Vision: A Resource for Writers
Issue # 33
May/June 2006

Featuring:
An Interview with Lee Martindale

And Articles by:
Patricia Loofbourrow
Moira Allen
Terry Hickman
Carolyn Moir
Darin Park
B.J. Steeves
And many more!
Table of Contents

Masthead

About This Issue

From The Editor

Workshop: Painting With Words By Lazette Gifford

Interview Lee Martindale Interviewed By Lazette Gifford

The Writer's Guide to Medical Websites By Patricia Loofbourrow, Md

Four Ways to Bring Settings to Life By Moira Allen

Get a Grip -- In the First 131 Words By Terry Hickman

Organizing Submissions By Carolyn Moir

KISS Your Readers, Show you Care By Lisa A. Wroble

Emotions in a Can By Elayna Finley

How To Win Writing Contests By Suzan Wiener

Bridging the Gap (On Writing) By Darin Park

The Ordinary Woman By Rodger Murry

What Happened to the 'Science' in Science Fiction? By B.J. Steeves

Technology for Writers Part Three By Mary Winter


Book Review: Self-Editing for Writers Reviewed By Jean A. Schara
Book Review: Elements of Arousal Reviewed By Jules Jones

Website Review: The Sacred Texts Archive Reviewed By Bonnie R. Schutzman

New on the Shelves

Submissions
Vision is published bi-monthly and pays .005 (one half) cent per word. I will be happy to look at any articles that will help writers. We pay one half cent per word for material.

Guidelines for Vision

If you have any questions, or would like to propose an article for an upcoming issue, feel free to drop a line to either of the editors below. We look forward to hearing from you!

Lazette Gifford, Publisher and Editor

Vision@lazette.net

Features' Editor (Reviews):

Margaret Fisk

margaretfisk@comcast.net

Copy Editor:

Ellen Wright

Copyright Information

Vision

Volume Six, Issue 33
May/June, 2006

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Spring has come to the northern hemisphere, bringing rain and flowers, and muddy dog paw prints through the house. Some writers find the renewal of nature gives them the extra little push they need to get back to work, as well. Winter and rest is over, and it’s time to get those manuscripts finished!

This issue is filled with interesting tidbits that might help to re-spark that fire and push you on to finishing your work. Or they might just give you some new ideas for the next story.

I hope that the season (spring or fall) brings you lots of inspiration and writing enjoyment!

Good luck with your writing in 2006!

Upcoming Themes:
Remember that theme articles are only a small part of the issue, and I always need articles on other aspects of writing. Please submit material! We are open to writers at all levels of publication, and I'm as likely to publish a new author as a known one.

**July/August (Deadline June 10th) -- What are The Rules? And when can you break them?**

Don't use 'ly' words, don't write partial sentences, don't ... there are dozens of rules we see in writing all the time. What are they? Why do they work, and when don't they?

**September/October (Deadline August 10th)-- Learning from other genres**

Limiting yourself to one genre, both in writing and reading, is ignoring a treasure trove of helpful information. Your romance might benefit from a little mystery, and your science fiction from a little romance. What can we learn from genres outside our own?

**November/December -- Children aren't stupid**

Writing for children does not mean 'dumbing down' a story. Characters, experiences, and voice play important roles in children's books. What are some of the tricks that can help adults think like a child again, but communicate like an adult?
I've been busy the last few months. I've turned in a couple final manuscript drafts to publishers, edited Vision, worked on the some material for Dragon Tooth Fantasy Books, made much needed changes in Forward Motion, and even managed some writing.

I'm rewriting an older novel titled Vita's Vengeance and it's proving interesting because, quite honestly, the version I'm working from -- which is already a draft or two from the original -- is so badly written. I was lazy. I could write better by the time I did the last rewrite, but I wasn't willing to work hard. And that's why I have to rewrite it again.

I see a lot of lazy writers these days. There are far too many people who choose to write the way they do because it's easy, and they don't want to have to work hard. And that's fine, if you are only interested in writing for a few friends. They'll be forgiving.

This isn't an easy business. If you want to be successful, then you have to work hard at it.
That means no easy answers, and no 'because I don't want to' attitudes.

Some of you would be amazed at what I get in slush pile material during the year, and DTF is just a minor little publisher. I read notes from other publishers -- I'm on a list of publishers only, small press and ebook people -- besides hearing various people at conventions. It's the same everywhere. People continue to make the same basic mistakes in formatting and turn over just plain bad writing, and expect it to be published. It's normal. It's what we see the most in the submissions.

In this case, you don't want to be normal. You want to stand out from the crowd, and to do that you have to learn to write well. Sure, you can break rules -- but only if you do so wisely. Doing it just because 'I don't want to learn rules' is not going to get you published.

Don't go for the easy answers. Look at everything you write, and learn from the sites that are willing to give you real information that pushes you to try harder and to do it right. It doesn't matter if you are a brand-new writer or one who has been around for years and not been published. In fact, if you are a brand-new writer, you have a much better chance if you start taking the work seriously from the start.

There are so many simple little things that you can do that will help you. First, read your material aloud in the final edit. If you get stuck and stumble over lines, look at how you can make those words flow better.
One of the most common problems I see is the overuse of *was* in writing. Let me give you an example -- and this isn't even an uncommon one. At DTF I had a 297 page manuscript, and from the start I could see that *was* would be a problem. I had Word do a quick check. In 297 pages the person had used *was* (just *was* -- passive or not), 2437 times. That equals about once every 25 words, and almost ten times per page.

It didn't matter how good the plot might be, or what wonderful characters wandered through the pages -- the words were boring, dull and repetitious. The sentence structure hardly varied at all.

Also, people -- I know you hear this a lot, but *said* is a very good word. Use it more often.

There's no excuse for not learning the basics of writing these days. The knowledge of what publishers would like to see, and guides to help writers refine their work, are everywhere on the Internet. Of course you also have to be careful, and the best bet is to check out as many different sites as you can and compare information. Look for people who have at least some publication. Just because something is on a site -- any site -- doesn't mean it's true. There may even be people who perniciously post things to derail a new writer's career. On the Internet everyone is an expert -- until proved otherwise.

Not everyone wants to work hard, and that's fine as long as you accept that
choice from the start. I spent years not really caring, but I really think that's
made it more difficult for me to write better now. I have to unlearn so many
bad things, and they creep into my writing again if I'm not careful. I wish I
had learned better from the beginning. I wouldn't be working this hard now if
I had known some of the guidelines from the start.

But I am a clear example that anyone can learn if they want to. No, I'm not
'perfect' yet. Of course, no one ever is -- but I'm far better at writing than I
was five years ago.

And I've stopped allowing myself to take the easy answers.
Bokhara, gridlin, salferino...

Chances are these are three descriptive words you have not used before -- and yet, they may be just the words you're looking for, along with annatto, gules, and stammel. Or perhaps your sunset is not quite so exotic, and the colors you're looking for are amethyst, orchid, and mauve, along with cinnabar, rust, and ruby.

I've yet to find any place that will actually show me these exotic colors, even though they are listed in a thesaurus with the first three (bokhara, gridlin, and salferino) as types of purple and the second three (annatto, gules, and stammel) as variations of red. Obviously, learning new names for colors is not enough. You have to be able to see that color in your mind to apply it properly to your manuscript.

A sunset of salferino and annatto won't evoke an image the way that amethyst and rust will because most readers will not have the mental links that call up the right colors. It could, in fact, bump the reader out of the story in a moment of confusion.

There are many other unusual colors that will not jar the reader. However, more often than not, writers will go for the far easier description -- a sunset of dark purple and blood red. Yes, we can see those colors, but they're dull compared to what the reader could be experiencing.
Your Turn #1:

This is a picture of a sunset that has a wide range of colors. Below are links to several color charts, although a color chart in an art book would be much better because these are almost all HTML safe colors, and that limits the choices. However, these lists will still give you some options you might not normally choose.

Write up two lists of the colors you see in this picture. Do the first without consulting the color charts. Do a second to see how many more colors you can pick out with the help of a chart to give you names.

http://www.adonispress.org/faber.htm
Learning Subtle Differences

I've mentioned this before: there is a theory that until we have words for something, we cannot fully experience it. If the only word we have for a range of colors is purple, then we are not going to experience the finer grades beyond perhaps light purple and dark purple. However, the moment you accept the word amethyst and can associate a color with it, you begin to see that color in the world around you.

Writers need to experience colors in a wider range than people who do not need to communicate the color of that sunset to others who have never seen it, not even in a picture. We all know that words are the author's tools, but sometimes we settle for a blunt instrument rather than a finely-honed implement.

The more color you can bring into your scenes, the less black and white they will be to the reader -- and the more real. The description of oak-paneled walls presents one image; a description of light oak, textured in sand and milk chocolate colored patterns, gives another.

There is a problem in trying to define things too perfectly. Readers will never see it quite the same way you do. It doesn't matter how much detail you give, a scene will still be skewed by their perceptions and what they have experienced. "Salferino and annatto" might be the perfect description for that sunset, and you may even decide the words fit your manuscript, knowing those words and what they represent.
The subtle differences between shades of color can make a huge difference in how descriptive your story seems, even if the change from antique white to blanched almond is so slight that most readers wouldn't be able to register the difference even if they were looking at the two colors.

That doesn't mean that writers should be careless. Striking colors are easy to write about, but the subtle ones take more practice.

**Your Turn #2:**

This picture has many subtle shades of grays, yellows, and even a hint of green.

Write your own description of it, first without reference to a chart and then again using one. Do your best to find new words to describe the colors, as well as the shapes.
Learn to Refine

Another great way to learn colors is to actually use them. Many of you will have a graphics program of some sort on your computer. Some of you may even use one regularly. I use several, from Corel Photo Paint 9 to Bryce 5.5.

You can use programs like those from Corel to learn to recognize colors. Corel Photo Paint 9 comes with several palettes. Try running your mouse over the color swatch and seeing if a name pops up.

Then make lines on the screen using the colors. Put other colors next to each other and see what kinds of feelings those combinations evoke in you.

Blue and green are considered cool colors, while reds and yellows are hot. They bring different responses, and we use them to signify emotions without even thinking about it sometimes: red-hot anger, green with envy, feeling blue. You can use those color-keys to help set up a scene by subtly influencing the reader with the colors you include in your description.

Your Turn #3:
The range of colors in this picture is subtle. What colors do you see -- with and without help from a chart? And what sort of feeling does this picture evoke for you? Cool or warm, and what season?

**The Places You'll Never See**

Using pictures to get an idea of what your story setting should look like is a good idea. Scan the internet for appropriate types of pictures or even for pictures of specific locations if your book is set in the real world. Study the pictures with an eye for the little differences in shades, shadows, and hues, as well as the blatant colors.

Science fiction writers, and sometimes those who write fantasy, are faced with the added problem of painting a word picture of a place that doesn't exist, and somehow making it both alien and understandable. The use of unusual color names and combinations can help to evoke something out of the ordinary.

But no matter what, it has to be done in words that your readers will understand. You can try to create words for new colors... but how will your readers see them? Something too alien will only alienate your readers, who want to experience the place and can only do so through normal human senses. Never forget your market in these cases.

**Your Turn #4:**

*(Picture Next Page)*
This may be an alien place, but the colors and shapes are still seen through human eyes. How would you describe the scene in order to make it seem otherworldly?

Remember that colors are an important part of your scenes, but don't settle for the easy, primary versions. We have a huge palette to choose from, with both subtle and striking differences. Teach yourself to be an artist with words, and your stories will be more vibrant for it.
Interview: Lee Martindale, Renaissance Woman with Attitude

By Lazette Gifford
© 2006, Lazette Gifford

Lee Martindale is a working writer, with the emphasis on *working*. As she states in this interview, she manages her writing career as a business. Her results prove paying attention to the details pays dividends.

Martindale’s *Such a Pretty Face* compilation was publisher Meisha Merlin’s first step into anthologies. The concept was a triumph of attitude over magnitude, and giants in the fantasy field pushed aside the stereotypical size 0 heroines in favor of full-sized fighters. Martindale also landed a spot in the long-awaited *Low Port* anthology, edited by Steve Miller and Sharon Lee.
Martindale has hammered home runs since she began professionally selling her work. Her first sale was to grandmaster Marion Zimmer Bradley, winning a spot in the fiercely competitive *Snows of Darkover* anthology.

Since then, Martindale's work has appeared in a variety of showcases, including many of Marion Zimmer Bradley's annual Sword and Sorceress compilations. It is great news that Yard Dog Press has pulled together much of her work and published individual chapbooks of Martindale's work. These collections that make it easy for fans to find and enjoy her work.

