



HOLLY LISLE'S VISION:



A RESOURCE FOR WRITERS

ISSUE # 8: MARCH/APRIL 2002

FEATURING:



AN INTERVIEW WITH
VERA NAZARIAN



SHOW AND TELL: HOW TO WRITE
REALITSTIC YOUNG CHILD CHARACTERS



BY S. L. VIEHL



AXIAL TILT AND OTHER THINGS

BY BOB BILLING



THE DESCRIPTIVE WORKSHOP

BY HOLLY LISLE

AND MUCH MORE!



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About This Issue

Featuring an Interview with [Vera Nazarian](#)

Welcome to issue # 8. In this issue we tackle the often difficult theme of **Parents and Children.** Why are families either badly depicted or nonexistent in a much of fiction writing these days? We hope that the theme articles will help you sort out the thorny problems.

We also have a wonderful interview from writer Vera Nazarian who offers interesting insights and wonderful advice to new writers

And, as always, we have a plethora of genre related material, dealing with everything from the current popular fantasy movies and their effect on the writing market, to giving your science fiction world a the proper axial tilt.

We hope you enjoy this issue. Drop us a line at vision@lazette.net to let us know what you think of Vision, and what types of material you might find interesting in future issues.

Vision is also available Adobe Acrobat™ and Palm Systems™ [downloadable versions](#). We also have a new archive section for the [on-line back issues](#).

[Interview: Vera Nazarian](#)

...Yes, small presses in general are more likely to buy niche-defying work from a new and relatively unknown writer, because they operate on a small scale and usually don't have all that much invested in any given writer. Thus, their risk tolerance is greater.

Theme Articles

Show and Tell: How To Write Realistic Young Child Characters By

S.L. Viehl: The way some authors write about very young children in their novels reminds me of something Emerson said: "Children are aliens, and we treat them as such."

Women, Men, Families and Fiction By Kay House and Justin

Stanchfield: Family background can add tremendous depth to your characters. Minor children as active characters add poignancy to your theme. Despite this, many writers make little reference to family, and children often appear only as props. Why?

The Perils of Cardboard By Ruth Pischke: One of the more common mistakes is creating a cardboard family. The loner with no past, the orphaned thief, the placid man who seeks to avenge his murdered family, the abandoned youth who somehow ends up being the savior of the world, and so on.

Exploiting Your Character's Parental Bond By Shane P. Carr:

The bond between a parent and child in a fiction story can be exploited in interesting ways. As many know, the bond between a mother and child is nearly

unbreakable. Just try to take a newborn puppy away from its mother -- chances are you'll get a low guttural growl warning you away.

Dare You Write About Your Family? By Robert A. Sloan: Every writer comes from a different family situation -- including those they love and fear to offend, family members who send them screaming in terror, or relatives about whom they feel embarrassed.

Heroes Have Families? By Francine M. Seal: Science fiction and fantasy heroes seldom have families, or if they do, they're severely dysfunctional. When writing stories, there are some very good reasons for this, both social and psychological.

Where Have All the Families Gone? By Valerie Serdy: Family relationships are among the hardest to maintain, yet they form some of the strongest bonds. Many families have unspoken rules and protocols to rival an international dinner,

Children Are Characters Too By Andi Ward: Children are people. People in fiction are characters. Characters have personalities, lives, hopes, goals, attitudes, and voices. Children certainly do too, and theirs are often more pronounced than adults. Therefore, it seems that children should be easy to write.

Blood Is Thicker Than Water By Bryn Neuenschwander: ...Generally naming the members of the family is easy. You have your main character (MC), his father, his mother, and maybe an aunt or grandfather who is

important enough to merit a name. But now I'm thirty-one characters in and I haven't even started to think about whether any of Saoran's siblings (she's my MC) and cousins have had children yet.

Genre Articles

Fantasy

[Fantasy Movies and the Star Wars Effect](#) By Forward Motion

Community Members: This year we've seen two powerful fantasy movies released that drew exceptional attention again. Will they have the same effects on the fantasy writing market that Star Wars had on SF?

Horror

[Introduction to Horror 2: Plot and Character in Horror Fiction](#) By

Teresa Hopper: Anyone who writes or reads much horror knows that a stereotype exists amongst some non-horror readers. Horror is seen as a somewhat inferior form of fiction – trashy, with unrealistic characters who do stupid things to sustain unfeasible plots. It isn't seen as serious fiction.

Poetry

[Reflections of Starlight](#) By Nic Bonson:

For me, writing poetry started a few years ago. Though I'd been writing in some form or another (and indeed, a few poems), I actually produced the majority of my work to date over a three-year period, from 1997 - 1999, the final years of high school.

Romance

[But Is It Romance?](#) By Lazette Gifford:

I was recently surprised (even shocked) to find out how little I know about the romance field. After

considerable discussion on several mailing lists, checking through books, and haunting web sites, I now comprehend Romance a little better.

Science Fiction

[Axial Tilt and Other Things](#) **By Bob Billing:** Axial tilt for a world is actually very easy to work out. Your imaginary planet has an axial tilt, which is a number that you can choose to suit the story. Think of the planet as going around the sun in a big, flat ellipse.

YA & Children

[Writing Mysteries for Children's Magazines](#) **By Ron Brown:** Like many, I grew up reading the exploits of The Hardy Boys and Encyclopedia Brown. I loved to gather clues with the young sleuths and strive to solve the mystery before the last page. Children today have the same desires, and magazines that target this audience are seeking good mysteries for their pages.

Young Writers

[Welcome to Young Writers Scene](#) **By Vicki McElfresh:** Newcomers to the Forward Motion Community who are under the age of 18 might not be aware that there is board just for them. The Young Writer's board features discussions, crit circles, and activities especially geared towards younger writers.

Advanced Writing

[Piracy on the High Bandwidth](#) By John Savage, Esq.: In the last year or so, several authors I know have suffered the ravages of intellectual property pirates. This article should help writers understand their rights and how to enforce them. We'll start off with a few examples, then issue some letters of marque and reprisal of our own.

**Also: workshop, reviews, news from the
Forward Motion Community,
guidelines, and more!**

From Holly

R&R

By Holly Lisle

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Every writer has things he's really good at, and things he's terrible at, and I am no exception to this rule. All skills are important, and one of the most important, I'm discovering, is the ability to put work down and walk away sometimes.

Whatever my other writing flaws may be, I know about this one quite well, and have for years. I have a typical workaholic personality -- I like my work, it energizes me, it consumes me, and when I'm not writing, I feel maimed.

So I just finished doing a complete 110,000-word novel in sixty days, from a scratch start and including rewrite, revision, and submission. Prior to that, I'd scrapped five hundred pages on the same novel -- two large starts that both failed to go where they needed to. I'd also finished and heavily rewritten *Vincalis the Agitator* and *Memory of Fire*, had redesigned the website from top to bottom; had written a couple of articles, four different very long proposals, three of which didn't make it past my agent and one that was simply not what my editor hoped to see, a lot of community posts, a ton of e-mails; and had found time to hang out with my family and do a few things that mattered there.

I finished *The Wreck of Heaven* on January 31. Finished the rewrite, sent it off, and sat down to get to work on version five of the proposal.

And nothing happened. I tried to write an overdue nonfiction article. Nothing happened. I posted a few things in the community, but in most cases I think I should have kept my mouth shut. E-mails -- nerts on them, too. I've answered only the merest tip of the e-mail iceberg recently, including somehow managing not to answer an e-mail from one of my editors for over a week.

It would be obvious to anyone but a complete idiot that I needed a rest -- and yet, every single day that I haven't written, I've driven myself nuts because I haven't written.

It feels like having a doctor tell me, "You have been breathing twenty-four hours of every day for the last forty-one years, and you really need to just take a little break from it. Take a few days off. You'll breathe better when you come back to it."

I have that same level of, "But I'll DIE," panic right now.

At the moment, I envy people with day jobs that they hate. People who can put their feet up when they get home and not work, and not think about working, and not give a damn that they're not working. For just one week, I would like to be able to turn off writing and not feel like I was in the process of dying.

One week.

R&R is a necessary skill. If you don't have it, you have my sympathy -- and a recommendation that you need to find a way to develop it before you find yourself exhausted and unable to step off the treadmill. If you're a good relaxer, hang on to that. It's a necessary skill. From here in the middle of the hamster treadmill, running hard and getting nowhere fast, I salute you.

On to Vision. This issue, we're bringing you the family side of writing -- the Parents and Children issue. Writing about parents and kids and writing as a parent or a kid. Also a workshop on description, an interview with Vera Nazarian, community news and updates, and much more. If you've just found us, welcome. If you've been with us for a while, welcome back.

Holly Lisle

Editor's Note

Finding Inspiration

By Lazette Gifford

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Story ideas. Plots. Perfect characters.

They're apt to hit at the oddest times, and the inspiration is often so mundane that people who don't write won't believe how simple it sometimes is to come up with ideas. The inspiration for a new story might come on the heels of a single word, the plot from a snippet of history, and characters from watching people pass at the mall. Songs are rife with plots. A writer glancing through the current Writer's Market and reading the want lists for different publishers might get hit with story idea overload.

