

# Holly Lisle's



Vision

## A Resource for Writers

Volume One - Issue 2  
March/April 2001



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Visualization for Writers Workshop

Creating & Using Languages in Fiction

Genetics in Storytelling

A Man in Beasts Clothing

Research Flaws in Romance Novels

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# MASTHEAD

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And Palm OS™ versions

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**V**ision 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. Guidelines for Vision

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### **Vision**

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## A WELCOME NOTE FROM HOLLY LISLE

**W**hat do we at Vision and at Forward Motion hope to give you with our magazine, our writers' community, and our website?

Do we hope to teach you to write? No. Writing can be learned, but not truly taught. I can tell you what works for me, and other writers can tell you what works for them, but until you start writing regularly, you will have no idea what works for you.

Do we think that we can get you published? No. We have no secret ties to the publishing industry; no ins with editors – even our own – that will allow us to get you through the door; no magic connections to agents – not even our own – that will guarantee you representation, or even improve your chances.

Do we think we can make the road to publication easier for you in any way? No. Any gains you make, you will have to make alone, just as every one of us has had to make our way up the mountain by our own path, one handhold and shaky foothold at a time. There is no easy way, and there is not even any easier way.

Then why should you waste your time reading this e-zine, or any writing publication? Why should you seek a writers' group; why should you join a community, why should you listen to anything we have to say?

Because if we can inspire you to take action, you will have gained the one thing from us that is truly ours to give. Reading about writing will never make you a writer, but writing regularly will – and by joining us, reading about what we are doing, sharing what you are doing, you will get the encouragement to act that can move you from having a dream to living your dream. In its purest form, you will find this call to action on the Daily Page Count board, where writers go in each day and just write down how many words or pages they have written, and how each day's writing went. You will find it on the Writers' Fitness Challenge board, where writers who have made a

commitment to living healthier lives post their fitness goals, their plans for reaching their goals, and how they're taking action on those plans.

But each critique circle, each writing discussion on the main board, and each article in this e-zine is a subtler call to action. You'll find ideas that interest you, suggestions that pique your curiosity, bits of information that give you a different lens through which to view some aspect of the world, or your life, or your writing. If you just read these boards and articles, and never take action, then for you we have failed. But if you are stirred, challenged, excited enough to sit down and start pulling the words out of your imagination and transferring them to the page, we have succeeded, because we will have served as a link between you and your dream.

Act. In action lies change, and in change lies the road between you and the vision you hold for your own future.

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

Holly Lisle  
Editor-In-Chief, Vision



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*From the Editor*

## WHY AUTHORS ARE CURSED

Or Zette's theory of what went wrong in the writing world.

Writers of the modern world have been cursed. It's obvious when you look at the trials and tribulations we have to go through to be published, and how, even then, it's no guarantee of fame. We're cursed, and I've finally figured out by whom and when.

In the old days, writers were considered great people. According to Diodorus, "It is fitting that all men should ever accord great gratitude to those writers who have composed universal histories..." They were venerated, and it wasn't always because they were brilliant authors.

The same was true in the Middle Ages. Writers flourished, whether they were writing inane poetry or historical dramas.

But then the modern age came, and we fell from grace. And now I can tell you the secret of why writers are no longer adored in the ways that we ought to be. It has nothing to do with ability. We all know we're just as brilliant as any of the ancients, right?

It has everything to do with paper.

The ancient world didn't have paper. The ancient world, in fact, was lucky to have words at all, but that's beside the point. They wrote on wood, rock, and clay. Later, the Egyptians invented papyrus paper, which was a great step forward. In the Middle Ages, writers worked with vellum and parchment, which was made from the specially prepared and skins of animals. It was cheaper and easier to obtain than the papyrus paper that had to be imported from Egypt.

It wasn't until modern day that we began using *paper*. Paper is made with vegetable fibers. More importantly, modern machine made paper is 95% wood.

Let me tell you about ancient Greek mythology, specifically about the Dryads. These lovely female creatures, who were

generally friendly to humans, lived in or near trees. When a tree was destroyed, the dryad died as well. The Gods punished humans for destroying trees.

We've been cursed by the Ancient Greek Gods.

But there is hope, people. The future holds the key to breaking this curse.

It's called electronic publication.



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# VISUALIZATION FOR WRITERS WORKSHOP

BY HOLLY LISLE

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**S**cenario One: You're reading along, completely into the author's story, excited about where it is going -- and suddenly the characters do something so sloppy, or so physically impossible, or so lame that you're thrown out of the book.

Scenario Two: You pick up something in the bookstore that -- from the cover -- looks like it's going to be great, but when you start reading, you feel like you're standing in the dark listening to someone muttering on the other side of a wall. Nothing is getting through to you in enough detail to keep your interest. You put the book down and look for something else.

Or Scenario Three:

You send off a piece in high hopes; you've gotten an okay from an editor who, based on a nice chat the two of you had at a con, is already excited about your idea. But within just a couple of weeks, your story is back. Rejected. The editor's note says, "Nice idea, but development is too thin."

In all three scenarios, the author would have benefited from developing better visualization skills. The more clearly you as the writer can see a scene in your mind's eye, the more clearly you can write it.

Visualization is one of three essential skills for building a career as a professional writer. (The other two are good grasp of the mechanics of writing and the ability to tell an interesting story in a coherent manner.) All three are learnable skills, but visualization tends to not even show up in most books on writing and in most writing courses. Writers seem to assume that if they can write coherently and if their stories are good, their work is done.

Not so.

If you cannot put the reader inside your scene, make him believe that he stands in the center of the world you have created, then it does not matter how technically proficient your writing is, or how compelling your plot: your work will fall flat.

So how do you learn to visualize? And once you have learned this skill, how do you put it into practice in your work?

Visualization is exactly what it sounds like -- it is seeing clearly and in great detail with your mind's eye. And you learn to visualize well by first learning to see with your other senses, and then transferring what you experience to your mind. People believe that they truly notice their surroundings, but the sad truth is that, on a clear and conscious level, most people really see only those things that are going to run over them in the next minute if they don't pay attention. Writers do not have the luxury of wandering through their lives in a state of blissful foginess. We have to see - really see - the people and places around us as if our bodies were full-sensory cameras and our minds were film. This workshop will give you some beginning visualization exercises. Beyond these exercises, make a conscious decision each day to notice in detail the people, places, and events around you.

On to the exercises, then. Before we start, gather up a couple of simple items:

- ❖ a piece of metal jewelry (something as plain as a gold wedding band, or as busy as a piece of costume jewelry)
- ❖ a book
- ❖ a food item from the kitchen -- anything from a piece of fresh fruit to a can of peas
- ❖ a photograph of a person
- ❖ a piece of unpatterned cloth. A square of black cloth will be the least distracting, but you can use anything from a white business shirt to a plain blue terrycloth bath towel.

### **Exercise 1A:**

(You can do all of Exercise 1 in the Writers' Community, and get feedback from other writers on what you've done.)

Place your piece of jewelry on your cloth backdrop. Look at it until you are certain you have memorized everything about it. Then turn away and start writing. Do not look at it again until you are certain you have described everything about it in the best detail you can manage.

If you've done a good job of paying attention to detail, you should have no trouble expending a hundred words or better on the description of a simple wedding band. If you're having trouble getting that far, I'll give you a couple of helpful hints. Did you remember to notice the shadows the ring cast? The many colors reflected in the metal? For smooth jewelry, the actual reflections you saw in the surface? Any engraving? Any signs of wear? Any scars? If it includes a stone, have you remembered not just the details of the stone, but any light it scatters, the method by which it is attached to the ring, the way it reflects in the metal?

Exercises 1B-1D are the same as Exercise 1; simply replace the ring on your piece of cloth with the book, your food item, and your photograph of a person. In each instance, look at the object, hold it in your memory, and write every detail of your chosen object, no matter how minute. When you've finished check to see what you got right, what you got wrong, and what you overlooked entirely.

Links to:

Instructions on how to do the exercise on the community board:  
<http://network54.com/Hide/Forum/message?forumid=70896&messageid=980263210>

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**Exercise 1A:**

<http://network54.com/Hide/Forum/message?forumid=70896&messageid=980263248>

**Exercise 1B:**

<http://network54.com/Hide/Forum/message?forumid=70896&messageid=980263272>

**Exercise 1C:**

<http://network54.com/Hide/Forum/message?forumid=70896&messageid=980263313>

**Exercise 1D:**

<http://network54.com/Hide/Forum/message?forumid=70896&messageid=980263353>

**Exercise 2:**

Next time you're out, spend some time looking at strangers. Imagine that you're going to have to identify them in a police line-up, or better yet, describe them to a police artist. (This also is great fun, in a paranoid, conspiracy-theory way.) Stare at one person only so long as politeness permits (or until you get caught). Start writing from memory. In busy public places, it can be tough to check your work. Restaurants can keep people in one place long enough that you can often see what you've missed. Bank lines can be good; doctors' waiting rooms are just great.

**Exercise 3:**

Time to put your folks into action. Find a couple of interesting-looking people, do your best to memorize them. Find a complex, interesting setting -- a local mall, botanical park, grand old Victorian house with display gardens, or someplace equally challenging. Really pay attention to your surroundings. Do your best to notice everything, not just with your sense of sight, but with all your senses.

When you think you have a pretty good bead on your people and your place, create a scene in which you use EVERYTHING you observed. Put action in there. Put dialogue. But your main issue in this exercise is to create an absolutely over-the-top all-senses-

engaged presentation of two people and the space they occupy. You aren't shooting for great literature here: in fact, you're going to be replicating some of the most extreme indulgences of many professional writers who are powerful enough to be able to override editors who would curb their excesses if they could. BUT . . . you'll be duplicating a sin of *professional* writers, who have been visualizing scenes clearly for years, and in the process you'll be learning through excesses valuable skills that will, when toned down and controlled, take your reader right into your story.

He will stand in the center of your scene, tasting your protagonist's fear, smelling the moldering autumn leaves and the faintly cinnamony scent of autumn woods, watching living people moving through a living landscape.



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# CREATING AND USING FICTIONAL LANGUAGES IN YOUR WRITING

By Damon M. Lord

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When we consider the process of language creation and evolution, we are, in the West, inevitably drawn to the Babel story of the Bible. Due to this cultural conditioning, it seems almost heretical to propose that there could be anything other than the natural state of a multilingual world. However, when we read fiction, for example a fantasy novel, we often find that all the characters, after traversing great distances over elegant maps in the front of the books, still are able to speak without any difficulty to the locals. We are going to assume for the sake of argument that using a natural language is no good for your characters, as of course aliens from Wtlond and Golden Knights from Dalinia are unlikely to speak French. Most likely your piece of fiction will be taking place in a world where languages are not as we know them.

Some authors are drawn to language creation, the most famous example being J.R.R. Tolkien. At some point books may require a made-up word or two. Often authors just resort to a creating a *naming language*, which is fine if you want to only use a few words of your language. For example, a goblin's alcoholic drink that smells like a dead rat or a magical blue fruit, would be better named *kuruh* or *novpomo* than calling it 'stinky beer' or 'sapphire coloured spell apple' throughout a book. If you are going to use a naming language, it is best to get the rudimentary sounds right to get the feel of the language. If I were to make up names for Star Trek, 'T'Spal' is more likely to be a Vulcan name and Gaghpak is more likely to be a Klingon. From the sound, we are already getting a little glimpse of the culture, by using softer sounds for the nobler cultures, and harsher for the warrior races. Don't be afraid to experiment with sounds, perhaps taking a few more interesting sounds such as the German 'ch', as in 'Bach', or the frustratingly difficult 'll' sound in Welsh.

If you are going to use a naming language, there is a brilliant tool for creating names for characters and so forth at <http://www.langmaker.com/langmake/index.htm>. This tool is great for generating hundreds or thousands of different words that have a particular sound to them, and it is possible, playing with additional lexical downloads, to create other wordlists that appear to have descended from existing languages.

If you are planning to use languages frequently in your work of fiction, in addition to the vocabulary created with the LangMaker tool, you may also need to look at what you know of other languages. The best way to start if you have never tried to create a language before is to take a look at some of the many sites that are scattered around the net, to look at examples of languages that people have already created to get a better feel for languages. Various indices can be found at:

- ▶ LangMaker Website <http://www.langmaker.com/>
- ▶ Richard Kennaway's Constructed Languages List <http://www.sys.uea.ac.uk/~jrk/conlang.html>
- ▶ Dmoz Open Directory Project [http://www.dmoz.org/Science/Social\\_Sciences/Language\\_and\\_Linguistics/Constructed\\_Languages/](http://www.dmoz.org/Science/Social_Sciences/Language_and_Linguistics/Constructed_Languages/)

"The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language" by David Crystal is also a good bet to introduce you in a fun way to the vast complexities of language. However, it does not dedicate much to the art of creating languages - which Tolkien called "the secret vice" - instead focusing a few chapters on languages that were created for auxiliary use, such as Esperanto and Volapük.

However, if you plan to create a fully usable language for your characters to speak in your story, it is best to consider grammar. Grammar is basically the nuts and bolts of the inside of language, which, like the car engine, is the bit that makes it work. There is no easy way of creating grammar, apart from a lot of perseverance. One of the greatest difficulties of language creation is grammar.

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There are, though, several aids for anyone wishing to attempt to create a full language. You can join the conlang (Constructed Language, <http://www.egroups.com/group/conlang>) mailing list, which, with nearly two hundred members, would be glad to help. Also worth reading are various articles and guides to be found around the web, such as the Zompist Language Construction Kit <http://www.zompist.com/kit.html> and How to Create a Language by Pablo Flores <http://www.geocities.com/Area51/Shire/1021/how/how.html>. One method I once used for creating languages is to take the basic grammatical structure of an existing language and modify it. There is a danger, however, that the new creation will just be a clone of the existing language.

Evidently, not all may have the time or wish to create a language in full, but still may wish to capture the flavour of having characters encounter linguistic difficulties. However, there are a few ways around this – one character could be bilingual (not an uncommon possibility), or possibly alter the syntax of the character to express difficulties in speaking, or to represent a different way of thinking. An example is Yoda from Star Wars: “Strong with the Force you are.”

Actually avoiding using a language is also an issue, which must be addressed. It would not make good, readable prose if every conversation were to be conducted in Wessisc or whichever language you have chosen to create. It is therefore a matter of style to how it is represented. It would not flow so well if following every utterance it was explained which language they were speaking, for example,

“Someone’s following us”, said Kelia in Wessisc.

may not flow so well as

Kelia lowered her voice and whispered in Wessisc, “Someone’s following us.”

However, when using or implying another language, we must also remember to add cultural nuances that will make the language

unique. For example, if a typical insult in your created Goblin language is “You look well dressed”, because the Chief Goblin hundreds of years ago had bad fashion sense, this adds some insight through language to the underlying culture. If you expand on this, it ultimately will give an insight into the minds of the characters involved.

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis may be of interest in evaluating how to use language to understand characters better – it proposes that language determines how people think, and also that languages have characteristics that are not found in other languages. This will undoubtedly have an effect on the cultures and characters of the people speaking the languages. For example, Aztec has a single word for many concepts: ice, snow, and cold. In contrast, Eskimo has many words for snow, each word having a different meaning for different ideas of snow, such as falling snow, snow on the ground, etc. This will be of particular interest to those creating a language for extra-terrestrials, as undoubtedly the mind-set of any alien would be quite different from that of the average human.

Extending this to fiction, there could be names for different type of people and concepts contained in a culture. An illustration is the various names of the groups of people in and around the Wennish Jungles of Holly Lisle’s “Bones of the Past”, such as the ‘tagnu’ (not-people), ‘keyunu’ (tree/god-people), and ‘peknu’ (things-that-look-like-people).

However, it will be inevitable that people interested in linguistics will ask questions about your language. The first time I encountered the words above, I paused a moment to analyse them. By the end of reading the first chapter of “Bones of the Past”, I felt it was safe to assume that the singular of the nouns in the Wennish tongue would end in ‘-i’ as in keyi (tree/god) with the plural ‘keyu’. Some people go as far as to actually attempt to create the language based on what is available in the text, as in Mark Rosenfelder’s attempt to recreate the Syldavian language from Hergé’s Adventures of Tintin.  
<http://www.zompist.com/syldavian.html>

There is evidently a lot of work to be considered before attempting to construct a language, or even just a few words of an alien tongue. For some, it is a life-long obsession. Tolkien created his universe so that he could have a sandpit in which he could play with the languages he had been working on throughout most of his life. Language is the apparatus of the writer, and exploring it in depth for his characters' speech may help the writer to understand his own tools better.



