual name). I remember her as being a very nice, tall woman, her dark hair always pulled back in a tight bun at the nape of her neck. She had a sense of humor, and put up with quite a few pranks and silliness from her sixth grade class. She also never complained when my writing assignments leapt from the required two pages to ten or fifteen. She didn't even wince at the stacks of paper that landed on her desk.

However, she affected my future as a writer in a very odd way. While going through a list of future employment for students to consider,

she discussed which ones would require a college education. And, glancing at me, she said that published writers must go to college.

Looking back over several decades, I'm sure she was trying to encourage me to look toward higher education, but I knew that I'd never get there. I came from an extremely poor family that moved every few months. There was no money for anything like college, and I never spent long enough in any school to even consider grades, or grants, or whatever else poor kids did to go on to higher education.

I remember that moment very clearly, even now. I knew I was never going to be a published author. I was disappointed. I saw a future as only a factory worker or a store clerk, doing mindless jobs -- the future, she told us, for people who did not go to college.

A couple weeks later we moved again, and I was off to a new school. Her words stayed with me, even when school and teacher faded. They might have stopped someone else from ever picking up a pen again, but I was already addicted to writing. It was something that I could take with me, from school to school -- an odd sort of tie, where kids from one school came to the next. It didn't matter that I wasn't going to be published. I wrote for my new friends at my new school. I amassed piles and piles of notebooks full of illegible handwritten stories, many of what would now be called fanfic, but quite a bit of original material as well.

And on, and on -- a few more schools, high school graduation (the only one in my family to make it that far), and then jobs in that factory, and finally a wonderful bookstore where I worked seven days a week for eight years. I brought my typewriter to work and wrote there. Stacks of papers continued to grow, filling boxes, file cabinets, and more notebooks that I lined up on shelves. I loved writing.

I met Russ at the bookstore. We married. He encouraged me to become serious about my stories, and I began to pick up books on the art of writing. I found that I loved learning to write properly, even if it was just for myself and my friends. Russ still insisted that I could write for the market, and eventually I decided that what I needed was a class of some sort. Not college exactly -- I could not imagine myself in that environment. But in the *Writer's Market* book Russ

bought me for Christmas was an ad for their novel-writing course. Okay, I thought. I can give this a try.

After I had registered, I found myself on the edge of panic. The books arrived, along with two notebooks filled with assignments that would help teach me the technical side that I had blithely ignored until now. Outlines? POV? Passive voice? Synopsis and cover letters? So much to learn!

A few days later I received a letter from the person who would be my instructor for the class. The letter was dated August 31, 1992

Dear Lazette,

Hi! My name is Holly Lisle, and I'll be your WDS SF/F Novel Workshop instructor. Welcome to the class.

I've looked over your initial packet, and I'm really pleased to have you as a student. You write very well.

You cannot imagine, after more than twenty years of believing that there was no reason to take writing seriously, what it felt like to read that last sentence. No stranger had ever told me that I wrote well. It was an amazing moment of both release and hope. I could write for other people.

I applied myself to the work. I did assignments, learned the fine art of rewriting and editing (both of which I found, much to my surprise, that I loved). I took Holly seriously when she threatened to beat me over my head with my own manuscript if I didn't learn passive voice. I learned a great deal in that class -- but more than anything else, it gave me hope and confidence. And while I haven't had an exactly stellar writing career so far, I'm a lot farther than I ever imagined I would be.

But I'm going to tell you a secret. *Mrs. Smith did me a favor.* She helped me become a writer in ways that I'm sure she would never have imagined. Because of her, I learned the love of writing just for its own sake. There was never monetary reward or troublesome ego attached to the act of putting words on paper. *It never became work.*

So I'll thank Mrs. Smith, despite the backward way in which she helped me to reach this point.

And Holly, of course, because without her help I never would have believed I could write well, and wouldn't have tried to learn the craft. I am still wandering down my path to success, but you know... so far I've really loved the journey.

The End

By Allan Howe

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I finished my manuscript on Thursday, May 17th at 1:20 p.m. To a writer, the event of completing your first novel is akin to when JFK was shot or when Armstrong took his first steps – you remember where you were. I was at work on my lunch hour when I finally wrote 'END' a couple of spaces below the last line. Not the most exciting place to be, I know. But that didn't matter to me one bit. What mattered was that I was finally finished!

Now, I know it doesn't look like it so far, but the purpose of this article is not to gloat or shout out to the heavens that I've finally finished. Nay, the point of all of this is to try and pass on a few of the things I stumbled upon during the whole experience, in the hope that those of you still working on your first novel can avoid them (or run smack dab into them as the case may be).

Right off the top, let me just say that there is no secret to writing. There is no magic pill that will give you the stamina (yes, I said stamina), creativity or the balls (all writers need them, man or woman) that are required to finish a novel. From what I've heard, I'm one of the lucky ones. I set out to write a book about three months ago and finished it in roughly the timeframe I had envisioned, with no false starts to speak of.

That doesn't mean that I didn't run into difficulties. Far from it. There were a few times that I got stuck (one of those times I thought I'd never get unstuck). But I persevered. On those few occasions when I did stumble, what helped me find my way again was talking about it with my wife. That's not to say that she gave me ideas for the story (although she did). Mostly, it was just enough to talk it over with

someone, get the problems out in the open and look at them from all possible angles. Pick someone who you can trust and who supports what you're trying to do (that in itself is sometimes hard enough to do) and just babble away about whatever's got you stumped. You'll be amazed at how well this works.

It could be argued that had I used an outline for my plot, I wouldn't have run into these roadblocks. That may be true, but for me, not using an outline ended up being of far greater benefit than harm. I think it's safe to say (even after only one book) that I am one of those writers that starts out with an idea for a story and just has to run with it, letting the plot fill itself in as I go. This method may not be as common as planning the whole thing out, but it does allow for a certain degree of creative freedom that outlining does not. What I mean by this is that with outlining, I believe your "creative paths" (for lack of a better term) are already mapped out. You know where you want the story to go, so you automatically "think" down that path in order to follow your outline. Although I'm not knocking this method (it certainly would have saved me some headaches), I think you unconsciously stifle your creativity when trying to mold the story to fit a predetermined structure.

What I experienced was that, although I met with some resistance at times, the story seemed to take on a life of its own. Many times I would be writing away, thinking it was going in one direction, when all of a sudden it would take an unexpected twist. Before I knew it, protagonist became antagonist, or a character I had thought would live until the end died instead. This was a delightful way to experience the story.

One of the reasons many people never finish their novel (again, just an opinion) is because they get bored with the plot or the characters and start thinking of it as work, as a chore. This is the death knell for any manuscript. Even if you do finish it, it will feel cold and empty.

The ending may seem rushed, as if the author was in a hurry to get it done and move on to something else, which is what most likely happened. One of the best ways to avoid this is to have the story remain fresh and exciting throughout the writing process. Discovering the story as you write it can certainly accomplish this.

The above method actually helps to avoid another big pitfall that many of us find ourselves in. Most writers (especially beginners like myself) agree that the most difficult task to accomplish is not coming up with the ideas, or silencing the inner critic, or even finding the time to write, but rather finding the stamina it takes to write *consistently*. Do I see a few nodding heads out there? I must agree that this was tough for me also. It was hard enough to find the energy and the will to write almost daily when I was working on a story that I enjoyed. I can't imagine trying to write one I had become disenchanted with. More often than not I found myself looking forward to my writing sessions simply because I was excited to see what would happen to my main character that day. I simply became the tool by which the novel found its way onto the paper. The story itself told the tale. And I was thrilled at being swept along for the ride.

There was something else that helped motivate me during times of crisis. This may very well be a controversial subject (actually, I know it is), so I won't beat around the bush. I'll just spit it out. One of the main reasons I write is to get published and one day make a living from my writing. Still there? Let me be absolutely clear on this so that there are no misunderstandings. I love to write. I really, really do. But I do not write *solely* for my own enjoyment. If I did, I probably wouldn't be so dedicated to treating my writing seriously. If it were just a hobby, I would only do it when I felt like it. I certainly wouldn't sit down and force myself to pump out a few pages at 11:30 p.m. after a hard day.

As I said, this is a controversial topic. Many people I've spoken with say that you have to treat writing and publishing as separate entities. I've never been one to subscribe to the majority's way of thinking, however. I believe that if you want to have your writing published, you have to recognize this as one of your goals and use it every day as a motivational tool. There has been many a time when the thought of sleeping in, working on my own schedule, not punching a clock (or setting one) and writing whenever I felt like it instead of when I could squeeze an hour in, has helped me shake off procrastination long enough to get the fingers moving again.