**Vision:** You have described yourself as "Poet, songsmith, teller of tales, lover, student, teacher, warrior... Bard." Do you see all those aspects as being interwoven, or is there a part that stands out from the rest?

**Lee:** I'm a Named Bard, and by tradition, that list is part of the job description. Although, to be honest, "poet" is more often than not "lyricist," and when it's other than song lyrics, it's because I didn't run fast enough or couldn't chew my leg out of the trap. As for the aspects being interwoven, it couldn't be any other way. A story or section of prose that works practically sings, dialogue that sparkles feels like a fencing
match between equal combatants. And, to me, the best writers are those who are always learning, always teaching, and always fully engaged in life.

Vision: You spend what seems like an incredible amount of time at conventions. About how many do you attend each year? Do you think it's helped your career?

Lee: It's not as incredible as all that. It works out to one and a fraction per month, 12-15 conventions most years. And, at least for me, conventions are tremendously helpful. First and foremost, doing conventions sells books. They put me in front of fans -- and potential fans -- who might not otherwise find out about my work. My publishers and several of the convention vendors have said they can tell when I've just done a panel, a reading, or a concert from the sudden increase in traffic at the tables. And there are other benefits, such as the opportunity to network with other writers and the recharging of the creative batteries that working a convention gives me. I consider it time very well spent.

Vision: How do you manage a writing career over the long term? What should new writers consider from the beginning?
Lee: There's a multitude of things for new writers to consider. The vast majority of working writers do not become rich, and, for most full-time writers, fiction is only a part of what they write. Many writers -- probably most -- have day jobs that enable them to eat on a regular basis and sleep indoors. The most important thing to consider, right up front, is that it is a business, complete with tedium, taxes, and its own equivalent of office politics.

How I manage it is how any professional manages his or her profession: professionally. Hitting deadlines, making good contracts and adhering to them, keeping meticulous records, and keeping a realistic eye on my potential markets. I spent quite a few years in project management, and I find that the same organizational skills translate to running what is essentially a sole-proprietor small business. A background in marketing and contract mediation doesn't hurt, either.

Vision: What sort of marketing do you do? Do you think it's important for authors to have a good web presence?

Lee: I market a new story or a reprint by reading market reports and guidelines for submission, finding one that the story fits, and submitting it in accordance with those guidelines. Repeat as necessary until the story finds a paying home. For
things like anthologies, I query a likely publisher with a brief description of what I have in mind, then provide a more detailed proposal if requested.

For that end of the business, a web presence has, in my opinion, no value at all. Publishers and editors do not troll the 'Net looking for new writers to make rich and famous. At least the legitimate ones don't.

Where my own web presence -- in my case a webpage and newsgroup on SFF.net -- has proved helpful has been in the area of promoting newly published stories and projects like the filk CD and the audiobook. Both are also good ways to communicate with my fan base, keeping them informed on what I've got coming out and what conventions I'm doing. The bibliography on the webpage also seems to be a good idea.

**Vision:** You have just put out an audio recording of *To Stand as Witness*, a collection of three Arthurian tales. Do you see more of these types of productions in your future?

**Lee:** Absolutely. In addition to being a new (for me) way to sell my work, doing them combines skills I've picked up over the years in various of the performing arts. Another plus: they're something of a middle ground between putting a story on the page and doing a turn in a bardic circle. And that's not even counting the fun of "playing" the characters I've created, or at
the very least, suggesting to the listener how the characters sounded in my head as I wrote the story.

**Vision:** Do you foresee any changes coming in the book industry? What would you like to see changed?

**Lee:** The only constant in the publishing industry *is* change, and that's probably been true since Gutenberg inked his first plate. The cynic in me says that the current trends among the major houses -- merger, conglomerate acquisition, and final decisions being made by editorial boards devoid of editors -- will probably continue. The hopeful part of me looks at the growth and editorial integrity of independent publishers like Meisha Merlin, and the chutzpah and talent of small presses like Yard Dog Press, and cheers them on. As far as I'm concerned, the jury's still out on electronic publishing.

Changes I'd like to see are mostly related to writing as a profession, as in being able to make all or a significant percentage of one's living doing it. I'd like to see the writer's share of electronic publication calculated on the actual costs of electronic publishing, not on models using the higher production, warehousing, and distribution costs of print publication. I'd like to see new writers stop giving their work away for free or close to it. Establish a professional track record -- pro sales at pro rates -- and *then* take a chance that a low-paying market will catch
fire or try a non-standard pay arrangement like a storyteller’s bowl. I’d like to see
vanity press publishers and outfits like PublishAmerica put out of business.

**Vision:** What suggestions would you give to new writers about the writing
process?

**Lee:** Learn the basics: grammar and punctuation. I can’t begin to tell you how
many manuscripts cross my desk that bear the marks of functional illiteracy. And
read. Read in the genre you write, read the good writers -- not just the ones with
famous names.

Do something every day, even if you can only snatch a half-hour for it. And be
flexible. Sure, it’s nice to have pristine silence, your favorite keyboard, a nice cup
of tea, and the Muse whispering every golden word into your ear. But I know
working writers -- heck, I do it myself -- who write anytime they’re sitting even
remotely still. A writer writes in waiting rooms, in airports, on planes, in the car
when someone else is driving, between loads of laundry, after the kids and
spouse have gone to bed or before they get up.

Don’t talk about it, do it. The person who discusses, ad nauseam, a brilliant idea
for a trilogy that will rival *The Lord of the Rings* has, ninety-nine times out a
hundred, not written a word of it, or anything else. That’s not a writer; that’s a
wannabe, and in all likelihood, it’s a permanent condition.

Finally, learn that rejection is part of the process. If you’re the type of person for
whom a rejection slip is a personal blow and a destroyer of your world for the rest
of the day, you probably should be finding another hobby. There are many reasons why perfectly good stories get rejected. Log it, pick the next potential market, and ship it out.

**Vision:** What genres do you write in, and why? And would you like to try your hand at any others?

**Lee:** I write primarily fantasy, a good bit of which is grounded in bardic tradition. I enjoy venturing into Arthurian legend, snipping off a piece, and taking it on a sidetrip. I've sold one piece that's probably classifiable as space opera, and several of my more recent sales could be considered horror and "horror light." Lately, I've been writing and selling humor. I write what I enjoy reading. More often than not, fantasy is best suited for the particular story I want to tell.

As I said, I've successfully ventured into space opera once, and I have at least one sketch for a story cycle or novel that fits that category. I've got one story making the rounds that's supernatural/horror/romance, and a couple of projects working that seem to be supernatural or paranormal mysteries with romance chasers.
Vision: Who has influenced your writing?

Lee: My earliest influence was my grandfather; he wasn't a writer, but he was one hell of an oral storyteller. Robert Heinlein, my introduction to SF, and Marion Zimmer Bradley, my introduction to fantasy and to whom I made my first professional sale. I've learned a great deal beta-reading for William Mark Simmons. And anytime Elizabeth Moon, Esther Friesner, or Selina Rosen talk writing within earshot, I take notes.

Vision: Do you see the Internet as a good tool for upcoming writers? How should they be using it, if it is?

Lee: How good it is depends on how well one can differentiate between solid, sound information and what gets mucked out of horse barns. There are certainly good resources to be found on the 'Net, good places to find up-to-date market information and the heads-up on scams, problematic publishers, and agents of questionable ethics... Unfortunately, one also finds the scammers, the problematic publishers, the agents of questionable ethics, and the guy who's never sold a word packaging nonsense as received wisdom. I recommend becoming familiar with established, reputable sources of information -- Writer Beware, the SFWA site (there's a wealth of good stuff there accessible to non-members), Ralan.com, and Speculations.com come to mind.
Vision: You are active in the SCA -- Society for Creative Anachronism. Do you find that work within the SCA helps you in your writing as well as being fun?

Lee: Correction: I've been active in the SCA in the past. I'm still a member, but between deadlines and convention travel, I've only managed to get to one event in the last six or seven years. The closest I get to it these days is being a fencing member of the SFWA Musketeers.

But I was, at one time, quite active -- as a bard, a field and camp herald, and a merchant. Experiences, impressions, sights, sounds -- lots of them are tucked away in memory and pulled out when I'm writing. There's nothing like knowing first-hand how something feels or smells or sounds to breathe life in the writing.

Vision: Where do you look for your inspiration?

Lee: Story ideas come from a variety of sources: a story in the news, a snatch of conversation, something my husband's said, something observed while being out and about. I often start with a title or opening line. And there's a tremendous amount of "inspiration" in market reports; nothing gets those creative juices flowing like knowing that stories on X theme are being read by Y for a particular magazine or anthology, and paying Z cents per word advance against royalties.

Vision: How has writing changed who you are or how you see the world? Are there themes that matter most to you?
Lee: It's not the writer or the writer's worldview that the writing is supposed to change; it's the reader's. The change can be temporary and small -- a smile, a laugh, a delicious little shiver, a change as seemingly insignificant as going from bored to entertained for the space she's reading. Maybe in the reading, she begins to think about something not considered before or clicks on a different take on a long-held attitude. Or finds that good cry he's been needing for too long. Any one or more of the above, and I've done my job.

There are themes that matter to me, and they do show up in my fiction fairly often. I let readers discover the themes for themselves, if they're ready to do so.

Vision: When did you know you wanted to be a writer? Has your career progressed the way you thought it would?

Lee: I never "wanted to be a writer." I've always written. I became a writer when I started getting paid for my non-fiction work, about ten years before I started selling fiction. I became a fiction writer when I made my first short story sale in 1992. No "wanting to be a writer" involved.
As to whether my "career" has progressed the way I thought it would, I'd have to say it's progressed better than I thought it would. Part of that is having come into it in middle age, with years of experience in the business world and a fairly realistic view of the publishing industry. No daydreams of winning a Nebula or a Hugo or being the next J.K. Rowlings. Just goals: write good stories, sell them, get paid at a professional level, enjoy the process. I'm meeting all of those goals.

**Vision:** Do you write every day?

**Lee:** Close to every day, yes. Writing, editing, research: something in the progression from blank screen to finished story. Some parts of the process I do almost constantly: observation, mentally working out scenes and dialogue. I do a lot of what I call "backburner work."

I know no working writers for whom writing is just the sitting down and stroking the keys portion of the exercise, and few who don't work on stories even when they're scooping the catbox or shopping for groceries.

**Vision:** What do you have coming out that we should look for? What sort of things do you plan, or hope, to write in the future?
Lee: As this goes to press, I have a story just out in the Yard Dog Press showcase *Flush Fiction*, one co-written with Bradley H. Sinor in Selina Rosen's *International House of Bubbas*, and one in the inaugural issue of the online magazine *Lorelei Signal* ([http://www.loreleisignal.com/](http://www.loreleisignal.com/)), edited by Carol Hightshoe. Esther Friesner's *Turn The Other Chick*, fifth in the "Chicks In Chainmail" anthology series, just came out in mass-market paperback, and of course the *To Stand As Witness: Three Arthurian Tales* audiobook CD is now available. There's nothing else in the pipeline at the moment, but we know how quickly *that* can change.

Under current projects: several short stories making the market rounds, the usual half-dozen or so in progress, notes for about a dozen others, and decent progress on that paranormal mystery novel with romance elements I mentioned before. That one's something of an experiment. My natural working length is the short story, but too many of those whose opinions I value have been encouraging me to try long form. If it works, I have two other novels outlined. I've also started recording the next audiobook -- *Hell Hath No Fury...: Five Bardic Tales*. More anthology editing is also in the works -- one with verbal acceptance, the other under discussion, with Meisha Merlin.
Vision: Thank you for taking this time for this interview. Any last words you’d like to say to our readers?

Lee: It's been my pleasure. As for "any last words" -- what's to say but write good stories, submit them, and keep at it until you can't or until those who love you pull an intervention.

Be sure to stop by Lee Martindale's web site, Harphaven, at:

http://www.harphaven.net/
Writers often use the internet for research on illnesses and contemporary medical equipment, drugs, or other treatments. If your plot hinges on your character having (or developing) a certain illness or receiving a certain line of medical treatment, the last thing you want to discover is that your time and hard work writing a story has been spent on sites that were inaccurate or gave "fringe" treatment options. This might mean doing a complete rewrite to make the story conform to reality.