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# A, B, C; BEITH, LUIS, NIN

## By Bryn Neuenschwander

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### Introduction

**S**top and consider for a moment, if you will: you are *reading* this.

When compared against the expanse of human recorded history, this becomes something fairly special. The vast majority of people in today's industrialized societies are literate, but in other places and times that was often not the case. Sometimes the ability to read and write was a skill deliberately restricted to an elite few, a class of scribes or priests who specialized in this task. Even when writing was permitted for anyone, few people had the leisure or opportunity to learn. Before you make your main character literate, you may want to consider that not only may illiteracy or partial literacy be more plausible, it can afford all manner of opportunities for you as a storyteller.

### Systems of Writing

An alphabetic system of writing, where each symbol represents a consonant or vowel, is not the only possible approach. Writing in primitive societies generally began pictographically, with simplified drawings meant to represent items such as sheep, cattle, and the moon; and with tally marks used to count these. From this the system complexified into hieroglyphic writing (Egyptian is a common example) where pictorial symbols stand for the objects they represent, but can also be used as stand-ins for homonyms. A system of this kind must by nature have a large number of symbols to represent the full range of the language; writing it is not terribly efficient, and learning it requires a great deal of study.

Ideographic writing is most commonly associated with Chinese. This evolved from the same roots as Egyptian hieroglyphs, but did not retain as strong of a pictorial character. Identifying the pictorial origin of a symbol may require a scholar, or may be outright impossible; many characters have become very abstract today. A

system of this kind still requires a very large number of symbols; most educated people in Japan (a country which uses only a selection of Chinese characters) know at least a couple thousand, enough to get by. Very, very few people will know all fifty thousand characters in an ideographic system, or however many it actually has. Like hieroglyphs, characters can be used in two ways: to represent a particular word (logographic), or to represent the sound of that word in another word (phonetic).

A syllabary (e.g. Japanese) distills these kinds of systems. Rather than mixing logographic and phonetic systems, it retains one symbol for every syllable in the language (e.g. ka, ki, ku, ke, ko; na, ni, nu, ne, no; and so on). Japanese writing as it is used today often combines syllabic writing with borrowed Chinese ideograms, but this is not necessary; the language can be fully represented using only syllabic characters. A syllabary has the primary advantage of being significantly smaller than an ideographic system; whereas there are many thousands of Chinese characters, all Japanese can be represented with forty-six symbols, twenty-five of which can be modified by the addition of an extra mark to create a new sound.

Alphabets are the simplest forms of writing which are capable of representing an entire language. Unlike a syllabary, which can require several dozen symbols, alphabets usually consist of just a few dozen – twenty to forty, or thereabouts. The advantage here is obvious: a prospective student faces a much smaller task in learning the actual system itself. Alphabetic writing was probably only invented once, somewhere in the eastern Mediterranean. From there it spread and diversified into a number of different alphabets, although all of them are related to that same ancestor. Given the relative scarcity of alphabetic writing, that may not be what you want to choose. Besides, opting for a different system can create a number of opportunities for a writer.

### Literacy

This article is written in English, so if you are reading it, you must have learned English at some point in your life. That being the case, you probably remember spelling tests. English manages to complicate what would otherwise be a very simple system by having

a complex and often contradictory relationship between symbol and sound; think of the differences in pronunciation between thorough, through, and tough. But if you are inventing an alphabetic language, you can invent a better one than English, one where each letter has only one sound. This will likely increase the number of letters, but even a few dozen are not so many to learn.

So if your character is dealing with an alphabetic language, one with a closer correspondence between symbol and sound, it is likely he will be either literate or illiterate, with no middle ground. The chance that he will recognize only eighteen of the twenty-eight letters is vanishingly small. The main way to confuse him will be through complicated pronunciation rules or his own limited vocabulary. The same goes for a syllabary, most likely. But in an ideographic or hieroglyphic system, with hundreds or thousands of characters, there is the possibility that your character can be partially literate.

The Maya used to erect stone pillars or stelae carved with proclamations of a ruler's exploits. One question common among archaeologists today is, how much of that was the average Mayan peasant able to understand? Writing was the domain of scribes, but after seeing a number of stelae and hearing their inscriptions read out loud, it is possible a commoner could learn to pick out the characters for the current king, his city, and maybe a few other words such as "enemy" and "war." He might also have learned to read the dates on the stelae. Such a man is not fully literate; he could not pick up a codex of the *Popol Vuh* for his bedtime reading. He cannot, however, be considered completely illiterate.

Ideographic systems also have some built-in structures that can aid comprehension. In the case of Chinese characters, these structures are called radicals. They can exist on their own as independent characters, or they can be scaled down and used as elements of a more complex character. This can help a reader when presented with an unfamiliar character; he may not recognize the entire thing, but he will see the radical indicating speech and know the character has something to do with language (reading, shouting, etc). The rest may become clear from context. Here there is the possibility of tantalizing the reader; the characters of your story may

glean just enough from the characters of the inscription to have a vague sense of what it means, without understanding it fully. If the inscription indicates impending doom, this can be all the more useful.

### **Conclusion**

When considering the literacy of your character, there are several elements you might want to keep in mind. What is writing used for? Religious or magical uses; mercantile activity; proclamations only? What material is it written on? Cheap paper makes widespread literacy more likely than stone inscriptions. What structural system of writing does the language use? Is literacy restricted? If it is not, what kind of comprehension might your character have? Full literacy may seem the easiest route, but it is not necessarily plausible for a person of low economic class, and sometimes other options can offer more opportunities, particularly with an ideographic or hieroglyphic system.

After all, sometimes it's more fun if the character *doesn't* understand everything.



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# GENETICS IN STORYTELLING

By Allison Starkweather

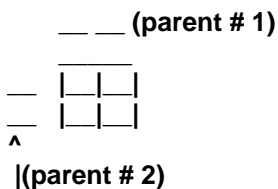
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**G**enetics can play an important part in a story. It affects how everyone and everything looks; your characters, their parents, their children, their cats, dogs, horses, and the potted flower sitting on their front porch. It can help your story, by giving it an extra touch of realism, or hurt it, by being completely unbelievable.

Organisms can reproduce one of two ways—sexually or asexually. When they reproduce asexually, there is only one parent, and the offspring are genetically identical to the parent. However, most organisms reproduce sexually, where two parents are needed and they each give the offspring half of their chromosomes.

Genes are the sections of DNA that tell what a specific trait, such as hair color, will be like. For most traits, there are two different alleles, or variants of that trait, which are either dominant or recessive. If an allele is dominant, then it will always be the one expressed, even if the organism also has a recessive allele for that trait. The only way a recessive trait can be expressed is if *both* alleles are recessive. Because of this, it is possible for two people who show dominant alleles to have a child who expresses the recessive allele, if they both carry the recessive allele and the child receives one copy of it from each parent.

Though you can never be completely sure what a child will look like, there are laws of inheritance that you can use to find the probability of the child's expressing or carrying a certain trait. One of the tools you can use to help you is called a Punnett square.



To use the Punnett square, you put the alleles of one parent along one side, and the alleles of the other parent along the other

side, with one allele in each blank space. Dominant alleles are written with capital letters, and recessive alleles are written with lowercase letters. Next, you combine the alleles in the boxes, so you can see all of the possible combinations. For example, if you wanted to know if your character's child could have a widow's peak (a dominant trait), and what the chances of that would be, you could use the Punnett square. If the mother did not have a widow's peak (which means her alleles would have to be  $rr$ ), but the father did, and his alleles were  $Rr$ , then we could stick them into the Punnett square:

	$r$	$r$ (mother)
$R$	$Rr$	$Rr$
$r$	$rr$	$rr$
(father)		

So, you can see that the child has a fifty percent chance of having a widow's peak, and a fifty percent chance of not having one. A Punnett square shows you the possible genotype of the offspring; their genetic make-up. From this you can determine the phenotype; what physical characteristics the child has.

Up until now, we've been assuming that **all** alleles are either dominant or recessive, but that is not always true. There are several types of intermediate phenotypes, two of them being incomplete dominance, and polygenic traits. Incomplete dominance is where, rather than one allele completely blocking out the other, the two alleles form a combined phenotype. One example of this is the snapdragon; if a snapdragon receives a red allele and a white allele, rather than being only one of them, the alleles blend, and the flowers will be pink. This does not mean that the **alleles** blend, however. The flower still has one white and one red allele, not two pink alleles. An example of this in humans is hair type; curly hair and straight hair combine to form wavy hair.

Another form of incomplete dominance is polygenic traits. That's where more than one gene controls a single trait. An example of this is eye color. This trait is controlled by three genes; one for the color of the pigmentation in the iris, one for the darkness of the color, and one for the distribution of color that creates the patterns in our

irises. Polygenic traits are much harder to predict than monogenic traits.

Other factors in inheritance are multiple alleles. Some genes have more than two alleles. They could have three, four, or more. Pleiotropy is also a factor. Pleiotropy is the opposite of polygenic traits. It is where more than one trait is controlled by one gene. This is the only instance where traits are linked, and inheriting one means you **must** inherit the other.

Environmental effects can also be important. Climate can play a major part in determining an organism's phenotype. In some organisms, such as the Siamese cat, the fur color is determined by temperature, which is why the cat's ears, nose, paws, and tail are darker than it's body: because they are farther from the body, their temperature is cooler. Social environment can also stimulate changes. Some fish can, if all of the males die, change their sex from female to male. If a new male shows up, they can then return to female form.

All of this information can help when writing your story. If a character gets pregnant, is it possible for the child to look a certain way, even if the parents don't show any of those traits? Do your characters' parents **have** to look a certain way, in order for the character to have turned out the way he or she did? Also, if you're writing fantasy or science fiction and create your own beasts, it can be incredibly useful in helping you decide how traits are inherited. Perhaps your stories include dragons. Are certain colors linked to the dragon's size? If it has horns or a neck frill, can they be different sizes, or are they either there or not? These are all questions to think about, not only when creating a new species or deciding to get a character pregnant, but also when creating any type of family.



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# CREATING CHARACTER 'EXTRAS' TO ENHANCE YOUR STORY

By Shane P. Carr

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**M**any times when you're writing a story, you'll realize that you need to add some characters to enhance your story's environment. These characters will generally be 'extras'. Much like many Hollywood productions these 'extras' will merely add flavor and atmosphere to your story's environment. The 'extras' can be anybody in your story. Let's say, for instance, that your two lead characters are sitting in a local diner having lunch. Since they are in a diner, chances are there is someone serving them. This person, waitress/waiter, is a story 'extra'. The character doesn't have the role of progressing the plot of the story, he or she is merely there to enhance the environment and bring it to life. Since your characters are in a diner, as long as it's a good one, there should also be other patrons. These patrons are 'extras' as well. If you portray them correctly, they will add a very realistic atmosphere to the scene.

Now as a writer, you're thinking that you already have a large enough cast for the story. You have created in-depth backgrounds on each. You've taken the time to get inside their heads and see how each one thinks. Now you're asking if you have to do all this for these extra characters as well. The answer, for the sake of every writer's sanity, is 'No'.

Chances are, these characters will not have much more than a physical description and perhaps a short piece of dialogue. Remember, we don't need to know the background of these characters.

You might wonder how you will come up with this cast of extras. You are probably even grunting over the extra work this is going to cause when you could be developing your plot. Don't worry. Creating an extra is extremely easy to do, and doesn't require much thought.

Unless you're a hermit, you encounter these 'extras' everyday. Think about the scene above in the diner; now think about your last real-life trip to a diner. Consider the waitress who served you, and the other customers who were seated nearby. See if you can describe some minor details of each. Perhaps you overheard a mother, seated at the table across from you, scolding her hyperactive child. Maybe at the table behind you, you overheard a couple arguing. What did these people look like? What was your perception of each person? What did you learn or observe about each one? How about the waitress? Did she appear to be overworked? Tired? Did she initiate some brief conversation with you, or just take your order?

Do you see how the experience you had at the diner gives you all the 'extras' you'll need for the scene? The only details you need are the ones you perceived in your actual experience and you'll have your cast of extras.

Now, depending upon the type of story your writing, you may want to use your creative license as a writer to embellish upon the description of your 'extras'. You may want to add stereotypes, profound traits, or enhanced personalities to your 'extras'. Perhaps your waitress is a blonde woman with a nice figure. If you decide you want to use the stereotype of the blonde as an airhead to add a comical element, by all means do so. This is part of your creative license. Just keep in mind that you only want to enhance the environment of your story. You don't want to distract your reader from the main characters. You may even find that you can enhance your main characters by having them play off an extra. Something about your main character's personality can be revealed through a small piece of dialogue. It may only be a preference for black coffee, but it will still help develop an image of your main character.

So the next time you go out someplace, try this exercise. It has worked well for me on numerous occasions, and I now do it as habit. Wherever you go bring a notepad. It doesn't have to be anything big, just something to write down brief thoughts and descriptions. Pay attention to the people you see or interact with. Examine the people around you. In your notes, briefly describe them. Pay attention to the varied mannerisms of people. Heck, I even give you permission to

eavesdrop on a few conversations. Pay special attention to the reasons you think some of these people would make good extras. When you get home and examine your notes, I think you will find that you have quite a colorful and realistic cast of 'extras' for your story.

Also keep in mind that, although this exercise works easiest for stories that take place in the real world, you can easily tailor your extras for any world or any genre.

Just pay attention to the world around you and you will soon see that you have a pre-made cast of thousands.



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## AT A LOSS FOR WORDS

By Vicki McElfresh

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**W**riter's block. The words send shivers down the spines of many authors, and send others away shaking their heads. Writer's block is not a living, breathing thing we can summon. It is not a demon hiding in the shadows. It is a state of mind that can be conquered.

I have faced major writing blocks -- my latest was just a few months ago -- and I have somehow managed to overcome them. How? I found the source of the block. I had just finished my third novel, and I nearly shelved that manuscript because writing had become a chore. The thought of sitting at my computer for hours made me physically ill. I had been so excited about the novel when I started it, and then halfway through, I lost all interest. I tried working on other projects, but I had the same lackluster feeling with them. I couldn't understand why. There was nothing wrong with my book: I loved the characters, and though the plot had some holes, they were holes that could be easily fixed in the rewrite. My daily word count dropped from over 1000 words a day to less than 300.

I found my answer in a writing exercise on the Forward Motion boards. The exercise was to have a conversation with a character, and so I moaned about my inability to write to Donag, the main character of my book. He said, "You're trying to force it again. Just relax, it's there, stop worrying about the words on the page."

My response was, "I can't stop thinking about all the other things that are going on right now. They're always in the back of my mind. And it's Sunday, I have to go back to work tomorrow." I had my answer. At the time of this particular block, my job had become unbearable, and that tension colored everything else in my life. I had been looking for another job for months, and when I finally received a wonderful offer, the tension, and my writing block, disappeared. I no longer felt ill when I sat down to work.

But sometimes, blocks are simply a problem with the story. After working on a project for a length of time, it begins to lose its sparkle. The words seem flat. The plot seems trite. The characters seem dull and cliché. In short, the project is going nowhere except a deep, dark place in my desk. I find this kind of block very easy to banish. I print out my story, put it in a folder, and set it aside. Then I open up a blank screen and begin something new, or I'll open a piece that's been waiting for revision and work on that. I might even work on a piece of fan-fiction. I try to choose a story completely different from the one that was giving me trouble. Within a couple of days I'll have fresh ideas. The sparkle will return, a little dimmer perhaps, but still there, and I'm off and running on my problem piece again.

The only cure for writer's block is simply to write. Locate the source of the problem, confront the issue, and write some more. Write five words a day if that's all that will come out. Write the same five words if necessary. Writer's block won't go away by sitting in front of the TV, or taking a long walk, or getting a good night's sleep. Writing is the only cure, or as Donag said in another exercise, "The words aren't gone; you've covered them up. Let go of something. Quit your job if you hate it so much. There are other jobs, but there's only one of you. Only you can write our stories."



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# THE ALTERNATIVE RULES

A Look at two forms of government  
and the cultures in which they thrived

**By Lazette Gifford**

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**T**his is not a scholarly look at forms of government, but rather a gathering of information to help writers gaze beyond the hazy democracies or easy kingships that rule the books we read. Even on Earth the ways of governing are not only myriad, but constantly mutating as well. Adapting any form of government to other worlds (either SF or Fantasy) is bound to create even more interesting variations. Imagine something beyond the facts.

Government is also not simply a form imposed on a people. It grows from their culture, and changes with their history -- except in the cases of foreign subjugation. But even then, the government will adapt over time. For that reason I have tried to show background as well as how the government affected the people who lived within the system.

At the end of this article is a list containing descriptions of several forms of government. If you are a writer like me, just looking at the list sparks ideas for entire new civilizations.

I have gathered this information from a number of sources, and have purposely chosen material that might help a fiction writer expand his own imaginary worlds. This is not a work of absolute historical accuracy. I found contradictions in nearly everything I read. I selected what looked like the most interesting possibilities.