Remember, I promised to share a few things with you that have helped *me* become a better writer. Whether they work for you is for you to find out. But the important thing is to *find out*. And you can only accomplish this one way, and that is to write! It sounds simple, but I'm constantly amazed when I talk to people (a few on the boards here, as a matter of fact) that tell me that they want to be a writer, and that they are reading all kinds of books on how to be one, and that they admire so-and-so and they've read everything he has ever written. Then I ask them what they are currently working on, and they respond, "Oh, I haven't started writing yet, I'm still learning." People, I know you've heard this before, from far better writers than I (published writers even), but it bears repeating. **YOU HAVE TO WRITE TO BE A WRITER!**

Don't tell me that it's hard to find the time, or that you have two kids that require constant attention, or that you work two jobs and have just enough time to sleep and eat. All of these are valid excuses, but they are just that – excuses. If you really want to write, you'll find a way. You'll treat your desire like more than just a hobby. You'll get serious about your craft.

One more thing I want to share with you. This may be the best motivation of all to finish that novel you've been struggling with. It's that feeling you get when you're done. I imagine that flying feels something like this. It's the weightlessness, the freedom, the accomplishment, the pure joy of the moment. The second you type 'END', you join a club that is a lot smaller than you might think. You join that group of people who have written a novel. A whole novel! And it is an incredible feeling.

I don't know if finishing your second novel, or your third, or your fifteenth, has the same feeling as when you complete your first, but I definitely intend to find out. I've discovered a hunger that has me wanting to experience not only this feeling again, but also all of the varied emotions that come along with the journey. I sincerely hope I get to welcome more of you into the club very soon.

Allan Howe, May 24, 2001.

Bio

I am 33 years old and live in Toronto, Canada. I have dabbled since high school, but only recently decided that writing was what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. I'm married and have two kids, so I know what it's like to have to squeeze the time in to write. I am currently at work on my second novel, and editing the first.

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It's Not Easy Being Green

By Sarah Jane Elliott

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Read enough Fantasy, and it begins to seem like there is an overabundance of teenagers populating the various fantastic worlds. Adults may exist in these worlds, but the book itself is often ruled by a teenager. So why do so many authors seem to have an aversion to writing from an adult perspective?

There are several reasons why teenagers make handy main characters. Authors who plan on a long chronology in their series are often forced to start with a teenager in order to accommodate everything that character is going to accomplish before he or she gets too old to do it. Others, who model their society after a Medieval European one, choose teenagers because, due to the short life expectancy of the people, the characters begin their adult lives as teenagers. However, the teenager is a convenient main character for another important reason: the teenager is, most often, a novice. He or she is still innocent in the ways of their world.

However, youth is not necessary for a convincing main character. It is the “green” aspect of the character that is appealing to the reader. Nothing causes a story to stagnate faster than a character who knows exactly what he’s doing all the time. If a character is in control, he is in no danger, and readers aren’t concerned for him. However, if a character is thrust into a new and dangerous situation, with no idea how to cope with it, he draws the reader in with him. In the words of the immortal frog, it’s not easy being green, and it’s that difficulty that makes the story interesting.

This is not to say that your character can't be an expert in something. It is quite possible to have a green character who is neither youthful nor innocent, provided he or she is new to the situation at hand. For instance, let's say your main character is the world's greatest swordswoman. She is cool, calculating, and brilliant. Place her in a fight against three burly thugs and you can be fairly sure that she's going to come out on top; there is no suspense or drama to captivate the reader. However, let's say that she gets a new assignment from the master of the Fighters' guild. She is to protect the two-year old son of a very important Lord, but she has to do it undercover. Now the calm, emotionless swordswoman has been thrust into the role of a mother -- a role for which her previous training never prepared her. Suddenly she has no idea what to do, and the story becomes interesting.

A great example of this kind of story is Emma Bull's "War for the Oaks." The heroine, Eddi McCandry, is neither a teenager nor innocent. She is an adult woman fully capable of caring for herself in modern Minneapolis, so Bull throws her into the middle of a war between the Seelie and Unseelie courts. Eddi is suddenly in completely over her head, and must use the skills she already has at her disposal to discover the power within her.

This is a wonderful illustration of why a green character is so engaging; if the character is a novice when the story begins, she has a chance to grow as the story progresses. A character that adapts, changes, and matures is far deeper than one who remains static, and the reader will be better able to connect with her. In Neil Gaiman's "Neverwhere," Richard's life is so mind-numbingly normal that everyone can sympathize with him. Thus, when Gaiman thrusts him into the dark and twisted world of London Underground, it is easy to share Richard's fear and confusion. It also lets the reader grow and change with Richard, so that by the time the story ends, the reader has changed his expectation of the story's outcome to match Richard's. This kind of deep connection is what makes a book sell, and is easy to achieve when the reader can see himself in the main character from page one.

By making the character green, you put the character on the same level as most of your readers. This comes in handy when you have a lot of worldbuilding to convey -- which is perhaps why fantasy stories in particular, where everything has been invented for the story, do so well with novice main characters. An expert would already know everything, and the author would have to rely on scads of infodumps and “as you know, Bobs” to get the point across, which cause the narrative to grind to a halt. By having a character who is new to the situation, the author is presented with a perfect way to convey information without resorting to ponderous exposition. The reader learns about the world with the character, which not only makes the exposition seem more natural, it also further helps the reader to connect with the character.

As an example, consider the classic example of fantasy, Tolkien’s “Lord of the Rings.” Tolkien had an enormous amount of information and history to convey, so he made the Hobbits innocents in Middle Earth. By passing information on to them, and consequently to the readers, he avoided getting mired in exposition and created a story that has remained popular with every new set of readers to discover it.

However, the writer must also avoid the pitfall this creates -- do not use a green character as an excuse to show off what you, as the writer, have created. Such scenes do nothing to advance plot or develop character, and risk disrupting the rapport the reader is establishing with the main character. A good way to turn a reader off is to write a scene like the following:

“...so that, my young pupil, is the four hour explanation of why the xylquax hate our people so much.”

“Ah yes, that was very educational. Tell me more about the xylquax, Master.”

“Very well. The xylquax have a breeding cycle of three quarads.”

“What is a quarad master?”

“A quarad is roughly equal to seven xiptargs. The xylquax mate every quarad and give birth to litters of twelve, six of which are usually eaten...”

I could go on, but I hope it's fairly obvious that I shouldn't.

The key to good storytelling is to give the character a challenge. Perfect characters that emerge unscathed from every difficulty they encounter are boring; it is the new, the challenging, the unexpected that engages the reader. Wise and experienced as a character may be, it is the element of “greenness,” the inability to cope with a situation, that makes the story worth telling.

It's not easy being green -- but that's what makes it so much fun.

Yes, Even YOU Can Write (and Sell) Poetry!

By Jennifer St. Clair Bush

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I have a confession to make. A long time ago, when I was but a child of thirteen and didn't know any better, I submitted a poem to the National Library of Poetry's contest. Imagine my delight and surprise when I got an Honorable Mention in the mail a few months later, and an invitation to publish my poem in a deluxe edition of poetry. If I remember correctly, they even sent me galleys, the final proof that my poem was to be published in one of their anthologies.

My parents were thrilled. I was thrilled (not enough to buy the book; at \$60 a pop we couldn't afford it, but they assured me my poem would be published.) I even sent them, and published, a second poem not too long after that.

And then, years later, I discovered that The National Library of Poetry was in effect, considered a scam, since it was highly doubtful they published a poem if the writer didn't buy the book, and they sent those 'Honorable Mention' letters to everyone. (Seriously, folks; on one of my mailing lists, there was an unofficial contest to see if they would accept any piece of dreck that was sent their way, and they did.)

After discovering that piece of sobering news, I continued to write poems, but I didn't submit a single one until the day I discovered that to submit a novel to a publisher, I had to write a synopsis. The very word struck fear into my heart. It wasn't the actual writing of it that seemed so difficult; it was the process. How could I condense a 475-page fantasy novel into a maximum of three pages?

I tried my best. My first effort was twenty pages, my second fifteen. By the third, I was sick and tired of the word synopsis, so I decided to try something different. Surely, I reasoned, any adventurous agent or publisher would be more likely to look at a unique synopsis than a boring, scene by scene, block of text. With that in mind, I sat down and wrote a synopsis... an 18-page long rhyming poem.

I called this literary effort 'Why I Hate Synopses', and thankfully never sent it off to any agents or publishers. I'm sure they would have laughed me out of the slush pile and into the annals of the Very Bad Idea. The poem languished in my files for the longest time, until I heard about a very tiny new market. The magazine only paid in copies, but I reasoned I needed to start somewhere, didn't I?