If your character would normally use an unusual treatment, this is fine, but you need to know what is standard, what is "alternative" and what are considered outright "fringe" treatments in advance, so you can develop your story and character properly.

Some examples:

(Note: I am not passing judgment on any particular treatment plan. That is between you and whatever health care provider you choose. I am just giving an example of what is at this time considered "fringe" vs. "standard" treatment of breast cancer.)
Scenario 1: Penny Standard is diagnosed with breast cancer. She undergoes surgery, radiation and chemotherapy. Her family is supportive or not, and she recovers or doesn't. Out of her struggle she changes and becomes a better person.

Scenario 2: Lucy Fringe is diagnosed with breast cancer. She rejects current medical treatment (why?) and goes into the desert to commune with a group that treats illness with sunlight passing through crystals. Her family is supportive or not, and she recovers or doesn't. Out of her struggle she changes and becomes a better person.

These are two perfectly legitimate story lines. However, if you don't know what the current symptoms and standard medical treatment are for breast cancer, both those stories are going to flop for any reader who 1) is in the medical field, or 2) has had or knows someone who has had breast cancer. They just aren't going to respect you if you don't know what the basic treatments are, the chance of survival, or any side effects of breast cancer or of the various treatments. Penny and Lucy will be vitally interested in these topics, and so should you.

When you go online and do a search about an illness, a huge list of websites appears. You find newsgroups, discussion groups, forums, articles, and sites of all kinds. Unfortunately, not all of them are medically accurate or useful. In fact, a lot of them aren't. How can you tell? Here are some guidelines to follow:
1) Who wrote it?

- Is it clear who owns or runs the website, who wrote the article, or who is posting in a discussion group or forum? What are their qualifications? Are they medical personnel? What training have they had in their field of study? Most websites by professionals will include a listing of the professional's qualifications and schooling that can be verified.

- If a forum or group that gives medical information is moderated, what are the moderator's qualifications? While people not medically trained may have accurate information, they also may not.

- Who provided the original information? Are they qualified to address the subject matter? A "noted researcher" or "world-renowned scientist" would insist that his or her name and qualifications be attached to reputable work, even if it is controversial. Has this person published any other work? What sort of education or training does this person have?

2) Where did they get it?

- Is the information based on scientific study or is it an opinion? Good scientific studies involve large groups of people (at least in the hundreds) and have a "control group" that does not take the treatment studied, in order to compare a certain treatment to doing nothing. Alternately, the study may compare one treatment to another, to see if one works better. Think also about the sponsor of the studies and what the sponsor may have to gain by a certain outcome.
• Does the website contain references to and from recognized peer-reviewed scientific publications? This is a clue that the site is legitimate. Your doctor or friends in the medical field can tell you if a journal or magazine has a good reputation.

3) What are they saying?

• The site or article should weigh the evidence and acknowledge the limitations of the way the information was obtained and the amount of benefit. Beware of "hidden truths," "secret formulas," and sites or products that guarantee a certain result.

• Beware of sensational claims and conspiracy theories. They are usually false. They might give good ideas for SF stories, but for a contemporary medical novel or a medically-related plot twist, you'll want your facts to be accurate.

• Arguments and claims should be based on fact, not fantasy. Beware of bold statements that are not backed up with evidence. Just because someone claims to have a "theory" doesn't mean it's true!

4) Why are they writing it?

• What is the motivation of the site or article? There is nothing wrong with selling products or enlisting you in a cause, but the motives should be clear.

5) How does this relate to other information I have?
• The information should make sense, and should not deviate too far from other sources, especially if the other sources are more reliable. If it seems too good (or too terrible) to be true, it probably isn't true! Remember that being on the Internet does not guarantee accuracy.

Don't be afraid to use your personal doctor or friends and family in the medical field for information. They can often direct you to useful resources or provide valuable critiques for your plot line.

Online medical information is only as good as those who are giving it. Use your head, be wise, think about what you are reading, and look for biases or wishful thinking. This will allow you to make the most of your experience online.
Four Ways to Bring Settings to Life

By Moira Allen
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The devil, it's said, is in the details. So, too, is much of the work of a writer. Too little detail leaves your characters wandering through the narrative equivalent of an empty stage. Too much, and you risk the tombstone effect: grey blocks of description that tempt the reader to skip and skim, looking for the action.

To set your stage properly, it's important to choose the most appropriate, vivid details possible. It's equally important, however, to present those details in a way that will engage the reader. The following four techniques can help you keep your reader focused on both your descriptions and your story.

1) Reveal setting through motion.

Few people walk into a room and instantly absorb every detail of their surroundings. Often, however, we expect the reader to do just that: we introduce a scene setting with a block of text that completely halts the action.

As an alternative, consider letting your description unfold as the character moves through the scene. Ask yourself which details your character would notice immediately, and which might register more slowly. Let your character encounter those details physically, interactively.
Suppose, for example, that your heroine, a secretary of humble origins, has just entered the mansion of a millionaire. What would she notice first? How would she react to her surroundings?

Let her observe how soft the rich Persian carpet feels underfoot, how it muffles her footfalls, how she’s almost tempted to remove her shoes. Does she recognize any of the gilt-framed paintings upon the walls, or do they make her feel even more insignificant because she doesn't know a Cezanne from a Monet? Don’t tell us the sofa is soft until she actually sinks into it. Let her smell the leather cushions, mingling with the fragrance of hothouse flowers filling a cut-crystal vase on a nearby table.

Use active verbs to set the scene -- but use them wisely. Instead of informing the reader that "a heavy marble table dominated the room," force your character to detour around it. Instead of explaining that "light glittered and danced from the crystal chandelier," let your character blink, dazzled by the prismatic display. Make sure that your character, and not the furniture, is doing the acting.

"Walking through" a description breaks the details into bite-sized nuggets, and scatters those nuggets throughout the scene so that the reader never feels overwhelmed or bored. However, it also raises another important decision: which character should do the walking?

2) Reveal setting through a character’s level of experience.
What your character knows will directly influence what she sees. Suppose, for example, that your humble secretary really doesn't know a Cezanne from a Monet, or whether the carpet is Persian or Moroccan. Perhaps she doesn't even know whether it's wool or polyester. If these details are important, how can you convey them?

You could, of course, introduce the haughty owner of the mansion and allow him to point out your heroine's ignorance. Or, you could write the scene entirely from the owner's perspective. Keep in mind, however, that different characters will perceive the same surroundings in very different ways, based on their familiarity (or lack of familiarity) with the setting.

Imagine, for example, that you're describing a stretch of windswept coastline from the perspective of a fisherman who has spent his entire life in the region. What would he notice? From the color of the sky or changes in the wind, he might make deductions about tomorrow's weather and sailing conditions. When he looks up at the seabirds wheeling against the clouds, he doesn't just see "gulls," but terns and gannets and petrels -- easily identified, to his experienced eye, by the shape of their wings or pattern of their flight.

Equally important, however, are the things he might not notice. Being so familiar with the area, he might pay little attention to the fantastic shapes of the rocks, or the gnarled driftwood littering the sand. He hardly notices the bite of the wind through his cable-knit sweater or the tang of salt in the air, and he's oblivious to the stink of rotting kelp-mats that have washed ashore.
Now suppose an accountant from the big city is trudging along that same beach. Bundled to the teeth in the latest Northwest Outfitters down jacket, he's still shivering -- and can't imagine why the fisherman beside him, who isn't even wearing a coat, isn't freezing to death. He keeps stumbling over half-buried pieces of driftwood, and knows that the sand is just ruining his Italian loafers. From the way the waves pound against the beach, it's obvious a major storm is brewing. The very thought of bad weather makes him nauseous, as does the stench of rotting seaweed (he doesn't think of it as "kelp") and dead fish.

Each of these characters' perceptions of the beach will be profoundly influenced by his personal experience. Bear in mind, however, that "familiar" doesn't imply a positive outlook, while "unfamiliar" needn't be synonymous with "negative." Your accountant may, in fact, regard the beach as an idyllic vacation spot -- rugged, romantic, isolated, just the place to make him feel as if he's really getting in touch with nature. The fisherman, on the other hand, may loathe the ocean, feeling trapped by the whims of wind and weather that he must battle each day for a livelihood. Which brings us to the next point:

3) Reveal setting through the mood of your character (and use it to establish a mood in your reader).

What we see is profoundly influenced by what we feel. The same should be true for our characters. At the same time, filtering a scene through a character's feelings can profoundly influence what the reader "sees." Two characters, for example, could "see" exactly the same setting, yet perceive it in opposite ways.
Suppose, for example, that a motorist has strolled a short distance into an archetypical stretch of British moorland. Across a stretch of blossoming gorse, she sees the ruins of some ancient watchtower, now little more than a jumble of stones crowning the next hill (or "tor," as her guidebook puts it).

The temptation to explore is irresistible. Flicking at dandelion heads with her walking stick, our intrepid motorist hikes up the slope, breathing the scents of grass and clover, admiring the lichen patterns on the grey granite boulders. At last, warmed by the sun and her exertions, she leans back against a stone and watches clouds drift overhead like fuzzy sheep herded by a gentle wind. A falcon shrills from a nearby hollow, its cry a pleasant reminder of how far she has come from the roar and rumble of the city.

A pleasant picture? By now, your reader might be considering travel arrangements to Dartmoor. But what if your motorist is in a different mood? What if her car has broken down and she has been unable to find assistance? Perhaps she started across the moor because she thought she saw a dwelling -- but was dismayed to find that it was only a ruin, and a grey and creepy one at that. The tower's scattered stones, half buried in weeds and tangled grasses, remind her of grave markers worn faceless with time. Its silent emptiness speaks of secrets, of a desolation that welcomes no trespassers. Though the sun is high, scudding clouds cast a pall over the landscape, and the eerie, lonesome cry of some unseen bird reminds her just how far she is from civilization.
When this traveler looks at the gorse, she sees thorns, not blossoms. When she looks at clouds, she sees no fanciful shapes, only the threat of rain to add to her troubles. She wants out of this situation -- while your reader is on the edge of his seat, expecting something far worse than a creepy ruin to appear on this character's horizon!

4) **Reveal setting through the senses.**

A character's familiarity with a setting and emotional perception of that setting will influence and be influenced by the senses. Our stranded motorist, for example, may not notice the fragrance of the grass, but she will be keenly aware of the cold wind. Our accountant notices odors the fisherman ignores, while the fisherman detects subtle variations in the color of the sky that are meaningless to the accountant.

Keep in mind that different sensory inputs evoke different reactions. For example, visual information tends to be processed primarily at the cognitive level: We make decisions and take action based on what we see. When we describe a scene in terms of visual inputs, we are appealing to the reader's intellect.

Emotions, however, are often affected by what we hear. Think of the effects of a favorite piece of music, the sound of a person's voice, the whistle of a train. In conversation, tone of voice is considered a more reliable indicator of mood and meaning than the words alone. Sounds can make us shudder, shiver, jump -- or
relax and smile. Scene that include sounds -- fingers scraping a blackboard, the distant baying of a hound -- are more likely to evoke an emotional response.

Smell has the remarkable ability to evoke memories. While not everyone is taken straight to childhood by "the smell of bread baking," we all have olfactory memories that can trigger a scene, a recollection of an event, or remind us of a person. Think of someone's perfume, the smell of new-car leather, the odor of wet dog. Then describe that smell effectively, and your reader is there.

Touch evokes a sensory response. Romance writers know they'll get more mileage out of "He trailed his fingertips along her spine" than "He whispered sweet nothings in her ear." The first can evoke a shiver of shared sensory pleasure; the second is just words. Let your reader feel the silkiness of a cat's fur, the roughness of castle stones, the prickly warmth of your hero's flannel shirt beneath his lover's fingertips. Let your heroine's feet ache, let the wind raise goosebumps on her flesh, let the gorse thorns draw blood.

Finally, there is taste, which is closely related to smell in its ability to evoke memories. Taste, however, is perhaps the most difficult to incorporate into a setting; often, it simply doesn't belong there. Your heroine isn't going to start licking the castle stones, and it isn't time for lunch. As in real life, "taste" images should be used sparingly and appropriately, or you may end up with a character who seems more preoccupied with food than with the issues of the story.
The goal of description is to create a well-designed set that provides the perfect background for your characters -- a setting that stays in the background, without overwhelming the scene or interrupting the story. In real life, we explore our surroundings through our actions, experience them through our senses, understand (or fail to understand) them through our knowledge and experience, and respond to them through our emotions. When your characters do the same, you'll keep your readers turning pages -- and not just because they're waiting for something interesting to happen!
If all your stars are lucky, the art and blurbs on the outside of your book will be so attuned to the life you've poured inside it that your reader's already halfway under your spell as she opens the cover. The lifting of the burden of disbelief has received some advance help from the cover artist and cover copy writers.