## **Sparta: Grace Under Fire**

The early history of Sparta is very similar to that of its famous rival, Athens. The Bronze Age Mycenaean settlement fell into disuse in the 12th century BC, but began to grow again, in the form of four or five villages, in the time of the Dorians. By the ninth century BC, the villages had become the town of Sparta.

The Spartan form of government was a myriad blend of several systems. At the top stood two kings, one chosen from each of the two most powerful families - the Agiad and the Eurypontid. Every year five ephors (overseers) were also appointed, who had executive, administrative and judicial authority. Added to this was the Gerusia, or Council of Elders, composed of about 30 members who were at least 60 years of age (and therefore retired from the military). The Apella assembly was the most democratic part of the government, of which all freeborn Spartan males were members. This group was also known as the homoioi -- The Equals or Like Ones. Each owned land, and together they formed the bulk of Sparta's famous hoplite army. Everyone else was excluded from government: women, slaves, the periokoi (Dwellers About -- foreign merchants and such), and the helots, who were serfs.

Sparta's renown as a military power eventually led to drastic changes in its citizens' way of life. Sparta won two wars with its western neighbor, Messenia, but was left perilously weak. It was at this time (the seventh century BC) that a severe military and communal system, known as the apoge, began to emerge. In its final form, the apoge system had complete control of the lives of its citizens. Children were examined at birth, and those deemed too weak were exposed or thrown from a cliff to die. Exposure of children was not uncommon in other Greek communities, but only at Sparta was it a governmental function. At the age of seven, all male children were taken to military school where they lived, under extreme hardship, until they were twenty and became soldiers. This weakened family loyalties, but strengthened the ties among peers who served together in the military. Soldiers were allotted a plot of land, and became citizens. However, it is likely that most of them never saw this land, since they were forbidden to do agricultural work. The helots farmed the plots, while the Spartan men continued to live in barracks until they were 30, after which they were finally allowed a home of their own. Communal meals were still the law, however, and failure to pay the mess hall fees resulted in revocation of citizenship.

Paradoxically, while Spartan men had fewer freedoms than their Athenian counterparts, the women had more. Spartan women were trained along the same lines as the men, so that they, too, had

some military abilities. But they were also the only Greek women to be taught to read and write. Also, because the men lived in barracks, even after marriage, the women had far more freedom in their daily lives than in any other part of the Greek world. A Spartan woman was expected to be able to defend her husband's property and to guard against invaders, while in other city-states of the time, women were not even supposed to be allowed outside.

Spartan marriage, as can be expected, was unusual. There may have been a regular ceremony, but the common ritual involved the woman being abducted at night, and her head shaved. If prior to this she had been a 'girl' she was now deemed a woman. Men might abduct any woman, which led to polyandrous relationships.

During the Persian invasion of 492BC, the Spartans found themselves slandered for not having sent their army to the Battle of Marathon, which was won without their help. They redeemed themselves at the battle of Thermopylae in 480BC, when King Leonides and all of his men fell to the overwhelming power of the Persian army under Xerxes, although they had delayed the Persians long enough to save the Greek Fleet at Artemisum. It was for this battle the poet Simonides penned his most famous epigraph, "Go Tell the Spartans, passerby, that here, obedient to their laws, we lie." (Legend says that when King Leonides was told that the approaching Persians were so large that their shields blocked out the sun, he replied, "All the better. Then we shall fight in the shade.")

In 464 Sparta suffered a devastating earthquake. The helots took advantage of this to revolt, but were put down. Despite their own troubles, Sparta so feared Athenian expansion that the two city-states came to blows, beginning the long and devastating Peloponnesian War, which lasted from 431-404. Athens was finally defeated, and the Spartans turned their army on the Persians from 400-390BC. It was not until the Battle of Leuctra in 371BC that they were finally defeated, this time by the army of Thebes.

The city still held out against Phillip II, but fell to his son Alexander's army under Antigonos Doseon. In 146 it was joined to the Roman province of Macedonia. But the timocracy of Sparta had

survived for centuries, and retained its legend of invincible military strength into the modern age.

### **Heian Japan: The Fine Art of Adaptation**

Japan is a nation of over 3000 islands, though only about 600 are inhabited. The landmass of the inhabited areas is less than that of California, and it is a mountainous terrain, which encouraged regional, rather than central, governments. The islands have a temperate climate, being on the Black current, which flows north from the tropics, but the region is also prone to earthquakes and tsunamis.

During the Ice Age, Japan was still connected to Korea by a land bridge, and was settled by a preliterate Mesolithic culture that created pottery, which elsewhere in the world is associated with the later Neolithic cultures. They survived by a hunter-gathering and fishing lifestyle, and lived in small tribal groups. The Jomon culture lasted, cut off as it was from any outside influence, from the 11th century until the 3rd century BC.

Then the Yayoi, from Northern China, invaded. They brought bronze weapons and agriculture, along with the first recognizable religion to the Islands, the roots of Shintoism. Yayoi clans were called uji and headed by a man who was both war-chief and priest. Each clan was associated with a single god, and the leader performed the rituals for the clan. The gods, called kami, represented forces of nature. Marriage was polygamous, and according to Chinese histories, women may have served as the clan leaders and priests.

But around 500AD another wave of immigrants arrived and brought new ideas of government, out of which the Yamato state grew. Situated close to the Korean peninsula, it is the richest agricultural region in Japan. The rulers of Yamato built tomb-mounds, including the one of Ninotka, which is longer than five football fields and has twice the volume of the Great Pyramid.

Although the basic social unit remained the uji, Korean titles were used for the aristocracy. There was an alliance with the powerful Paekche kingdom of Korea, which sent potters, metal workers, and other artists and workers to the Yamato court. Chinese writing was employed, and in 513AD a Confucian scholar was sent to the island. In 552 the Paekche court sent an image of Buddha, scriptures, and a representative of the religion. These three gifts -- writing, Confucianism, and Buddhism -- all came from Korea, and profoundly influenced Japan's future.

With the fall of the Korean Paekche kingdom, Japan was faced with new immigrations and resistance within their own court. In 573-621 Shotoku Taishi, regent during the reign of Empress Suiko, reorganized the Yamato court on the Chinese model, encouraged Buddhism, and sponsored the writing and adoption of the Chinese Style Seventeen Article Constitution (Kenpo Jushichijo).

It was at this time that the most pervasive myth of Japanese government began to unfold. The emperor was no longer ruling by divine fiat, but was now believed to be divine in his own right and a direct descendant of the sun goddess, Amaterasu-Omikami. It was her grandchild, Ninigi-no-Mikoto, who came to the island of Kyushu with a mirror, a jewel and a sword. These became the symbols of royalty.

With the establishment of Japanese Imperial Rule, the Emperor exercised absolute authority. Japan now became, in theory, a unified land, although outside of Yamato the country was still basically Neolithic and wild. It would be centuries before the Japanese nation was really born, partly because communication was so poor. Only a few people understood the Chinese written language, which the government had adopted.

But it was during this time that the incredibly complex, and highly civilized, Heian court came into being. The Emperor was already settled into a paradoxical role: a supreme ruler, descended from the Goddess, but at the same time more of a religious symbol than an actual head of government. The control of administration

was in the hands of the prime minister, a position that was fought over by several clans.

Other problems grew from the importation of Chinese religion. While the upper classes turned toward Buddhism, the lower classes, especially those far removed from the capital, were still clinging to their Shinto beliefs. Theologians were quick to reconcile the two religions, since the Imperial Family was descended from the Shinto sun-goddess, and without that authority, the control of government would fall apart.

One of the important, and eventually far-reaching, government measures was to declare all agricultural land the property of the throne. It was allotted back to the peasants in small plots. The peasants paid taxes in the form of part of their crop and with labor for public works. Many of these plots were given to aristocrats for their own tax collecting, and became a new way to gain wealth. The edict spread slowly away from the capital, however.

This redistribution of land had one truly adverse effect on the peasants. If they did not have a local lord in control, they were at the mercy of the imperial tax-collectors, who conscripted men for labor and military service. The latter was the worse, since a soldier had to supply his own food, clothing and weapons. Having a son in the army often ruined a peasant family.

Prior to 710, the Emperor's capital was hardly more than a large village, and it moved from place to place, since at the death of an Emperor a location became ritually unclean. The Buddhist influence changed that, however, and a permanent site was chosen on the Yamato plain. The city was laid out on the same plan as the Chinese T'ang capital, but within 18 years the court moved again. The reason was that the new Emperor wanted a city that was away from the many Buddhist temples and monasteries that had grown up near the palace. He built the beautiful Heian-kyo, meaning "the capital of peace and tranquility." Later it became known simply as The Capital, Kyoto.

The city was an island of civilization in a land where most of the five million inhabitants were simple peasants, and their backwoods aristocracy and officials were hardly more cultured. Within the city, however, one of the most refined civilizations in history reigned. Despite the hostile world outside, Heian-kyo managed to survive in relative peace, possibly because of the nonviolent influence of Buddhism. Even the soldiers within the city were only the ceremonial imperial guards, and more harm was done with intricate poems than with a sword.

The Fujiwara clan dominated the Heian Government from the ninth to the eleventh century, establishing a unique way to maintain their position. They wanted the Emperor to maintain all the pomp, majesty, and mystic of his position, but at the same time they wanted to make certain they had him in their control. They did this by presenting generation after generation of charming, intelligent, and prolific daughters, whom they successively married to the reigning Emperors. Within a few generations, the Emperor's ancestry was almost entirely Fujiwara, and he knew where his power base lay. It was, in fact, the Fujiwara clan's lack of a suitable daughter that finally led to their downfall, and the influx of a new bloodline -- though, as always, the genealogy was carefully kept, so that a direct line could be shown back to the grandson of the Goddess. By now the emperor's main work was to perform the long, sacred rituals considered necessary for the welfare of the country, and to be present at other court functions and festivities.

Life in Heian-kyo was so appealing that noble families abandoned their strongholds to live in the city. Of the population of about 10,000 only around 3,000 were the high-ranking aristocrats, and they were very careful of their rights. People belonging to a certain rank wore distinctive clothing, and only ranks above the fifth were allowed to enter the Emperor's audience chamber. Commoners were considered semi-human, and lesser bureaucrats weren't much better. However, within this small group, an incredible flowering of culture, style, grace and manners was maintained for centuries.

The people held to strange superstitions, despite their Buddhist and Confucian beliefs. Divination was very important, and days that

were counted lucky and unlucky were very seriously observed. In the Imperial Palace, the guards twanged their bowstrings at regular times to frighten away the demons. Even the site of the city was chosen with care, to have the Mt. Hiei and its Buddhist monastery as a barrier to the northeast, the direction from which demons were most likely to attack.

The homes of the nobles were simple wood structures with moveable walls and little privacy. Secondary buildings for family members and servants were built nearby, and reached by covered corridors, which made each estate a maze of passages and courtyards. There were few furnishings, but one of the most interesting was the kicho. This was a six-foot high, portable curtained frame, behind which a high-ranking woman would conceal herself from view, appearing as only a shadow through the cloth. An important part of a Heian love affair came when the woman allowed her male visitor to come behind her kicho.

They had, however, created one distinct problem for themselves. By adopting, and clinging to, the Chinese characters for writing, they made it very difficult to develop their own literature. The Chinese language is made of monosyllabic words, which were each written by a single character, and these numbered in the thousands. However, Japanese was easier to write phonetically, since it had only 47 syllables. Two forms of this phonetic writing were actually created, both called Kana. However, high-ranking men shunned them, since the older Chinese system was a sign of their rank.

This did not, however, stop the women from using it. Kana was even called 'women's writing' at times. They used it to write letters, diaries, poems, and the first true novels in history. It was a lady in waiting to an 11<sup>th</sup> century empress who began writing a love story to pass the time. 630,000 words later, she had completed "The Tale of Genji" which is the first major novel in history.

The fall of the Heian Empire came through many sources. The Fujiwara clan had grown so large that they began to feud among themselves, and the main branch of the family failed to produce enough daughters to marry all the Imperial male descendents. In

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1068 Emperor Go Sanjo came to the throne. His mother was not a Fujiwaran, and he was not a child. He took the rule away from the long-established family, and then abdicated in favor of his own son. This allowed him to move away from the symbolic structure of being Emperor, and set up his own offices where he could control the government.

It was a time of change. Beyond Heian-kyo, chaos had grown. The Minamoto and Taira clans were becoming more powerful, and a new figure was making its presence known in Japanese history. The age of the Samurai had arrived.

### **Some Forms of Government:**

- ❖ Absolute Monarchy -- kingdom in which monarch has complete power
- ❖ Anarchy -- absence of government
- ❖ Aristocracy -- government by a wealthy, privileged minority or hereditary ruling class
- ❖ Caliphate -- government by Islamic civil and religious leader
- ❖ Civil government -- government established by laws made by citizens or their representatives; nonmilitary, nonreligious authority
- ❖ Coalition government -- temporary alliance of members of two or more parties to form governing majority
- ❖ Collective -- group or institution organized and run by all members equally
- ❖ Commonwealth -- government in which ultimate authority lies with people
- ❖ Constitutionalism -- government based on written constitutional principles
- ❖ Constitutional monarchy -- government headed by monarch and regulated by constitution
- ❖ Democracy -- government by the people with majority rule exercised in periodic, free election of representatives
- ❖ Despotism -- government in which ruler exercise absolute power
- ❖ Dictatorship -- government in which absolute power rest with one person or a few

- ❖ Duarchy or duumvirate -- government by two equally powerful rulers
- ❖ Dyarchy -- dual responsibility shared by colonial government and native ministers
- ❖ Empire -- several territories, nations or peoples governed by single sovereign authority
- ❖ Fascism -- government based on establishing oppressive, one-part, centralized national regime
- ❖ Federal government -- system in which political units surrender individual sovereignty to central authority, but retain designated powers
- ❖ Feudalism -- political system in Europe from 9th to 15th century in which lord owned all property worked by vassals
- ❖ Gerontocracy -- rule by elders
- ❖ Gynecocracy -- government by women
- ❖ Hagiocracy -- government by group of persons believed to be holy
- ❖ Hierocracy -- rule by priest or clergy
- ❖ Isocracy -- government in which all individuals have equal political power
- ❖ Matriarchy -- government or monarchy in which power rests with females or descends through female line
- ❖ Meritocracy -- government in which criterion for leadership is skill or intellectual achievement
- ❖ Monarchy -- government with absolute hereditary ruler who serves for life
- ❖ Ochlocracy -- rule by the multitude or mob
- ❖ Oligarchy -- government by small group of privileged individuals
- ❖ Pantisocracy -- utopia in which all members rule equally
- ❖ Parliamentary government -- system in which executive (prime minister) is chosen by elected legislature (parliament) from among its members
- ❖ Patriarchy -- government or monarchy in which power rests with males or descends through male line
- ❖ Plutocracy -- government by the wealthy
- ❖ Principality -- state ruled by a prince, often part of larger state or empire
- ❖ Regency -- reign of non-monarch during youth or indisposition of monarch

- ❖ Republic -- government in which power is vested in elected representatives of citizenry
- ❖ Sovereignty -- political autonomy and freedom of state from outside authority
- ❖ Stratocracy -- government by the military
- ❖ Technocracy -- government run by experts and technicians
- ❖ Thearchy -- government based on divine sovereignty
- ❖ Theocracy -- government by church officials, who believe they have divine authority
- ❖ Timocracy -- government based on love of honor and military glory or on requisite ownership of property
- ❖ Totalitarianism -- authoritarian political system in which citizen is totally subject to will of state
- ❖ Triarchy -- government ruled jointly by three person; triumvirate
- ❖ Tyranny -- government by single absolute authority, especially one exercising oppressive power
- ❖ Unitary government -- system in which power is held by single central source, and local governments are merely administrative agents, the opposite of federalism
- ❖ Welfare state -- system in which ultimate responsibility of government is well being of all citizens



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## FANTASY

Sarah Jane Elliott, Associate Editor

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### A MAN IN BEAST'S CLOTHING

By Sarah Jane Elliott

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When you immerse yourself in a fantasy world, chances are you're going to come across a talking animal sooner or later. They've been running around fantasyland for a long time now.

Narnia is full of them. So is Oz. Talking animals are a staple of children's stories, and the fond memories we get when reading them as children tend to stay with us, which may be why we love to read about talking dragons, telepathic horses, and intelligent eagles. But there is a problem with many of these inhabitants of fantasyland. Nine times out of ten, they act like people in animal suits.

Not that there's anything particularly abhorrent about this -- Disney makes a fairly comfortable living off just such characters -- but too much of this sort of thing and they all run together. Your characters become just another human with some fur or feathers slapped on.

It's easy enough to see where the anthropomorphic animals came from. Historically, a talking animal was used most often in literature as a metaphor for some aspect of humanity. In Aesop, the hare became pride, the tortoise perseverance, the fox cunning, the crow intelligence. They acted like humans because they represented humans.