Writers will find inspiration anywhere because they are open to the idea that not everything is as it seems. Why can't there be pixies hiding in the park and aliens living in the desert? Why shouldn't the woman staring at the clothing shop window find herself whisked away in a swirl of mystery and romance? Or maybe she's not really looking at the clothes. Maybe

she's watching the reflections, waiting for the enemy agent to pass so she can trail her to a secret meeting.

Writers look at the world differently than those who have never imagined anything beyond their everyday lives. Most people imagine some little change that could affect them: What if the boss quit? What if I won the lottery? But writers don't limit their imaginations to their own lives, and that is the real difference.

Authors create new life with a few paragraphs, bring hope with a poem, and offer knowledge with an essay. The art of writing can create love eternal, a journey to the stars, or a flight on the wings of a dragon...

... Writers are the true magicians of the world.

Holly Lisle's Workshop

The Description Workshop

By Holly Lisle

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Description is one of those occasionally reviled writing skills. It gets a bad reputation from books that include pages of turgid, extraneous detail; no book has ever been rendered unreadable by virtue of too little description. Unpublishable, maybe, but not unreadable. Whereas a couple of hundred-word descriptions jammed into a three-page paragraph can not only kill your book, but maybe even your editor or first reader. Bad.

So you don't want to do that. But you don't want to walk away from description entirely, either. It gives you powerful tools for bringing worlds and characters to life. Used judiciously, it can make your readers *believe*, and that is a wonderful thing.

You have a number of things you'll routinely have to describe in your writing – settings, situations, and characters.

Let's do setting first, since it's the first thing most writers think about when they think about description. If you've done a lot of worldbuilding, it's easy to get carried away with this one. You've developed a ton of wonderful details, and the temptation is to use them all, and to do it all at once. At the beginning of your story, especially if you're doing a novel and are writing about your own world, you're going to have to give people some description

so they'll know where they are. However, even in a solid block of description, if you keep the background moving, you'll bring the scene to life and keep your readers' interest.

Here's an example of what I mean, taken from the novel **Diplomacy of Wolves**.

So Kait Galweigh stood off in one corner at the Dokteerak Naming Day party and scanned the crowd while she pretended to sip a drink. The Dokteerak Family women in their gauzy net finery clustered beneath the broad palms in the central garden, chatting about nothing of consequence. Torchlight cast an amber gleam on their sleek skins and pale hair and made the heavy gold at their throats and wrists seem to glow. They were decorative---Kait's Family had such women, too, and theirs was the fate she so desperately wished to escape. The senior diplomats from both Families, Galweigh and Dokteerak, gathered in the breezeway that surrounded the courtyard, leaning along the food-laden tables, nibbling from finger servings of yearling duck and broiled monkey and wild pig and papaya-stuffed python, telling each other amusing stories and watching, watching, their eyes never still. Concubines flirted and primed, tempting their way into berths in the beds of the high-ranking or the beautiful. Dokteerak guardsmen in gold and blue propped themselves against doorways, swapping racy stories and tales of bravado with Galweigh guardsmen in red and black. Outland princes and the parats of other Families and their cadet branches

drifted from group to group, assessing available women the way hunting wolves assessed a herd of deer.

(You can read the entire chapter here -- <http://www.hollylisle.com/tm/DOW-chap.html> – to see how I continued the use of people to describe setting.)

Now this is a longish paragraph – 214 words. However, the reader gets a feel for the world from watching people doing things. **Description Rule Number One – People are more interesting than scenery.**

When you're finished reading this one paragraph, you have an idea of the social and political structure and technological level of this part of the world, social mores and morals, the weather that evening, the climate of the region, and at least a suggestion of the social standing of the characters. And if I've done my job correctly, you're interested enough in what the people are doing that you don't see the things I've slipped in with them. Did you consciously notice the palm trees, the presence of monkeys and papaya on the menu, the women dressed in gauzy clothing? Tropical climate. Did you notice concubines, decorative women, uniformed guardsmen, outland princes, Families with a capital F? Complex social structure with a number of conflicting political models, sexual mores different than those of middle-class America, and the presence of a definite hierarchy. Torchlight? The possibility, if not yet the certainty, of a lower-tech world. The Naming Day Party? An unfamiliar celebration of some sort – and something that obviously is of some importance.

What other rules did I use in this paragraph? **Description Rule Two – Forms of the verb “to be” are your enemy.** I did not write, *It was a hot night*, or *The Dokteerak women were beautiful but immoral*, or *The food on the table was strange*. Those would have been really boring sentences. If you're telling, you can't be showing, and when you describe something, you want to show it. You don't want to tell about it. Think about a car salesman. He wants you to buy the car. So does he tell you how great it is? No, he drags you out, sits your butt in the driver's seat, and lets you smell the leather interior, wrap your hands around the steering wheel, peer through the windshield, and feel the way it moves with you as you drive it through city streets.

Let your readers drive your world.

Exercise One: List three or four important points about your story-universe that you want your readers to know. These can be anything from weather to political structure to the rules of a game characters will play that is integral to your plot. When you have them listed, write a paragraph describing them ... but do it using people, and avoid as many variants of the verb “to be” as you can.

Finished? Like the energy in what you've done? Have you managed to sneak your worldbuilding in disguised as action? If you have, great. If not, give it another shot, and then let's move on.

Next, let's work on situation description. In order to start a story, you have to let the reader know where your character is, what the problem is, and why it matters. This requires description – but again, description shouldn't

be something your reader has to drag himself through out of obligation. It should, instead, reach out of the page, grab him by the throat, and drag him kicking and screaming into your story and your world.

Here's a situation description I did for **Hunting the Corrigan's Blood**. It is, in fact, the first paragraph of the book, and this time it is straight description – no action.

The corpse's left eye squinted at me from mere centimeters away. Decomposition lent her face an increasingly inscrutable expression; the first time I'd regained consciousness, when I found myself tied to her, she looked like she had died in terror. After a while, she started leering at me, as if she had reached the place where I was going and took perverse pleasure from the thought that I would join her there soon. Now, having had her moment of amusement at my expense, she meditated; beneath thousands of dainty auburn braids, her face hung slack, bloated and discolored, the skin loosening. Threads of drool hung spiderwebbish from her gaping mouth. Her eyes, dry and sunken and filmed over beneath swollen lids, still stared directly at me. _

(You can read this paragraph in context here -- <http://www.hollylisle.com/tm/htcb.html> – to see how I used description to create situation.)

Technically, it is a description of a dead body. However, it is a bit more compelling than a simple description of a corpse, because the narrator is

telling you about the corpse in the first person while the two of them are handcuffed together and locked in a locker. It is, I think, one of the catchier openers I've done. From this short description, the reader understands immediately and completely that the narrator is in terrible trouble, that the trouble is premeditated and the stakes are high, and that there is at least a bit of a mystery ongoing – people don't refer to those they know as “the corpse” – so the dead body to which the narrator is bound must belong to a stranger. We get confirmation of that in subsequent chapters, but I've planted the seed in the first one.

So what rules did I follow in setting up this situation? **Description Rule Number Three – Lead with the biggest gun you've got.**

I didn't start by mentioning that the narrator was badly hurt – though she was, and you get a hint of that from the fact that she's been unconscious more than once. I didn't lead with the locker, or with the narrator's confusion over the fact that the woman was a stranger, or with a description of the space station or Cadence Drake's job, or any of the events that got her where she was. I started her out eyeball to eyeball with the body of a dead stranger, and took a bit of time and a number of gritty words to describe the stranger. (I also followed Rules One and Two.)

Exercise Two: Figure out what the most compelling detail is in a situation you're trying to set up for your character. Weed out all the things you wish the reader knew, and all the things that are secondary, and just dig into that one compelling detail.

Finally, let's look at description of character. Everyone knows about this one – “Missy looked at herself in the mirror. She liked her short, pert nose, her perfectly blonde hair – natural, of course – and the way her enormous breasts complimented her tiny waist. She didn't think she was perfect, of course. She thought she was too skinny and plain, but everyone else kept insisting she was beautiful, so maybe she was.”

If you have ever written a paragraph like that, don't feel bad. Most of us have at one point or another. But it is dreadful, and there are much, much better ways to describe character.

I had to dig for an out-and-out description of a character, because I rarely do a block of text telling what a character looks like. I'll sneak a detail in here or there, but for the most part, I let characters describe themselves by their actions. Every once in a while, though, someone comes along who deserves a real description. This is from Chapter Two of **Diplomacy of Wolves**.

Crispin and Andrew both grinned at each other. As they did, Anwyn slouched into the dungeon. Marcue had thought from his name that he would be human. Anwyn was a good Parmatian name, like Crispin ... or Marcue, for that matter. The thing that skulked into the dungeon wasn't human, though. He might have been one of the Scarred---one of the creatures from the poisoned lands whose ancestors, stories said, had once been men. If he was Scarred, however, he was from no realm that had ever traded in Calimekka.