But the author seldom has anything to say about her book's cover art. Worse, oftentimes the artist doesn't even get to read the whole book -- or any of it -- before creating the cover art.

So, left with a cover that may not even have anything to do with the story, you must capture the reader with that first page. You have to lift the heavy box of disbelief off the floor all by your authorial self.

That would be hard enough on its own, but you also need to draw that reader in and make those first sentences so compelling that the reader has to keep reading.

I tried an exercise recently that really helped me enliven the opening lines of a story. You can try it with any book whose first page grabbed you into the story. It's a method I adapted from lots of similar advice I've read about crafting first
pages -- but I'm impatient and my time is precious, so I made it a fairly quick method.

I chose Jeff Long's *The Descent*. I counted the words of actual text on page 1. (I ignored the quotations and epigrams at the top of the page. That's a device that wouldn't have worked for my story.) There are 131 words:

In the beginning was the word.

Or words.

Whatever these were.

They kept their lights turned off. The exhausted trekkers huddled in the dark cave and faced the peculiar writing. Scrawled with a twig, possibly, dipped in liquid radium or some other radioactive paint, the fluorescent pictographs floated in the black recesses. Ike let them savor the distraction. None of them seemed quite ready to focus on the storm beating against the mountainside outside.

With night descending and the trail erased by snow and wind and their yak herders in mutinous flight with most of the gear and food, Ike was relieved to have shelter of any kind. He was still pretending for them that this was part of their trip. In fact they were off the map. He'd never heard
When I first picked up the book, that opening got me to turn the page – I couldn't not! What followed kept me reading long past my bedtime, but if the first 131 words hadn't seized my attention, I'd never have gotten to page 2.

How did Long do this? What's in those few words, and more to the point, do they have something I could apply to my own stories?

In the beginning was the word.

He's immediately set us up for something Biblical, or at least epic on a Biblical scale. He's also telling us that this is to be the very beginning of something, and the sense is that it's something Big.

Or words.

Whatever these were.

He introduces some confusion here, some mystery.

They kept their lights turned off.

This tells us we're in modern times. If he'd said "torches" or "lanterns," the picture emerging in our mind would be subtly suggestive of an earlier era.

The exhausted trekkers huddled in the dark cave and faced the peculiar writing.
So there are several of them, and they're huddling together in a cave! -- because the space is small? Cold? Are they afraid as well as exhausted?

Scrawled with a twig, possibly, dipped in liquid radium or some other radioactive paint, the fluorescent pictographs floated in the black recesses.

Here's the central weirdness of this page: pictographs, scrawled with a twig, in fluorescent pigment, a bizarre combination of primitive and very modern concepts -- and they've been given no backing yet, no hint as they float in the blackness of what they're scrawled upon.

Ike let them savor the distraction.

Finally, a person's name: Ike. Sounds American, and like an ordinary guy. If it had been Carleton, for example, or Festus, how would your mental picture of him been different? "Ike" carries the baggage of American President Ike Eisenhower: the reluctant hero, the self-effacing leader. And this Ike seems to have some authority over the huddled trekkers, since he's "letting" them fixate on those mysterious glyphs.

None of them seemed quite ready to focus on the storm beating against the mountainside outside.
They're inside a *mountain* cave, then; there's a storm outside, and Ike's group of trekkers seem willing not to face that reality. Also, it suits Ike, apparently, to put off the moment when they do face it. Presumably he's exhausted, too, but this tells us he's sensitive to people's moods and when they're capable of coping.

With night descending and the trail erased by snow and wind

There's no going back tonight!

and their yak herders

Aha! The Himalayas!

in mutinous flight with most of the gear and food,

No sitting around hoping for rescue, then, either. And hunger, cold, and discomfort, can be expected.

Ike was relieved to have shelter of any kind.

He's got a realistic understanding of their predicament, and is grateful for this lucky break.

He was still pretending for them that this was part of their trip. In fact they were off the map.

His trekkers are naive, not seasoned travelers. And Ike is either trying to avoid their ire, or spare them from fear.
(The last three words on page 1, "He'd never heard," are just a fragment and I'll discard them for this exercise.)

So that's all we get on that first page. *All?* We know we've got an American trek guide and several naive customers holed up in a Himalayan mountain cave without gear or food while a blizzard batters the mountain outside. They're exhausted and, the guide alone knows, lost. And there are some mighty peculiar glow-in-the-dark hieroglyphics seemingly floating in the lightless air.


Would you like your books to have the same effect on readers? Who wouldn't? But how to do it, that's the question. I decided to look at one of my own science fiction stories, working title "SKRJ," to see if my beginning was as compelling. I took the first 131 words and analyzed them as I did *The Descent*'s opening.

Here are the first 131 words from "SKRJ" as accepted by Raechel Moon Henderson at Eggplant Productions:

He burst from under my feet in a fountain of snow, throwing me to my back so I floundered for a few seconds before I could get my knife out. By then he crouched before me, the pelt-traps swinging from his belt, wild-eyed -- and human.

"Fool!" I lowered the knife. "You should be dead."

"Sorry." He shoved his knife into its worn-out scabbard.
Sorry? I looked at him again. I wouldn't have expected a mentally deficient human to survive for any length of time here in the Swan's Half. He had long, dark blond hair and bright blue eyes that quirked up at the outside corners, giving his thin, pale face a fey quality. An intelligent face.

He'd relaxed a little, stood up straight, and I could see he was my height, five-ten. Small

OK, there's a "he." And "we" are in snowy country, somewhere. And he's human, so there's the implication that the Narrator expected something or someone non-human, and probably dangerous. "I" am armed with a knife, and "he" is obviously a trapper, so the inference is that this is occurring in primitive times, or a primitive place -- or at least, that modern technology is absent for some reason. The scorn of the narrator tells us that he or she is accustomed to having the upper hand, maybe a little arrogant. The worn-out scabbard tells us that the "he" is a veteran outdoorsman, or maybe soldier? The name of the place where they have this encounter is the Swan's Half, and it's apparently a pretty brutal place to survive. We get "his" physical description.

And that's it. We don't even know the gender (or for that matter, the species!) of the narrator. We know Narrator is arrogant, and about 5 feet 10 inches tall, and that Narrator is apparently a skilled outdoorsperson and is prepared to kill, perhaps predisposed to kill.

This seems awfully vague to me. I tried again, keeping The Descent in mind:
He burst from under my boots in a fountain of snow, throwing me to my back, and I floundered a bit before I could whip my knife out and leap to my feet. He crouched before me, the pelt-traps swinging from his belt, thin, wild-eyed -- and human.

I didn't change much there, just made the Narrator's re-gaining his/her feet specific and immediate.

"Fool!" I lowered the knife. "You should be dead." I felt like killing him just for delaying me.

This made the impulse to kill more concrete, and added the information that Narrator was in a hurry when interrupted.

"Sorry, Ranger-lady."

This line of dialogue establishes the gender of Narrator, and her status: a Ranger.

He stood there waiting, placid, holding his shovel. His shovel!

Personality clues: he's calm, not easily agitated, not an instinctive fighter. The Ranger is capable of at least inward irony and maybe even humor.
Sorry? I studied him. How could someone so apparently stupid survive for any length of time here in the Swan's Half? He had long, dark blond hair, blue eyes quirked up at the corners, a fey quality. An intelligent face.

I added the word "apparently" to emphasize the Narrator's sense of the man's incongruity.

"Any Slitters around?" I asked.

After the surprise of their run-in, here's the first thing on her mind, so it's probably the danger she'd anticipated, and given the odd name, probably not human.

He paled. "No."

Two items of information: no Slitters, and the young man is afraid of them.

Standing up straight he was my height, five-ten.

Now we know the Ranger is not a tiny woman: five-ten. I've discarded the single word "small" for the same reasons as I did the sentence fragment in Long's page.

So, let's put it all together like a reader would first encounter it:
He burst from under my boots in a fountain of snow, throwing me to my back, and I floundered a bit before I could whip my knife out and leap to my feet. He crouched before me, the pelt-traps swinging from his belt, thin, wild-eyed -- and human.

"Fool!" I lowered the knife. "You should be dead." I felt like killing him just for delaying me.

"Sorry, Ranger-lady." He stood there waiting, placid, holding his shovel. His shovel!

Sorry? I studied him. How could someone so apparently stupid survive for any length of time here in the Swan's Half? He had long, dark blond hair, blue eyes quirked up at the corners, a fey quality. An intelligent face.

"Any Slitters around?" I asked.

He paled. "No."

Standing up straight he was my height, five-ten.

I was much more pleased with this opening than the first. It's got more inherent life and action, and the reader has a better picture of the two people than with the first version.

Raechel liked it better, too.*
Another nice thing about this exercise is that it didn't take long, maybe an hour or two. Small price to pay for a better whack at grabbing that reader!

*Some weeks later, Eggplant Productions shut down, before publishing "SKRJ." - TH

THE DESCENT by Jeff Long

Publisher: Jove; Reissue edition (November 1, 2001)

ISBN: 051513175X
Organizing Submissions

By Carolyn Moir
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I've read a lot of writing how-to books. I love them. One of the things they all agree on is that once you have a piece of writing you like, you should send it out again and again and again until it gets accepted. When I started doing this, I didn't have a good system in place for keeping track of those submissions. I had no way to record which story had been sent where. As soon as the first batch of rejection letters arrived, I realized my mistake. The rejection letters didn't have the name of the story on them, so I soon lost track. When it came time to send the stories out again, I didn't know where I had already sent them.

Perhaps I thought they would all get accepted right away. Perhaps I just thought I would always send every story to a different and new market, without ever trying again. Whatever I had been thinking, it was clear immediately that it wouldn't work. Even if every story got accepted, how would I remember not to send a published story out again?

That's when I developed the system I use today. It helps me track the submissions for everything I write, no matter what genre or category, and it allows me to quickly find the information on new markets I had been gathering in preparation for a submission. I started with a binder, paper, and several clear plastic sheet-protector sleeves.
On my computer I created a spreadsheet. The first box was for the story title, the second box across the top was for the market, the third was for the date I sent it in, the fourth was for the date I was supposed to hear back, and the last was for the word Accepted or Rejected. I printed out one sheet for every story that I had.

I wrote the name of the story in that first box, and when I sent it out to a contest or magazine, I filled in all the other information. I put the page into a sheet-protector, and into the front of the binder. When the inevitable rejection letter came, I would slide that into the sheet-protector behind the page. There were plenty of lines on the paper to list the next market I sent it to, and the next, and the next, and the next, until that story got published.

When I started using this system for my other writing as well, I bought dividers and kept the spreadsheets for each type of writing in their own section. For example, I have sections for Essays, for Short Stories, for Poetry, for Articles, for Craft Patterns, and even for Novels. Every kind of writing I do gets its own divider tab.

I also began to gather markets. In writing magazines, on the Internet, from browsing through Writer's Market, from announcements at school, I kept finding places to submit work. Again I found myself with overwhelming amounts of information. So, I added them to my organization system in my submissions
binder. Within the divider tabs, behind the spreadsheet of each type of writing, I put the markets for that writing. Short story markets went into their own sheet-protectors behind the spreadsheets of my short stories, essay markets and contests went into their own sheet-protectors behind the spreadsheets for my essays, and agent listings went behind the spreadsheet for my novel.

I didn't want to make a new spreadsheet for every poem in the poetry section. It seemed like a waste, and the pages would become overwhelming far too quickly, since I have many more poems than, say, novels. I tweaked my system to work better with the bulk of poetry by dividing the poems into groups by similarity. For each group I made one spreadsheet and I wrote the title of each poem down the left edge of the paper. Across the top edge of the paper I wrote each market as I submitted to it. At first there is only one market listed at the top, and I go down the page and put the date beside each poem that I submitted to that market in that column.

The last step to this submission machine is to label my rejections. When those SASEs come back to me, I pull out the rejections and, if the manuscript isn't returned, I match it up using the spreadsheet. Even though I put the rejection slip into the sheet-protector with the spreadsheet, I also write the name of the story or poem across the top of the rejection. This system is useful for acceptances too. You have to keep track of that writing as well. I usually move those sheets to a "retired" section, and keep any paperwork associated with publication in the sheet-protector with the rejection slips.
Being organized about my submissions makes me feel more like a professional writer, because it shows me that I am taking my writing seriously. It also helps to take some of the stress out of submitting. The more organized I can be, the more opportunity my work has for getting published. The packet of information contained within each sheet-protector allows me to see at a glance how many individual pieces of writing I have, and to track how each story, article, or novel makes its way into the world.