In *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, C.S. Lewis created Aslan the lion, one of the most famous anthropomorphic animals. But Aslan acts very little like a lion. Lewis adopted the literary devices of Aesop's fables and early fairy tales to embody aspects of humanity in the Animals of Narnia. The wolves, only now losing their reputation

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as wicked, evil creatures, were the embodiment of savagery and bloodlust, and fell to the side of evil. The beavers, industrious and persevering, became the saviours of the human children. And Aslan himself, a lion, the symbol of strength and royalty, became a Christ figure. In the spirit of post-war idealism, Lewis created Aslan to be the epitome of logic, reason, compassion, and everything that post-war society craved in mankind. But because Aslan was a representation of these aspects of humanity, he lost his animal heritage.

Modern fantasy writers are faced with a tough challenge. Obvious allegory, like *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, has been done. Today's readers have seen it, and though we appreciate it, we need something new. We crave reality.

Think of the alien invasion theme in movies. In the 50s, movies like Siegel's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* were terrifying, but we aren't frightened today. Today we want movies like *Independence Day*, with cutting edge effects that make things as real as possible. We don't care as much about films that are metaphors for the dangers of communism. We want action, we want great characters to cheer for, and we want it as real as it can get.

The same is true for novels, which is why the man in beast's clothing is no longer a useful writer's tool. It has become cliché. Readers crave a story in which they can immerse themselves, and real, believable characters who become our best friends. A good way to do that is to strip away the humanity and make our animal characters what they are: animals who just happen to be able to communicate.

This is a lot harder than it sounds. You have to keep enough apparent humanity that the reader is still able to identify with the character, but at the same time immerse yourself in a totally alien mindset. The character is not human. Its responses are not going to be the same as the ones your human character has.

The easiest way to go about doing this is to take a good long look at your creature's natural history. For example, let's take a look

at an intelligent species that you've decided to base on a wolf-type morphology (you can play around with that to your heart's content, but that's a whole other article). We'll call it a jorveth. This wolf base can affect almost everything about your jorveth, from his people's culture to the gestures we take for granted.

To begin with, your jorveth is going to be a carnivore. And unlike humans, who started out as scavengers until we had tools to help us out, he's an active carnivore, with the biological equipment to back it up. Blood, death, and hunting are probably going to have a much bigger role in his culture than in that of your human characters. Not just in terms of ritual, but in everyday beliefs. Where a human would consider crying for someone an expression of grief, a jorveth might think it a much more fitting tribute to shed blood for a fallen comrade. His species will probably have more words for these things than humans do (my griffin have twenty-seven words for 'blood'), and it will figure as a subject of their art, their literature, and their poetry.

Wolves run in packs with a very structured social hierarchy, so your jorveths may have something similar. Instead of monogamous families, you may have households composed of an alpha pair and assorted beta and gamma males and females. They may have formed elaborate rituals of greetings. Their rituals may not even be visual, as ours are -- the primate brain is unique in that it has a large portion of it devoted to vision and has very underdeveloped olfactory lobes. Canine and other mammal brains place a much higher emphasis on smell and hearing.

But don't just think about culture... think about the little things. We all know what it means when someone shrugs, or laughs, or grimaces. These are little gestures that we take for granted, and they communicate a lot. Particularly the obscene ones. ("Do you bite your thumb at *us*, sir?"). But a jorveth *can't* shrug, because he's quadrupedal. He has to keep those feet on the ground. You have to think of new gestures that convey the same meaning as a smile, or a thumbs-up, or a blush. So go back to biology again. Clenched fists convey aggression in a human, but when a canine is angry, he goes stiff-legged and raises his hackles. Humans smile to show that they're happy, but in canines, a show of the teeth is a challenge for

dominance. A tail wag conveys the same as a smile. Learned gestures like shrugs are harder. You have to think of the ways a canine shows confusion. Little things like whines, or a flattening of the ears to the sides of the head. Ear-flattening in itself can have many different meanings, from happiness to fear, depending on the placement of the ears. A jaw snap can convey annoyance. Averting the eyes can mean embarrassment. Crouching low to the ground indicates submission or shame. There is a wealth of ideas for the taking -- there are a lot of animals that do a lot of neat things out there.

Anthropomorphic animals have been thoroughly sterilized, humanized, and sanitized for the purposed of conveying allegory. It's about time we let them return to their roots. An animal character can still convey a metaphorical meaning, but there's no reason why he can't be interesting at the same time. Defy the conventions, skip the sanitization, and set the beast free.



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## HORROR

Teresa Hopper, Associate Editor

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### WHAT IS HORROR?

By Teresa Hopper

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Sounds like a pretty simple question, doesn't it? I'm sure that many of you out there reading this already know the answer, or think that you do. Up until a week ago I thought that I knew the answer as well, but I was wrong. You might be too.

So, what is horror? If you'd asked me that question a week ago, I would have told you that for a piece of fiction to be considered 'horror', there had to be a supernatural element. It didn't matter what kind of supernatural element – vampires, werewolves, ghosts, curses, zombies, witchcraft (and too many more to name), but it had to be there, or I just didn't consider it to be horror. I was, I suppose, a bit of a horror snob.

I'd read a lot in other genres – crime and suspense fiction, dark thrillers, but I saw them as distinct and separate genres. Sure, at times these novels had disturbed me, maybe even scared me a little, but they weren't horror.

Then, last week I started to read a book that has changed my views on not only horror fiction, but also the dividing lines between all kinds of fiction. What is the book that sparked off this insight? A how-to book? No. An article on the nature of the horror genre today? No. It was a novel by Jonathan Kellerman called *Monster* (Little, Brown and Company, 2000). A suspense novel about a serial killer – one of those other genres. For some reason this book got under my skin and into my head in a way that not many books do. It scared me. That night I had to check under my bed to make sure there wasn't a madman there, with a long, shiny knife waiting for me to turn out the light. I've had to check under my bed before, nothing unusual in that,

but before, I was checking for whatever monster had been in the latest horror novel that I'd read.

And that book got me thinking about the nature of horror – what is horror really? If you take the old definition and scrape away all the monsters under the bed and the vampires and the ghosts, horror is about fear. It's about abnormal occurrences happening to normal people, which they are often powerless to prevent. Lots of novels that aren't considered horror are based around fear, and the old me would have said 'but they're different, that's a different kind of fear.' But is it really? Imagine you are in bed at night, naked and all alone, you've just woken up and hear a noise outside the bedroom door. On the other side could be a ghost or a monster, or it could be a maniac with a sharp knife and a grin. One option comes straight from the pages of a traditional horror story, and the other from crime or suspense. But is there really any difference? Obviously, one has a supernatural bent, and the other does not, but both focus on fear. For both types of fiction the fear comes from horrific and abnormal events happening to ordinary people. The fear comes from the belief that that person could be you.

So, what am I suggesting here? That we re-classify anything scary as horror? No, certainly not, but what I am suggesting, is that maybe we have been thinking of horror in very narrow terms, keeping it firmly within the realms of the supernatural, when maybe the dividing lines between horror and other genres are more blurred. A novel concerning serial killers which focuses on fear, has elements of both horror and crime/suspense.

And one of the reasons that I think this has occurred is the negative image that horror fiction, and therefore the horror writer, has with the general public. I often try to get non-writers to talk about horror fiction (without them knowing that I am a horror writer myself), because I am interested in their opinions. Invariably it is either something they love or hate; very few people have no opinion, but even amongst those who like to read horror, horror writers are still considered to be odd. They are viewed as strange, almost scary. One person said to me that horror writers were a bit frightening, because "they go around with all that [scary] stuff in their heads all the time".

No wonder then, that a lot of people would rather not classify themselves as horror writers, even though their writing might be highly fear-based.

So maybe we shouldn't be looking at horror in the strict terms of the supernatural, but we should widen our criteria. I suggest that two types of horror exist - supernatural horror, and a horror which is not supernatural, but based around the horrors of our real world – hate, murder, cruelty. Both are equally valid but related forms of fiction.



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## POETRY

[Jennifer St. Clair Bush](#), Associate Editor

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### HOW-TO HAIKU By Jennifer St. Clair Bush

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**H**aiku is a form of verse that was first developed in Japan about 400 years ago. At one time, Japanese Haiku festivals were held where one poet would reply to another, eventually ending up with 10,000 line poems. When I was in High School, my friend and I did something like this, but ours lasted only six or seven pages, not 10,000 lines. It was definitely interesting to find out about the historical basis!

Haiku flourished throughout the centuries and became very popular around the world. If you go to the library, you're likely to find plenty of books filled with Haiku poetry, but have you ever tried to write one of your own?

Haiku poems are traditionally three lines with a total of seventeen syllables. The first line has five syllables, the second line has seven, and the third line has five. Sound easy? One of the traditional rules of Haiku is that one of the lines must have a word that is identified with a particular season. This is called a kigo. In modern times this isn't always followed, but the Haiku we write for this exercise will follow that rule.

In Haiku, try to avoid adverbs. You want each line to form a picture in your mind--a picture of whatever you are trying to tell the reader. The first line should set up the poem (just like the first page of a novel), the second should carry you forward and bring you to the end.

Here's an example I wrote:

In early morning  
Rain falls across the city  
Melting winter snow

What do you see in this poem? Do you see the muddy dawn of an early spring morning, perhaps wetting down the world just in time for rush hour and the mad dash to get to the office? Do you feel yourself lying in bed, listening to the rain patter on the bedroom window? Have you ever been in this situation? This poem only has eleven words, and yet it conveys the point just as well as a longer lyrical poem describing the early morning rain.

The easiest haiku to learn to write is usually nature-based. Imagine a budding flower or a squirrel in a tree, and use the 5,7,5 rule to describe what you see. Post it here (<http://network54.com/Hide/Forum/message?forumid=69977&messageid=981914473>) and share your haiku with the community members.

Through the years Haiku rules have been stretched and skewed, but the 5,7,5 syllables have pretty much remained the same, though some people believe a 3,5,3 version is closer to the brevity and feel of the original Japanese form. While searching for information for this article, I came across a random Haiku generator (<http://www.cs.indiana.edu/cgi-bin/haiku>) that will give you some interesting random Haiku and will show you how many variations you can achieve while writing them. (Some of them are pretty bizarre!)

There are many more sites online about how to write haiku. Any search engine should come up with many choices. If you wish to learn more about the history of Haiku, I would suggest this site: (<http://www.nhi.clara.net/gepm002.htm>), which has a fairly detailed article on the history of haiku.



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## ROMANCE

Anne M. Marble, Associate Editor

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### RESEARCH FLAWS IN ROMANCE NOVELS

By Anne M. Marble

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There are two big mistakes a romance writer can make when incorporating research into her novels. One is neglecting the research and making huge factual errors. The other, less obvious mistake is overusing your research.

#### Corn on the Cob and Gaslight, Oh My!

Mistakes in historical romance novels can be very obvious. One best-selling author, not known for her historical accuracy, had her Regency era hero complaining about the "simpling females at *White's*." However, *White's* was a men's club, so there were no females, simpling or otherwise, to be found. This novel was full of errors like this, and the characters acted as if they were modern-day people in fancy costume. Readers who went to this book looking to be immersed in the historical environment were disappointed.

Look out for anachronisms. These can pull a reader right out of your story. Are your medieval warriors dining on corn on the cob even though corn wasn't brought to England for hundreds of years? Does your heroine read by gaslight in 1800, even though that wasn't introduced to London until 1817? Even worse, do your Victorian characters have modern names, such as <shudder> Crystal? Then maybe you're not at home writing in that era.

If you're writing novels set in the American West, you have a new set of challenges to face. Many romance writers have their characters travel by train. Unfortunately, they forget to look up information about trains of that era, so they have their character

traveling on tracks that don't exist. Other writers err in the other direction, having their characters travel by wagon train when they could have easily taken a train for less cost. When you write romances set in the West, many of your readers live in that area, and they will spot those mistakes quicker than you can say, "Howdy pardner!"

Mistakes don't have to be so obvious. Inaccuracies can be subtle yet damaging. One of the biggest flaws in many historical romances is that the characters don't behave like typical people from their era. For example, if your frontierspeople all treat Native Americans fairly, or if your British lords are kind to the Irish servants, then you are neglecting the historical context of your story. In addition, you may be sacrificing potential drama.

When you write a historical novel, remember that you're writing about another era. The culture is often as alien as what you'll find in a science fiction novel. In all too many historical romances set during the Regency era, the courting couple often goes off together, alone. But this was simply not done at this time. A couple going off unchaperoned would create a huge scandal. Proper women simply wouldn't allow such liberties.

This isn't to say that your characters can't be iconoclasts, but you must explain why your heroine is strong-willed enough to refuse to marry the husband her father picked out for her. After all, most women of the upper classes accepted that their marriages would be arranged. So unless you have portrayed her as rebellious, don't have the heroine act with shock and horror when she learns her father expects her to marry a man she has never met.

Do you plan to write only contemporary novels? You will still have to do research. Is your book set in a certain city? Is it about a particular profession or region? Make sure you get all the facts right. If you make obvious errors, such as having your characters visit the Baltimore Aquarium when the proper name is the National Aquarium in Baltimore, you risk alienating readers who know the area. The same is true if you have a character referring to "Silver Springs, Maryland" when the correct name is "Silver Spring." If you make lots

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of subtle errors, such as having your characters get take-out from exclusive restaurants such as Sardi's, readers will think you don't care about your setting.

Don't base your research on what you've read in other romance novels. Remember -- those novels might have gotten the facts wrong. Also, remember that research is more than just facts. Research is a great way to find information that can help you out of a tight plotting situation or give your characters a more detailed background.

### **Here, Duke! Here, Duke!**

Authors often get the titles of the British nobility wrong. It's a very basic error, and it's bound to annoy your readership.

If you want to write British historicals, it's imperative to learn the proper way of referring to nobility. Mistakes can make you look like a newbie. For example, let's say your hero is the Duke of Earl. Do not have your heroine call him "Duke." Only the duke's familiars are allowed to do this. Everyone else must call him "Your Grace."

This is a complicated topic, and too involved for a couple of paragraphs. Luckily, there are lots of web sites to help you research titles. Romance writer Jo Beverley has a wonderful page about the proper use of titles. <http://www.sff.net/people/jobeverley/title.html>

### **As You Know, Jane, Some Writers Like to Show Off**

Research can pose another problem to the romance author. There is the danger of being so in love with the facts you've discovered that you want to tell the world about them. All of them. That leads to a potential deadly flaw -- not interspersing information carefully throughout your novel.

Recently, I read a novel where the action stopped for about two pages because the author decided to lecture the reader (in an omniscient voice) on the importance of the rain forest. This came in

the middle of a novel set during the 1800s, before anyone knew that the rain forest was important to the environment. So it was not only a huge expository lump, it was also an authorial intrusion.

The rain forest seems to have an odd effect on writers. I read a contemporary novel dealing with issues of the rain forest. Potentially interesting background became dull and listless because characters who felt strongly about the rain forest would stop and tell each other how important the rain forest was. I kept expecting one of the characters to suddenly say, "Stop! I'm a research biologist. Don't you think I know all this stuff?" But the characters didn't do this because they were being used as "sounding boards" for the author.

There's nothing wrong with incorporating research into your novel. But you have to break it down into smaller pieces, and you can't have characters lecturing each other on things they already know. (See, science fiction novels aren't the only ones that suffer from infodumps.)

Don't include details for the sake of showing off. Try to include details because they add to the story. Do they advance the plot? Reveal character? If you're a good enough writer, you might be able to get away with more detail, but you'll have to watch yourself. Some writers lavish their attention on trivial details and end up writing dull stories. Others seem to know every trivial detail but forget to fit them in the context of the times.

Don't forget that you're writing to entertain. Some poetic license may be necessary. It's possible to be too accurate. Few readers will want to read about a medieval hero who never takes a bath or a cowboy with bad teeth. They will also have a hard time accepting a dandified hero who wears pink and waves a perfumed scarf in the air. On top of that, readers have little patience for writers who use realistic historical dialogue because that can be impenetrable to modern readers. (And whatever you do, don't add lots of "perchances" and "tis's" to make the dialogue seem historical. Most likely, you'll end up with a "faux" historical atmosphere.)

## It's All in the Details

The amount of detail in your novel will vary depending on several factors. Some publishers prefer novels that use historical background as “wallpaper,” while others prefer novels with excruciatingly researched details. If you’re more comfortable writing a novel where the history serves as wallpaper, then go for it. This style of historical background is much better suited to romps and farces. However, you can raise your novel above the crowd by making sure that while you don’t let the historical details get in the way of your story, those details are still accurate.

Also, keep in mind that some types of books require more research than others. Regency fans are sticklers for historical accuracy, while readers of historical novels set during the Regency are generally less demanding.