And if he wasn't one of the Scarred, then he was a demon from the lowest pit of Zagtasht's darkest hell. Long horns curled out from his forehead. His scaled brow beetled over eyes so deeply set they looked more like hollow sockets. His lips parted in a grin that revealed teeth long as a man's thumb and serrated like a shark's. He hunched forward, and Marcue could make out the ridge of huge spines that ran down the center of his back beneath his cloak. His hands were talons, though five-fingered, and while one of his feet fit in a man's boot and grew from a man-shaped leg, the other was a cloven hoof attached to a leg that, beneath a man's breeches, bent backward at the knee. That leg he dragged forward as he moved into the room.

231 words, most of it straight description. I used 'to be' verbs in this, and interspersed a line-item description with reaction description from the scene's point-of-view character. The only reason I wrote the paragraph this way is because Anwyn isn't human, or anything like it, and I wanted to get that point across quickly and with as much visual and visceral impact as I could manage. **Description Rule Number Four -- Describe by list only as a last resort.** Contrast the treatment above with the initial description of the young woman who is the actual focus of the scene.

The stone walls, rough-hewn and slime-coated, gleamed in the torchlight. The chill of the place, and the stink and the darkness and the skittering sounds of the rats, wore on Marcue's nerves even when

all the cells were full and the men in them talked and quarreled and wondered about their futures. Now the dungeon was empty except for one prisoner, and that was a girl---a child, really---and she rarely spoke, but frequently cried. Her crying was worse than the rats.

That's it. That's all you learn about her in the first paragraph. I dole out bits and pieces of descriptive information throughout the rest of the scene, so that by the end of it, the reader has a very clear picture of Danya Galweigh – but it comes only a line here and a line there. You can read all of Chapter Two here: <http://www.hollylisle.com/tm/DOW-chapk.html> Take a look to see how description of a major character can be made subtle and spread out, and compare to how it can be blunt and in-your-face, and remember **Description Rule Number Five: Only describe what is different.**

Exercise Three: List the characteristics that make your character different. When you have that list, write two samples – one in which you do straight description, and one in which you spread out the salient points about your character over paragraphs or pages.

Description doesn't have to be the part of your writing that readers skim to get to the good stuff. If you pay attention to the five basic rules of description, you'll make description part of the good stuff.

An Interview with Vera Nazarian

By Lazette Gifford

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Vera Nazarian is a multi-talented woman who not only writes, but also is an artist and a musician as well. She sold her first short story to Marion Zimmer Bradley's *Sword and Sorceress II* anthology just as she was graduating from High School, and was published in numerous volumes of this series over the following years. She has long championed self-promotion, and has several ideas and suggestions for new writers.

 <p>Dreams of the Compass Rose (Wildside Press; ISBN: 1587155842)</p>	<p>Vera's first novel, <i>Dreams of the Compass Rose</i> (Wildside Press; ISBN: 1587155842) is forthcoming in May 2002. The book has been described by Charles de Lint (<i>The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction</i>, February 2002) as a novel of "...stately lyricism, a compelling and visionary voice that speaks to the heart of the reader."</p> <p>She is also the cover artist for the book.</p> <p>You can find more information about Vera at her web site: http://www.veranazarian.com/</p>
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Vision: First, can you tell us about your unusual childhood, Vera?

Sure. I was abandoned by urban elves on the doorstep of an apartment in Moscow, Russia, a mad changeling child wrapped in a blanket of leaves and dandelion.

Seriously, I was born in 1966, in the former USSR, the child of penniless intelligentsia parents. My schoolteacher mother had taught me to read early and introduced me to fairy tales of all lands and cultures, and to ancient Greek mythology. I was a six-year-old girl obsessed with the Homeric epics, knew passages by heart, wanted to change my name to "Athena," carved functional bows and spears out of wooden sticks in the back yard of the apartment complex and pretended to be an Amazon.

I was also a very sickly child, and spent most of my time out of school bedridden, and reading tons of books that my mother would bring me from the library. I read the classics, children's fantasies and fairy stories, novels of magic and ancient history - all in Russian, of course. When we left the USSR, I was just finishing up 3rd grade, and had just begun to study English, my second language, at the same time as I was assimilating by osmosis my other native language, Armenian (later in school in the US, I studied Spanish, Mandarin Chinese, and German).

We immigrated to Beirut, Lebanon and lived as refugees during the very beginning of the Lebanese civil war, then lived in Greece, and finally were admitted to the United States in 1976, the Bicentennial year. During my time as a refugee, I did not attend school since I did not know enough Arabic and was illiterate in Armenian (those were the only schools available), and instead my mother made me read an old borrowed children's encyclopedia in English for over a year, in lieu of formal schooling. Thus, I never finished 3rd grade and did not attend 4th grade.

Vision: Do you think your background has affected what you write?

Goodness, yes. I feel like my head is a cauldron of different cultures, East and West, all made familiar and comfortable -- so much so that I cannot imagine not knowing a little bit about everything all around the world. Linguistically I seem to have an innate ability to understand roots of words from many languages I have never formally studied, and to correctly infer meanings. Culturally it all mixes together into an acceptance of many possibilities, an open-ended permanent state of wonder. The concept of the imaginary and the fantastic has been so firmly ingrained that only recently did it finally sink in why some otherwise quite intelligent and educated people do not enjoy reading fantasy or science fiction -- they really truly do not think in such terms. Even though they may have learned *critical thinking*, they certainly have no background whatsoever in

"*wonder thinking*." Difficult to conceive, for those of us who are steeped in imagination, but there it is.

Vision: *Dreams of the Compass Rose* has an interesting premise. I believe you call it a collage novel. Can you tell us about the plot and what that term means?

First of all, DREAMS is a weird book. And I am not just saying it because I want to intrigue you. It is weird because I, the author, keep finding new revelations, new aspects of wisdom in it every time I return to read it. This has never happened to me before. At most, I am done with a story and that's that, no more "Aha!" moments. With this one, it has a life of its own. It morphs before me, a kaleidoscope of fable and philosophical concepts. And that kinda freaks me out.

In a nutshell, DREAMS OF THE COMPASS ROSE is the story of ... well, many people. And it takes place in an ancient alternate world. In a sense, it is one big fable about the nature of truth and evil -- notice, I don't say "good and evil."

The Compass Rose itself is a unifying symbol, a metaphor of life's directions: Past, Present, Future... Alternate. The Dreams and the characters populating them, all move along the four temporal-spatial directions. And with them, so do you, the reader.

You might find it odd that I cannot really name a main character, but this is part of the book's weirdness. I suppose

that Nadir is the closest to being a main character. He is certainly a personal favorite of mine. Nadir, whose name means "the lowest of the low" because he had no better name when he was first found as a young dark-skinned boy in the gutter. Nadir is an angry, proud, but honest little boy who gets himself in trouble and then into an odd state of honor-bound slavery. The relationship between him and the sadistic woman whom he serves for the greater part of his life is a motif all throughout. And yet, there is no fair way to single out any one character in this tapestry of many points of view, personalities, places, times, and ethnicities (most of the characters are non-white -- Nadir is black, and serves a woman who is ethnically Chinese).

Which brings me to the explanation of the structure. A "collage novel" is a term I coined to refer to a collection of standalone stories set in the same universe, that have common characters who star or play supporting roles, and "visit" each other's stories. And yet, what makes this a true collage forming a distinct semantic entity (as opposed to just a random grouping of related tales) is that the individual stories, or Dreams, flow one into the other and shape a greater story meta-arc of meaning when read in order. Not one takes real precedence, and all work together to form the greater whole. And yes, there is an order of revelation, just as you would get with a traditional novel with chapters.

But Charles de Lint said it best in his review of DREAMS OF THE COMPASS ROSE in the February 2002 issue of F&SF, where he calls it "a story-cycle in which we keep coming back to the same characters, except from different viewpoints and different times in their lives. It's set in a land of desert empires that never was, though it could easily be our world--far in the future, or deep in the past."

The complete review can be found here:

<http://www.sfsite.com/fsf/depts/cdl0202.htm>

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

At the moment I write primarily fantasy and science fiction, often with a healthy dollop of romantic tension, a drop or two of dark fantasy and erotica, and a sprinkling of mystery. I've found that I have no interest in poetry, very little in "mainstream" (which I find mostly boring and depressing, a genre of modern humdrum fiction without imagination or direction) and in fact am rather annoyed with the genre boundaries altogether.

What I write is heroic hopeful fiction of the imagination, fables and metaphors that present the world as a multi-layered onion of realities, and my underlying eclectic philosophy. I don't consider myself a storyteller so much as an interpreter of patterns; I explain the world -- to myself foremost -- using extended metaphors in story form. And although this might be

considered anathema, I like to imbue all patterns with moral meaning. It's fun to pretend that the world itself is really just an amazing slipstream story and all the real life details are simply plot points reaching forward to a logical resolution.