I have plans for even more levels of organization. I would like to create spreadsheets for contests, too: one spreadsheet for each month, and the contests listed by their deadlines. That way when May starts, I could look at my May spreadsheet and see all the contests I could submit to that month. Then, maybe I could create a list of all the titles of my current unpublished pieces of writing, and I could refer to that list when looking for something to send to a contest...

There are probably infinite layers of possible organization. Of course, you can go too far, and I have to remember that as important as organizing my writing is, and as informative as reading writing how-to books is, actually doing the writing is the most important thing.
KISS Your Readers, Show You Care

By Lisa A. Wroble
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Having spent many undergraduate hours on drills to tighten my text, I looked forward to creative writing. I'd now have the freedom to allow thoughts to flow and show off my vocabulary. Right? Oh, how preposterously misinformed! While that's fine for a first draft, trimming to magazine word-limit and sharpening clarity is the key.

*Keep it simple, silly.*

Most readers — and editors — prefer concise, vivid writing. The KISS acronym is well known to business and technical writers. Skills I learned in technical writing classes apply to both fiction and nonfiction writing. If you care about your readers, you'll KISS them by trimming excess verbiage.

**Dump empty words.** 'Just,' 'suddenly,' and 'then' — the list goes on. Empty words serve the same function as 'um' does in a bad speech. They're filler — empty calories padding the word count. Do you really need them? "But 'just' isn't 'empty!'" you say. "We use it in speech all the time!" True, but in speech 'just' is usually emphasized through inflection. In writing that inflection is missing. Unless you're showing progression of steps, 'then,' 'next,' and 'now' are also filler. Use
empty words *sparingly* to achieve the impact they have in speech. Trim empty words for leaner prose.

**Focus sentences.** What is the subject *doing*? It's easier to consider this when writing fiction. What is the *character* doing? Readers care less about what is *being done to* the subject or character. Which is more engaging, "the rocks were collected by geology students" or "geology students collected the rocks"? Don't bury the action in the sentence. Zero in on it instead.

Comb through your manuscript. Cut unnecessary, unfocused words. Instead of, "in addition, there were some people who disagreed," try "some people disagreed." Rearrange sentences beginning with "there was" or "there were." Instead of "there was a stray dog barking at us," restructure to focus on the action. "A stray dog barked at us."

**Paint images.** Don't tell *how* something was, show it. Engage the reader. Rephrase "thousands of butterflies were everywhere" as "Monarch butterflies coated the fence and covered every rock." Be specific. Get out your thesaurus and have fun coming up with the exact word to express your thought. Readers breeze through concise, vivid writing like a boat slicing through the water.

**Consider sentence length and vocabulary.** This is especially important if you're writing for children because multi-syllable words bump up reading level. Using many three- and four-syllable words in several long sentences raises reading level quickly. Even if you don't write for children, varying sentence length
creates a rhythm in writing. Shorten sentences to add impact. Longer sentences slow down the reader and help ease the flow of the story. Divide long or compound sentences into two for better clarity, and use punctuation with purpose. Your goal is to entertain, not to overwhelm.

Review draft manuscripts with the above items in mind. Write tightly and aim for clarity. Readers feel your caring when you KISS them.
Do you have a favorite CD? Is it playing right now?

Many authors respond to music. Some of us like to write with our eyes half-closed while the music washes over us. Others prefer silence to contemplate. Whether you like music on or off during writing, you can use it to enrich your story ideas and characters.

You likely chose your music because it makes you feel. It creates an emotional response in you, whether it's happy, sad, angry, or excited.

What does this have to do with your story? A good story resonates with the reader. It makes him feel with and for the characters. In order to write a story you must know your characters intimately. How can you create an emotional response in your readers if you haven't first felt it yourself? The following is my method for learning not only the emotional motivations of my characters, but what it feels like to be in the grip of those emotions.

Get comfortable with your favorite CD. It works best for me when I'm driving down a familiar stretch of highway, my brain switched to autopilot with my favorite song on repeat. You could also stretch out on the couch with headphones, but you're more likely to be interrupted.
Listen to your favorite song. Let it move you. Feel it as fully as you can. Now play it again, only this time imagine that the words are the thoughts of one of your characters. Which one would be most likely to feel this way? If only parts of the song fit a character, how might you interpret the rest to fit him? Are there things he may have done or felt that you don't know about? Maybe some parts of the song fit one character and some fit another. Are these characters on the same side, or opposed? If they are opposed, do they have something in common that causes the same song to resonate with both of them? Even if the words don't fit at all, the basic emotion of the song might set the mood to look at a character in a different way.

Most characters, good or evil, possess the full range of human emotions. In addition to the songs that fit your character, run him through a few that clash with his temperament. Maybe you can't see how a love song applies to your villain, but try it. Feel it with her. Given her current personality and situation can she feel this way about anyone? Has she ever? Does she want to? Maybe it doesn't fit at all; why not? How does she view others who feel this way? Asking these questions usually generates a lot of new ideas about character backstory, creating depth and possibly the answers to some plot kinks.

Music also aids in creating believable reactions and physical responses, freeing and magnifying emotions that we normally suppress. Have you heard a song that makes you cry? Play it. Close your eyes. Squeeze your character's tears out onto your cheeks. Notice how they burn, your breath thickens, your chest aches.
When music is your tool, strong emotion is always close, waiting for you to call it into use. Today your angry song is her indignation, tomorrow his bitterness.
How to Win Writing Contests

By Suzan L. Wiener
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Are you tired of not winning writing contests and thinking your writing is better than the winner's? Here's how to make the judges see that too. It will take some time and practice, but you will see that it is doable by the increase in wins you receive.

If you're entering a poetry contest, don't use trite rhymes, such as moon/June or you/too. Remember to use your imagination and let your poem shine. It has to be different enough for that "Wow" factor. Then the judges will sit up and take notice, and yours will be number one. If your poem is merely good, it won't win any awards. It has to be better than all of the other entries.

After you have written your poem, let it sit for a few days and then re-read it out loud. See what changes you can make to improve it. Have it critiqued by others who will give you their honest opinion. Don't only want the person to say, "Wonderful." That won't help you win the contest. If you let someone else critique your work, try to accept what they write to you gracefully. Say thank you even if you don't agree with what they tell you. If you should be impolite, word will get around and no one will want to help you.
Often free verse (non-rhyming poetry) will stand out more than the usual rhyming pattern. It seems to be more popular today. It allows the poet not to be constricted in what they can write and makes for a wider readership, which judges want.

If you are writing a story, make sure to have a beginning, middle and ending. This of course, applies to a poem as well. Make the beginning grab the judge's attention immediately so she will want to continue reading. There must be a problem involved, and the protagonist must solve it without help from someone else.

As basic as this may sound, make sure to follow the contest's guidelines. So many great poems are disqualified because the writer misses the deadline, or doesn't adhere to the rules.

Make sure to proofread your story or poem several times for any obvious grammatical errors or spelling errors, and to make sure it makes sense. That's an important thing to do as it will get the judges to see your entry in a more favorable light.

It's important that your story or poem be about the contest theme. If it is not, it will be disqualified, which would be a shame. Too many could-have-been winning entries are adversely affected this way. Also, if there is more than one theme in the contest, pick the one that is least likely to be picked by the other entrants. It is
also a good idea to enter contests that are run within your state. Judges tend to look on local entries more favorably.

Don't forget to mail in the payment with your entry, if there is a fee. If you don't, it won't be counted. If you mail it too late, it will be disqualified. Many entries are disqualified because of these forgotten things, so being careful can give you an edge.

Follow the above points and your chances of winning writing contests should be greatly improved. I know it helped me quite a lot.
You think you know someone -- then they tell you something that causes you to do a complete re-evaluation.

I've recently had to re-evaluate my mother. Let me explain a bit about her before I tell you what I discovered. She was born in Newfoundland in 1943. Growing up, for her, was no bed of roses. Chores filled her life more than childhood play. During her marriage she gave birth to six children -- five lived. Her first child had died of what is now known as "crib death." She scrubbed baby diapers by hand with a washtub and corrugated scrubbing board, until she could afford the then brand-new washer and wringer/dryer. I could go on about how her life has been up until now, but let me just put it to you bluntly: the woman is as tough as nails.

This is a work of fact, not fiction, and I've come to call it the "Bird Story." Here's how it goes:

My mother is sitting on the patio, enjoying the sun, waiting to watch her favorite soap opera. She can hear the chirping of young birds. In the eave of her house is a nest with new hatchlings. She knows this because on occasion she's had to pick up a dead infant that has jumped from the nest in a too-soon attempt to fly
and dispose of it. The time is close for her show. Soon she should go inside to watch TV.

There is suddenly a loud series of bird calls and chittering. Curious, my mother walks to the corner of the patio and looks down to see a young bird staggering about on the deck next to the house door. He's unhurt, but very young. Apparently, he had tried the same trick of flying, stepped out of the nest, and tumbled to the deck below. He must have spread his wings instinctively and caught enough air to cushion his landing, but now, he's trapped on the deck with no way back to the nest.

Looking up, my mother sees the mother bird. (Let's call them sparrows for want of a bird type. My mother didn't know what they were -- just birds.) The mother sparrow is on the eave by the nest calling down to her young one. The sparrow on the deck is crying incessantly, plaintively, shivering and hopping about. He has no idea how to get to his mother. The sparrow on the roof jumps into the air, flutters its wings for a couple of strokes, then lands again. It calls to the young one below. The young bird just hops and cries, hops and cries.

My mother feels sorry for the bird, but she knows she can't pick it up or touch it. She would do more harm than good trying to help this young bird. So she just watches and silently hopes the bird realizes it has wings. Mentally, she pushes her thoughts to the bird -- fly. You can fly. Watch your mother. She's showing you what to do. Just do what she's doing.
After about ten minutes of this, the mother bird never ceasing in her calls or her
leaps off the roof and little flights, there is sudden silence from the young sparrow
on the deck. He is watching his mother intently, his little head turning from side to
side. She keeps calling and taking little flights.

Mom watches the little sparrow spread his wings and flutter them, taking a
tentative leap into the air. The mother sparrow gets very excited, her calls
changing pitch, almost as if she is adding words of encouragement. Mom holds
her breath.

Three times the little sparrow leaps into the air. Three times, the little sparrow
comes back down. Each time, the wing flutters get faster, beating more strongly,
and the sparrow comes back down more slowly. Then, as if something is lighting
up the entire bird, Mom notices a change in his attitude and she can fairly feel a
sense of rapture emanating from him. The fourth time into the air, the sparrow
stays there, fluttering furiously, and in the space of a few heartbeats, he wings
his way to his mother and the safety of his nest. Erratic flight to be sure, but it is
flight, and he has finally bent wing to bridge the gap between himself and his
home.

As my mother finished this tale of recent spring, her eyes held a strange dreamy
quality and on her face was a smile that I hadn't seen there in years. In my heart,
I have always loved my mother, loved that "tough as nails" woman that brought
me into the world, the woman who chastised me when I was not exactly on the
good side of childhood (in fact, I was downright incorrigible), and now I loved her
even more. Her soap opera had gone on without her, and she had cared not a bit. Her intense interest in watching a young bird learn to fly for the very first time had caused her more joy than any program on TV could possibly provide.

Belatedly, I realized that there were a few morals to this story and I will attempt to list them below:

1. In relation to my mother, people, no matter how well you know them, will always surprise you with something new. You cannot judge a person's character by what you see, because all you really see is the surface, the cover to the book, if you will.

2. In relation to the "sparrows," the little bird didn't know how to fly, didn't know it could. The mother, its teacher, patiently kept showing it how to do it, lending its expertise to the young bird until it was willing to listen to someone in the "know" and follow the example it was seeing. We are all young birds, and it's only through stopping and watching what's being shown to us that we are able to learn from those who can aid us and then to fly on our own.

3. In relation to the actual flight, the sparrow learned from its mother but still flew a slightly erratic course to its nest. It is true we can learn how to fly from instruction, but our course may deviate from the course we are shown. That is due to individual differences and skill sets.

Now, the crux of all this is in relation to writing. And you were thinking, "Now, what's this got to do with writing?"
Everything.