Finally, remember that research isn't everything. You must have interesting, sympathetic (or at least charming) characters in a fascinating plot. That comes first. However, good research can make a potentially generic book ("Oh, not another guardian/ward novel.") into a keeper. ("Gee, I didn't know that men during the Regency wore shoes made of...")

## Parting Shot

A final word. Some readers won't care. They want to be entertained, and they don't let inaccuracies bother them. If you don't mind writing for this audience, then go ahead and have fun. You might even become a best-selling author. However, you won't reach those pickier readers, and they are the more rewarding audience.



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## SCIENCE FICTION

Bob Billing, Associate Editor

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### TUNING THE UNIVERSE

Time, Distance and Cost in Science Fiction

**By Bob Billing**

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**F**iction, of whatever kind, is about people. And the art of writing fiction is the art of making life difficult for your characters. Specifically, science fiction - at least the kind that I write - is about the way a combination of high technology and low stupidity can drop the entire cast into the sort of pickle from which it takes 120,000 words of fast-paced action to extract them.

This means designing future technologies and giving them properties which make them useful - but not too useful - to the characters.

I specialise in the sort of SF that has space travel as a major theme, so I'm going to keep referring to that genre. But a lot of what I have to say applies to any imaginary world.

The time things take to happen is the first useful property of your future technology. It's interesting to examine a few classic SF novels and note the times that the authors have picked for interstellar journeys. Isaac Asimov chose one of the fastest speeds for his ships - he placed nearby stars less than a second apart in journey time. This gave him a vast canvas on which to draw the rise and fall of galaxy-spanning civilisations. Other authors have gone slower - both Larry Niven and H Beam Piper set the time between adjacent stars to be days, and told stories of independent human colonies with widely differing customs and societies. Going even slower still as in Harry Harrison's "Captive Universe" or Niven's "A Gift from Earth", restricting interstellar ships to sublight speeds, leaves little islands of humanity almost completely cut off from one another. Niven incidentally twice wrote about the effect of accelerating interstellar travel - the discovery of FTL itself and then the "second quantum" - a

big jump in speed. This let him examine the effect of opening up contact with a previously isolated society.

Distance has the same sort of effect - but I think it's a mistake to take a story that works in one environment and simply try to scale it up to a larger frame. Different orders of magnitude of distance have different flavours of problems associated with them - and simply changing the scale, but keeping the story the same, will ring false.

Let me illustrate. Let's say you are writing a story set in the 1930's, on an ocean liner. Someone falls off into the sea, wearing a lifejacket. The ship stops and goes back to look for him. The liner would have been travelling at a speed comparable to a car in traffic, and in the time it took to turn around it might be miles away. But the search area would be only a mile or so long, well within what a lookout with binoculars could scan, and our hapless character would have a decent chance of being picked up.

Now move the same story to an interstellar liner on passage between Earth and Alpha Centauri - a very local run in interstellar terms. A character in a spacesuit falls off. Let's pick a speed for the liner of one thousand times the speed of light, so that the passage time is about a day. Once again we know to a minute or so when our luckless friend fell off. He's floating along in his spacesuit, screaming blue murder on the radio - but now the search area is a thousand light minutes across - about twice the size of the solar system. If the lookout is in exactly the right place and looking in exactly the right direction it won't help because light and radio waves will take the best part of a day to get from our casualty to the ship. Without an outrageous stroke of luck, or some really clever technology, you're never going to see the character (or the space suit rental deposit) again.

Of course this can be used to advantage in plotting - one of my characters said, "There's no chance of my being rescued *unless I do it myself.*" It's this shift towards being alone and out of contact with fellow humans, and thrown back on one's own resources, that's one of the advantages of this sort of SF. You can get characters more lost

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in less time, and with bigger problems getting home, than anywhere else in fiction.

I've been talking rather glibly about travelling faster than light, even though that's something we can't do at the moment. But interstellar distances are so big that some way of breaking the light barrier is going to be needed if we are going to be able to tell stories at all. I'm ignoring for the moment both multi-generation ships, where distant descendents of the original passengers arrive at the far end, and special tricks such as freezing the passengers. These have been done very well in several classic novels, and are a distinct sub-genre all to themselves.

To go faster than light we need a "black box" of some kind that will let us suspend or bypass some of the laws of physics for the duration of the story. And by choosing the properties of this box carefully, we can set up a whole series of problems for our characters.

There are three really important properties to the black box:

- How easy is it to make?
- How fast does it go?
- What does it cost to run?

And by deciding these we can more or less set up any environment we want for our story.

If the box is really difficult to make, and requires a lot of specialised machinery, we'll only find a few factories that produce them. This would make the entire business of interstellar travel terribly vulnerable to an attack on one or more of these plants. However, the people who owned them would be rich, powerful, sophisticated and worth kidnapping. This suggests half a dozen plots at once.

On the other hand, if anyone could make a black box in his garage, there would be a huge number of unlicensed interstellar spaceships in service, because space is so big that you'd never catch them. Doing it this way you have a largely anarchic society in which

criminals can easily escape from one planet to another, young men get shanghaied as crew onto badly maintained ships, and Nice Young Ladies who go too close to spaceports are dragged off to the obligatory Fate Worse Than Death and never seen again.

Speed is the next important decision. It has huge effect on the sort of world our characters inhabit. And since we have no idea of how the black box might work, we can pick more or less any numbers we like. In general, choosing numbers towards the faster end, making the galaxy days to weeks across, will tend to create more cohesive societies - galactic empires if you like. On the other hand, this choice allows a character to disappear utterly into a populated area so large that finding her again could take lifetimes. This might make whoever was in power decree elaborate documentation and registration.

Going to the lower end, making even a very local interstellar trip take days would have the opposite effect. There would be huge differences between societies on different planets, and little chance of making an empire hold together. A rebellion could well be over and a colony independent before reinforcements for the garrison arrived, weeks or months later. But the relative isolation would tend to make the individual societies more colourful. If you want to write a "voyage among islands" in the old sense, a traveller's tale visiting lots of exotic locations with high adventure and a spot of swashbuckling, this is the sort of thing to go for. Here you'll find space pirates, shiploads of treasure, and people being forced out of the airlock at blaster point.

The cost of running the black box also has an effect on the type of world you create. At the most basic level, if you increase the cost, fewer journeys are made and less freight is shipped. But the cost will also control your characters' way of looking at interstellar travel. Make it very cheap to run, and they will go on interstellar jaunts as casually as we would drive to a supermarket. There would be little or no keeping of logbooks, and very little question of authorisation to use a spaceship or distinction between official and private use. Make it very expensive and the reverse applies.

The cost of running the box also puts a lower limit on the interstellar freight rates - the upper limit is defined by what the freighter firms can get away with charging. This then fixes the proportion of the price of imported goods which are down to interstellar carriage. Make the box cheap to run and commodities such as steel or wheat are only produced in a few places and exported to many destinations. The places where things are produced then become strategically significant. Make it a bit more expensive and only luxury goods are worth transporting. Make it a lot more expensive and we are left with a few urgent, life-and-death cargoes, such as vaccines, making the trip.

The cost of running the box will also influence the degree to which the economies of different planets interfere with one another. The cheaper interstellar freight rates are, the more commodities will be shipped between systems, and the greater the proportion of an industry's products will be exported off-planet. When one planet has an economic downturn, they'll stop importing, and the exporters on half a dozen other planets will see their profits shrinking. But if freight rates are high, only luxury goods will be shipped in small quantities and economic problems on one planet won't affect the others nearly as much.

Finally I'd like to look at a special case, one that I've used in my own worldbuilding.

This is a transitional state where one section of the human race has the technology to travel faster than light - but the majority does not. A secret like that couldn't be kept forever, but I think it could be kept for a very long time. If the society that had the technology located all its manufacturing on a group of planets which were closed to outsiders, it would be completely safe from spying - you couldn't get there to steal the technology unless you already had the technology you were trying to steal.

The society that had the technology would quickly gain economic and military ascendancy. It could be an evil empire, or a benign presence. And from time to time its officer class might be

called upon to make the supreme sacrifice in defence of the technology.

And thereby hangs a novel...



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## STAGE & SCREEN

Robin Catesby, Associate Editor

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# THE DUAL LANDSCAPE OF PLOT AND STORY

By Robin Catesby

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When I sat down with script consultant Bill Johnson for last issue's conversation (*The Promise of Premise, Vision, issue #1*), we covered a number of topics -- a story's promise, the three-part premise statement, and a key element to developing the emotional impact of a script, the difference between story and plot. Plot is the script's sequence of events; the *action* of the script. Story is what's beneath, defined by the emotional arc and the premise. In a strong script, plot events contain an emotional resonance because they connect to the script's story. In a weak script, there's no resonance. "Things happen," Johnson says, "but no one feels anything about it." Often this is because the script strayed from its story arc, or it lacked a story to begin with.

After our discussion, I felt a need to explore this further -- to figure out exactly how the connection between plot and story can make or break a script. I dug back not only into my stacks of earlier screenwriting notes, but into short story workshop notes as well -- there's much overlap in structural theory between the two. I looked for clues to story telling with a strong sense of cohesion and balance.

Balance, that was vital: strong scripts maintain a sense of balance between plot and story. But, to take it a step further, they also employ the craft of symmetry -- a symmetry between the outer and inner landscapes of the script's journey.

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## The dual landscape of a hero's journey

Imagine you're at a lake. It's a perfect day, not a cloud in the sky. Across the lake you see a spectacular mountain range. High jagged peaks, slender valleys; the edge of the world that meets the sky is described in sharp angles. Now imagine this edge from left to right as a journey -- the path your hero takes up into the heights of action, battling the forces that oppose him, scaling that final climactic summit before his descent to journey's end.

Below all of this, the lake, and in the lake, a perfect reflection of the heights above. Here, even in the intangible mirror, you can see your hero, scaling the depths of the reflection -- the echo of the outer world. Here below, in perfect symmetry to the tangible plot above, is the hero's inner journey. The story. Here is where we find our premise.

The shape of the mountain range is not important. You can work with Syd Field's three-act paradigm, Robert McKee's 5-part narrative structure, John Truby's seven steps and 22 building blocks, or the stages of the hero's journey. All will take you to your destination. What is important is that the shapes do echo. That you do not have the Himalayas above and the plains of Kansas below.

### First Steps of the Journey

To create this isomorphic landscape, it's essential that you address the needs of your hero on both a plot level and a story level. For this, think of your hero as having not one, but two goals. I've seen this defined a number of ways - false goal/true goal, want/need, outer problem/inner problem. Whatever the terminology, the key is, the outer goal (or plot goal) drives the plot of the script, and the inner goal (story goal) drives the story. Another way to break it down might be that the story goal is reflected in the script's premise, while the plot goal is often summed up within that catchy one-sentence pitch. ("It's *Die Hard* on a bus" tells us that Jack Traven's plot goal in *Speed* is to keep the bus from blowing up.)

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*Die Hard* itself is easy to break down this way. The promise of the film -- its deeper issue -- has to do with reconciliation; John McClane's desire to reconcile with his wife. The three-part premise statement, (as defined in Bill Johnson's book *A Story is a Promise*) is *Courage to face adversity leads to renewal*. While the plot of the film is hinted at in this premise statement, note that there are no specific references to terrorists or exploding buildings. Instead, it addresses that broader issue of human need -- the need John McClane has to find renewal. So, to go back to our dual goal approach:

John McClane's plot goal is to defeat the terrorists.

John McClane's story goal is to reconcile with his wife.

This dual approach leads to a much stronger story than say, *Die Hard 3*, where McClane's only goal is to defeat the mad bomber.

### Keeping plot and story connected

Let's go back to the symmetry of the lake. Each mountain top above defines a moment of action that drives the plot of your script; each reflected peak below defines a moment of emotional impact along the character arc of your hero. If the two landscapes don't match -- Himalayas vs. Kansas -- then obviously physical and emotional events aren't going to match. You'll be left with action that lacks emotional impact, or emotion that isn't manifested in the plot.

Draw a picture of your landscape and label the peaks. Sometimes it helps to give a peak more than one label. Plot point two, for example, might be the same thing as your hero's Dark Night of the Soul. Now, each step of the way, think about the connections. Does this event move my hero emotionally, or does it leave them stagnant? How can I tie in this plot revelation on page 60 to my hero's inner journey? How can I tweak this moment of action to give it a thematic kick? How can I take this moment of character revelation and connect it to my end of act II car chase? Use your antagonist's arc and the arcs of your supporting cast to build upon your premise and tie events together. Use recurring images, lines that echo through the story, foreshadowing. Of course the

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landscapes can't always mirror each other so perfectly that every emotional realization occurs simultaneously with every peak in action -- sometimes it takes a character a scene or two for an event to sink in -- but if you've created a string of major plot events with no connection to the story at all, then chances are your audience will sense that disconnect as well, and leave the film dissatisfied.

## Growing your characters

Remember, too, that in order to create that inner landscape of story, your hero must grow. She must have an arc, an inner journey to make. You can use the dual-goal approach to emphasize this journey and develop a complex and engaging protagonist. Choose your hero's goals carefully. Don't give her a story goal and a plot goal that are both easily obtainable. She should have to work hard for them and -- here's the fun part -- she shouldn't be able to get both of them at once, not without some sacrifice. The growth comes in the choice your hero faces. Perhaps she has a clear plot goal at the start of the script, but her inner story goal is unspoken. She may not recognize it in herself yet, because a character flaw prevents her from seeing past her outer desires. As she grows on her journey, she comes to recognize that the story goal is important too. In fact, it might be just as important as the plot goal. Perhaps even more important. Perhaps she eventually has to make a choice between the two. In *My Best Friend's Wedding*, Julia Roberts' character follows this exact progression. Her plot goal is to break up the wedding at any cost. She is ruthless, conniving and manipulative. Her opponent is sweet and charming and perfect in almost every way. Can she possibly succeed? Well, in a word, no, because what she does instead is grow. She learns that there are more important things in life than stealing a husband-to-be. In the end, she moves past her flaws and instead takes the path that leads to story fulfillment.

Another recent film that serves as a good example is David O. Russell's *Three Kings*. Major Archie Gates (George Clooney) begins the film with a clear story goal -- a search for reason. "I don't even know what we did over here," he remarks [since the quote isn't strictly a question], early in the film. He's a seasoned and cynical soldier,

and he's come to question the entire action of Desert Storm. Once the plot kicks in, his plot goal is clear: Get the Kuwaiti gold. His inner drive never leaves him, though, and manifests itself through his actions and his relations with his fellow soldiers. As both plot and story progress, it becomes clear to Archie that there are far more important things to do in the desert than steal gold. Iraqi rebels are in desperate need of help, and the U.S. Army is doing nothing to aid them. The story goal becomes clear: make a difference, save these people. At the climax of Russell's excellent script, Archie and his two companions are faced with a choice -- save the rebels or keep the gold.

Why do the "three kings" of the film's title choose story goal over plot goal? Character growth. They begin the film with major character flaws -- selfish, cynical, willing to put on blinders to the horrible aftermath of war -- but by the end, each character has grown in his own way. Each has moved far enough along his inner journey that the choice is clear: give up the gold.

Here are a few more examples of films that contain the dual goal/dual landscape of story and plot. Notice how often the hero either is faced with a choice between goals, or must sacrifice something of value to accomplish both. Also, remember that your hero need not even be *aware* of her inner goal at the start of the film, and that the outer goal may not become apparent until the plot kicks in.

In *Titanic*,

Rose's plot goal is to survive the sinking of the ship.

Rose's story goal is to break free from the bonds that society and her impending marriage have placed on her.

In *Star Wars*,

Luke's plot goal is to aid the rebels in destroying the Death Star

Luke's story goal is to discover his true identity and become a Jedi like his father.

In *Lethal Weapon*,

Riggs' plot goal is to work with Murtaugh in defeating the drug smuggling ring.

Riggs' story goal is to resolve the grief he feels over the death of his wife.

In *Galaxy Quest*,

Jason Nesmith's plot goal is to save the Thermians from destruction.

Jason Nesmith's story goal is to regain his self-respect and the trust of his fellow actors.

If we take each one of these films back to our mountain lake and follow the dual paths of inner and outer landscape, we'll discover how symmetry manifests itself all along the journey. How in *Lethal Weapon*, the plot begins with an apparent suicide of a young woman -- an event that has a clear impact on our suicidal hero. How in *Star Wars*, Luke's final shot to destroy the Death Star coincides with the climactic moment in his character arc where he chooses to trust in himself and in the Force. How in *Titanic*, Rose's leap of faith, to trust Jack implicitly and follow his path to freedom, is a literal leap of faith off the stern of the sinking ship.

In each instance, the scriptwriters chose plot events that had a deeper resonance, and created moments -- even at the height of action -- that touched upon the story's premise and upon that basic issue of human need that drives the hero forward. This symmetry of landscape, this reflection of the inner world upon the actions, deeds and reversals of the hero's fortunes, can elevate a script above the endless stream of action clones and empty bits of fluff, and turn it into something with emotional impact, and (as is clear from the examples above) box office staying power.