Since I believe that fiction of the imagination in all its flavors -- also called speculative fiction -- is the only "genre" without boundaries, I see no reason to switch. Fantasy is what one makes of it, and my make is to produce literature of hope. I like how Sherwood Smith calls it writing the world not as it is but as it ought to be.

Vision: Who were your influences in writing?

A better question would be to ask what were my conscious influences. Because I think the sum total of my reading experience -- the classics, mythology, fairy tales, and all the fantasy and SF I have ever read, make up the subconscious foundation. Place on top of it the exotic dark beauty of Tanith Lee's style, the in-depth analysis of Leo Tolstoy, the romanticism of George Sand, the earnest humanity of Marion Zimmer Bradley, the sophistication of Fyodor Dostoyevsky, the young wonder of Andre Norton, the wit and elegance of Oscar Wilde, the urgency of C.J. Cherryh, the nostalgic sorrow of J.R.R. Tolkien, the layer magic of Roger Zelazny, the mayhem magic of Piers Anthony, the intricacy of Gene Wolfe, the spirit of Homer.... I need to stop, really.

Vision: Do you think small press companies like Wildside are more likely to buy something unusual than the big publishers?

Yes, small presses in general are more likely to buy niche-defying work from a new and relatively unknown writer, because they operate on a small scale and usually don't have all that much invested in any given writer. Thus, their risk tolerance is greater.

I submitted my novel DREAMS OF THE COMPASS ROSE directly to Wildside -- it has never been to any other publisher -- knowing that my best chances are to take the fate of this weird book into my own hands, since small press gives you a bit more control over production (for example, my own cover art) and promotion. And in this case, there was also a modicum of excitement and curiosity, since I think that unlike most other small presses, World Fantasy Award-winning Wildside Press is in a unique and fascinating position, primed to take full advantage of the changing face of publishing. Not to mention that it's currently behaving like an aggressive growth fund in a bull market, quickly growing, with nearly 500 books in print right now, with major distribution by Ingram, Baker & Taylor, and Bertram's (UK).

If I had gone to a major traditional publisher first, it would have been a guaranteed waste of my time at this point in my career. Big publishers say they love new groundbreaking work, and in some ways they do. But usually it is after it has proven its

marketability that you hear this long exhaled breath of secret relief. And unlike the smaller and upcoming presses, they are not going to take chances with a Published Small Fry as readily on something as offbeat as my "collage" novel. Maybe if I had been a known name like Robert Jordan, instead of a PSF, I'd get away with one weird book. But only one.

Vision: Your earlier sales were in short stories. Do you think that either the writing or publishing of those stories has helped your career as a novelist?

I am a firm believer in cumulative effect and varied exposure. Pro short story sales help tangentially, and at times they can be mentioned in cover letters. But this is on a very limited basis. Overall, a novelist career is a wholly separate beast, and unless you have won awards or some other distinctions with your short fiction, you basically start from scratch. The only thing a short fiction sale can do is testify that you can write. And cover letters filled with semi-pro or lesser sales credits actually look naive to most New York major book publishers. Keep that in mind before you mention those sales.

Vision: Let's discuss promotion for newly published authors. If you could give a person just three rules that they should do, what would they be?

I give quite a few more than three rules in my upcoming Speculations article "Publicity And Self-Promotion Nouveau:

Doing It With Class." However, the three I would like to give here are:

1) Treat everyone in the industry as a fellow human being and potential friend first, anything else (editor, agent, publisher, potential Nebula voter) later.

2) Information, more so than connections, is the thing of most value in the industry. If you hold information, you become a desired connection yourself. See how that works?

3) Be persistent and don't be afraid to think outside the box. This advice is similar to writing advice. Writers already know to be persistent in sending out their work and accumulating rejection slips. Now they need to realize that publicity and self-promo works the same way too. You just do it on a regular basis, a little every day, forever and ever. It's a good thing that you have some control over publicity, much more than you have over fiction sales.

And the second part of the equation is, be creative and original in your publicity efforts. Analyze what it is that you are promoting, your work's strengths and weaknesses and specific niche, and don't be afraid to try things that other people have not. In fact, try a little bit of everything. Yes, there is the danger of negative publicity, and no one really knows when things can backfire, but that's why you need to use your head

and think ahead before you act. Weigh your risk potential, and then go for it.

I invite anyone who is further interested in this topic to subscribe to the Yahoo!Groups mailing list that I run, called Publicity And Self-Promotion For Writers:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/PublicityAndSelf-PromotionForWriters/>

Vision: And what would you tell them *not* to do?

Don't be an asshole. *grin* Don't be blind to facts. Don't annoy/pester/tease/harass anyone who may be in a position to help you with your efforts -- bookstore managers, fans, con committees, fellow writers. Although this planet contains over 6 billion humans, it really is a small place.

Vision: What changes do you see as the role of authors in the upcoming years?

Oh, where to begin.... In brief, I see a world of mixed media, a world of publishers scaled down and scaled up to a manageable mean, who handle traditional print runs, print-on-demand, e-books, audio-books, and any other media -- each publisher offering all of the above elements under their house imprints, and customized to fit the potential sell-through of any work of fiction or non-fiction according to well-analyzed factors.

I see Customized Publishing and the blessed return of the Backlist.

I also see an even greater number of competent authors than now, all working in this more eclectic more fast-paced market, and struggling to keep up with all these newfangled publishing options. The ones who get in on a good thing early, are the ones who earn. The ones who are not afraid of being true to themselves are the ones who persist and find a solid place for themselves and their work.

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

The internet is like money -- it depends on what you make of it and how you use it. If you invest your online time wisely, you will discover so many things and opportunities that you will be surprised. On the other hand, it's easy to fall into a web-surfing rut. My foremost advice is to first look around and see where the people you admire hang out. Then establish a strong online presence in at least one area, with the most passive being a website, and most active being a USENET or other newsgroup or electronic newsletter or online journal. Chose the level of comfort that's right for your personality and time constraints. But plan to make it a permanent regular activity, since face it, you are now a public persona, whether you like it or not, for the rest of your life.

Vision: What about conventions?

Everyone needs to go to a major convention at least once. Then, if you decide this kind of thing is for you, the next step is to get to know the industry from all sides, fan and pro, and keep your eyes and ears wide open, and your heart ready to make friends.

Vision: Any words of wisdom for new writers?

Persistence, as Ron Collins and Lisa Silverthorne always say, is the key to many things. In other words, as Holly Lisle says, never ever give up on your dreams. However, if you think you're in a writing rut, don't be afraid to start in a new direction. You are not being graded on this, you know. Well, maybe a little, but not in a sense that really counts. Where it really counts -- in your writing -- you can choose to listen to the good and bad estimation from others but only you can grade yourself.

Vision: What are your plans for the future? What are you working on now?

As soon as I turn in the final draft of LORDS OF RAINBOW, an epic fantasy and my second book, to Wildside later in 2002, I am going to be working on two rather ambitious projects. First is PANTHEON, my near future political SF trilogy, which takes place in the same universe as my story "*Rossia Moya*" (which was on the Nebula Preliminary ballot for 2000) but somewhat

later, in an Iron Honeycomb world (the Iron Honeycomb is a political iron curtain that has closed off all countries from each other and the rest of the world). The second project is the Adventures of Ruricca NoOnesDaughter trilogy, a fantasy. Both of these book series will be marketed traditionally to the big publishers.

Vision: Any last things you'd like to cover?

Just this -- always remember that you are ultimately in control of your writing but not in control of the industry -- even when things are seemingly going wrong, you have the power of choice in your own actions. So the thing to do is to learn how to surf each trend and, like a wave, always flow back. Good luck, my friends!

Show And Tell: How to Write Realistic Young Child Characters

By S.L. Viehl

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The way some authors write about very young children in their novels reminds me of something Emerson said: “Children are aliens, and we treat them as such.” Many of these child characters we’re shown seem more like products of wishful thinking, like a one year old who never cries. Others, like a two-year-old who eats with a fork and knife -- and even potty trains herself in a few days -- are just plain ludicrous. These kids might as well be aliens, because from the way they’re written, you can’t tell me they came from *this* planet.

You Mean, Kids *Can’t* Potty Train Themselves?

In reality, human beings learn their physical, mental and social skills in well-recognized stages during early childhood, from birth to five years of age. These stages are called developmental milestones, and acquiring these skills does *not* happen spontaneously or overnight. All children acquire these skills in the same, logic order – for example, a child cannot stand before he or she learns how to sit up. They also can’t reach these milestones alone, and need both practice and stimulation from both their immediate environment and family members in order to acquire and hone these skills.

Maturation of the central nervous system directly governs progress in the four main categories of child development: locomotion, hearing and speech, vision and fine movement, and social behavior. Developmental rates are largely determined genetically for each individual at the moment of conception, and later modified and influenced by environmental factors in the womb and after birth. Doctors have

discovered that gender also plays a role. Several studies show that girls often talk and/or walk at an earlier age than boys.