So I printed out my 18-page monster, did the proper cover letter (with a two paragraph synopsis and the story behind the poem) and sat back to wait. A month later, I received an acceptance letter in the mail. The synopsis I didn't want to write had found a home. The fact remains, even though I didn't get paid for that particular publication, it was my very first, and will always have a place in my heart.

Sometimes, even the strangest ideas can turn out to be good ones, if you wait long enough.

Harnessing the Wild Idea: The Creation of Run for the Stars

By Bob Billing

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One cold morning I had a wild idea. I'd been trying to write SF on and off almost all my life, with varying degrees of success, but this was it, this was the big one, this would lead to fame and fortune.

It didn't.

My first novel died horribly, choked under a pile of rejection slips. I put it away and wrote other things, some of which found their way into print in newsletters and fanzines.

A decade later I dug out the manuscript, dusted it off and read it again. The writing was terrible but the wild idea still amused me. And the character that the idea had created kicked me really hard and said, "Write something better then. I'm waiting."

Jane was back in my life. She was the daughter of the wild idea, the female character who, despite her diminutive size, wins in the end by a mixture of raw brainpower, feminine wiles, total disregard for the rules, playing characters off against one another, outrageous stunts and, when all else fails, mayhem. Diplomacy, according to Jane, is the art of getting your own way without actually having to hit anyone. All I had to do was set her up against two men who were prepared to do anything, including starting an interstellar war, to get what they wanted. The images began to flow and the words rattled onto the

page. The wild idea was running - now it had to be tamed, fitted with bridle and harness and set to pull a cart loaded with well-made scenes.

With fingertips still blistered from the first round of rejection slips, I though it might be a good idea to get some professional advice before I went too far this time. An extensive search of the web brought me to www.jbwb.co.uk - the site operated by Jenny Hewitt. Jenny is a published author who runs a critique and advisory service for newcomers to the business. I hesitated for a while; some people in the literary world regard SF as the disreputable end of fiction. However, Jenny was charm itself and I sent off a couple of chapters (with a fee) for critique. She replied almost at once by e-mail, pointing out a number of minor flaws and one big one - I had a tendency to get on with action or dialogue without explaining to the reader where the characters were.

Encouraged, I pushed on for a while despite self-doubt and a certain amount of head-shaking by friends and family. Mecifully I ran across Holly's website and read the "One Good Enemy" article. Now I was jolly well going to finish this thing. I ploughed on to the ending, determined that I would enjoy the story whatever anyone else thought about it. I was going to have slightly dotty characters, guards that argued when they should be guarding the prisoner and a senior spaceship designer who brought three dogs to the office. If my family didn't like it they could write their own books. This was my lovechild and it was going to live.

Six months later I had 120,000 works of rollicking space operetta. I packed the whole lot off to Jenny for critique.

Oh dear.

As the lady said it pays to have a thick skin if you want to write. Jenny's report contained two paragraphs on why the novel was brilliant. And seven and a half pages on what was wrong with it. When I stopped hitting bystanders, the roof, the bottle and the prozac, I realised that Jenny's analysis was accurate and pointed the way to a much better book.

Then began what came to be called 'The Great Rewrite', which took most of a year. Almost every scene had to be ripped apart and reworked for one or more of three reasons.

- 1) Working with Jenny had given me a much tougher, crisper style and I had to rework a lot of flabby passages.
- 2) I'd developed a bad habit of wandering between third and first person where the unspoken thoughts of the leading characters were involved.
- 3) I'd overcooked some emotional scenes until they were ruined.

The first was easy enough to sort out - shorter sentences, ruthless mass executions of redundant words and chopping away at unnecessary rambling description until the keyboard ran red with the blood of fallen paragraphs.

The second was harder to fix and touched on the SF author's worst nightmare - the pluperfect tense.

We've all been there. The first time someone tries to write SF it comes out more or less like this:

Colony ships had been sent out from Earth in the 22nd century. They had found alien life on a planet of Alpha Centauri. Jim "The Knees" Hackenbush had had a row with his mother and he had signed on for the colonies where he had discovered that he had the ability to communicate with the aliens via coded body odours.

Had enough?

The next thing that happens is that some kind soul will explain the difference between showing and telling, and our aspiring author will swear off the pluperfect for life. Which is the wrong thing to do, because there is an opposite error and I was committing it. Imagine a scene where our hero walks into the kitchen only to find that instead of a bright-eyed furry face greeting him there is a

mangled blob on the floor. The wrong way to proceed is to lurch between persons:

Horace looked at the corpse, his anger mounting. I'm going to kill the cat for doing this to my gerbil.

Much better is to accept that the pluperfect has a proper use:
Horace looked at the corpse, feeling the hot, salt anger at the back of his throat. The cat had done this to his gerbil. The cat would die.

In the end every possible construction in English has one or more proper uses. There are no "right" and "wrong" ways of writing, any more than a piano comes with right and wrong notes. But phrases - or notes - can sound awful in the wrong place.

The third and final problem - that of overblown emotion - was the hardest to put right. In the end two chapters went through fifteen rewrites. But with a lot of help from Jenny, I made it.

This is the end of chapter 31 as it originally stood. Jane had a brief affair with Alan Cook then broke it off. Alan reappears in her life and is shot.

Alan looked blankly at her, his lips moving as he tried to form words. Then for a moment he seemed to be at peace. "Jane, my love..." He whispered.

"Oh Alan, Alan, don't die," she screamed, "for God's sake don't die!" All at once she dropped the teleportal, tore off her goggles and gloves, and threw herself on Alan, weeping and kissing him, promising him anything if he would only live, that she would resign from spacefleet, or run away, and marry him tomorrow, and she would be a farm girl again for his sake.

It's so emotional that most readers will simply switch off at this point. Of course that's the way Jane is feeling - but what I'd done wrong was to throw buckets of warm, scented syrup at the reader and drown them in a welter of passion.

After a long series of e-mail exchanges with Jenny and a lot of rewrites, I set things up in advance by slipping in the idea that a traditional Arcturian wedding dress is green and gold. Then Alan turns up with an engagement ring - emeralds on a gold band. Jane doesn't find this until after Alan's been shot and is dying. The scene came out like this:

Alan looked at her, his lips moving as he tried to form words. Then for a moment he seemed to be at peace. "Green and gold," he whispered.

Jane laid her cheek to his. "I know. I found the ring. I'm sorry." No, sorry wasn't enough. "I'm utterly ashamed of what I said to you. What I did was wicked."

Now we're almost down to the bare bones of the story, telling what happened and what was said. The reader can infer all the emotion that's needed.

Worse was the scene about two chapters later where Jane, blaming herself for Alan's death, takes her ship right outside the galaxy. In the original version this ended with Jane attempting to kill herself:

She hung the locket that Alan had given her about her neck, then went forward to the day cabin, and took out the bottle of wine that Alan had brought, and two glasses from the galley, and for a while she poured and drank, then unsteadily made her way back to the flight deck to sit in the command seat, for the very last time. The ship was utterly silent now that the faint whisper and hum of the life support systems was finally quietened. In the stillness she slowly became aware of the sounds of her own body - her breathing, the beating of her heart and the swish of blood in her ears - but she chose to give them no attention. By simple force of habit she clicked the seat harness closed about her, giving thanks for its familiar, comforting embrace.

The warnings were repeated on the panel in front of her. Four rectangles flashed scarlet, each labelled "TOUCH HERE TO RESTART SYSTEM". She closed her eyes and ignored them.

Consciousness slipped away from her. She prayed that it would be for the last time.

Being kind, all you can say is that it's a nice scene. But it's out of character for Jane - if her lover got killed she'd not want to die, she'd want (her words), *'To get the beggar that did it and nail him to a tree with blunt bloody nails'*" I'd got so carried away with the scene that I'd hammered it into the novel willy-nilly even though it didn't fit. However, the logic of the plot demanded that Jane come back changed, so she had to get very near to the edge. A lot of rewrites later I ended up with this scene:

She didn't want to die like that - she didn't want to die at all - but she had to find Alan again, to apologise, to make it all up to him.

Her fingers hovered over the partial pressure control.

She had to sleep now. Sleep, reduce the setting and sleep, sleep away the millennia.

She wondered if Alan would be there when she woke up.

That's how it now stands, deliberately ambiguous about what she's done.

Curiously, the one passage which has survived from almost the first draft follows on from this.