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Spend some time at your lake, give each of your major characters a story goal as well as a plot goal, explore the mountains above and below, and see where those dual journeys take you.

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Further reading:

*A Story is a Promise*, Bill Johnson, c.2000, Blue Heron Press, ISBN 0-93085-61-4. For more information, visit Bill's website at [www.storyispromise.com](http://www.storyispromise.com).

*The Writer's Journey, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Mythic Structure for Writers*, Christopher Vogler, c.1998, Michael Weise Productions, ISBN 0-941188-70-1



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# SUSPENSE & MYSTERY

Shane P. Carr, Associate Editor

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## SCENE OF THE CRIME

By **Shane P. Carr**

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**D**id you ever want to write a mystery or crime story, but didn't know where to begin? Perhaps you have an idea but you are not exactly sure how to develop it into a suspenseful story. Maybe you just want to make your characters and scenes a bit more realistic. No matter what you reason, your goal is to create some compelling and suspenseful crime fiction. In the following article I offer you a few of the key ingredients necessary for such fiction.

Mystery and crime writers have a few obstacles before them that writers of other genres do not. In developing a good crime story, the author must be able to think backwards to the scenes that happen before their story begins.

Let's say, for instance, that I am writing a story about a serial killer. As the author, I must envision the crime as it happens as well as the motive and actions that lead up to it. I must also be able to see what mistakes the villain will make that enable the hero to solve the crime.

When creating the villain for a crime or suspense story you need to focus on the following:

- ✓ The villain's background. Who was he/she prior to committing the crime? This includes the character's family, profession, hobbies, interests, social status, etc. A clear view of this character's normal life must be established. The background should also include the character's phobias and weaknesses. This will help your hero develop a psychological profile on your villain. In turn, your hero will begin to think like your villain.

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- ✓ **Motive.** Why did the character commit the crime? What would he/she gain by committing the crime? The motive can usually be drawn from the character's background or an event that affected the character's life. A pattern of abuse or psychological disability can lead the character to commit violent crimes. A man who is homeless or poor may decide to steal, either for survival or just to live his life more comfortably. A woman who catches her husband being unfaithful may be hurt enough to plan his, or perhaps his lover's, murder. In any case, the character's motive is the driving force behind why he or she committed the crime.
  
  - ✓ **MO or Modus Operandi:** This is the method the villain will use to commit the crime. Most people who commit crimes regularly have a repetitive pattern, especially in the case of violent criminals. Does the villain strangle his victims with a certain type of rope? Does he leave a rose at the scene? Is the crime scene organized in a certain way? Does each crime take place on a college campus or near a certain truck stop? Does the villain target only women or men? Does he target a certain ethnic background? Perhaps the villain is a thief who only steals a certain type of car or only robs certain types of businesses. These are but a few examples for developing your character's MO. Your choices in this area are nearly limitless. Just keep in mind that the MO should make the crimes unique to your villain and convey something about him or her to the reader.

Once you have developed your villain's background, motive and MO, you must then envision the crime happening. Some writers choose to begin their stories with the crime as it occurs. Other writers like to start the story with the police or hero arriving at the scene of the crime. Either way works. However, at this point, it's a good idea for you, as the author, to already know how your hero solves the crime. You should have a general idea of what clues will be found and which supporting characters witnessed the crime.

In all criminal investigations, the investigators will develop an initial list of potential suspects. The list will include people who may have had a grudge against the victim (Motive), as well as a list of suspects previously convicted of a similar crime (MO).

The list of possible suspects is one of the crime or mystery writer's most useful tools. The list allows the writer to add twists and cast doubts as to who the real villain is. This will increase the suspense of the story and keep readers guessing until the end.

When you have this figured out, you can begin writing your story, leading your hero through a series of events that help him/her to solve the crime. Watching police dramas on television or reading some good mysteries/crime dramas should help you in this area. Take for instance 'Law and Order' or 'The Profiler'. Each show is a prime example of criminal investigations. Another prime example is Andrew Klavan's novel 'True Crime' in which an investigative reporter discovers a death row inmate scheduled for execution is innocent of the crime and, in turn, must build enough evidence to prove it. In each of these, pay attention to how the characters develop a profile of the villain as well as other potential suspects. Examine the techniques used to investigate and question potential witnesses and possible suspects.

Once you have tuned yourself to thinking like an investigator, writing your story should become easier. Luckily there are plenty of resources for writers to learn about criminal investigations and criminal profiling. A quick trip to your local library or bookstore should give you easy access to them.

One series of books that I found particularly useful is the Mind Hunter series by John Douglas and Mark Olshaker. John Douglas is a renowned profiler for the F.B.I. Through each of his books he brings readers into the minds of the world's most dangerous criminals. Covering everyone from John Wayne Gacy and Ted Bundy to the Unabomber and Timothy McVeigh, Douglas gives readers a glimpse of the crime scenes and explains how criminal and psychological profiles were built on each. I found it a must for anyone developing a violent criminal character for his or her story.

I would also recommend the 'Howdunit' series to anyone writing crime or suspense fiction. This series, published by Writer's Digest Books, is an excellent set of reference tools. Covering every

technical aspect of crime fiction in an easy to use format, writers can research everything from crime scene investigations, police procedure and forensic medicine to criminal MO, poisons, and different types of crimes. A must-read for any writer who wants to get the finer details precise and accurate.

You should now have a wealth of resources to draw from when writing your story. All you need to do now is think up the perfect crime.



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# YOUNG ADULT & CHILDREN

Justin Stanchfield, Associate Editor

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## A QUESTION OF STYLE

By Justin Stanchfield

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**T**here's a rumor going around that writing for kids is somehow easier than writing for adults. Well, I'm here to tell you, it just ain't so!

Writing is writing, no matter what age the audience. Period. And if you think you might like to write for younger readers because it's simpler, or less demanding, or easier to break into print, you really need to stop for a moment and consider your motives. Writing for kids is a genre like any other, with its own conventions and styles. In fact, it is more than one genre. It's dozens, from First Readers up through Young Adult and all points in between. And, like writing for adults, (as opposed to Adult Writing, he says with a leer) for every age group there are sub-genres: mysteries, adventure, science fiction, fantasy or romance. The possibilities are endless, and they are just as hard to do well as their adult counterpoints. Don't step into children's writing because you think it's an easy way out.

If, on the other hand, you want to write for children because you have a story that desperately needs telling, then by all means read on.

How much difference is there between adult writing and writing for children? In truth, very little. Of course, I'm not talking about restrictions or taboos. There are, and will always be, certain things that aren't permissible in a kid's story. Yet, having said that, if you are writing for Young Adults, the age group between 12 and 18, then all bets are off. Most subjects have, at one time or another, been broached. In fact, one of the most popular genres in YA publishing

was, up until a few years ago, the 'problem novel,' a book that revolves around a specific issue, often sexual or drug related, and how it takes over the protagonist's life. These have fallen somewhat out of favor, but it does illustrate how thin the walls between Children's Lit and Mainstream Literature have become.

Restrictions aside, as far as the actual nuts and bolts of children's writing is concerned, the stylistic differences between material for children or adults are considerably smaller than most people would imagine. Personally, I don't adjust my style at all when switching between kid's stories and adult ones. Sure, I might not swear in it, and there probably won't be any steamy sex scenes, but the way I string my words together doesn't change one whit. After all, it's still the same 26 letters, still the same noun-verb/ subject-object relationship we all learned in grade school. Writing is writing. Letters make words, words make sentences. String enough of them together and you have a story. Writing is a direct line from your imagination to the world, and it doesn't matter whom you are writing to; in the end the basic tools remain the same. Everything that lets someone in their twenties or thirties or nineties enjoy a good yarn goes double for kids.

One thing to keep in mind is that most kids read at a higher level than they express themselves verbally. This is natural, and a big part of the learning process. Just as adults like to be challenged by what we read, so do kids. Young readers will work through a complicated sentence or unfamiliar word as long as they are engrossed in the story. Ah, but how do you keep their interest? The same way you keep any reader turning the pages. Lots of action, plenty of good dialogue and strong description. Avoid passive verbs like the plague. Don't waste time on meaningless explanation. Jump into the story and keep it moving. Or slow it down and paint something so wonderfully moody that it follows them not only home, but for the rest of their lives. I remember reading Ray Bradbury when I was in the sixth and seventh grades, utterly absorbed in the images he painted. And I remember those same scenes to this day. The point is, whatever story you're telling, make it count!

You will find, as you read through material intended for different age levels, subtle differences in style. A First Reader picture book is

obviously simpler in narrative than a middle grade adventure. The plot in the picture book is short, straight forward and without adornment. Characterization is accomplished as much by the illustrations as by the writing. By the time a child is reading on his own, however, he wants sub-plots and strong characters, protagonists he can identify with, and problems that drag him into a story and never let go. Red herrings, flashbacks, in fact, anything in your writer's bag of tricks is fair game in a middle grade or young adult novel. Don't hold back. Give your descriptions life. Close your eyes when you start a scene and put yourself inside your character's point of view. What do your surroundings look like, really look like? Is it hot or cold? Is it raining, or is an August sun beating down on your unprotected head? Use all the senses. Involve your readers.

One thing I have discovered since I first started wasting ink: No matter what age I was targeting, I try to write to an audience at least a few years above that level. I found early on that I like writing middle grade adventures. (Please, no jokes about my twelve year-old mentality - they're all true.) But since I'm writing *for* a twelve year old audience, I write *about* characters who are fifteen or sixteen. And I write in a style appropriate for my teen-age protagonists, not my adolescent audience. Why? Because no self-respecting sixth-grader will read a story intended for fourth-graders, any more than someone in junior high will read a novel written for kids in grade school. I didn't realize this at first. In fact, it wasn't until I began selling stories I had intended for teen-age consumption to magazines catering to much younger children that it dawned on me. It's not enough to simply say your protagonist is fifteen. You have to match his or her actions with the story's tone and your own narrative voice.

Occasionally you will use a word or phrase that is not, as one fine editor once pointed out to me, kid-friendly. Normally you will pick these up during re-write, especially if you are reading your stories out loud, a practice I highly recommend. Sometimes, however, a word just seems to fit even though you know in your heart it's far above the reading level of your audience. My advice, for what it's worth, is leave it in, but be prepared to change it if the editor asks you to revise. After all, she knows her readers better than you can. I've made a lot of revisions in the stories I've had published, and can honestly say, only

once did I feel my choice was better than the editor's. And even then it was a judgment call, and as he needed to make the change to suit the magazine's format, I had no objection.

Dialogue is a huge part of children's writing, as much as if not more so than in material for older readers. But, especially in stories or novels intended for younger grades, you may have to use more dialogue tags than sounds natural, sometimes even including a 'he said/she said' at the end of each exchange. Of course you can still use a bit of action to set the speakers apart, as long as your readers can keep clear in their minds who is saying what to whom.

One thing I have noticed in a lot of Children's material is a heavier reliance on adjectives than would be usual in mainstream fiction. This, in my opinion, is a mistake. If something is bad writing for adults, it's bad writing for kids. Show action or description with strong words, not adjectives and adverbs. Let your characters saunter across the room instead of walk slowly. And be wary of stringing too many modifiers together, the 'big red fuzzy dog with a big red empty bowl' syndrome.

One last point: although this may sound crass and commercial, keep in mind that while you are targeting young readers, the editor who will read your material first is very much an adult. If she doesn't enjoy your style, she won't buy your story. Sure, we want kids to read what we've written, but before that happens, your precious manuscript must pass through the filter of at least one more set of adult eyes. Try to make your writing work on different levels. Challenge your readers. Challenge yourself. Throw yourself heart and soul into your stories no matter what age group you want to reach.

After all, isn't that what writing is all about?



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## YOUNG WRITER'S SCENE

Beth Adele Long, Associate Editor

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### BEFRIENDING THE INTERNAL EDITOR

By Beth Adele Long

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**T**here's a good chance that you and your internal need to sit down for a serious talk.

No, I'm not going to tell you to bop him (or her) in the nose and shout, "Leave me alone, you big lout!" Though I've heard many discussions that suggest a lot of writers would like to do this, I think a more diplomatic approach is necessary, for the very simple reason that your internal editor should be your closest friend.

Let's talk about why you might want to squelch the internal editor. (Let's call him "Ed.") Ed is the person who sits on your shoulder while you write and says, "What? You're writing *that*?" He criticizes your phrasing, ridicules your characters, laughs at your plot structure, and holds his nose when you indulge in descriptive passages. He makes you feel inferior as a writer --- and on bad days, inferior as a person --- and sometimes the thought of facing him makes you avoid writing altogether.

So far, Ed sounds eminently squelchable.

#### **An Important Ally**

If Ed just makes your life miserable, why bother to make friends with him? There's one very good reason to start with: because so much of the time, the annoying little guy is *right*. Your phrasing

needs improvement, your characters could be better developed, your storylines are weak, and so on.

The proof is in the pudding; unless you are consistently publishing your work in pro markets, there's probably good reason to suspect that those external editors (you know, the ones who send out rejection slips) are being at least as critical as Ed. And even if you are publishing, you know that your fiction isn't perfect. There's always room for improvement.

"But wait," you say. "If I listened to Ed all the time, I'd never get anything written, much less submit it!"

I know. But Ed can make some very important contributions to your writing. If you're willing to give Ed his due and recognize that a lot of his criticism is accurate, then we can go to the next step: the negotiating table.

### Negotiating the Truce

Here's the situation. You know your writing needs improvement, but in order to improve, you need to be able to sit down and write without interruption. You need Ed to shut up for a while and let you get through a complete story. Though it doesn't seem so at first, the worst thing you could do to yourself at this point is to find a way to get rid of Ed completely.

Why? Because Ed has a high standard. He doesn't just want you to write your best, he wants you to write *better* than your best. He's the one who's going to push you to aim higher, work harder, do better. He makes it hard for you to write those first drafts, true, but he yells at you for a reason. He recognizes bad writing. You want him around.

The solution is to negotiate a truce in which both sides compromise.

First, Ed has to agree to keep quiet while you do first-draft work. He can't holler every time your writing doesn't measure up, particularly when it has to do with phrasing or syntax or other things that are easily changed during revision. If something really bugs him, he's allowed to make a note of it, but he has to wait until after the first draft before he can bug you about it. That's his side of the bargain.

You, for your part, have to agree to hear him out once you have the first draft on paper. You have to sit back, look at the manuscript, and tell Ed, "It's all yours." When he tells you to change something, *listen*. Don't tell him, "Well. . . You're probably right, but I'll see what everyone else says." He held up his part of the bargain, right? You have a rough draft in hand. Now you have to come through. Hand him the red pen and let him turn the manuscript scarlet.

This doesn't mean you shouldn't also incorporate feedback from one or two reliable first-draft readers. After all, Ed may be picky, but he's not infallible. You do need other points of view. But usually, Ed is a lot closer to the truth than we'd like to admit. Nine times out of ten, second-guessing him is just going to hurt you.

All right, so we've started to build a new way of relating to Ed. First we set aside our egos long enough to recognize that, despite his bad manners, the little guy has good instincts. Then we set up the terms for a truce so that we're able to get work done without rejecting Ed's advice outright. So far it sounds more like international diplomacy than making friends.

That brings us to a couple key factors in the relationship: time and experience.

## Learning to Work Together

Any good friendship takes time. Comfortable patterns don't pop up overnight, especially when you're in a working relationship where the emotional stakes are as high as they are for fiction writers. It will take a while before you and your internal editor get to the point where you're able to work together enthusiastically, instead of glaring at each other over the top of your manuscript.

One way to improve your relationship with Ed is simply to keep writing. Once you've made your truce and the two of you are getting along well enough that you can finish rough drafts, write as much as you can. You'll both start to see patterns in your writing. You'll see where you're improving, often because you listened to Ed during draft revisions, and you'll learn to trust him more. He'll see where you have persistent problems, often because he *didn't* catch something, and he'll realize that he has things to learn too. Mutual respect will develop when you both realize that the other one has something important to offer.

Eventually, you want to get to the point where Ed can start participating in first draft work again. Just as you need to learn from Ed when you do revisions, Ed needs to learn from you about the process of putting a story together. Ed's good at sounding the alarm when there's a problem, but he needs to move beyond criticism and learn how to offer workable solutions to problems when he sees them.

Once the two of you feel more comfortable with each other, it will be easier to bring Ed in during first drafts. Instead of shouting "That stinks!" when he sees a problem, he'll be able to pull up a chair and offer practical suggestions. "Jack would never do that. Have him walk out instead." "You're letting the tension dissipate. The reader is going to lose interest right here unless you pick up the pace." You might take the suggestions; you might not. But you'll be more likely to fix a problem when it occurs instead of waiting until the second or third or fifth draft. This is why some authors, as they gain experience, find that they write slower but do fewer revisions.