Yet while there are always variations in the rate of progress and attainment, most children follow a fairly predictable timetable. And whether you are a veteran parent of five, or only see kids once a year during the family reunion, it's a good idea to consider the developmental challenges your young child character faces before you begin writing, so you can show a realistic portrait to your reader.

Following is a breakdown of the four developmental categories, as well as the milestones within that category that most children reach *on average* by the age listed. Please remember that exceptionally gifted children, as well as those with any physical and/or mental handicaps, will display very different rates of developmental progress.

Do the Locomotion with Me

Locomotion is the predominant childhood development stage, probably because it's the most startling, the most encouraged, and the most visible. From the moment we're born, our genetic programming makes us strive to walk erect on two limbs. There's no developmental stage that gets us more praise as young children, either. Getting up on our own two feet, however, takes some doing.

Locomotion Milestones

- 1) Newborns have no control over their heads, bodies and limbs. It takes up to six months for infants to learn the most basic muscle control.
- 2) By six months of age, babies can hold their heads up and sit upright with support, and they can roll their bodies from back to front, and front to back.

- 3) At nine months, children begin trying to crawl, can sit without support, and use their hands to pull themselves up into a standing position.
- 4) Kids usually walk by their first birthday, but spend most of their time crawling on their hands and knees.
- 5) By eighteen months, they make the transition from crawling to walking, and start to run. These toddlers can also stoop to pick up objects, walk upstairs with support, and can crawl backwards downstairs.
- 6) By age two, children can walk up and downstairs without support, and begin honing their climbing skills.
- 7) Three-year-old children climb with confidence and agility, can throw and kick objects, and will ride small bikes (like tricycles.)
- 8) Four-year-olds can walk and run on tiptoe, and take the stairs with one foot on each step.
- 9) By age five, children can stand and jump on one leg, and are competent at playground skills such as sliding, climbing, and swinging.

See What You Can Do?

Like locomotion, vision and fine movement skills begin developing immediately, but progress in attaining the predictable landmarks is much more subtle. Until this century, doctors were not even sure newborn infants could see. We now know children begin developing hand-eye coordination from birth.

Vision and Fine Movement Milestones

- 1) Newborns connect seeing with doing by watching their own hand movements, which may also be the first milestone in becoming aware of their own consciousness.
- 2) At six months of age, babies have learned to look intently at everything. They can follow movements and reach out for objects with one or both hands.
- 3) Nine-month-olds begin grasping with index and middle fingers, and can manipulate objects with a limited amount of success.
- 4) By their first birthday, children can grasp and release objects and use both hands equally.
- 5) At eighteen months, children are stacking blocks and begin gripping crayons with help, and begin showing a use preference for the right or left hand.
- 6) Child safety caps are always vital, especially when two-year-olds display their ability to unscrew caps and open containers.
- 7) By three years of age, they will be able to unbutton clothes and hold crayons, and settle on right- or left-handedness.
- 8) Four-year-olds can copy simple letters and build high towers of blocks.
- 9) At five years old, children can differentiate colors and begin drawing recognizable images.

Talk to Me, Baby

The main contender for most-encouraged developmental skill is, of course, talking, which falls under the category of hearing and speech. Unfortunately, until vision and hearing develop sufficiently, a newborn can only communicate by crying. Parents are often amused by how intently their babies stare at them, but what most don't realize is the child is watching their mouths and listening to the sound of their voices – and learning.

Hearing and Speech Milestones

- 1) Newborns learn to recognize their mother's voice in the womb.
- 2) At six months old, infants turn to locate the source of a sound, begin to understand voice tones. They enjoy making noises and laugh out loud.
- 3) By nine months, basic words like "no" are understood and children begin babbling in strings of vowel sounds.
- 4) At one year, kids recognize their own names, have some understanding of how people feel, and know what most household objects are used for – but they may only say two or three words themselves.
- 5) By eighteen months, a toddler's vocabulary contains from five to twenty words. They also understand short sentences.
- 6) Speech skills treble by age two, when children begin concentrating on conversations around them. They can construct two-word sentences and have vocabularies of up to fifty meaningful words.

- 7) Three-year-olds enjoy bedtime stories and recognize the difference between statements, questions, and commands. They speak in sentences but often make syntax and grammar errors.
- 8) At age four, children can repeat words whispered to them from a distance of three feet. They speak fluently, in complete sentences, and begin telling stories themselves.
- 9) Five-year-olds begin making rhymes and can learn how to read short, simple words.

Let's Go Outside and Play!

Until the last half of the twentieth century, life in the home environment was virtually the only place for a child to learn and develop social behavior and play skills. Economic and lifestyle changes now compel most mothers to place their young children in day care facilities, and while this is not always viewed as an ideal situation, one benefit is that it provides wonderful social stimulation, particularly for children without siblings.

Social Behavior Milestones

- 1) Due to their developmental limitations, newborn infants cannot play or interact with others beyond communicating through crying.
- 2) By six months, kids enjoy playing peek-a-boo and looking into mirrors, but are timid with strangers.
- 3) Nine-month-old children will look for objects that are shown to them, and then hidden, which shows the beginning of memory. They will wave and clap their hands, but they are still shy or afraid of strangers.

- 4) At one year, children concentrate on putting objects in their mouth and otherwise manipulating them. They will play and show affection to parents or a familiar adult.
- 5) What some parents refer to as “the terrible twos” actually begins as early as eighteen months, when children begin actively exploring their environment while also showing irrational, selfish behavior. These toddlers constantly waver between showing affection to parents and struggling to break free.
- 6) By the two-year mark, children want to know the names of everything, and will participate in singing simple songs. They will begin to make food preferences and ask for diaper changes, which is a signal for parents to begin potty training. In keeping with their bad reputation, two-year-olds do not play well with other children, are constantly demanding and often throw tantrums.
- 7) Three-year-olds love to ask why, and can dress and undress themselves. Potty training continues and they begin to display nighttime bladder control. They will share toys with other children and can be reasoned with. They are much more affectionate toward family members and begin to show interest in strangers.
- 8) At four years, children become more independent and skillful at dressing, bathing, and personal hygiene. They prefer to play with other children and can understand the concepts of past, present, and future.
- 9) By five years old, children understand the need for rules and fair play, understand the passage of time, and enjoy being a part of a group at play.

Other Tips on Writing About Children Versus Adult Midgets

If you want to portray children in your work, but have limited or no experience with them, the best way to improve your knowledge is to actually spend time with a child who is the same age as your character. This can be a family member, such as a niece or nephew, or the child of a friend. Remember when interacting with young children that up until age four, most children are timid or afraid of strangers, so your interaction may be limited to observation only.

To understand how young children relate to each other and adults, try volunteering for an afternoon at a local day care center as a teacher's assistant. Spending eight hours with a class of twenty two- to three-year-olds can change your whole perspective on social behavior and interaction among young children, as well as give you some insight on the specific demands your young child character will have on the adults in your story.

The main point is, don't try to idealize young children in your work. Avoid fantasizing about what you think *your* kid might be like, or what you can drag from the dim memories of your own childhood. You'll end up writing about children who are just midgets version of your adult self.

In the real world, any parent will tell you that young kids are regularly loud, messy, defiant, and a hell of a lot of work – as well as being charming, affectionate and filled with the kind of wonder that dazzles everyone around them. Capture some of that for your reader and show them the real deal.

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Women, Men, Families and Fiction

By Kay House & Justin Stanchfield

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Family background can add tremendous depth to your characters. Minor children as active characters add poignancy to your theme. Despite this, many writers make little reference to family, and children often appear only as props. Why?

Children and family do not belong in every story, but the problem is broader than that. Many writers hurt otherwise excellent stories by including poorly drawn children, which leads us to suspect that insufficient information and inadequate research play a part. Still, more and more writers use fully realized minor children as characters in stories intended primarily for adults, creating complex, realistic family relationships to deepen their adult characters. Here are a few examples.

I. Stories with Kids

Most of the examples of stories with minor children were written by women. This probably reflects the fact that, even today, a woman is still statistically likelier than a man to be the primary caregiver for minor children. It follows that more women than men will have extensive experience in childcare to draw on to reduce the amount of research required to write minor children effectively. More and more fathers, however, are becoming deeply involved parents. We expect this to reduce the research imbalance as time goes on.

Many science fiction and fantasy novels are bildungsromans.^{1[i]} Still, fully developed minor children abound in this genre. In Mercedes Lackey's *Arrows of the Queen*, we meet Talia, the heroine, on her thirteenth birthday.^{1[ii]} *Arrows of the Queen* also features Elspeth, a spoiled seven-year-old who is heir apparent to the throne of Valdemar. Elspeth expects Talia to kneel because she is in the "Presence of the Heir to the Throne."^{1[iii]} Instead, Talia turns the tables on Elspeth, and wins Queen Selenay's admiration. Later scenes between Talia and Elspeth evoke the large family setting in which older children serve as auxiliary parents for their younger siblings.^{1[iv]}

In *Bones of the Past*, by Holly Lisle, two-year-old Kirtha accompanies her mother on a quest. One character objects that he doesn't want "a helpless mother and her tiny babe"^{1[v]} to come on the expedition. Lisle's dialog for two-year-old Kirtha is especially well done. In one scene, Kirtha gives her shirt to another child.^{1[vi]} Later, the action turns on a beautifully realized play sequence among children of differing ages. At this point,

^{10[x]} Susan Wittig Albert, *Thyme of Death*, ISBN 0-684-19522-4 (New York, 1992).