As the ship slowly turned, the entire span of the galaxy came into view, filling the glass from edge to edge, but now Jane was fifteen thousand light years above the great disk, and seeing the spiral arms laid out in their majesty as a vast diamond tapestry in front of her.

The endless curving arches of stars burned on, ageless and silent in the darkness, returning to the unwinking glory of the complex, terrible core. Somewhere, out there, in that stark, cold beauty was a region whose diameter was barely one hundredth of the whole galaxy, which was everything that every human had known. Out there, in a space that she could blot out with her thumb, on five hundred worlds, every man, woman and

child, save her, lived and died, and rejoiced and mourned, and fought and made peace. And still the awful majesty of the stars burned on, tearing her soul apart with their unchanging loveliness, in the depths of their silence speaking the truths she couldn't bear to hear.

I'd like to call this the "Galveston Strategy" in honour of the song. The lyrics contain hardly any emotional words, apart from the rhyme of "afraid of dying" with "tears she's crying." But the song as a whole evokes the most powerful emotions, mainly by what it doesn't say. Similarly, it's possible to write fiction in which emotion is hardly, if ever, stated but which ties knots in the reader's heartstrings.

It takes a lot of heartache, hard work and endless rewriting to harness a wild idea. But once it is harnessed it can carry your story along. And who knows where it might take you?

Using the Tools of an Actor

By Robin Catesby

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Ever read a novel that had you so engrossed that all outside life ceased while you turned the pages? Chances are, compelling characters had a lot to do with it, and chances are, those characters were created by an author who was using (whether they were aware of it or not) the tools of an actor.

When you create a character, what are the first things you ask yourself about that character? What's his name? Age? Occupation? Marital status? Favorite color? Favorite food? I've seen character questionnaires 50 questions long filled with these sorts of queries. The kind of questions you might see in a pre-teen pen-pal service. They are helpful in filling in some details, but do they even remotely get to the core of that character's being?

Let's take a look at how an actor creates a character — from the inside out.

When an actor is given a scene to play he will typically ask a particular set of questions to help him understand how to approach the text.

Who am I?
Where am I coming from?
What do I want?
What's in the way of what I want?
What do I do to get what I want?

Serious method actors might write lengthy character analyses covering just those first two questions. The latter three should be answered in direct statements using active verbs. This is key to understanding basic scene work. Within every moment of every scene, each character should know what they want (their objective), what's in the way of what they want (their obstacle) and what they do to get what they want (their action). The motivation -- the drive to achieve a goal -- is crucial. Without motivation the scene falls flat.

In Jeffrey Sweet's excellent book *The Dramatist's Toolkit*, he states that every scene within a good script should be a negotiation between characters. A negotiation can only happen, however, if the goals of the characters clash. Give all your characters the same goal and there's nothing to negotiate.

A fiction writer should approach his material the same way. Even the simple action of one character greeting another can include opposing goals.

It's important to think in terms of goals rather than results. There's a huge difference between the two. Bad directors often direct scenes using "result" direction. Instead of working with character motivations, they'll simply say "be happy" or "be afraid." Acting is not about being, it's about doing. An actor following such "result" direction will end up with a poorly developed, cliché-ridden performance. On the other hand, when a director is a "process director" and gives the actors motivations (*to intimidate, to seduce, etc...*) the resulting performance will be more nuanced, more complete.

For writers, think of this process as describing behavior vs. describing emotion. A "result" writer might tell us "Janine was still nervous when she hung up the phone." A "process" writer might say "Janine set the phone down, then shuffled her stack of recipe cards for a fourth time, and a fifth." As with any acting performance, the specific behavior is far more interesting than the general emotion.

Those specifics -- the *physicality* of the character's behavior -- will come out in rehearsal, organically, through exploration.

As a writer, you can work this way too. Put yourself in the shoes of your character and ask yourself that important question, "What do I want?" Then act it out. Get up if you need to. Use props. Borrow a friend. Concentrate not on the result but on your character's goal. Ask yourself, too, "What's in the way of what I want?" and "What do I do to get what I want?" In acting it out, you might discover that getting what you want is harder than you expected. Or easier. If it's too easy, make it harder. Raise the stakes, increase the obstacles. If you can't think of any obstacles, chances are the scene isn't going to be all that interesting. The obstacles need not be huge, but they should be present, and they should lead to negotiation.

If you're a dramatic writer and you're still not convinced that giving actors an emotion to play is unnecessary, here's a little secret: You know those directions in parentheses that often show up before lines of dialogue? The ones that say (*dejectedly*) or (*with extreme anger*)? The ones Shakespeare never used? Those are called parentheticals, and many actors and directors take a big black sharpie pen to their scripts at first rehearsal and cross them right out. Actors don't want to be told how to deliver their lines, directors don't want to be told how to direct the lines, and writers must write so that they can trust their audience to figure the scene out solely from the dialogue and the action.

In fiction, parentheticals and "result direction" are equivalent to an excess of adverbs. If you find a spot in your prose where your character is doing too much emoting with too little in the way of actual described behavior, just think of Jon Lovitz' character Master Thespian, and remember that your reader would probably prefer to see someone with the skill of Jodie Foster or Kevin Spacey in the role.

Another useful take on this subject is the acting term "play the adjustment." Say you've got a character who is lost in an exceptionally cold terrain. How would you describe that setting and the character's reactions to the setting? I remember a beginning acting class once where a student tried to "play cold" by standing in one spot and shivering uncontrollably. A second student then stood, pulled his collar up around his face, attempted to warm his hands with

his breath and stomped one foot on top of the other to keep his toes from freezing. That is playing the adjustment -- looking for specific reactions to the circumstances, rather than thinking "I'm hungry" and then rubbing your tummy and licking your lips.

Where do you find these adjustments? How do you know what actions will ring true for your audience? That's where another tool of the method actor comes into play: *sense memory*. Sense memory involves the ability to conjure up an emotional moment from your past and use the specific sensations you felt at that point to recreate a similar emotional experience on stage. If you are in a scene that requires great fear, remember a fearful moment from your past and delve into the details. What was your breath doing? Your heart? Your throat? Your skin? With each step of the remembering, work to recreate -- tighten your throat, shorten your breath. The emotion will follow.

Before anything is set in stone, you should allow some time to explore. In theater, the best rehearsal processes are the ones with room to play -- room to improvise and discover nuances and unexpected moments of humor or tension. This improvisational work can't happen if you've got a director who continually micromanages the process and stops the flow. The same goes for writing. You know what the scene is about, so turn off your editor and play. Discard those parentheticals and concentrate on actions and adjustments.

Here are two improvisational exercises to get the juices going. Try these with a friend and a tape recorder.

- 1) Decide on your goals and obstacles for the scene, then, on 3x5 cards, write out a list of tactics. The tactics should be written as active verbs -- verbs that create movement in the scene: To seduce, to reject, to pressure, to needle, to destroy, and so on. Write as many active verbs as you can think of, even if they don't seem relevant to your scene goals. Now, shuffle the cards into two stacks and begin the scene, each of you playing the top tactic on your stack. If that tactic fails to take you to your goal, try the next one, and

the next and the next and so on. Some tactics may be completely outrageous; some may seem out of character, but no worries. The point of the improvisation is to explore all of the possibilities, no matter how strange. You never know what wonders may evolve.

- 2) If you've got two actor friends handy, here's another one to try: Give each actor a goal for the scene but tell them the goal in private so the other actor doesn't hear it. Now, ask the actors to play the scene, attempting to obtain their goals, but -- here's the trick -- they cannot overtly say what their goals are. All motivation must be subtextual or expressed through action rather than words. What this exercise does is help open up all of the different ways a character might go about getting what they want. Rarely are those ways ever going to be overt. Even more rarely is a character going to constantly announce their goal to their fellows in a scene.

While these are excellent exercises for the dramatic writer, they are also quite useful for writer of novels and short stories. Note that this whole process revolves around actions and active verbs. No adverbs in sight. If you've begun a fiction draft and are choosing the details to add to your dialogue, remember how an actor would approach it. You are the actor. These are your actions.

Any story, whether on the stage or on the page, is made up of a series of moments. On stage, if each moment rings true and each moment builds off of and leads to the next, then the actors, using the tools I've described above, become lost in the "now" of the moment. All life outside the reality of the play ceases to exist. As a writer, it's your job to do the same for your audience, and, if you use the tools of an actor, that job might become just a bit easier.

The Roleplaying Game Market

By Christina Stiles

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You like to write horror, fantasy, or science fiction, and like most writers, you aspire to be published. My question to you, then, is: have you ever considered writing for the paper roleplaying game market?