All this is good and well, but what about writers that don't have an "Ed"?

### **Internal Editor? What Internal Editor?**

Maybe all of this sounds like a foreign language to you. Maybe when you sit down to write, you're pleased as punch with everything that shows up on the page, and you don't have any problems with

voices in your head telling you what an awful job you've done. If that's your situation, I can think of two possible reasons.

You could be brilliant. If this is the case, you're pleased with everything you write because everything you write is fantastic, and you'll start selling (and winning awards, I'd imagine) so fast that the rest of us will be crying into our keyboards with envy.

The alternative is that you don't have an internal editor. In order to figure out how to develop one, let me step back from this anthropomorphism for a moment and specify what I really mean when I talk about the internal editor.

### Stepping Back and Moving Forward

Calling the internal editor "Ed" is convenient and a little cute, but we all know that there really isn't a separate entity hiding out in our heads. Whenever I talk about Ed this or Ed that, you know I really mean *you*. The human brain is an amazing thing, and sometimes it really does seem like we have multiple personalities (like Ed) who push and pull us in different directions.

But here's fact of the matter: Ed is you. Ed is your sense of what's good and what's bad in your fiction. Ed represents your instincts about storytelling and language and motive and style. The internal editor is the same part of you that gets annoyed with silly movies and badly written books, but it hurts so much when we see the same shortcomings in our own work that we try to distance ourselves a little from the criticism.

If you want to develop your instincts --- whether you want them to be even better or whether you don't have them much to begin with --- there are lots of ways to go about it. The best way is to read widely and continually. Read all kinds of books and short stories: difficult, easy, exciting, boring, exhilarating, perplexing, old, new, popular, impenetrable. There will certainly be some books you like better than others; spend time figuring out what you like and don't like in other people's work.

Get involved in a critiquing circle and learn to take apart a story and understand its structure, its strengths, its weaknesses. Learning to analyze other people's work will be invaluable when it comes to understanding your own fiction; make the most of this opportunity.

Pay close attention when people talk about what they liked about a particular book or movie, and ask them lots of questions about their experience of a story. Different people like different kinds of fiction; figure out why it is that a story thrills some people and bores others.

### **The Positive Side of Negative Instincts**

The most important thing for you to take away is that your negative instincts can be one of your most valuable assets. As long as you can keep your "internal editor" from paralyzing you, having a sense of what doesn't work (and, as you mature, knowing how to overhaul such problem areas) is what can move you from frustration to success.

Trust your instincts, learn to sharpen them, and when that contract finally arrives in the mail, you and Ed will be able to congratulate each other on a job well done.



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*BOOK REVIEW*  
**THE WRITING LIFE**  
**BY ANNIE DILLARD**  
**Reviewed by Beth Adele Long**

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*When you write, you lay out a line of words. The line of words is a miner's pick, a wood-carver's gouge, a surgeon's probe. You wield it, and it digs a path you follow. Soon you find yourself deep in new territory. Is it a dead end, or have you located the real subject? You will know tomorrow, or this time next year.*

**S**o opens Annie Dillard's *The Writing Life*. You don't have to read much farther before you realize you have a gem of a book in your hands. It's a slim book, with only 111 pages in the paperback edition I own, and its combination of economy and completeness have earned it comparison with the classic English stylebook, Strunk and White's *Elements of Style*.

Dillard does not approach writing head-on; she sidles up to it, walks around it, maps the surrounding territory. This is not a how-to manual, or a dry dissertation on the forms and conventions of fiction. Dillard practices her craft even as she discusses it, using metaphors and stories and vivid imagery to communicate the joys and struggles of the writing life. "You write it all," Dillard says, "discovering it at the end of the line of words. The line of words is a fiber optic, flexible as wire; it illumines the path just before its fragile tip. You probe with it, delicate as a worm."

Sometimes Dillard is hilarious. "In subsequent years, once [Jack London] had a book of his own under way, he set his alarm to wake him after four hours' sleep. Often he slept through the alarm, so, by his own account, he rigged it to drop a weight on his head. I cannot say I believe this, though a novel like *The Sea-Wolf* is strong evidence that some sort of weight fell on his head with some sort of frequency - but you wouldn't think a man would claim credit for it."

Bits like this will pop up here and there, unexpected, making you laugh out loud.

She is blunt. "Your manuscript, on which you lavish such care, has no needs or wishes; it knows you not. Nor does anyone need your manuscript; everyone needs shoes more." On some pages, you might get the idea that Dillard thinks writers are insignificant and their task trivial. Not so. She knows the value of literature, the value of "a line of words," and elsewhere she discusses literature's importance. But precisely because she knows the value of literature, she puts writers in their place. You may do an important thing in writing a book. But the writer must remember that a shoe salesman does an important work also, and a much more necessary one. No writer can come away from this book with an over-exalted view of herself or her task.

Dillard is also practical. She speaks of the real concerns of a writer. "Appealing workplaces are to be avoided. One wants a room with no view, so imagination can meet memory in the dark." She speaks simply and frankly of the fundamental issues of writing: "Writing every book, the writer must solve two problems: Can it be done? and, Can I do it? Every book has an intrinsic impossibility, which its writer discovers as soon as his first excitement dwindles."

One of the marvelous things about this book is Dillard's sense of perspective. She has been writing since the 1960's, and *The Writing Life* first came out in 1989. In that span of almost thirty years of writing, Dillard has learned a thing or two. The resulting sense of perspective, of taking the long view, gives the book a richness that most younger writers could not provide. "There is no shortage of good days," she writes. "It is good lives that are hard to come by. ... Who would call a day spent reading a good day? But a life spent reading - that is a good life. A day that closely resembles every other day of the past ten or twenty years does not suggest itself as a good one. But who would not call Pasteur's life a good one, or Thomas Mann's?"

Dillard often makes seemingly paradoxical statements, being perfectly comfortable with apparent contradiction. She knows the

truth that underlies conventional perceptions is both simpler and more complex than most people allow. She doesn't let the reader get away with one-dimensional perspectives. An amateur artist herself, Dillard understands perspective, and dimension, and representation. The attentive reader will learn much from following her trained eye and hand.

A word of warning: Dillard's spare prose and oblique approaches may be off-putting to some. Don't be scared away; if you can adjust to Dillard's style and fall into step beside her, you will soon be captivated by her eye for detail, her delightful humor, and her gift for unifying the numinous and the practical in one sentence. If she seems too oblique, too round-about, keep reading. Follow the wandering path Dillard takes you along, and you may turn a corner only to find yourself abruptly at the center of the very matter you thought Dillard was avoiding. It's a startling sensation, and a wonderful one.

Which sums up *The Writing Life*: it's a startling book, and a wonderful one. I imagine it would be possible to write a review that was longer than the book itself, but that would be pointless. Why read a review when you could be reading the book itself? For that matter, why write a review when I could be re-reading the book?

Find *The Writing Life*. No writer will regret the time spent on this magical little book.

**The Writing Life By Annie Dillard**  
**Harper Perennial paperback published 1990, original**  
**HarperCollins hardback published 1989.**  
**ISBN 0-06-091988-4**



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*WEB SITE REVIEW*  
**THE FORWARD MOTION  
WEB SITE**

**Reviewed by Lazette Gifford**

©2001, Lazette Gifford

**P**art of the purpose of this ezine is to draw people to the Forward Motion Writers' Community -- but once you go there, it probably looks very intimidating. I thought I would take this issue to try and explain some of the sections, and what you can find at the site. Here is a brief into to the site from Holly:

For writers, the community is here to help you:

- To write better
- To sell your work
- To develop a lasting writing career

How far you pursue these goals is entirely up to you. We have members who have no intention of selling their work, but who want to write better -- and we have people who want to make a living writing. As long as you want to make your work better and are willing to work to do so, you'll find plenty of support here.

And here is some of the material that you will find at the site:

At the top of the pages there is a list of links:

Community | Moderators | Chat | Newsletter | Mailing List | Join the community

Community -- You can reach the community through <http://hollylisle.com/community/>, which is also the gateway to the readers' community. This page also points to information about Holly. There are lots of links here to sample, and you may want to try a few before you join, especially the ones that deal with the rules of the site. There are dozens of helpful writing articles, a free download of Holly's Mugging the Muse, and considerable information on the

community and how it works. For writers who aren't interested in interacting with others -- or who are not yet ready for it -- this area will provide you with more than enough helpful information.

Moderators -- These are the people who help Holly run the site, and who are there to answer whatever questions we can. You can read bios -- and in some cases look at some of the Moderator's own work.

Chat -- What would any site be without chat? Ours is often busy, and while we don't always talk about writing, we are there to share frustrations and victories, or to answer what questions we can.

Newsletter -- Holly often sends out notices of things going on at the site. This will pop up a mail window for you to subscribe. Don't be nervous about signing up -- Holly hates spam at least as much as the rest of us, and you won't get anything but the newsletter if you subscribe.

Mailing list -- Here people discuss Holly's work through email. A great group, who are often quiet for long periods of time, and then suddenly get very silly...

Join the Community -- If you would like to interact with other writers facing the same goals and frustrations as you do, then you should really join the Forward Motion Writers' Community. Joining is free and gains you access to almost all the boards. (There is at least one private board for Moderators only.) To sign up, go to this link: <http://network54.com/Hide/Group/3188>

Once you have become a member, there are a lot more boards for you to visit. Some of them are open to all the public, but the work-related ones are all private. Only members can access those, which means material posted there for critiques is not considered published. (Posting stories on your personal web sites is considered First Publication, and makes it very difficult to sell them anywhere). Only members can access the work-related boards.

## General Interest Boards and Chat:

### Writer's Board

This is a public board (non-members can access it). Here we post questions, notices, fun stuff -- just about anything is apt to show up here from the You Know You're a Writer When thread, to questions about where to find things on the site.

### Daily Page Count

For those writers who do well with goals they want to meet, and find that posting a daily page/word count gives them a little extra push to get the work done.

### Your Say (rants)

The place (and the only place in the community) where we can argue politics, beliefs and anything else that might spark debate, but even here there are rules for good conduct.

### Resources and Articles

An extensive -- and growing -- list of material of interest to writers, including book lists and links to numerous web sites.

### Review Favorite Books

Writers are readers as well. Here are short reviews of fiction books that members have found enjoyable.

### HollyLisle.com Feedback

Having technical problems with the site? Post here. (If you have questions about the community, try the Member Feedback, listed below)

### Games & Contests

Here we list writing events that you might want to join, like our Writing Dares and last year's Doggerel Is King Contest. Lots of fun!

### Writers' Fitness Challenge

From Holly: "The health of our bodies and minds is the single most important factor in promoting our longevity as writers -- in

predicting how long we can continue to work, how sharp our work will be, and how productive we'll be as we age. It's worth fighting for. The Writers' Fitness Challenge board offers a daily opportunity to post your success in keeping to your daily fitness goals, to get and offer encouragement, and to remember why you want to stay in shape."

### Sneak Peeks of My Works In Progress (private)

What is Holly working on now? She might just post a chapter or two of the latest WIP (Work in Progress) for members to see!

## Info

### Moderator Updates

This is the area where the moderators post any information that they think might help community members -- and where community members can post questions to them. (To learn more about who the moderators are and what areas they cover, try this link: <http://hollylisle.com/community/moderator-index.html> )

### Member Feedback

Questions about how things work in the community?  
Suggestions that you think might help out? Try this board!

### Member Bios & Links

If you are a new member, introduce yourself! This is where you can write a short bio and put a link to your own web site.

### Workshop Request Center

This board is for people who are taking part in the critiquing process, to request that material be removed from the crit circles or the roving member posts. (More on this below...)

### Crit Circle Classifieds

The heart of the Forward Motion Writer's Community is the Crit Circles. These are small groups that join together for the purpose of critiquing and helping fellow members. There are several such groups. You will want to look here for a group to

join -- or to post that you would like to form a new group. You may decide that belonging to a Crit Circle is not the amount of work you can commit to right now, and decide to post as a roving member instead, asking for individuals to critique your material. Either way, this is the place where you want to look. (The circles themselves, along with the area for roving members to post are in the Writing Boards area, listed below.)

### Market Reports

You have something your ready to send out into the world of publishing, but you're not really certain where it should go? Take a look at this page for lists of a few publishers.

### Moderators' Board

This is a private board for moderators only, where we discuss upcoming events and work on problems within the site.

**Writing Boards** (These are mostly the Critiquing boards, where people post material and get suggestions from others in the community.)

### General Fiction

This is an area with an assortment of crit circles and other notices, like the Novel Swap group (people with completed drafts of novels who want someone to look them over a last time before they go out). The crit groups here are generally mixed genre, or the critique circles for material written for Children or Young Adults.

### SF/Fantasy

The largest section of our community writes SF or fantasy, or both. This isn't surprising, since many of us found the site through reading Holly's books. This board has a number of crit circles and numerous individual posts. But there's always room for more!

### Romance

Here is a place for Romance writers to work with people who are also writing in that genre.

### Mystery

The place for mystery writers.

### Crime & Suspense

The place for crime and suspense writers.

### Horror

The place for horror writers and their critique groups.

### Poetry and Experimental

A surprisingly busy section, with a lot of interesting material.

### Screenwriting & Drama

Yes, we even cover this type of writing, and we have at least one member who has had plays produced on stage!

### Miscellaneous Genre

This is an area for anything odd that might turn up. If enough people are interested in something new, Holly will create a board for it.

### Young Writer's Scene

This is for writers 18 and younger -- an area that helps meet the special needs of writers who are just learning the craft and dealing with midterms and essays at the same time!

### Round Robin

Round Robin stories are where one person posts a part of a story and another takes it up for awhile, and another after that. Although there hasn't been much posting in this area, it's still open and people are encouraged to check it out and join up -- or start a new round robin.

### Shared Universe

Things are a bit calm here, as well -- but check it out and see if you'd like to contribute to creating a shared universe in which to write stories.

### World-Building

Having trouble figuring out how to put your world together? Here is where you come and ask questions on everything from magic systems to clothing styles.

### History in Fiction

Looking to use some real history as a basis for your fiction? Wondering how history in your story universe would affect actions in your manuscript? Here is the place to come and ask questions or present possibilities.

### Workshops and Exercises

This is a busy board! Here we have a daily writing exercise, along with places to work through the workshops presented in Vision.

As you can see, The Forward Motion Writer's Community is a very busy place, with considerable resources for writers. Come in and join the fun. With diligent work and new friends to help out, you'll be amazed at what you can do!



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# HELPFUL POINTERS FOR COMMUNITY MEMBERS

By Jim Mills  
Associate Editor,  
Forward Motion Community

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The Community Gateway URL is:  
<http://hollylisle.com/community/gate.html>

You can also get there from the Community URL:  
<http://hollylisle.com/community/>

Under the community gateway there are links to the following, among others:

Privacy  
Community Rules  
Finding or Making the Group That's Right for You  
Where Do We Talk About Writing and Other Stuff  
Critiquing Basics  
Ongoing Projects  
Ongoing Workshops and Exercises

Of particular interest are the community rules:  
<http://hollylisle.com/community/gate.html#community%20rules>

Holly has spent a lot of time and effort producing this information for writers and posting it on the site. It's all helpful material that you should check out, and keep in mind when cruising the site or working on your writing.

A couple of things to keep in mind:

Always be courteous to your fellow writers, your agent, your editor, everyone. Even if you think the person on the other end email or board posting is a flaming idiot, don't say so. Be nice, be constructive (tell him/her that "this way has worked well for me, and it

might work well for you, too..." and be positive. The agent or editor you treat with respect will feel the same towards you.

We have a number of younger writers on the boards. Please keep this in mind when posting messages, and try to promote good behavior that doesn't get anyone in trouble. In particular, please think twice before posting a message about, or chatting about subjects, that might get us all in trouble should someone complain to Network 54 (i.e.: drugs, crime, sex, etc.). I don't mean that these things cannot be discussed, but please keep them in-context as a subject for use in your writing (or the other community members) and be careful not to sound like you're actively promoting such things in real life. (LOL! Heaven forbid anyone sound like they're promoting sex in real life!)

An ounce of common sense will allow us to keep our happy home.

### What's New?

The [Writer's Board](#) is always hopping, and bears checking out on a regular basis. Some of the recent discussions include:

- Alien Anatomy and Biology
- Can anyone give me tips on sword fighting scenes?
- Curing a lack of enthusiasm
- Gender problems (handling characters that can and do switch genders, etc.)
- Prologues and Epilogues
- Using foreign languages

There are more. Be sure to click on "Next" at the bottom of the page -- there are dozens of pages to this board, with the newest first, and you have to scroll to the following pages to see the older stuff. Enjoy!