^{11[xi]} Susan Wittig Albert, *Witches Bane*, ISBN 0-864-19636-0 (New York, 1993) pages 98-105.

^{12[xii]} Susan Wittig Albert, *Rosemary Remembered*, ISBN 0-425-14937-4 (New York, 1993) pages 198,202, 239-243, 263-275.

^{13[xiii]} Nora Roberts, *Rising Tides*, ISBN 0-515-12317-X (New York, 1998) p. 18.

the children and their motivations drive the plot.^{1[vii]}

C. J. Cherryh's *Cyteen*^{1[viii]} and Anne Bishop's *Daughter of the Blood*^{1[ix]} both focus on exceptional girls as heroes. Exceptional children represent a special challenge. The temptation to write them as small adults is almost overwhelming. Neither Cherryh nor Bishop succumbs, and the results are outstanding. In *Cyteen*, Cherryh takes Ariane and her friends from toddler to teen with remarkable skill. In fact, the body of Cherryh's work is replete with unusually well drawn teenagers.

Susan Wittig Albert writes about an amateur detective, China Bayles. China encounters family issues through Brian, the 11-year-old son of her lover, Mike McQuaid. In *Thyme of Death*, China and McQuaid (a single dad) enjoy the luxury of a weekend while Brian stays with his grandparents.^{1[x]} In a later book, Albert demonstrates her skill in writing middle-school children. China learns more about Brian, but their exchanges are indirect, demonstrating the non-interactions that typify exchanges between adults and children in middle school.^{1[xi]} In *Rosemary Remembered*,^{1[xii]} the way Brian and China interact builds her development as a character. At one point, Brian drives the plot with his persistence in seeking a sci-fi character holo-card.

Finally, in her *Quinn Brothers Trilogy*, Nora Roberts brings to life on the page two minor children who are critical to the success of the story – one a charming toddler, the other a rebellious, frightened adolescent boy. Roberts demonstrates adult-toddler relations at their best in one short scene. Ethan, the protagonist, finds that the neighbor who comes in to help with the cleaning has brought her daughter with her. In *Rising Tides*, we find

¹⁴[xiv]

Aubrey, the toddler, in the front room with Ethan.

... "Ouch!" She giggled, rubbed his face again. "Beard."

Obliging, he skimmed his knuckles over her smooth cheek, then jerked his hand back. "Ouch. You've got one, too."

"No! You."

"No." He pulled her close and planted noisy kisses on her cheeks while she screamed with delight. "You."^{1[xiii]}

Roberts uses proto-sentences to convey the child's age more effectively than description. Despite their tiny attention spans, toddlers can be as persistent as older children in pursuing an objective. Roberts shows both children as characters whose motivations and actions help drive the plot. In *Rising Tides*, the children are not passive victims. They are characters through whom adult characters see their own dilemmas in a more compassionate light.

Many horror writers use children as props. Children are added as 'extras' to fill a scene, or worse, as victims to elicit the reader's sympathy. However, writers such as Stephen King portray children with an honesty and realism seldom seen in other genres. It is rare for King to write a novel without including at least one character who is a child. Often even King's adult characters are motivated by events from their childhoods, a lesson lost on too many lesser storytellers. Children in fiction, like their

adult counterparts, should act with a healthy sense of ^{1[xiv]} self-interest, sometimes selfishly doing whatever they think is best for themselves. Selfishness is an all too human trait. Good writers use it. Great writers live and die by it.

II. Stories with Family

Both sexes are well represented among writers who, like King, use family relationships to show the motivation of adult characters. Dorothy L. Sayers' Peter Wimsey novels weave family relationships in and out of the series. The family is functional, but has some relationships that work better than others. *Clouds of Witness*,^{1[xv]} finds Lord Peter facing a mystery in which his older brother and younger sister are murder suspects. Neither is willing to tell him the truth. Peter finds comfort in a close relationship with his mother in *Strong Poison*,^{1[xvi]} in which he falls in love with a woman accused of murder. Throughout the series, Sayers uses Peter's love for his family of origin and his desire for a family of his own as a way to "knock the sawdust out of "^{1[xvii]} Peter. That it no doubt "hurt like hell,"^{1[xviii]} was not important, because, as Peter concludes, "What would that matter if it made a good book?"^{1[xix]} David Weber's Honor Harrington also has a healthy family, which Weber cites^{1[xx]} as a reason for the strength of Harrington's character.

Dick Francis' *Straight* focuses on the relationship of adult siblings. Derek, the protagonist, deals with the death of a brother nineteen years his senior. He finds himself regretting lost opportunities for deeper friendship with his brother.^{1[xxi]} Francis' Sid Halley novels^{1[xxii]} show an unusual twist on family relationships. He creates an in-law bond so strong that it survives the divorce. Finally, in *Nerve*, Francis explores the effects of family expectations on career choice, health and achievement.^{1[xxiii]}

S. L. Viehl, in her *Stardoc* novels, uses family dysfunction as a plot driver. Scenes between father and daughter^{1[xxiv]} demonstrate an unhealthy relationship in which a parent wants to live the child's life as well as his or her own. Cherijo's refusal to be owned and controlled drives the action at many decision points. The plot of Roberta Gellis' *Thrice Bound*^{1[xxv]} is similarly driven by the protagonist's need to escape from an abusive father.

More women than men write romance, a genre often criticized for concentrating too much on family. This complaint seems unfair. Family opposition is a classic source of conflict in romance. An invitation to "meet the folks" signals that a relationship has commitment potential. Romance writers sometimes build a series by basing book two on the romance of some friend or relative of the bride (or groom) in book one. Cameo appearances by principal characters from previous books can be overdone, but readers want to know how their old friends are doing, and it would be inappropriate to deny them

III. Stories for Kids

Children's writing was once a male-dominated genre. Frank L. Baum, E. B. White, Edgar Rice Burroughs, and dozens of other men wrote the bulk of children's fiction throughout the early decades of the twentieth century. Even writers such as Roald Dahl, who tried unsuccessfully for years to distance himself from children's novels - most of his stories were spy thrillers and occasionally erotica - is best remembered for the children's classic *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*.^{27[xxvi]}

Starting in the 1960's women began writing children's and young adult novels in increasing numbers. Simultaneously, especially in the young adult genre, the writing style became harder edged, grittier, more true to life. Today, authors like Jane Yolen, Sherwood Smith, and Annette Curtis Krauss write with such brutal honesty and attention to detail that their characters absolutely breathe. Fictional families behave like real families: brothers, sisters, and parents all wrapped around each other in the complex knots that bind any flesh and blood unit together. Realism, even in science fiction, fantasy, or horror stories, has replaced the silly sweetness that once was *de rigueur* in children's literature.

Sadly, we notice that the balance between the sexes has slipped too far. Instead of becoming a genre in which the contributions of both sexes are well represented, women writers now dominate the field overwhelmingly. We suspect that some men who would otherwise write for children and young adults share Roald Dahl's concern about being over-identified with the genre. Or maybe some publishers feel that kid's writers should be either stay-at-home moms or single mothers trying to make ends meet. Regardless

of why, the imbalance is regrettable. Children need to sample a wide range of viewpoints as they find their way into adulthood. Despite the imbalance, the challenge of writing books for today's young people is exciting, and the field is very much in flux, a vital, evolving genre whose full potential has yet to be tapped by either sex.

IV. Humor

Many of the best observers of human nature are humorists. Whether men or women, humorists write about the warts and bumps of humanity and turn these flaws into something both funny and instantly recognizable. This takes a keen eye. From Mark Twain to Erma Bombeck to Patrick McManus, the art of being funny relies less on inventive plots or clever prose than on being able to see through the grimy facade of day-to-day living to the silver linings beneath. That isn't to say differences don't exist in the approach women and men take to humor. Men will often laugh at situations many women consider crude. Still, the work of a good writer transcends differences, not just between the sexes but between cultures as well. Good humor is more than a simple set-up and punch line. The best humor is a fun-house mirror that strips away pretension and prejudice to let us laugh at ourselves and with each other.

Well-drawn families and children contribute immensely to stories intended for any market, but a badly written child can only detract from your work. To portray children well means serious research even if you happen to know a child of the age in question. In the end, the question of who writes better families, women or men, is probably a matter of taste, where verisimilitude, like beauty, truly is in the eye of the beholder.