The same skills that you use to create believable, compelling fiction could be used to create gaming supplements that do what no novel can: allow your audience to actively participate in *your* world, experience *your* plots, and interact with *your* characters. Imagine authoring something that will not only be read for enjoyment, but *played* for enjoyment, too.

I know. You want to be a novelist, not a game writer. Well, consider the fact that several bestselling authors have roots in gaming. I'm sure you've heard of a phenomenal series called *Dragonlance*. Well, Margaret Weiss and Tracy Hickman worked on gaming products for TSR's *Dungeons and Dragons* before hitting it big as novelists. To this day, Tracy Hickman is widely known for writing a game adventure called *Ravenloft*, which he wrote with his wife, Laura Hickman. The Hickmans' adventure not only spawned an entire horror-based D&D game, but it sparked a series of novels by various authors, as well. And maybe you've heard of Raymond Feist and R.A. Salvatore? Parts of Feist's world of Midkemia were previously published as gaming supplements, and Salvatore claims to be a long-time gamer to this day. In fact, he wrote the D&D gaming supplements *The Bloodstone Lands* and *The Accursed Tower*. Of course, he is most

widely known for his dark elf novels set in the Forgotten Realms, a D&D setting.

Have I gotten your attention? I hope so. I'm not saying that roleplaying games are an extremely profitable market, though some are. Most companies pay between two to five cents per word, which is about the standard pay for a short story in the magazine market. And, like the magazine market, the publishing outlets are very few. The point is, however, that you can hone your world building skills in the market, and you can gain an audience for your future novel endeavors as you do so. It's something to consider.

The toughest part about writing for the game market is that you're required to learn a game's mechanics in order to write for it. It's also good to have played the game, in addition to processing its rules. Both of these things require time. In addition, if you choose to write gaming adventures, which are basically playable plots, then you need a logical mentality. For instance, you need to cue the Game Master--the person running the game--on how to deal with foreseeable, conditional situations. You might say, "If the characters attempt to open the secret door without the necessary magical key, they are immediately teleported to the top of Mount Viricoz." It's important to outline as many situations as possible, as this helps the Game Master direct the outcome of the game. Writing game supplements, like playable kingdoms, is a little more straightforward and novelist-like, but knowing the rules is still a must.

If you are interested in deciding if this market suits your writing skills, you might want to check out the following long-lived markets and their game lines:

www.sjgames.com (*GURPS: Generic Universal Roleplaying System*, Produces the online *Pyramid Magazine*)

www.atlas-games.com (produces the *Penumbra D20* line, *Feng Shui*, *Unknown Armies*, and *Ars Magica*)

www.wizards.com (producers of *Dungeons & Dragons* and two D&D-related magazines: *Dragon* and *Dungeon*)

www.fudgerpg.com (Grey Ghost Games, producers of *FUDGE*)

Steve Jackson Games maintains an extensive list of game companies on their site. You can find other possible markets from their link: www.sjgames.com/general/companies.html

I hope to see your name on the gaming shelves soon!

Looking for a Writing Course

By Justin Stanchfield

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Help, like the truth, is out there...

But you have to be willing to ask for it. Not so long ago (six years to be exact) I realized, after a year and a half of rejection letters, that I needed a boost getting over my writing hurdles. Even though I was writing steadily, and had already had seen several of my plays produced locally, I couldn't seem to make that all-important leap from hopeful to publishable. I wanted to write. I loved sitting down every night and pounding out short stories, and as importantly, I was sending manuscripts out as quickly as I finished them. Unfortunately, the same manuscripts were coming back nearly as fast as I could stuff them into envelopes. I was stymied. After all, words are cheap and ideas are a dime a dozen, so why couldn't I string them together into something an editor would be willing to buy? Much as I hated to admit it, I needed help.

So, with no small amount of trepidation, I filled out an application form I had received in the mail a few weeks earlier and signed up for a correspondence course through the Institute of Children's Literature. Let me state right off the bat, I am not advocating this course. For me it was a good decision, but it is not for everyone. I was paired with a wonderful instructor, whom I have stayed in touch with long after the classes ended, and who was able to work the assignments around to fit my schedule. However, the tuition was relatively high, and the marketing techniques used by the school are aggressive. I was very

happy with the course, as are most of the people I've spoken with who have also taken it, but I am sure there are just as many students out there who were dissatisfied. Still, the bottom line remains: did the class make a difference?

Yes.

Within six months of starting the course I had, upon the advice of my instructor, sold one of my class projects to a magazine that more than paid for my tuition. In fact, over the years, I have managed to place several of the assignments I wrote for the class, not to mention the stories I have written and sold using what I learned. The information and feedback I gleaned over the eight months of instruction, and the confidence I developed, have been invaluable. Could I have eventually reached that point on my own? Maybe. Did taking a writing course get me there sooner? Absolutely.

Help is out there. But it is up to you to ask for it. Realizing that my writing needed help was a major step for me. However, it was a step I was ready to take. I wanted to learn, and I dived into the material with abandon, devouring each new section, each new challenge with an almost childlike joy. And after a while I began to understand it was less what I was learning than the fact that I was willing to learn that made the critical difference. Finding a course was only the first part of the equation. In other words, how you approach a writing class is just as important as what you are shown. For a student, attitude truly is everything.

More than once I have heard people comment that when it comes to instruction, you only get what you pay for. Personally, I don't agree. Paying a high premium for a writing class is no guarantee of success. Instead, concentrate on finding a course and a teacher that you are compatible with, and more importantly, that offers what you want to learn. Far too many would-be writers throw away their pens before they ever have a chance to discover their talents because some 'expert' advised them that genre writing is neither profitable nor a worthy pursuit of an author's time. Choosing the wrong course or writing group, or suffering through a poor instructor/student relationship is worse than no help at all. Look for someone who shares your love and enthusiasm for the type of writing you want to

create. If what you want to write is fantasy or science fiction (or mysteries, or romances, or westerns, or gothics...) and you're unsure how your prospective teacher views genres outside the mainstream, ask him. Early is the time to discover that the class is not what you were looking for, rather than after you have already invested your hard-earned time or money.

Still, finding the class is only the beginning. As with the horse that doesn't want a drink, no teacher can make you learn. All she can do is give you the opportunity. Don't simply approach a lesson. Attack it! Throw yourself into each assignment. Tackle the new material. Squeeze the drops from every paragraph you study. Push yourself to your limits and beyond with every assignment. And don't be shy. Try to impress your teacher. Show her what you're made of, and that you're not afraid to prove yourself a writer. A class is a good time to experiment, a time to extend the boundaries of your skill. Part of the learning process is the feedback between teacher and pupil, and the harder a student is willing to work, the more an instructor can give in return. It is up to you, as the student, to find the challenge in even the simplest lesson. It is also up to you to listen to the criticism you receive, even when it is painful. Understanding your weaknesses, as well as your strengths, is all part and parcel of being professional.

Fine. You've decided you're ready to take a writing course. You know what you want to say, and you're convinced you have the stick-with-it to jump into the class feet first with your eyes wide open. Now, where do you start your search? The options can be overwhelming. Take your time. Ask other writers if you can, preferably ones who have taken similar classes. Do you want to take an evening class at a local college? A correspondence course? Perhaps you feel that an on-line class will give you the best return. No one can make this decision for you. Keep in mind how the class will affect (the rest of your life maybe change this to: your daily routine). How much of your free time are you willing -- or more realistically, able -- to give up for homework? Realize from the start that a certain amount of sacrifice is required for any class, no matter what the subject, and if you're not prepared to make the sacrifice, perhaps you should rethink your choices.

How much should the class cost? Again, the answers can be staggering. Prices for writing courses run from free to hundreds of

dollars, and only you can decide how much you are willing to spend. But, please, keep in mind simply because a class is free doesn't make it worthless, nor is a high price tag necessarily an indicator of quality. Scams exist, and it's all too easy to fall prey to the unscrupulous, especially where your most private dreams and aspirations are concerned. Scammers rely on a person's insecurity, rather than their desire or greed, to take advantage of them. Don't let yourself be a victim. Ask around before you commit any money. Haunt the on-line bulletin boards and newsgroups to get a feel for what is legitimate and what is not. Are the class requirements and curriculum well defined? Are the prices in keeping with similar courses? And, most importantly, is there a guarantee of publication lurking somewhere in the pitch? If there is, walk on by. No professional teacher would ever make the claim that you will be published by the end of the course. Writing is simply too fickle a business for anyone to make that claim. After all, a teacher can only present you with the basic tools.

The rest is up to you.