The [History in Fiction board](#) has a number of interesting threads going. Here are a few of them:

- Does anyone know anything about Sumerian Gods? (with lots of references in the follow-ups)
- How do you stop World War I?
- Mythical beings
- Timelines and Histories of various writers' worlds

The [World Building](#) board has some helpful information, including:

- Deserts
- How NOT to Worldbuild
- Magic
- Magic System Offered Up to the Gaping Hole Gods
- Maps, etc.
- Names for animals
- Sunrise, sunset, moonrise, moonset, and phases of the Moon
- Wordmaker
- Yes, You ARE God...

The [Workshops and Exercises](#) board has a writing-exercise-of-the-day each and every day... the exercises and what writers have written for them are always worth investigating (got tired of seeing "check it out" everywhere) .

There are lots of other interesting boards and postings on Holly's site. Be sure to check them all out!



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## FROM THE WRITERS' BOARD

### You might be a writer if...

....you decide to treat yourself one day, and so you go buy the Writers' Digest book "Body Trauma: A Writer's Guide to Wounds and Injuries." And then you spend the evening lounging around in bed reading it.

-- Bryn Neuenschwander

1. Your pots have burn scars on the bottoms because you thought you'd "just write a paragraph or two" while the water boiled and then you forgot about the pot...
2. You steal ideas from your own dreams
3. You buy a Latin/English dictionary just so you can make up neat-sounding names
4. Something bizarre, dramatic, and/or faintly unpleasant happens, and you secretly think "This would make SUCH a great scene in a story..."

-- Eilonwy

... you worry when you \*don't\* hear voices.

... you make notes while reading fiction, and you're not a student.

-- Katherine (Kewms)

... You shake your head over the poor narrative flow in technical reports.

... When people ask you about your work-in-progress, you get so caught up telling them all the backstory that you never actually get around to summarizing the plot.

... You see obscure reference manuals like "Guide to Deep-sea Invertebrates" in the bookstore and think, I really need to get that.

... Your idea of a jackpot Christmas is getting pens, notebooks, printer cartridges, and an ergonomic keyboard.

... And you definitely know you're a writer if you find yourself agreeing with and contributing to "you might be a writer if" lists!

-- Beth Adele Long

... You try to piece together the not-terribly-important-and-only-sketched history behind a story...only to find that given dates are wildly inconsistent or the whole thing's self-contradictory. And it ruins the whole book for you because it's a testament to the author's laziness.

-- Jeff Burke

... Your family won't watch movies with you because you always see what's coming next plotwise... or confuse them by telling them what SHOULD have come next.

... When you're sitting somewhere quietly, not bothering anyone, your SO says, "Will you just stop writing for ONE minute!"

-- Dona Vaughn

... You can't watch a movie without mentally trying to figure out how it might be written if it was a novel.

... Your friends introduce you to people at parties as "the girl who's always got a pen in her hand -- \*please\* don't ask her what she's writing!"

... Your friends don't bother to introduce you to people at parties, because they know you're just going to sit in the corner writing, and no one will notice you anyways.

-- Allikat

... Your power goes out and you're so desperate to make your writing goal for the day that you sit with a flashlight and write the scene out longhand.

... When you can't get any editing done at home, you e-mail chapters to work. No one understands what you do anyway, and you look like you're doing real work.

... You hear the word 'sleep' and wonder what people are talking about.

-- Vicki McElfresh

... You say 'I'm sorry, my mind's on another planet today,' and quite literally mean it.

... There are tear marks down the side of your space-bar from that last tragic scene.

-- Alison

... you read that and initially space-bar meant a place near the spaceport where off-duty ground engineers drink and fugitives arrange to get off planet quietly. Doubly so if you started drafting the scene.

-- Bob Billing

... You get a brand new dictionary and your sister tells you to leave it in the car when you go into the restaurant to eat because you keep trying to read it like a novel . . .

... The WIP-labels (or report-writing, for those in non-industrial fields) you have to do at work remind you of all the writing-time you're "wasting" for a paycheck.

... You start weighing time with your friends/family against that exciting new story idea/outline you want to work out...

... When you get stares from people who think you're schizophrenic--- and you're actually working out important dialogue in your WIP.

... You have to remind yourself to suspend disbelief while watching an action movie because you're pretty darned certain no one can do that.

-- A. Shelton (Zaiud)

... you find staying up 'till 3 in the morning to get into the right mindset and banging your head into the computer "fun."

-- Miaka

... You've ever woken up ~on~ the keyboard at 3am...<g>  
-- Jennifer St. Clair Bush

... And then turned it into a scene where the heroine dozes off at the controls of a spaceship.  
-- Bob Billing

I actually have woken up at the keyboard...  
... dozing in the chair at 5 a.m. after pulling an all-nighter.  
... you wake up at 4 a.m. and turn on the PC to write a scene or two because you can't get back to sleep.  
... you sleep all afternoon so you can stay up at night and write.  
... you plan your writing activities around your spouse's (or significant other's) work schedule so that you can spend time with that Spouse/S.O. (alternately, you plan your writing activities around any other real life activity. You do remember what real life is, don't you?).  
... people keep asking you when you're going to get a job. (I wonder if they ask Steven King that question?)  
-- Jim Mills

... You're single and you realize that interest in any possible significant other has to at least equal if not surpass interest in your writing.  
-- A. Shelton (Zaiud)

... you try to look a word up in the dictionary, only to remember that you invented it yourself.  
-- Ariella

### **I knew I'd been writing too much when...**

...I went out one evening and couldn't shake the feeling I was underdressed ... because I wasn't wearing a sword.  
-- Alison

---

...Mine was a walking stick and a cloak, but I know what you mean.  
-- Jennifer St.Clair Bush

### **You certainly are [a writer] if...**

... You can look up at a starry sky, and point out exactly where your characters live.  
-- Bob Billing

### **You know you've made it when...**

... People dress up as your characters--and it's not even Halloween.

... You have a hard time finding nice, normal names for your characters. You've exhausted the entire baby name book for your stories. Twice.

... Your writing awards are on display in the National Museum.

... Your agent needed to be taken under the Witness Protection program--other agents are killing to get his job.

... You get calls from writers asking if they can worship at the Temple of Your Greatness.  
--Malliki

... you create a really bad, thin plot, then make millions and sail the seas in your luxury yacht with your adoring readers as crew, and laugh as people and even barmy Hollywood idols snap up your books and do courses in your works at ludicrous prices and accept them as fact.

-- Damon M. Lord

... the clerk in a bookstore who is taking your check recognizes your name and realizes you might be at least related to someone whose books he stocked yesterday.

... the clerk where you've been buying books for five years suddenly makes the connection between you and his end-cap display.

... your new next door neighbor has heard of you.

... your old next door neighbor has heard of you.

... your parents stop suggesting you get a real job.

... checks arrive before the rent is due.

... you don't rent, you own. Outright.

... you see someone you don't know reading one of your books in a public place.

... you've stopped worrying about money.

... you've stopped worrying about your sales numbers.

... you've stopped worrying about whether your next manuscript will sell.

... you've started worrying about tax shelters.

... telling the maitre 'd your name results in a table better than the one next to the restrooms.

When any of these happen, I'll figure I've made it.

-- Holly Lisle



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## NEWS FROM FORWARD MOTION

### Forward Motion Good Fortune!

**T**he Forward Motion Writers' Community had a plethora of great writing-related notices in the last few weeks!

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FM Moderator **Sarah Jane Elliot's** story , "*To Soothe the Savage Beast*", received an Honourable Mention in The Isaac Asimov Award for Undergraduate Excellence in Science Fiction and Fantasy Writing. The Award is sponsored by "Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine" and the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts (IAFA). Each year, out of hundreds of submissions, five stories are chosen. The winners fly to Ft. Lauderdale to attend the International Conference on the Fantastic in March, where the award will be presented.

At this year's conference, she will meet three fellow finalists and last year's winner (FM Moderator Beth Adele Long), as well as Neil Gaiman, Peter Straub, James Morrow, Sean Stewart, Karen Joy Fowler, Kelly Link, John Kessel, Joe Haldeman TOR editor David Hartwell, and many many more.

For more information on the International Conference on the Fantastic (including the conference schedule), visit the [IAFA website](#).

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FM Moderator **Beth Adele Long** has been accepted to this year's Clarion Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers' Workshop , an intense six-week workshop held at Michigan State University. From the Clarion website (<http://www.msu.edu/~clarion>) : "Each week a

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different professional writer conducts the workshop. The resident writer also lives on campus and is continuously available. Mornings are devoted to critiquing manuscripts in a workshop setting; afternoons and evenings are devoted to individual writing, conferences with the writer-in-residence, and completing class assignments. Tom Disch once said that the 'six weeks of Clarion are the literary equivalent of boot camp.' It is indeed an intensive experience."

This year's instructors are Steve Barnes, Kelly Link, James Patrick Kelly, Pat Murphy, Geoffrey Landis and Mary Turzillo, with guest editor Shawna McCarthy. Needless to say, Beth won't be very active in the community during those six weeks, but she does promise frequent updates from the wilds of East Lansing, Michigan!

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Community member **Caroline Allard** has placed three short shorts with ShadowKeep.

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FM Moderator **Jennifer St. Clair Bush** has sold her first novel!



*Second Coming*, a fantasy about King Arthur, Mordred, and the end of the world, will be published in mid-2001 by FictionWorks as an original paperback.

(graphic is not the cover art!)

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The soundtrack CD for Robin Catesby's world premiere production of *The Velveteen Rabbit* is now available at MAH Records ([http://www.mahrecords.com/new\\_items.htm](http://www.mahrecords.com/new_items.htm)), the record company of composer Michael Allen Harrison. 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](http://www.velveteen-rabbit.com).

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When FM Moderator Justin Stanchfield was asked if he has any publishing news, this was the reply:

Ummm.... I've got one up on ShadowKeep this week, and the one on Ideomancer will probably be rotated out next week, but I'm not sure. I think they'll both be in archives for a while, though. And my contributor copy of Indigenous fiction came Saturday.

Upcoming I've got stories in the next issues of Foxfire, Colonies, and Hadrassaur Tales. The ones I've placed with Alternate Realities and Xoddity haven't been scheduled yet, and I'm not sure about the release dates on any of the anthologies I'm in yet.

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FM Moderator Lazette Gifford's short story, *A Fate Cast In Stone*, found a home at <http://www.ideomancer.com>. She also sold *A Warrior's Work is Never Done* to Dragonlaugh (<http://dragonlaugh.freeyellow.com/>) for both electronic and a print anthology, and her first published story, *Epilogue for a Lost Tale*, was chosen to be included in Jackhammer Ezine's (<http://www.eggplant-productions.com/jackhammer/>) "Best of" Anthology.

Lazette's first novel, *Silky*, is also available beginning March 1<sup>st</sup> from Embiid Publishing. (<http://www.embiid.net>) The publishers have also

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created a web page where tee-shirts, cups and mouse pads can be purchased featuring the e-book's cover art. (<http://www.cafepress.com/zette/> )



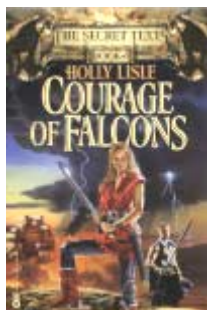
Years of slavery have robbed Silky of his magical abilities, and left him with no expectations of a better life, until his act of unselfish bravery delivers him into the hands of a powerful Lord of the land. Adapting to the new household, he struggles to recover the magic that can help him protect Lord Reed from his dangerous enemies.

*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*

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## 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

[Read the preview chapters](#) | [Read the reviews](#) | [View the cover](#) | [Order the book](#)

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## Great Resource Award For HollyLisle.com -- given by [Writers-Exchange](#)

Award text reads:

25 February 2001: Holly Lisle: Published author Holly Lisle has built a great set of resources and informative articles on this site. She covers all aspects of writing, from constructing a novel to getting a little fitness into a sedentary writer's life. On the front page of the site are cheers for people who have achieved goals with their writing. Her articles are filled with honesty about the industry and motivation for the new author, giving readers a true picture of the rollercoaster life most authors lead. There are links to literally dozens of different articles as well as other terrific resources. Be prepared to spend a couple of hours here, just poking around and learning.



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## What else is happening on line at the Forward Motion Writers' Community?

The first Writing Dare of 2001 is over, but the second one will start on April 1, 2001. There are several categories for this dare, which includes master and apprentice, novel, short story, and rewrite sections. Check out the information on the Games and Contests page.

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The site also features a daily writing exercise. These range from "Write an Interesting first sentence" to "Have a conversation with one of your characters." In March we will be starting a free-for-all round-robin type of exercise, in which members get to add to story posts all week. This is going to be a lot of fun! Workshops and Exercises Boards.

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This round of the novel swap is filled up, but you can sign up for the next one! If you have a completed novel that you think is ready for the submission process, you might consider sending it through this group first. These are not line-edit critiques, but searches for holes, dropped characters, dangling plot twists, or other problems. Think of it more like a detailed review. You can find the sign up on The General Fiction Board



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## TELL US ABOUT...

In the first issue of Vision we asked readers to tell us about their worst rejections. Here are the posts we received!

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From Lazette Gifford:

About 8 years ago I submitted my first novel manuscript to a publishing house. I heard nothing at all, and after 6 months I managed enough courage to write and ask about the novel.

I was pleased (and amazed) to find out the manuscript had made it out of the slush pile, and was being read by someone else. I was told I would hear something soon.

I'm pretty patient. I waited about 8 months before writing again. I received no answer at all on that letter. I began writing little notes asking for updates every six months. I never got an answer.

And so, after a little over 4 years, I wrote a letter saying that I was withdrawing the manuscript.

9 weeks later I finally received my first communications from the publisher in over 3 and a half years.

It was a form rejection.

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From darleesh

The story of my worst rejection slip is short and simple: the worst rejection slip I have ever received is NONE.

This is a sorry kettle of fish that I vow to take care of during the year 2001 by submitting something that could be rejected.

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From Bryn Neuenschwander

I'm just starting my collection, but right now the prize goes to my own query letter mailed back to me, stamped with the short phrase "Sorry -- not for us." They couldn't even be bothered to make their own rejection slips?

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From A. Shelton

The one I DIDN'T receive. I sent in a story nine months ago. I sent a little reply card, all postage paid, so I'd know they got the story (I put the date the card returned on the card when I get it back, so I know where the story is and, using their guidelines, how long I can expect to wait before I may send the story to another magazine). Either they didn't get the story; or they opened it, ignored the card and return SASE, and threw the lot away. I would have liked to have gotten another rejection slip. Or even just the reply card. It would have told me that they at least took the time to open the envelope!

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From R. Bayne

The worst rejection was the one written by a "junior" editor who lacked grammar and spelling skills. Years later I relayed what happened to the publisher, who was mortified, and wondered how many potentially great books she lost by that "editor's" hand.

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For the second issue we've asked a far less troubling question: Where did you learn about our ezine? To answer just go to <http://www.sscdc.net/vform/form.htm> and fill in the blanks! Thank you!



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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Let us know what you think of the Ezine. We'll choose a few to place here in future issues!

### Letters to the Editor

#### **A few of the letters received on the publication of our first issue:**

I peek regularly at the Writer's Forum and I'm glad you mentioned Vision in it. It covers a wide range of topics and will surely be a source of motivation and help for a beginner writer (like me!). Thanks again, and Happy New Year!  
Caroline Allard, Montréal

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Hi!

I learned of your site "Holly Lisle's Vision" through the Fantasy Writer's list. I found your new ezine quite thorough and well done and have added a link to it from my Writer's Resources links page.

<http://www.clamcity.com/linkresources.html>

Thanks for what you do!

Larry.

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I just wanted to say that I have read most of the articles in the first edition of Vision. I really enjoy the magazine and think that it really fills a need in the writing community and particularly in the Forward Motion community. I'm glad to see that you are still an active participant in the community and that you are taking such an active role in this newest manifestation of Forward Motion.

Just wanted to say that I appreciate your hard work. Thanks again.

John Ward

aka Feanor (from the old Forward Motion Boards)

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Hi ~

I just found your site the other day and I LOVE IT - Thanks so much for making such a wealth of information available to other writers. I could easily spend hours at your site and be so enriched for the time spent there. Thank-you again.

Most Sincerely,  
Stephanie Abney 🌹

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What a great site! I immediately bookmarked it.  
Thank you for taking the time to do it.

Paul Martens  
Author of "Your Own Hope," Writers of the Future XVI

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I just wanted to let you know that I recently found your website and was so thrilled. Your content is excellent and I look forward to reading many more episodes. One comment: Could you please change the color of your hotlinks from orange/yellow to something that shows up on the screen and is more easily readable.

Thanks, keep up the good work.  
Dr. Shari Villani



## GUIDELINES

**W**e will happily consider manuscripts from either unpublished or 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.

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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