The Perils of Cardboard

By Ruth Pischke

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Writing is a craft founded on passion. It burns inside and we ache to put to paper the visions that we see in our mind's eye. Yet it is that same driving need that can lead writers to make mistakes. One of the more common mistakes is creating a cardboard family. The loner with no past, the orphaned thief, the placid man who seeks to avenge his murdered family, the abandoned youth who somehow ends up being the savior of the world, and so on. It's most noticeable in Fantasy, but it happens in most genres. The cardboard family is a one-dimensional, stereotypic creation meant to serve one purpose: get the hero into the middle of the action.

Why does it happen? It could be that the idea of crafting a believable family intimidates some writers who are afraid that they will never do justice to the concept of the family. From my own experience, though, I suspect that it is something else altogether. Families are ignored in the novice's mistaken belief that they are not important. If the story then sells, that belief is validated and the writer continues to make the same mistake.

When we first start to write, we want to use all those ideas that threaten to burst out of our skulls. Our hands are twitching, and we are confident that world building is a simple matter of making up the impressively magnificent hero, the stupendously hateful villain, a loyal sidekick or two and a few exotic-sounding locations. There are times when a character design looks like a chart from a role-playing game instead of a person's history. The novice chooses not to develop the character's family because it seems tedious and unimportant. That is, if it even occurs to the novice to consider it in the first place.

Novices can be in such a hurry to start writing that orphans and cardboard families look like easy shortcuts to get the story moving. Writers, no matter how inexperienced, know that there must be some reason that the hero ended up in the middle of the disastrous mess that is the story's central crisis. The novice can be tempted to use the first response that comes to mind, not realizing that the most obvious answers are rarely the correct ones.

As a result, Joe becomes an orphaned thief, Jane becomes the young woman fleeing from her greedy father who wants her to marry the evil mayor, and Bill becomes a silent brooding warrior because the Forces Of Evil slaughtered his family. The answers that sound so good to the novice ear are only cardboard solutions to a larger issue: What makes an ordinary person fight, even at the risk of death? Family. If you don't give your characters that anchor, you are crippling them.

Family is often the ultimate reason that we do things, even if we do not realize it at the time. We love, hate, fear and believe because of family. It is both our strength and our weakness. The family is where we come from, and it's where our characters come from too. Even orphans had family once and people they consider to be family now. Leaving your characters rudderless only hurts them.

The orphan character has its uses but can lure a novice into making things larger and grander than they should be. Catastrophes become world-encompassing but emotionally remote. The larger the scope of the disaster, the more abstract it can seem to the reader. People can instantly imagine personal loss or the death of an individual. The deaths of millions, however, can be too large to grasp and is reduced to mere number crunching.

The orphans themselves seem to exist in a vacuum, as though they had never had family to begin with, or are in the hands of caregivers who are always insensitive, cruel, or scheming. They exist solely to push the hero out the door and into the main plot.

When the novice writer does create a family for the character, the temptation is to turn them into an ideal image of family life. As a result, family members become faceless

and bland in their perfection. It is a result, I suspect, of wish fulfillment. Who doesn't want the perfect spouse, kids, siblings, and parents? The problem is that everyone knows these people do not exist. The reader dismisses and forgets them.

And what happens if the cardboard family is killed off in a bid to provoke sympathy? For a death to mean something, the life first has to have been important. Most of the time, the reader will have seen it coming after the first sentence. It may provoke a yawn, but is unlikely to generate much more.

The novice writer has to learn that any good tale requires a good background, and that shortcuts will only hurt the story. This includes the creation of believable families for the characters. It doesn't matter how much, or how little, stage time the family has. What is important is that the people are realistic.

Look at the family as a motivator and as a backbone. They are the source of strength your hero Joe relies on when things get tough, or the reason Jane has all those hobbies and personal rituals. Family could be the reason why Clarice will never touch a drop of alcohol, or why Bill worries obsessively that every spot and blemish might be cancer. Any character's history must inevitably include the issue of family, so why not make a real one instead of a facsimile?

It can seem overwhelming when you realize that you not only have four major characters, six side characters and a slew of villains to develop, but also their families as well. It can make novices want to throw up their hands in despair and curl up into a ball in the closet. This can be less intimidating than one might think. The family can be designed in parallel with the character, or developed from the character's already designed background.

While designing a character profile, keep asking yourself questions such as Who, Why, and When. Let the character's personality, habits, hobbies, and failed jobs and romances be a guide to what the family is like. Even the age difference between siblings can provide valuable information on how the members of the family relate to

one another. Let each question lead to another question until the result is compelling and believable.

Don't be afraid to include both dark and light in the family dynamics. A son can both love and hate his father; a daughter can both admire and resent her mother. That older brother can be an annoying jerk, and also a substitute father figure. That younger sibling that steals the clothes from your character's closet can also be the one who instinctively knows how to solve thorny problems. Mom can be an alcoholic who becomes a horror when she's drunk, but is loving when she's sober. Dad might come from the generation that feels awkward about expressing affection and seems distant to his confused teenage daughter.

It is vital that you be honest with yourself and resist the urge to tone down things that upset you. Take advantage of them instead. Ask yourself how your characters feel about their parents, spouses, siblings, in-laws, and children. What do they love about their family, and what do they hate? Which family members do they feel closest to? What family members do they have the most trouble dealing with? What subjects will spur a friendly or intense conversation? Which subject is guaranteed to leave everyone angry and upset? The list of questions to ask is endless, but never forget to find out why things are the way they are. Always ask yourself "Why?"

People are who they are because of their families. Their entire world is colored by where they came from and what their circumstances were. Families aren't stereotypes in real life, so they shouldn't be in fiction either. A family doesn't have to be totally bad for someone to want to leave, and a family doesn't have to be perfect for someone to fight to the death to protect them. Cardboard may be useful in some situations, but it doesn't hold up very well under pressure.

Characters may be fabrications but they are people nonetheless. The novice writer should learn to see characters as people in their own right, and give them the depth they need to come to life. It is the characters that live and breathe, that have an existence outside that of the writer, who have the biggest impact on the reader.

Tame your impatience and create fully fleshed characters, ones that have a genuine past. Create families that can be anchors for your characters to rely on for that time when you will put them through hell. Turn your back on cardboard.

Exploiting Your Character's Parental Bond

By Shane P. Carr

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The bond between a parent and child in a fiction story can be exploited in interesting ways. As many know, the bond between a mother and child is nearly unbreakable. Just try to take a newborn puppy away from its mother -- chances are you'll get a low guttural growl warning you away. This protective nature isn't something reserved for lower animals: do the same thing to a human and you'll find a similar primal response.

This bond can be explored in various ways in writing. Think about the original *Star Wars* trilogy. In the first movie we saw Luke's aunt and uncle (surrogate parents) die at the hands of the evil Empire. This led to a driving motivation for Luke to take up arms and battle the empire. In *The Empire Strikes Back*, Luke is told that Darth Vader is his real father. This makes for an interesting plot twist. Since the person responsible for the death of Luke's surrogate parents turns out to be a real parent, Luke now has the inner conflict of fighting his own father. In *Return of the Jedi* we see, at the end of the movie, how the parental instinct of Darth Vader takes over when the emperor nearly kills Luke. Evil couldn't overcome the parental instinct to protect a child.

We see the parental bond explored in many fantasy stories. In one such story, a group of adventurers raided a dragon's lair for treasure. In the next chapter, the dragon attacked the town, and the local militia gathered to slay the dragon. When they confront the dragon at the climax of the story, they learned that the group of adventurers had stolen one of the dragon's eggs when they looted the lair. The dragon had traced the egg to the town and was now unleashing its parental rage trying to flush out the adventurers and recover its egg. This makes an interesting conflict as the reader tries to decide who is in the right: the adventurers who unknowingly took the egg, or the dragon,

who killed many innocent folks while trying to save it. See how the parental bond can add some interesting conflict to your story?

These are some obvious examples of using the parental bond to add conflict. You can utilize the bond in more subtle ways and still get an added depth to your story. Let's say your story has a main character who wants to practice magic. Perhaps his parents have had a strict religious upbringing and see magic as evil. You now have a conflict between the parents and the main character. You can keep this conflict as part of your character's background or you can choose to explore it. Perhaps one of the turning points in your plot could have your character demonstrating to his parents how magic isn't evil. The scene could have the character using magic to save the life of a younger sibling.

There are countless ways to use the parental bond to flesh out the lives of your characters, and many of the ways will become apparent as you work through your characters' backgrounds. If you take the time to explore the various possible conflicts that can be created in your particular story, you may find one that will push your story to new heights and better bring your characters to life.

EXERCISE: Exploiting the Parental Bond

Take a character from one of your stories. Think about his or her background and parents. Use one of the parents to create a conflict with your character. The conflict should expose the strength of the bond the character shares with the parent.

Themes to use:

- Parent and character have opposing viewpoints (e.g., war, politics, religious beliefs, education, etc.)
- Character or parent make great sacrifice for the other

- Character finally gets long-sought approval from parent
- A scenario causes the bond between your character and parent to collapse (consider secondary scenario that redeems the bond)
- Put the parental bond in conflict with another character that shares a similar type of bond with your character (e.g., a love interest, mentor, etc.)