Picture yourself, the writer, as the bird on the deck: young, innocent, knowing next to nothing. You want to write a story, a novel, and get to your "nest," which could be the symbol for publication. However, you can only hop from the deck, never reaching the nest, which seems to rest an unreachable distance away. There above you is the writer who has been there, calling down, giving you instruction on how to proceed, how to form your sentences -- how to spread your wings and learn to fly. You try three times and find that you get better each time you try.

Then, once you've mastered your wings, learned what you can from the "teacher," you stretch out and fly towards the nest. Your flight represents the story you write. Now, let's say that you land on the roof beside the nest. Well, you've missed publication but only because your course wasn't the correct route. The next time you take flight you may well land right in the nest and achieve your goal.

Summation:

We can learn best from those that already have the skills and knowledge to pass onto us. Listen, emulate, and we can gain those same skills.

We can succeed if we continue to try. If we stop trying, we will remain on the deck and learn to live off the land rather than in the air where we are meant to be.
Publication is a goal but not the only goal in the writing field. Every word, sentence, paragraph, page, book we write is a stepping-stone into the air. As long as we write, we will improve our skills, until our course is as true and swift as a sparrow's flight to its nest. As we get better at "flying," our chances of publication are increased.

But, to bridge the gap, start at the beginning. Every author that has come before you had to start at the first page, the first line, with the first word. And every author that comes after you will have to follow that same course. There is no other way. In order to reach the nest, we have to learn the skills along the way.

In the end, there is no other outcome but that you learn to fly. Fly well, my friends. One day I hope to meet you all and we can huddle together, sharing experiences and looking out at the world from the confines of our nest...

Darin Park is the creator of *The Complete Guide to Writing Fantasy*, available at

http://www.dragonmoonpress.com

and


*The Complete Guide to Writing Fantasy*

**Paperback:** 360 pages
Publisher: Dragon Moon Press (July 2003)

Language: English

ISBN: 1896944094
There have been so many articles on character creation that it would almost be redundant for me to describe how I create characters. First off, I'm not terribly certain where they come from, other than I'm fond of relating names to characteristics. But I would like to talk to you about the creation of one of my characters.

August is not particularly young at 32, nor particularly pretty except in that clear-skinned, nice hair and brightly-coloured eyes way that most women are pretty. Neither slim nor plump, she is the average.

She is named after a month because her mother and her grandmother and all the women in her family's history have been named after the months of the year. Her grandmother was June, her mother July.

Her first appearance was in a short story where she left her long-time sleazeball boyfriend after shooting up his TV because he cheated on her with an unnamed high school girl. Typical, sort of. She left in her father's old farm truck, with his police pistol tucked between the seats, and drove until morning.

Now it may sound silly, but I created August specifically for the purpose of describing the place she was in and what it made her feel, because it's a place
I've been and a thing I've felt but never been able to articulate. August was, essentially, me. At the time I wrote her I was not a 32-year-old women with trouble fitting into her jeans and a sleazy boyfriend who never left his armchair -- except, apparently, to commit statutory rape. I was not even a woman. For clarification, I am not one now either.

I was feeling jaded, vaguely lost, and as though I were driving along a paved county road between two endless wheat fields in the sunrise. No destination, just cruising along in the rosy light of youth and possibility. So August became somebody that people could really believe. You could see why this woman was jaded and uncertain.

In that short story, which I later titled "The Ordinary Woman," August showed my favourite attributes in myself and other people: an urge to raise some hell, and the balls to not give a damn about everyone else when her own wellbeing was at stake.

Later I began a much longer story with August, which is still untitled and should become a novel in the due course of time, and I am finding that there is room to show the parts of August that are also in me. She's not all piss and vinegar, and she's definitely not perfect.

There is a scene in the story where August wakes up in an inn and finds herself, through her morning routine, trying to get up the momentum to get through the day. She feels as she puts her bra on and puts her hair back into its ponytail that
she is putting herself together. There is a feeling that she is getting ready to go through the day on her own two feet, because Lord knows nobody else is going to carry her.

Finally she stands, dressed, takes a deep breath, and makes the decision that I make many mornings. She decides to walk out the door and try her damndest to be the best person she is because she'll be damned if anything keeps her from being who she is.

I'm not sure why I feel the need to tell people about August. She is, for me, an extremely rare treat. So many times in books I have wanted to jump into the story and scream, "Don't do that, you idiots! Don't you see where this is going! Foreshadowing in chapter six clearly indicates what the antagonist is going to do!" With August, I have that voice in the story. It's not filtered through a character that I have created by the rules or through any process. That's just me, on the page. Sure, she's a woman and nearly 20 years my senior, but she is me, make no mistake. Just as in life, on the page, being myself has been a great freedom and a joy.
What Happened to the 'Science' in Science Fiction?

By BJ Steeves
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If you look up the term science in a dictionary, you will find a definition similar to the following:

\[a: \text{a department of systematized knowledge as an object of study} \quad b: \text{something that may be studied or learned like systematized knowledge}\]

\[a: \text{knowledge or a system of knowledge covering general truths or the operation of general laws especially as obtained and tested through scientific method} \quad b: \text{such knowledge or such a system of knowledge concerned with the physical world and its phenomena} \]

(Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary)

The definition clearly states that there are rules for the way things work, the way different things interact with each other, and the way things develop and grow. Without these rules, these "laws of nature," there would be total chaos. There are times when we feel that things are out of control, in chaos, but that doesn't mean that there are no reasons for these chaotic episodes of our lives. It is just that we don't know the reasons.

Let's take a look at a typical definition of the term science fiction, which is:
a: fiction dealing principally with the impact of actual or imagined science on society or individuals or having a scientific factor as an essential orienting component

(Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary)

This definition implies that science fiction is a fictional story based on a set of scientific rules, or laws of nature.

Much of today's science fiction, which is being produced in movies, television and writing, is more reliant on special effects and bad science than on a good story. Let's look at the *Star Wars* universe. *Star Wars* showcases some of this bad science with multitudes of fighters buzzing around in tight, circular loops, in direct defiance of the laws of Newton. In reality, any vehicle traveling in space cannot make this kind of diving turn. It looks great and exciting on the screen and/or the page, but science just doesn't work that way.

Another movie with a lot of silly so-called science is *Independence Day*. Large alien ships the size of a small city move in, floating over most of the largest cities around the world. If an alien race had the technology to build such craft, travel untold distances to reach the Earth, and stabilize the craft in place over large cities, why would they build nothing more than a conventional fighter type plane to engage the U.S. Air Force fighters? I would think with that kind of advanced technology, the aliens would just use some kind of force field and simply disable any attacking force. Doesn’t make sense, does it?
There is much "silly science" in movies, television, and many of the science fiction/fantasy books on the shelves. In the next sections below, you will find a list of some of my favorite computer-related examples.

- Super-intelligent computers that blow up when the hero confuses them
- Super-intelligent computers that get confused when the hero says to them "everything I say is a lie" or some other paradoxical statement
- Computers that can be programmed by someone who has no knowledge of the computer's operating system
- Computer terminals that display the current operation (e.g., "UPLOADING VIRUS") in huge, flashing letters
- Computer security protocols that can be overridden merely by saying "override" to the computer
- Computers that, when shot, explode as if they had been stuffed full of Roman candles
- On-board computers that always know exactly how long it will take for the malfunction to blow up the ship
- Computers that can work harder or faster when their power supply voltage is increased
- When a computer is working on a difficult problem, the increased power requirements cause the room lights to dim or flicker
- AI software that has unique properties that prevent it from being copied or transmitted like any other data
- AI software that is able to bypass the security protocols of the operating system in which it runs
- Computers that exist in the far future or are alleged to be 'cutting edge,' but demonstrate less functionality than a Commodore 64 or an Apple II
- Increasing a computer beyond a certain level of speed, memory capacity, or complexity causes it to become self-aware

Will the real Captain James T. Kirk please stand up? It seems that the original Star Trek can't stop using these "scientific" plot points, as they appear in more than just a few episodes. There are more than a few in the list which can also be seen in the later Star Trek series.

- Space vessels that lack fuses, circuit breakers, and surge suppressors, so that the control panels explode when some distant portion of the ship is damaged
- Spacecraft that, when shot, blow up as if they had been packed with gasoline and liquid oxygen
- Spacecraft that have no seatbelts, even though the crew gets tossed around like rag dolls on a regular basis
- "Reversing the polarity" is the solution to virtually every engineering problem
The medical field is not immune to the "silly science" syndrome. From Dr. "Bones" McCoy's bag of tricks:

- Untested medical treatments that are 100% effective and have no side effects
- A medical condition that will be fatal in an amount of time expressed to the tenth significant digit; the cure is found and applied in the nick of time, enabling a 100% recovery
- A large dose of radiation results in super powers instead of super tumors
- A large dose of radiation causes an individual creature to "evolve" into a more advanced form
- When a character is aged prematurely, hair that has already grown turns gray
- When a prematurely-aged character is cured of his condition, hair that has already grown turns from gray back to the youthful color
- Somebody lifts a car (or some other heavy object) with his bionic arm, even though the rest of his body is normal flesh and bone and couldn't possibly support the load
- Creatures capable of changing their shapes can alter their mass while they're at it
• Extras and minor characters instantly die when shot; major characters, when shot, either linger for a while before dying, or suffer a dramatic but non-lethal wound

I know that I have been picking on Star Trek, but it doesn't have a monopoly on silly science. It can be found in other stories, too. I simply used Star Trek as it appears to be a common frame of reference, because almost every one knows these episodes.

Another set of pet peeves for me occur in stories which deal with clones. There are several "silly science" plot points that appear a lot more often than they should. Have a look:

• Clones that grow to match the cloned person's state of physiological development in a small fraction of the time
• Clones that think, act, and speak in a manner indistinguishable from the original person
• Clones that come out of the cloning vat with the same haircut as the individual cloned

Have you ever known or have friends who were twins, or maybe triplets? Even though they are raised in the same environment, and they generally will act similarly, they each have their own personalities, likes and dislikes, and their own views and opinions. Clones would act the same way, with each one growing and developing a separate personality.
Vehicles and weapon systems are also included in "silly science."

- Patently obvious design flaws in a vehicle or weapon system that go uncorrected during the entire life cycle of the system in question
- Vehicles and/or weapon systems that are totally impractical for the environment in which they are deployed (e.g. the forest chase scene in Return of the Jedi)
- Spacecraft with features that have been pointlessly carried over from water-borne designs
- Hand-held weapons significantly more complex to engineer and costly to build than a twentieth-century firearm, but not noticeably deadlier, longer-ranged, or more accurate
- Heroes/ships that can dodge laser beams because the beams travel so slowly
- The hero who knows how to defuse the bomb, but can't remember which of two wires to cut

Many other technologies, current or future, suffer from the "silly science" fate:

- A robot is shot and bleeds oil
- An item of technology is quickly reverse-engineered by a far less advanced group of researchers
- A group of aliens is smart enough to steal someone else's technology, but too stupid to make any improvements on it
- A technological development progresses from half-baked theory to useful implementation in fifteen minutes instead of fifteen months

- Nuclear weapons which have an effect well out of proportion for reasonable yields (like throwing the moon out of its orbit, etc.)

- Two-way viewscreens which work between two races which have never contacted each other, cannot speak each other's language, and cannot possibly have worked out compatible protocols for transmission of image and sound

- Lasers that are visible in the vacuum of outer space

- Advanced robots that have difficulty negotiating stairs

- Tactical systems that can only deal with targets visible to the naked eye

- Alien artifacts that still work after being abandoned for a million years

- Spaceships that make a whoosh as they go by

- Huge, expensive spacecraft that are used to transport inexpensive goods in tiny quantities

- Stars go shooting past the spaceship as it flies through space

- The solution for a problem solved four weeks ago is thrown away and never seen again
- A space vessel is sent out on missions before its systems are fully operational
- Robots that despite their size and function are designed with exactly the same features as a human (two arms and legs, ten fingers, two eyes, same joint system, etc.)
- The plans for a complicated device can be downloaded onto a 1.44 Meg floppy
- Nebulae that are as opaque as an equivalent volume of fog

I can come up with a lot more to add to this list, such as Adam and Eve variations, but you get the idea. What does this mean to the prospective writer of a science fiction and/or fantasy story? Scientific rules need to be followed. And a writer must decide on what the rules for the world/universe are, whether based in science or in fantasy, and stick to them throughout the story. These rules must be described in some way to the reader, as an integral part of the story. This can be extremely difficult if the subject matter is very technical. As long as the rules, real or made up, are consistent and faithfully followed, then the reader will have an easier time believing the premise of the story being told.