Some useful links:

SFWA

<http://www.sfw.org/>

Verla Kay's Webpage

<http://www.verlakay.com/>

Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators

<http://www.scbwi.org/>

Speculations

<http://www.speculations.com/>

Holly Lisle Forward Motion Community

<http://hollylisle.com/>

Find Your Inner Secret Diary

By Caroline Allard

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Ah, secret diaries. Got one gathering dust on your highest bookshelf or at the bottom of an old drawer? I do. When I started living with my husband, I pulled it out of its retreat and we looked at some pages together. I was eager to share it; I expected to find some bright ideas in it, some witty observations, a distinct view of the world. I remembered writing stuff like that! Well, so much for those ideas. On each of its fifty pages, I just encountered a shy twelve-year-old who couldn't write about anything but boys, and boys who didn't even know she existed. A ridiculous testimony. We read it for a shameful half hour, and after that it was back to the drawer, you stupid girl, and don't even think you'll see the daylight again!

But then, I started to write. A couple of months ago, I had this idea for a story. It's about a twelve-year-old girl whose friends reject her from the band for no obvious reason, and how she deals with it. It's not coming straight from my imagination. This little girl is me, and what I would now identify as a distant and unimportant event remains one of the most itching memories of my youth. It's not that I'm seeking revenge – well, not quite -- but why *wouldn't* I write a novel about it? Every "Know-How" book about writing for kids will tell you just that: write from your own experience. As far as this experience went, I knew it stung, but I wished I could just remember more details, the reasons, the reactions I had, what we said to each others... But wait a minute: I wrote all about it in my diary! The conversations I had with these girls, the new activities I had to find and the new friends I made: I had written everything!

When I read my diary again yesterday, I didn't find it ridiculous anymore. True, there is some laughable material in there. But, reading as a writer, I found out that I could go beyond the words: I could hear what was going on, I could feel the sadness and the humor and courage of this little girl that I was. With the diary as a prompt, and reading as a writer, I could let myself go and be twelve again.

Reading with writer's eyes; looking at my memories as a writer. What it meant for me yesterday was reading with an open mind. Not reading and be shameful about what I wasn't, not reading to find only words on the paper, but be prepared and *wishing* to go beyond, to grasp and investigate the feelings as they came. I was prepared to do that last night, and I closed my diary with the certainty that I had found there many useful hints to tell a compelling story to young boys and girls. More than that, I continued to read after that and I found at least three new ideas for stories to come.

My point here is not to tell you that an old secret diary is essential if you want to write for children. You're not doomed if you didn't keep a personal diary. I am glad now that I did, and I'm seriously thinking about beginning a new one – who knows what I will find in it in thirty years! But in fact, my reflections here are not about a real diary. I had to go beyond the words to find out what I was looking for; the words themselves were a prompt, a tool, not the goal in itself. If I had sat back, closed my eyes and thought about this day when my friends were not my friends anymore, and if I had made this journey with an open mind and wishing to investigate the thoughts that came to me, I'm pretty sure it would have been worthwhile.

Every child experiences fear, rage, hope, love, disgust, and so on. The real way to go from saying that you remember what it is to writing about it in a compelling way is not an old diary but an open-minded search of yourself. I tended to avoid thinking about my friends' rejection, not only because it doesn't matter anymore but also because the twelve-year-old I was felt very ashamed for not being able to keep those friends; shame is not a feeling that I gladly bring back to life. But now, thinking of it as a writer, I'm grateful to bear this

memory of shame and loneliness: I'll go find it where it's hiding and hopefully I'll write something good about it.

If you have an old secret diary, especially from the unforgiving teen period, don't let your patronizing adult tribunal judge it. Make allowances, and go read it with your writer's eyes: even if, like me, you were a witless diary writer, your diary will still have a tale to murmur. And as I said, my diary was a great tool, but I could have found what I was searching for without it. Thus, this process isn't really about a written diary, it's about an inner diary. It's not about the artifact, it's about how far you're willing to see beyond it.

E-Publication and Uniformity

By Lazette Gifford

© 2001, Lazette Gifford

There was an article recently -- forgive me, because I've lost all reference to the actual piece -- that said what the e-publishing market needs to become accepted is uniformity: use of ISBN's, similar book styles, web sites set up on the same plans, etc.

Right. If this sort of uniformity was all it took to sell books, then print publishers would be putting out nothing but black covers showing ISBNs.

What (in my opinion) it's going to take is time, patience, good writing/editing, professionalism, and then more time and patience. This is a new medium and a growing market. We are getting used to quick changes in our life where technology is concerned, but that doesn't mean it's going to automatically be accepted just because it's there.

Saying that people who read want uniformity in books is missing an essential point in why they read at all. People who read books are looking for change -- especially in the fiction market. That's the entire reason to read fiction, isn't it? To step outside of their normal world and experience change without really having to change themselves. ISBN's and such may be a sign of something being a 'real book' to book publishing professionals, but not to most readers. I worked in a bookstore for eight years. The vast majority of the reading public has no idea what an ISBN is, and couldn't care less about it.

Nevertheless, I think ISBN's are important. If you can get the reading public to pay attention to them, they are an invaluable aid for

ordering, for listing in reviews, and things like that. ISBNs are a tool that can be used well for publishing. But they are not going to be the drawing point for readers.

Let's really look at the paper-print market versus the e-pub market and see what marketing could bring in the print readers. After all, it would be great to draw all those people, wouldn't it?

But we aren't going to do it, because of one single, important fact: many of these people are not computer users at all. They may have a computer in the house, but how often is that 'for the kid's school work,' rather than anything they would even bother to touch? That's not our market, and though a few might wander in when they see someone else with one of those neat book readers, most are not going to be drawn in by any amount of marketing and wishing, especially if that is confined to on-line, where they are never going to see it.

It's those kids, working every day on those computers, and growing up with this as a normal part of their lives, who are going to be the real market of the future. They don't find reading material on a screen, PDA, or Rocketbook at all unusual. It's a part of their lives, and they've already accepted it.

There is a large section of the population that you are NEVER going to reach. It's not the material in the books, it's the medium itself.

However, having said all of that, if the ebook publishing market wants to be taken seriously by others in the business -- and those others do have the power of national reviews, indicating books available in multiple formats, etc. -- then ISBN's and such are a good way to start getting there. Though, in truth, I don't think it's going to make that much difference. If every ebook and POD now had ISBN's, there are people out there who would find another reason to say they aren't as good as print. Those people are always going to be there. I'm sure there are some of people out there who still think paperbacks are an abomination that ruined the reading market by making material available to the plebs, where hardbound books were a very aristocratic (and expensive) item.

Telling epubshers that they'll do better by making websites look the same is like telling bookstores they have to all line up their books in exactly the same way, and all covers have to show exactly the same thing. That's silly. It's nice when a site looks professional, and I'm sure that helps sell books, but I knew a lot of dusty, hole-in-the-wall print bookstores where I found gems hidden on their shelves. The trick is to find those bookstores...

And that brings me to my last related point. What we have is not a bunch of bookstores; we have ebook publishers with too few central points where a potential reader could go and look for books. Part of the reason I started SFF.NET's E-Stand (<http://www.sff.net/estand>) was to try to create a place where people could 'browse' through the new titles from ebook publishers and the table of contents for ezine publishers, just like in a bookstore. I have fallen down on the job of promoting it since I became the managing editor for Vision, but I hope now to put more time into it again. I think places like Estand (and there are others) are another helpful step, by bringing together a variety of publishers, much like bookstores do. The World Wide Web is too large for people to flitter from place to place, even with the help of search engines, in hopes of finding the book that's right for them.

If print readers had to go to each publisher's location to get a book, rather than Barnes and Noble, it would be an entirely different reading world.

I am never going to get my Aunt, who is in her 70's, to buy an electronic reader, even though she reads two or three romances a day, and this would be a perfect device for her. I'm not going to get her 40-something daughter to get one either, since she blanches at the very word 'computer.' However, her sons, in their twenties, can't imagine a life without a computer.

The markets for ebooks are not going to just spring up and engulf the entire world in a sudden flood of awareness and acceptance. I've seen far too many ebook authors who are surly about this lack of acceptance. Snappish notes to the writers of articles are not going to help the cause. Childish replies to someone who doesn't understand the market is no help either, especially when they see print in newspapers and magazines. We are all ambassadors of the new

medium. We need to remember that lecturing the public about how stupid they are is no help. Pointing out the good sides of epubliſhing, rather than demanding acceptance, is going to help far more than any uniformity, ISBN's and other tricks.

Book Reviews

Book Review: *The Forest for the Trees* by Betsy Lerner

ISBN 1-57322-857-5 pub. Riverhead Books \$12.00 U.S.

Review © 2001, Shane P. Carr

When I am out searching the shelves of my local bookstore, I keep my eyes open for that book that will enlighten me or offer some me some secret advice on how to become a best-selling author. As most struggling writers will tell you, there is no secret advice or magic that will make a publisher buy your book; however, in my search I found a book that does come close.

The Forest for the Trees: An Editor's Advice to Writers by Betsy Lerner is a fascinating book that gives writers a glimpse into the world of editing and publishing from an editor's point of view.

The book opens with an honest and sometimes brutal look at the psychological makeup of most writers. Through her experience working with various authors, Lerner gives a first hand account of the trials and tribulations all writers face. She covers personality traits and mental disorders that plague the most gifted of writers, as well as the demons that can effect the creative mind, such as alcoholism and drug abuse.

In each instance Ms. Lerner manages to make you empathize with the writers she discusses as she guides you through their rise to fame and their untimely downfall to their inner demons. We learn that being a writer can be a trying experience for the mind that wishes to create but cannot find the words to do so.

This is where some of the subtle enlightenment sets in. While reading *The Forest for the Trees*, I realized how much I had in common with many of the writers discussed. It was refreshing and calming to learn

that even great writers such as Truman Capote, J.D. Salinger, and George Orwell suffered from "creative angst." I gained the knowledge that I was not alone in feeling the emotions that most writers experience.

Ms. Lerner even shares her own personal struggles to break into the field of writing and publishing. With deft humor, Lerner manages to touch her reader's hearts with her most trying experiences in the publishing industry.

At this point we only have only begun to approach the enlightenment this books offers. In the second section, readers get the insider's look at what it takes to get a publisher's attention. Drawing from her personal experiences as both writer and editor, Betsy Lerner gives solid advice on finding and agent, preparing a query letter, and submitting to the right publishers. She explains in detail what attracts the attention of an agent or editor, as well as what will immediately turn them off to your manuscript.

So whether you are a writer who is preparing to submit a manuscript, or just a reader who wishes to learn how writers, editors, and publishers think, *The Forest for the Trees: An Editor's Advice to Writers* is a must read.

Del Rey Digital Writing Workshop

By Vicki McElfresh

© 2001, Vicki McElfresh

After overcoming serious server problems from about a year ago, the Del Rey Online Writing Workshop is back. This workshop was my first introduction to the world of online writing communities. A year ago when I began posting chapters of my WIP on the Del Rey Online Writing Workshop (DROWW), I was pleased, though occasionally annoyed, by the workshop format. The crits I received weren't always good, but I was still disappointed when DROWW went offline.

When I first received an email from the workshop coordinator for DROWW, Ellen Kay Harris, I was a bit surprised. Curious, I signed back up. Because I had participated in the original workshop, signing up was a bit of an adventure. I didn't remember my original user ID or password, so I had to create a new one, which the DROWW database did not like. After four usernames, I finally got into the workshop, and was disappointed almost immediately.

One of the features of the old workshop that I did not like was the rating system. I had hoped the new workshop would have a new critiquing format, but it didn't. The rating system was still alive and well. The system works on a scale of 1-5 in five different categories: professionalism of writing, setting, character development, plot credibility, and dialogue. Based on the number of crits, each submission will score a cumulative rating. I suppose that ratings are a good way to see how well a piece is received. The problem I have is that they don't reflect the quality of a piece at all. I've read pieces on DROWW that have overall ratings of 3's but are well written, well plotted, and well on their way to publication. I've read pieces with

overall ratings of 4.5-5, that I suspect will never be good enough to see print.

I could live with the rating system, if the written critiques reflected the ratings. More often than not, I see stories receive 3's in the plot category, yet the critiques have no comments about the plot. I've seen stories receive 5's in the professionalism and have two pages of grammar comments. I often receive 3's for character development, but I almost never get comments on what is wrong with my characterization. In my opinion, this defeats the purpose of the workshop to "help you grow as a writer." Most of the crits I have received have been shallow, short, and not all helpful.

The DROWW does have some nice features. My favorite is the requirement that each participant has to earn at least 3 review points before a submission can be posted. Each story reviewed earns a participant 1 review point, unless the piece has no reviews at all, then it earns 2 points. When I first joined, I was given three review points to post one submission and try out the workshop. After that I would have to crit more pieces in order to post anything new. The nice thing about this feature is it ensures that pieces receive at least one crit, often two, without much effort from the poster. The catch is there are so many pieces listed on DROWW (approximately 2000) that in order to receive more than one or two crits, a writer must review other submissions. Doesn't sound so bad? The problem I've discovered is that even those people who promise to return crit, usually don't. For me, this means that for every six or seven stories I've reviewed, I might have received two crits. Because of this, reviewing on DROWW can quickly become a full time job, something I don't have time for.

Another nice feature is the actual submission process. DROWW lists pieces by type, short story, fantasy chapter, sci-fi chapter, or a mix of sci-fantasy. The writer is also given a checklist to tell what stage a submission is in, early draft, middle draft, or polished draft. Comments about the submission can be posted in the "Author's comments" box. The story or chapter is pasted into the submission window. When the submit button is pressed a preview screen will come up that will show both the story as it will appear on the workshop and also in the submission screen. It's a great way to

check for HTML tags that aren't closed, add spaces between paragraphs, etc. Another click and the submission process is over. It's quick, simple, efficient, and a great improvement over the original DROWW.

Perhaps the best feature of the DROWW is the Writer's Resource page, which has links to other writing related sites are listed by types, organizations, other workshops etc. A few of the links, such as the one for Inkspot, are out of date, but most are working. If DROWW isn't for you, then perhaps this resource page can lead you someplace better.

The workshop is free. If you are looking for a forum to use as a sounding board for how a story might be received, DROWW is a good place to start. If you are a serious writer looking for ways to improve, DROWW is not the place for you.

Del Rey's workshop can be found at:
<http://delrey.onlinewritingworkshop.com>.

Around the Boards with Jim Mills

© 2001, Jim Mills

The Writers' Board... <http://network54.com/Hide/Forum/64272>

One of our members is no longer with us. Jack Harness passed away on Friday, July 13, 2001. I didn't know him long or well enough. He gave me some good critiques and I had the opportunity to read and crit one of his stories. You'll find his posts here and there around the boards. We'll miss you, Jack. Here's a link to the Jack Harness memorial web site, including a picture and thoughts of those who knew Jack:

<http://www.lasfs.org/lasfs/history/harness.html>

A thread from when we first learned of our loss of Jack:

<http://network54.com/Hide/Forum/thread?forumid=64272&messageid=995238111>

Forum Design Contest Final Results

Congratulations go to Holly Lisle, whose Forum was an inspiration... in more ways than one. Here is the scoring breakdown:

<http://network54.com/Hide/Forum/thread?forumid=64272&messageid=995845313>

Way back when I joined as a member of Holly's site, one of my favorite features was participating in the classes and workshops. They've been on hiatus for a while, but now they're back, and better than ever. Read all about 'em... here's the link:

<http://network54.com/Hide/Forum/69772>

Speaking of classes and workshops, Holly is running a course of classes based on the new bible of writing: *Writing the Breakout Novel* by Donald Maass. If you want to write well, get a copy of this book! I haven't seen it in bookstores yet, but it's out there, or you can order it from Amazon like I did. Here's the scoop on Holly's course of classes:

<http://network54.com/Hide/Forum/message?forumid=69772&messageid=999311144>

Info on registering for classes:

<http://network54.com/Hide/Forum/69772>

Visor owners - information on various applications for your PDA:

<http://network54.com/Hide/Forum/thread?forumid=64272&messageid=996329416>

An interesting thread containing comments on multiple viewpoints:

<http://network54.com/Hide/Forum/thread?forumid=64272&messageid=996221348>

Here's another interesting thread on how you know if you have a novel-worthy idea (as opposed to a short story idea), with comments about "padding" the story out to novel length:

<http://network54.com/Hide/Forum/thread?forumid=64272&messageid=996159578>

Zette takes really interesting pictures. Have a look. Maybe they'll inspire a story for you. Here are a couple of links:

Dewdrops and the Short Story classes:

<http://network54.com/Hide/Forum/thread?forumid=64272&messageid=996534191>

A tiny backyard flower:

<http://network54.com/Hide/Forum/thread?forumid=64272&messageid=996122730>

I particularly liked the boy, teddy bear and dragon in the clouds:

<http://network54.com/Hide/Forum/thread?forumid=64272&messageid=995716757>

A peacock, 24 stories sold in 24 months and a national award:

<http://network54.com/Hide/Forum/thread?forumid=64272&messageid=995347067>

Also from Zette: What to do when stories hit:

<http://network54.com/Hide/Forum/thread?forumid=64272&messageid=995865893>

Should you have love scenes in your fantasy or SF stories? Here's the thread for a discussion on that topic.