Before you consider writing a great blockbuster novel, consider the plot of the story. Look at it from an editor’s point of view. If it seems like the same old stuff, then the automatic rejection slip is guaranteed to be in your mail sooner or later. Sooner, most likely. This is not to say that an original story could not be written from one of the listed examples, but I would bet that any editor would think, "Not
another one!" and toss it. So, when you start your next work, I hope that you will avoid these devices. Your readers will thank for it.

*Star Trek* is ™ & © by Paramount Pictures

*Star Wars* is ™ & © by Lucasfilm
As you stare at the computer, the blood drains from your face. Several frantic calls to friends, family, and even tech support yield the terrible verdict: your computer has died. It's every writer's worst nightmare. As a technology professional with a large corporation, I deal with the effects of dead computers on a weekly basis, and when people don't have a backup, it's not a pretty event. But you can avoid having your work dissolve into the abyss of dead hard drives and crashed operating systems.

How do you avoid this trauma? Back up your files.

If you haven't backed up there are services out there that will try to recover your data for you, but those services aren't cheap. It's far more economical to ensure you don't need their expertise. But, if you have the money and don't mind waiting, you can pay for the service. Most of us, however, don't have that kind of disposable income. So, how can we back up?

The important part of backing up is to ensure your backup is separate from your computer. After all, it makes no sense to put an extra copy of your files on your hard drive, because when your computer "crashes" you won't be able to access
those either. Secondly, store your backup in a safe place. A locked fire safe in your house might not be a bad idea (that's my biggest fear: what if I should back up and the house burns down with both my pc and my backup?).

Depending on the amount of data to back up, there are a few common methods.

1) Uploading the data to an online source, such as Yahoo! Briefcase or extra space on your web hosting plan

2) Using a tape backup such as Iomega Zip Disks

3) Using a flash (pen) drive

4) Burning the data to a CD

5) Using an external hard drive

Let's work our way down the list. Our first option is utilizing an online storage service for our data. At first glance this solution appears ideal. Not only do you not have to worry about keeping some kind of backup media, but it's as easy as completing a form on a website. The drawbacks, however, are many. First, especially with free services, you might be limited in the amount of information you can store. Also, some companies may have privacy policies that impact how you can use the data, or how they can use the data you upload. And, filling out that form, especially for someone with a lot of files, can be a pain. Then, with
online companies, what happens when the company goes out of business? Can you access your backup then? If you have only a few files, or aren't picky about who, or what, has access to your files, online services might work.

Tape backups, such as Iomega Zip Drives, are another method of storing data. The new Iomega 750 drives hold nearly as much as a CD. Older models are limited to only 100 or 250 MB. Media costs are much larger for zip drives as well. Plus, like any "floppy" media, the archival quality isn't perfect, and the initial cost of a zip drive is more than that of other methods of backing up.

The new flash, or pen, drives make transporting data easier than before. Literally the size of a pen or smaller, these tiny drives can hold up to 1 GB of data, more than enough space for the most prolific of authors. Plus, the smaller drives start at $20-$30, making them affordable.

Of all the methods, burning the data to CD is the best option. Most computers come with CD-RW (CD Rewritable) drives, and purchasing one for those that don't, internal or external, is fairly inexpensive. Blank CDs are also inexpensive, and each CD holds quite a bit of information. As long as a CD is kept safe, it can last forever. This makes CDs a great way to back up computer files.

An external hard drive can also be used for backing up files. While these devices offer vast amounts of storage, they do have a few drawbacks. Like any electronic device, an external hard drive runs the risk of corruption and failure. Otherwise, an external hard drive offers a lot of storage for a moderate price.
With all methods, simply copying the files or folders to the backup device will ensure a copy is kept in case of computer failure.

I've only listed the five most popular means of backing up files. Other people may have other methods, and like anything, if it works for them there is probably no reason to change it. However, for those who haven't made a habit of backing up, I hope this article provides an overview of backup methods and encourages them to begin backing up. As I tell my customers at work, it's like car insurance: we all hate to pay the premiums, but when we need it, we're glad it's there. Just think of backups as insurance for your computer.
Publication announcements from members of online writing communities are valuable resources for writers at the beginning of their careers. Though the communities may contain members at many levels of publication, overall, markets listed in these announcements tend to be open to new writers.

All the markets presented in this column came from a publication announcement. I receive announcements from various sources including Vision; The Critter’s Workshop; Online Writing Workshop for Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror; and the SF and Fantasy Workshop. These announcements are all available online. They list markets at varying levels of payment or reputation so, if you use these resources, be careful to research the market yourself before submitting. Even the list below should be used as a signpost rather than a definitive answer about any market because situations do change. Reputable sites such as www.ralan.com are good places to get the latest news. Ralan’s and Quintamid Market Database have been known to have information not yet listed on the publisher website. However, always check the publisher's guidelines as well.
While not all the markets that appear in this column offer “pro” rates, they all provide some compensation. In my opinion, offering payment is an indication of the editor/publisher’s commitment. In many cases, markets with some compensation are more likely to stay around because they have considered the economics of running a publication.

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<td><strong>Sub Email</strong></td>
<td>Only for qualified professionals. See site for details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Specifics</strong></td>
<td>Looking for all kinds of speculative fiction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Requirement</strong></td>
<td>Prefers stories 7,500 and under but will consider longer works.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Payment</strong></td>
<td>$0.03 cents (3 cents) per word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>URL for site</strong></td>
<td><a href="http://www.aeonmagazine.com/index.html">http://www.aeonmagazine.com/index.html</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>URL for guidelines</strong></td>
<td><a href="http://www.aeonmagazine.com/writersguidelines.html">http://www.aeonmagazine.com/writersguidelines.html</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genre</td>
<td>Speculative Poetry</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>The Magazine of Speculative Poetry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editor</td>
<td>Roger Dutcher, Editor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address</td>
<td>PO Box 564</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beloit, WI 53512</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub Email</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specifics</td>
<td>Looking for speculative poetry in the science fiction, fantasy, horror, and dark fantasy genres, though very demanding about the last two.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requirement</td>
<td>No length requirement. 2-3 page poems have been included before, but longer poems will have to be that much better.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payment</td>
<td>$0.03 (3 cents) per word with a $5 minimum and $25 maximum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>URL for site</td>
<td><a href="http://www.sff.net/people/Roger-Dutcher/#msp">http://www.sff.net/people/Roger-Dutcher/#msp</a></td>
</tr>
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<td>URL for guidelines</td>
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<td><strong>Genre</strong></td>
<td>Mainstream/Genre/Literary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Title</strong></td>
<td>Byline Magazine</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Editor**   | Carolyn Wall, Fiction Editor  
|              | Sandra Soli, Poetry Editor  
|              | Marcia Preston, General Editor |
| **Address**  | P.O. Box 5240  
<p>|              | Edmond, OK 73083-5240     |
| <strong>Sub Email</strong>| None                      |
| <strong>Specifics</strong>| Looking for general short fiction, mainstream, genre or literary. Articles should be useful for writers. |
| <strong>Requirement</strong>| Stories between 2,000 and 4,000 words, articles between 1,500 and 1,800 words. |
| <strong>Payment</strong>  | $100 for stories, $75 for feature articles, $10 for poems. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Genre</strong></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Title</strong></td>
<td>GrendelSong</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Editor** | Paul M. Jessup, Senior Editor  
Rachel Jessup, Assistant Editor |
<p>| <strong>Address</strong> | None                |
| <strong>Sub Email</strong> | <a href="mailto:paul.jessup@gmail.com">paul.jessup@gmail.com</a> |
| <strong>Specifics</strong> | Looking for innovative, unique, strange stories that fall into the speculative fiction genres and subgenres. |
| <strong>Requirement</strong> | Stories should be between 1,000 and 6,000 words |
| <strong>Payment</strong> | Pays $0.01 (1 cent) per word for stories and $10 per poem |
| <strong>URL for site</strong> | <a href="http://grendelsong.kapo.ws/">http://grendelsong.kapo.ws/</a> |
| <strong>URL for guidelines</strong> | <a href="http://grendelsong.kapo.ws/guidelines.php">http://grendelsong.kapo.ws/guidelines.php</a> |</p>
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<tr>
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<tbody>
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<td><strong>Title</strong></td>
<td>Neometropolis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Editor</strong></td>
<td>John Jacobs, Editor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peter Mondlock, Assistant Editor</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tim Knodel, Assistant Editor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>David Pickston, Assistant Editor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A.R. Yngve, Assistant Editor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anne Mondlock, Assistant Editor, Lead Artist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Address</strong></td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub Email</strong></td>
<td><a href="mailto:submissions@neometropolis.com">submissions@neometropolis.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Specifics</strong></td>
<td>No gratuitous sex or violence, but otherwise this market is open to anything in speculative fiction. Also looking for articles, reviews, and poetry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Requirement</strong></td>
<td>No word count restrictions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Payment</strong></td>
<td>$20-$40 per manuscript. No payment for poetry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>URL for site</strong></td>
<td><a href="http://www.neometropolis.com/index.html">http://www.neometropolis.com/index.html</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This book helped me understand the big deal about adverbs and adjectives. Maybe you’ve solved your adverb and adjective problem years ago but you may have other areas of concern. What value might you find in this book?

The book contains twelve chapters. In addition to Chapter 1, Show and Tell, you will find the following:

- Characterization and Exposition
- Point of View
- Proportion
- Dialogue Mechanics
- See How It Sounds
- Interior Monologue
- Easy Beats
- Breaking Up Is Easy to Do
The authors have included an appropriate cartoon in each chapter, and the book's voice is comfortable and clear. Appropriately, the authors chose Voice for the final chapter. They offer no exercises for this chapter, because, as they say, there's no better way to become an individual than to work on your own manuscript.

As you can see from the chapter titles, each one discusses key trouble areas with writing, areas new writers may not even recognize as problems. Experienced writers wrestle to keep these trouble areas under control. Whether you are a new writer or an experienced one, you can easily turn to your problem area chapter. If you have more than one problem area (it happens), you can address them sequentially or in any order you feel works best for you.

Each chapter focuses on a different element of the manuscript. They discuss their subject matter with examples that need improvement, a slightly better version, and a more desirable version. Explanations accompany the examples. Then the authors provide a checklist followed by exercises for you to practice what you've learned. You can easily compare your work to the examples and evaluate whether you have a problem or not--then, if you do, you can apply what you've learned to solve it.
Additionally, the book contains two appendices and an index. The first appendix, thankfully, contains answers to the exercises. The answer provided is not the only possible one, but the reader can see what one good answer might be. The second appendix lists top books for writers, subdivided into books on craft, books on inspiration, and reference books.

You could benefit from this book at any stage in your writing, but it, as the title states, highlights the editing stage. Use it when the first draft is complete and the work needs polishing. After reading *Self-Editing for Fiction Writers*, I cut thousands of redundant words from my work in progress and did so with greater confidence than I might have before reading this book.

This book is flexible enough to be helpful in nearly any way you choose to employ it. You could read *Self-Editing for Fiction Writers* straight through, you could read it and work the exercises, or you could skip around and do or not do the exercises. At 279 pages in trade paperback size, it won't make a very good doorstop. It cries out for you to use it and wear it out. Make it a permanent resident of your handiest reference shelf.

*Self-Editing for Fiction Writers: How to Edit Yourself into Print (Second Edition)*

By Renni Browne and Dave King

ISBN: 0-06-054569-0
Book Review

Elements of Arousal:
How to Write and Sell Gay Men's Erotica

(2nd edition of Lavender Blue) by Lars Eighner

Reviewed by Jules Jones
© 2006, Jules Jones

This book was written as an erotica writer's manual, but it's also an excellent guide to both the craft and business of writing for fiction in general. If you don't mind the focus on gay erotica, there is a wealth of advice that will be useful to any beginning fiction writer, and I still think it's the best "how to write" book I've ever read. I have no hesitation in recommending this book to any writer who isn't bothered by the content. However, be warned that the writing examples used are extremely explicit, and for that reason, the book will not be for everyone. The other drawback is that the second edition of the book was published in 1994, and thus some of the advice (in particular, about computers and the specifics of tax law) is now woefully out of date. This only affects certain sections of the book, and it should be reasonably clear in context when a section is outdated.
The first half of the main part of the book covers the craft of writing, the process of putting words on paper. The second half covers the business side of writing, from the basics of how to format a manuscript to what sort of records you need to keep to satisfy the taxman. Eighner starts with an important reminder -- in the first half of the book, he is giving the best advice based on what is most likely to be successful. It should not be treated as if carved in tablets of stone. Some books on writing leave the impression that their way is the only way; Eighner makes it clear that his way is simply the way likely to be the most successful for most writers. He goes on to give a quick summary of what the beginning writer does need, doesn't need, and may need, and then repeats the message that you do not need to follow all of the rules if they do not work for you.

The first five chapters in the craft section cover various aspects of writing fiction, starting with a basic lesson in grammar and covering such things as characterisation and constructing a plot. While the examples used are from erotic fiction, most of this material is relevant to any fiction genre. The sixth chapter focuses on writing the erotic scene, and is a must-read for those writing erotica for a gay male audience. This chapter is less applicable to other genres (including other erotica genres) and may be readily skipped by those not interested. Still, there are some useful lessons on the construction and pacing of a scene within a story.

The business section covers the many things a writer needs to know when it comes to selling the work, including submission format, record-keeping, market
research as well as dealing with rejections, contracts, and taxes for the self-employed writer. It is United States-centric and in places very out of date, but is still an excellent source for information on these subjects. Even where the information is outdated or country-specific, it is a useful indicator of what sort of current information a writer should be looking for.

The book also includes a style guide and glossary. These are fairly basic, but their very brevity makes them a handy reference guide to keep on the writing desk.

Sadly the book is no longer in print, but Eighner has placed the text of the second edition online. Access is free, with a suggested donation to help cover the costs of the website. It's also usually readily available second-hand, often at very reasonable prices. The online version is easily searchable, but its location may be changing. Additional information about the book can be found at http://www.larseighner.com/

Website Review

The Internet Sacred Texts Archive

Reviewed by Bonnie R. Schutzman
© 2006, Bonnie R. Schutzman

www.sacred-texts.com

The Internet Sacred Texts Archive (ISTA) bills itself as "a quiet place in cyberspace devoted to religious tolerance and scholarship." Its mission is to provide electronic texts of books of religion, mythology, legends, and folklore as well as occult and esoteric topics. John B. Hare started the site in 1999. He and a team of volunteers have scanned, redacted, and added more than 300 texts since then.

You will find an impressive listing of available e-texts in the ISTA. The complete listing of works at the site runs 50 printed pages and ranges from the Zetetic (flat-earth) astronomy of Samuel Rowbotham to the King James Bible, from the first thousand lines of the human chromosome to multiple versions of the Qur'an, from reproductions of some of the Ardeche cave paintings to The Internet Book of Shadows. It even includes some classics of fantasy writing, such as Spenser's *The Faery Queen* and Eddison's *The Worm Ourobouros*. Notable recent additions include *The Lusiad*, a Portuguese epic poem about the voyage of Vasco de Gama; Lewis Spence's *Hero Tales and Legends of the Rhine*; and a
1913 translation of Lucian's *De Dea Syria (The Syrian Goddess)*, a text that played a seminal role in the development of modern neopaganism.

The site is organized by topic with some books referenced from more than one section. The listings include a certain amount of introductory material that highlights major scholarly issues and orients the reader to both the original text and its more modern uses. But no attempt is made to provide full scholarly critiques.

The texts display as HTML. A few are available in zip files for download. Most of the site is also available on CD/ROM (USD49.95, with free worldwide shipping when ordered directly from the website). The CD might be a good option if you make heavy use of the texts and don't have a high-speed internet connection.

Many of the texts are scarce and hard to find in print form, such as the extensive collections of African, Pacific, and Native American legends and folk tales, translations of the Vedas, the Shinto texts, and the Lotus Sutra. Primary texts are included in their original language as well as in translation. Many secondary texts are also available. If you want to build a world that isn't just another medieval European or Celtic clone, you'll find plenty of material here.

Most of the texts are in English, though primary source texts such as the Qur'an and the Bible are available in the original languages. All the texts at the site are either in the public domain or made available with the consent of the copyright holders. This means that you are free to use the texts as you see fit, but it also
means that few of them are recent. You may need to supplement these sources with more current research and scholarship.

Another shortcoming of the site is its lack of texts from newer religions, such as Scientology or the Unification Church, which don't have any public domain books about them (and jealously guard their copyrights).

The site is not affiliated with any religious organization, academic institution, or corporate entity. It is funded primarily through sales of the CD/ROM.
New on the Shelves!

Forward Motion for Writers has many published authors as members. Here are just a few of the currently available materials that they have had published:

Lazette Gifford's current publications include:

Available through the Holly Lisle Bookstore

Freedom and Fame
Book Six of the Dark Staff Series

Available from DDP

Holly Lisle's novels, available in bookstores and online:

Last Girl Dancing
By Holly Lisle

Midnight Rain
By Holly Lisle
S. L. Viehl's novels, available in bookstores and online:

The Way of the Cheetah

Available from OneMoreWord

Afterburn
By S.L Viehl

BioRescue
By S.L. Viehl
If Angel's Burn
by Lynn Viehl
If Angel's Burn made it to the U.S.A. Today Best Seller List!

Private Demon: A Novel of the Darkyn
by Lynn Viehl

Tamara Siler Jones' novels, available in bookstores and online:

Treads of Malice
by Tamara Siler Jones

Ghosts in the Snow
by Tamara Siler Jones
Wen Spencer's novels, available in bookstores and online:

- **A Brother's Price**
  - by Wen Spencer

- **Dog Warrior**
  - by Wen Spencer

- **Tinker**
  - by Wen Spencer

- **Wolf Who Rules**
  - by Wen Spencer

C. E. Murphy's novels, available in bookstores and online:

- **Urban Shaman**
  - by C.E. Murphy

- **Including Banshee Cries**
  - by C. E. Murphy
The Cardinal Rule
by Cate Dermody

C.E. Murphy (Site Member cemurphy) will also be releasing a second urban fantasy series through her publisher Luna Books. The first title will be Heart of Stone, available late 2007 in mass market paperback. This new series will be released concurrently with her Walker Papers series.

Left Horse Black
by S.J. Reisner (Site Member Stephjr)

is available at your local bookstore or from the ArcheBooks in ebook and hardcover.

Kristen Howe (Site Member angelscribe) has a poem, Gulf Coast Devastation, available in the Poets' Section of Funny Paper.

Val Griswold-Ford (Site Member captain_hobbes)’s novel Not Your Father’s Horseman received nominations for both ForeWord Magazine’s Book of the Year and the 2006 Independent Publisher Book Awards.

ISBN #1-896944-27-2

Available from Dragon Moon Press
**Lunar Pioneers** by Robert A. Black (Site Member ShutterBob) has been accepted by *Windstorm Creative*. This is a middle-grade reader story about a family in the 22nd century who move to a Moon colony.

Gisele LeBlanc (Site Member Gisele L) has sold her short story *Jasmine Magic* to *Story Station*. The story will be available in April 2006.

Zoe Cannon (Site Member luminessence) debuts in *The Forum* at the end of April 2006. Her story is called *Disciple’s Path*.

Cliff Hightower (Site Member rocklion)’s story *The Ghosts and Christy Lee* will appear in the June edition of *The Dark Reveries*.

Cheryl Mills (Site Member cherylmills) has a short story, *Sunset Limited*, appearing in the July 2006 issue of *The Harrow*.
Submissions

One of the fun aspects of working on Vision is helping a new writer find an article subject, and then helping them through the steps of refining the idea and writing and editing it. However, as I pointed out previously, I have less time to do that if I have to rework too many articles just to fit the guidelines.

Vision generally runs, in the PDF version, between 160 and 200 pages. That's a lot of material to edit, format, and make into three distinct versions (html, PDF and Palm) every two months.

So, here are the things I want the rest of you to consider when you're writing an article for Vision:

Read the guidelines and follow them. If you have a question about the guidelines, email me at zette@cableone.net and ask.

Don't write an article and send it off without proofing. In fact, read it more than once. Let it sit for a day or two, even if you are running late. I would rather have a well edited late article than a messy one sent on time.

Don't worry about the theme of the upcoming issue and think that your article won't fit in. I want anything that has to do with writing, from how you think up a story to finding a proper pen.

If you love writing and have anything at all that you can offer to other writers,
consider writing 500-2000 words for one of the upcoming issues.

Have favorite writing-related books or web sites that you think could help fellow authors? Consider writing a short review of them. I am especially in need of web site reviews!

Did I mention reading the guidelines?

Writing for Vision is a lot easier than most people assume, and a few of our writers have gone on to sell material they first published in Vision, or to use the 'sale' as part of a resume to get a job at some other publication.

So, let's work together and get the next issues done.

Oh, and do go read the guidelines...

I am interested in all facets of writing, from first-person experience articles to genre-specific how-to's and informational articles about your area of specialization – whether that 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, and I'll be interested in taking a look.

Starting in 2004 Vision will pay half a cent per word for articles. That's not much money, and I'm going to be asking a lot for that half cent -- both ezine rights as well as the right to publish anything we choose in a POD 'Best of' Anthology at the end of the year. By printing the anthology, we hope to make back the funds
that I will be putting into Vision to buy the articles and perhaps even make enough to fund the following year's article acquisitions.

I will be limiting the number of articles bought, and 2000 words ($10) will be the cut off point for payment. All the other guidelines remain the same. I will be looking for articles on theme-related, general writing and genre topics. If you have some suggestion that you think might help another writer, consider writing it into an article and submitting it to Vision.

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 edit it to our standards. If we feel that it need massive rewrites, we won’t accept it.

If you have any questions, or wish to query about an article, email Vision@lazette.net

Please note that Margaret Fisk is now the Features' Editor and will handle all the review articles.

Guidelines:

Articles must be at least 500 words with 2000 words as the 'soft' top. I'm willing to go over that count if the article needs it, but payment stops at 2000
Check your spelling and grammar! Also, if you are from a country that does not use US spelling conventions, let me know in the email. That will stop me from making several 'corrections' before I realize they aren't mistakes.

PLACE YOUR TITLE AND YOUR NAME AT THE TOP OF THE DOCUMENT. I hate having to go search through emails, checking attachments, to figure whose article I'm actually reading.

Title

By

Your Name

Use one of these fonts: Courier, Courier New, Times New Roman, Verdana or Arial, 12pt.

Double space your manuscript.

Do not indent.

I would like submissions to be made in either Word Doc files, or .rtf files, and as attachments to the email. (I believe that WordPerfect allows .rtf saves, doesn't it?) If you use Works, a regular file will do, although (at least in the 4.5 version I have), this program also allows for an .rtf file save.
A plain text copy (.txt) can be sent, but be certain to mark any italics like this:
*before and after the section in italics*, and bold likes this: _before and after anything in bold._ If you cannot do attachments, use the body of the letter as the last resort.

Indicate book titles with italics. And yes, that means if you are doing a Word doc or rtf that you can use actual italics and not an underline to indicate italics. (This is not common submission procedure, but it's far easier for me since I can cut and paste to my wysiwyg web page editor.)

Do not use an underline for emphasis. Underline on websites indicates a link, and people often send emails to say the link is not working. Use italics or bold.

NO HTML code except for links, and those written in this fashion:
http://www.whatever.com/this.htm

Provide the ISBN #s and publishers for all books mentioned or reviewed. Do this by adding the title, author, publisher and ISBN# at the bottom of the file. The same is true for articles -- be certain to cite them.

**An additional note to Word users:** Turn off the 'smart quotes' option in Word, which can be found under Tools-AutoCorrect and then the tabs AutoFormat while you type AND Autoformat. Also uncheck the symbol replacement for --. While Smart Quotes look really neat on the screen, they sometimes translate to funny little squares that cannot be taken out with the
'find-replace' feature, but have to be hunted down by hand. If you are submitting anything electronically, you will very likely hear back from the editor on these. And remember -- a lot of print publishers are now asking for electronic copy for their end as well.

We've been receiving very good articles, and I hope that all of you look at the list of upcoming issues at the bottom of this page and choose something you feel comfortable with writing about.

We are also still looking for general genre-related articles. If you would like to write an article on how to research romantic settings, the proper use of codes in spy thrillers, etc., let us know. The genres we like to cover in each issue are:

- Fantasy
- Historical Fiction
- Horror
- Poetry
- Romance
- Science Fiction
- Suspense & Mystery
- Young Adult & Children
- Young Writer's Scene

I'm always interested in any writing-related articles!
Thank you!

Lazette Gifford

Managing Editor

Questions? Queries? Submissions? Email me!