<http://network54.com/Hide/Forum/thread?forumid=64272&messageid=995971872>

How about movie fight scenes? How should you write fight scenes in your novel?

<http://network54.com/Hide/Forum/thread?forumid=64272&messageid=995845313>

The class on Developing Mythological Systems spawned a thread of comments with lots of good information. Check it out:

<http://network54.com/Hide/Forum/thread?forumid=64272&messageid=995088519>

More on mythology -- unsystematic mythology:

<http://network54.com/Hide/Forum/thread?forumid=64272&messageid=995567664>

Bob Billing asks for help! No tension - or what's wrong with the WIP? This is a thread that gives you a look at some of Bob's work and comments various members have made about how to improve it:

<http://network54.com/Hide/Forum/thread?forumid=64272&messageid=995412883>

Ever have that feeling that one of your ideas has escaped you and is merrily writing itself into a huge monolith? Comments about writing your story:

<http://network54.com/Hide/Forum/thread?forumid=64272&messageid=995391416>

What you MUST have for fantasy - a debate:

<http://network54.com/Hide/Forum/thread?forumid=64272&messageid=995344899>

Sequels and trilogies and selling your work:

<http://network54.com/Hide/Forum/thread?forumid=64272&messageid=995341791>

Justin Stanchfield asks: What was the seed? What was the first book any of you read, or movie or television program you watched, that made you sit up and say "Hey! I could do this!" What lit the fire inside you to become a writer?

<http://network54.com/Hide/Forum/thread?forumid=64272&messageid=995210985>

Some of Holly's books are available for free:

Fire in the Mist:

<http://network54.com/Hide/Forum/thread?forumid=64272&messageid=995321265>

Vengeance of Dragons:

<http://network54.com/Hide/Forum/thread?forumid=64272&messageid=991958957>

Fantasy archetypes:

<http://network54.com/Hide/Forum/thread?forumid=64272&messageid=995247800>

There's more -- lots more. The links above are just a sample.

When you look at the writers' board, especially if you haven't been there in a while, do you look at more than one page? The writers'

board is our most active board, and there are lots of threads with all kinds of interesting discussions, as well as general information that you may find useful in your stories. When you get to the bottom of the page, you'll see "Next >>" at the lower right. Click on that to take you to the next page. The posts are in "most recent first" order, and we keep most old posts, so there's a lot of stuff you can peruse. See the numbers (i.e.: 1 through 25?) at the bottom? You can click on any of those to go directly to that page. At the time of this writing, there are 137 pages dating back to May of 2000 -- over a year of accumulated information. Enjoy!

(Publishers' note – You can also search the contents of any board by clicking the "Search" link on the yellow board bar, next to "Chat.")

-- Jim Mills

<mailto:Jim@HollyLisle.com>



News From Forward Motion

Good News From Forward Motion

Holly was interviewed by Fiction Factor. Read the results here:
<http://www.fictionfactor.com/interviews/HollyLisle.html>

HollyLisle.com mentioned in the current newsletter from Moira Allen at Writing World, the link is <http://www.writing-world.com>

Holly Lisle's Vision: A Resource for Writers has one its first award!
<http://www.editavenue.com>

Moderator Justin Stanchfield reports that he as a story in the new ebook anthology, The Lawbreakers.
<http://www.shadowkeepzine.com/lawbreakers/index.html>

Looks like Caroline Allard and Justin will be half of the September output of flash fiction at ShadowKeep. If anyone is interested in writing a flash story - 500 words or less - ShadowKeep is still looking for a few more. No pay, but great fun!
<http://www.shadowkeepzine.com/>

Member Robert Sloan has had "Black Days and Blazing Nights" accepted by Morbid Musings for issue # 2. Morbid Musings Online
www.MeghansMusings.com/Morbid.html

Moderator Ron Brown placed a story with Futures that should be appearing in October.

New Gaming Moderator Christina Stiles has I freelanced 4 monster descriptions for a roleplaying game supplement entitled, Liber

Beastarius, by Eden Studios. The book should be released in this fall or winter.

Additionally, she will be editing a book of non-player characters for Atlas Games that will be released in 2002.

Jennifer St. Clair Bush's The Tenth Ghost is now available at www.Bookmice.com .



The soundtrack CD for Robin Catesby's world premiere production of The Velveteen Rabbit is now available at MAH Records, the record company of composer Michael Allen Harrison.

(http://www.mahrecords.com/new_items.htm).

The new musical adaptation played Dec 21 through 24 in Portland Oregon. For more information about the production, the script and the music (including the original cast recording CD), visit www.velveteen-rabbit.com .

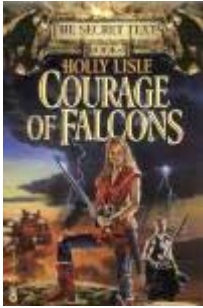
Moderator Lazette Gifford has placed a few more stories, including Weber's Site to Dark Moon Rising. (<http://www.dmr.com>) and Legend to Ideomancer(<http://www.ideomancer.com>). Her story, Sumerian Nights at Alternate Realities (<http://www.alternaterealitieszine.com/fan.htm>) has been given one of the first Webmaster's Choice Awards from Ahmed Khan's Index of Fiction On Line, and A Fate Cast in Stones (<http://www.ideomancer.com>) was chosen as one of Paula's Picks. She also placed 24 stories in 24 months, since her very first sale to Jackhammer Ezine back in July, 1999.



Lazette's first novel, Silky, is available from Embiid Publishing. (<http://www.embiid.net>)

Exciting, complex and richly textured, with a world you'll believe and a protagonist you have to cheer for -- Silky is wonderful.

--Holly Lisle, author of Courage of Falcons



Holly Lisle's current book -- on the stands now!

To defeat the Dragons, Kait and Ry must destroy the source of the sorcerers' power -- the Mirror of Souls. But if they succeed, they will lose the only weapon that can stop Luercas from becoming a demonic god who will enslave the entire world . . . forever.

Book III of THE SECRET TEXTS

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| [Order the book](#)

Masthead

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[Lazette Gifford](#)

Publishers

Visions is published bi-monthly and accepts articles only from people who belong to the Forward Motion Writer's Community. [Joining the community is free](#), and it's a great resource for upcoming writers.

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Vision E-zine Submission Guidelines

We will happily consider manuscripts from unpublished and published writers – we prefer to be queried (all queries and manuscript submissions are handled by e-mail). We are interested in all facets of writing, from first-person experience articles to genre-specific how-to's to informational articles about your area of specialization – whether it be history or science or nursing or long-distance running – and how and where your specialty can be used correctly by writers. Write something that will help other writers write better, and we'll be interested in taking a look.

We are a non-paying market with a 100% volunteer staff. In return for your work, you get as many copies of the e-zine as you care to download, and our sincere thanks. Your work will make a nice tear-sheet to present when selling other work, but it doesn't count as a professional market because we can't afford to pay.

On the other hand, the e-zine is also free.

We use only non-exclusive serial rights; what this means is that you can sell your piece elsewhere before, during, or after you have placed it with us. We don't mind if it runs simultaneously. However – and this is very important for you to keep in mind – if you place a piece with us that has not been published elsewhere, we will be using your First Serial Rights, which means they will not be available for sale elsewhere. Reprint rights are harder to sell. And back issues will be available from the site (though not from e-zine newsstands) for as long as I can keep them there, as a reference to new people coming into the site.

If you sell a piece elsewhere after we have accepted it but before we have printed it, and you need to have us pull it in order to be able to make your sale, please let us know immediately. We can pull a piece up to a few days before we go to press, but the longer you wait, the

more difficult time we'll have getting another piece copyedited and ready to fill the slot your piece occupied.

We strive to maintain professional standards – manuscripts must be professionally formatted, as free from spelling and grammatical errors as you can make them, and in what you perceive to be final draft form. We will not welcome massive rewrites of a piece after we have accepted it – when we accept it, we consider it pretty close to finished and will only request such edits as will finish it to our standards. If we feel that it need massive rewrites, we won't accept it.

For feature articles, query Lazette Gifford. For genre- or area-specific articles, query the relevant editor. All e-mail addresses are in the masthead.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Holly Lisle and Lazette Gifford
Publishers, Vision