When you are finished, examine what kind of depth the bond scenario has added to your character. Perhaps you will find a situation that will help add to or expand your current story or novel. At the very least, you should end up with a better understanding of your character's motivations.

Dare you write about *your* family?

By Robert A. Sloan

© 2002, By Robert A. Sloan

Every writer comes from a different family situation -- including those they love and fear to offend, family members who send them screaming in terror, or relatives about whom they feel embarrassed. It's a tough juggling act. Writing in depth about life demands looking at the people you know best, but writing about them realistically may cause domestic problems. Nobody's perfect. The people you love most are flawed and their flaws may be what make them interesting to write about. The people you can't stand may have unexpected virtues. Sometimes it can be hard to look at them honestly in their context, recognizing their good points, when old pains or unresolved conflicts get in the way. No one said it's easy to be a writer!

I'm going to show how I handle this situation with a personal example of a loved family member who's dead. Her feelings won't be hurt by this article, which has to come a lot closer to life than the characters I've drawn from living family members. Because I chose someone I loved very much, the portrait's more sympathetic than if I drew from a dead family member that I'm still angry at. Family conflicts can drag on for years, even a lifetime, because even if they're irreconcilable, family is still family. You can choose your friends, but not your family.

I've based many characters in novels on my grandmother. She was an incredible woman: smart, dynamic, sweet, wise, skilled, and one of the most subtle women I've known in my life. During the Depression, while my grandfather was unemployed, she started working at a beauty shop and wound up owning four of them. She sold her businesses as soon as he got work and retired to become a housewife. She made "housewife" a profession she loved. At times she bordered on Mary Poppins with the way she made life fun for my sister and me.

She also discouraged my writing. The spoonful of honey she put on her disapproval made it so much harder just to tell what was going on than in fights with family members who openly tried to stop me from writing. I did not know why every few months I'd fall into pits of suicidal despair and feel as if my life was a worthless, empty fraud. I let myself get distracted by everything else that a high school kid ever wanted, when deep down I was betraying myself by not writing and giving it my best. I felt as strongly about my writing then as I do now. It is central to my self-image and my life. She honestly disapproved. Conflict -- that was a core irreconcilable conflict.

She's long dead. It took me years after her death to figure out that her distractions always coincided with my attempts to get writing done or buy writing supplies. I had good teachers in high school. I had Mr. Mazurek cheering me on, convinced I was the next great dark poet of my times and fully expecting me to sell novels too. I had thought no one appreciated my writing, but this high school teacher did.

The problem was that one of my nearest and dearest family members, someone I trusted, didn't approve of anyone wasting time reading or writing. She was happier with the idea of my going out and partying, being social and dressing well. She said things that suggested this was her general attitude.

"Don't you get bored just sitting there for hours trying to write? Let's go out and do something."

She was always on the go. She couldn't imagine someone might be happier staying home than going out. Going out was its own reward to her. She wasn't doing it as something to make me do what she wanted. She just projected her own feelings onto everyone around her, as many people do. From her point of view, she was trying to cheer me up. It must have been frustrating to her all the times I got upset over not being able to write. As a writer, I am now able to see it from her side of things too.

If she were alive, tackling this issue might really hurt her feelings. She was the woman who held my head every time I vomited as a little kid. She was also the woman who sent me Care Packages in college, and used to spend hundreds of dollars on crafts

tools I made my living with when I wound up poor. She liked doing crafts, so she didn't think they were a waste of time like reading. She was the one who got me to a doctor for a Gym Slip, and ended the nightmare of required athletics I wasn't physically capable of doing. She was just a Mary Poppins with a slant; she didn't like the idea of my turning into a pale indoor scholarly writer who never went out.

She also played mind games. She was Machiavellian enough that she would've survived a Florentine Ducal Court. She ruled everything and everyone around her. It's entirely possible under it all that she just decided it was better to be loved than to be feared. No matter what it was, she did what she wanted and she got what she wanted. The only thing that dared stand against her was Death; when Grandpa was gone, that almost killed her. Almost. She grieved for one terrible year, and then she picked herself up, went into beauty work again and lived another decade.

I loved her. I still do love her. It's a hard question what to write and what not to write.

I know that I answer that in fiction by jumbling the truth with fiction.

I'll take some particular element of my grandmother as a person, say the way she was so ladylike and so strong, and then add bits from other people in similar situations. I even use abstract ideas that fit the character and make the story work. The character of Mrs. Arcadia Evans in *Raven Dance* is based in part on my grandmother's good side, like the rose garden. My real grandmother loved to garden, and she grew wonderful roses. It was always eerily perfect.

She always grew bumper crops of great tomatoes and used them in her cooking. They may turn up as background for another character who likes to cook. I could use the memories of her tomatoes and her pasta sauce for a male Italian cook who likes to garden, and it would still ring true.

She once showed me a faded old photo from when she was a fashion-to-the-minute party girl flapper with short, perfectly fingerwaved black hair. She joked that she looked like a gangster's moll. She was gorgeous. She told wonderful stories about her youth.

Some of those will come back in other fiction. She startled me at one point when she pointed out one of those photos where she'd posed with half a dozen equally gorgeous, fashionable young men and cheerfully told me almost all her male friends were gay. My grandmother was like the gal in Cabaret -- not exactly a normative Grandmother!

In order to write anything at all about her, I have to break up the facets of her life. I have to focus topically, whether I'm drawing on her mind games and Machiavellian intrigues, how a wise woman can comfort a sick child, or how a wild young woman can maintain her virginity and fidelity to her equally faithful husband despite ethnic differences and family infighting. Looking at her that way, I'm stunned again. There's a Romance Heroine lurking in that flapper girl photo from my memory. She looks wild, drinks a little but she's good; in all those old fashioned ways she's. In the end, the aristocratic Italian girl who fled Italy gets together with the poor German boy who works hard, and they're so much in love that 47 years later it's still fiery.

That's a book that if she were alive, she might approve of -- or she might not. I never could second-guess her when she was alive. Trying to do it now is pointless at best. I'd have to assume something, and I might be a bit better off guessing positive than negative. It won't hurt her, and it will keep the best in her alive. Most of her anecdotes were good ones. There's a wealth of material in just this one family member's stories, but when I do fiction, I still mix it up with other sources.

Dare I *not* write about my family? Anyone seen that close up will have flaws. That's what makes fiction interesting. Characters can't be flawless, but people outside the family will usually keep their embarrassments to themselves. I can't write characters just from the social distance of acquaintances and coworkers who put their best foot forward most of the time. If I don't write from my experiences of my family, if I try to whitewash them, I'm left with characters who bore my readers.

One hard solution is to just grit my teeth, be honest, be self-honest, and do it. When I was a portrait artist down in New Orleans, I used to work on those drawings detail by detail. I put in wrinkles and moles. I put in crooked teeth and lumpish noses, double

chins and funny eye shapes. I didn't expect to sell a dang one of them because of that realism. Inevitably though, an old woman would look at hers and exclaim, "You flattered me! Look at this, honey, he made me look so young! I look so good!"

All I'd done was to show her smile lines, pose her with the sun on her face in a way that brought out the highlights on her hair and then draw realistically. Perhaps that's my best answer to "Do I dare write about my family?"

I haven't lied about my family in my fiction. They, and anyone else I've drawn inspiration from, may recognize a detail or an anecdote. But when it's too close to home, I give them good lighting.

Heroes Have Families?

By Francine M. Seal

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Science fiction and fantasy heroes seldom have families, or if they do, they're severely dysfunctional. When writing stories, there are some very good reasons for this, both social and psychological.

First, it's unlikely that the hero of the story will be younger than ten years old. That's because children in our society are watched almost constantly. If they're not under the watchful parental eye, they're in school or being babysat or watched by neighbors - even total strangers, like the people who have appointed themselves as "child protectors." You end up with a society much like ours, where a child can't have a legitimate accident without some busybody calling child protective services and raising the ugly specter of child neglect or even abuse.

Today when a child disappears for two hours or more, usually even the most lax parents will start calling friends and neighbors. After that it doesn't take long for the police to be involved. That pretty much eliminates adventures where the hero is gone for days, weeks, or more.

Should the child be lucky enough to have his adventure and return safely (with no cuts, scratches, or bruises) without time passing for his family, he's off to a safe start. But the minute he starts talking about amazing adventures with mythic creatures or people with magical abilities, people may start wondering about why the child is avoiding reality. If enough people hear the child and the child cannot be dissuaded from talking about these adventures, then parents will be encouraged to clamp down on the child's imagination, provide more structured activities, or even take the child to a psychiatrist. In any case the child will not be believed and will likely come to doubt the adventures even happened.

So much for children as heroes in our society.

Theoretically a young teenager could survive in our society long enough to have an adventure, if he were precocious and wily enough. However, up until the child graduates or drops out of high school or is otherwise emancipated, he will face the same problems encountered by a younger child. What may change is the type of abuse suspected and perhaps the identity of the suspected abuser. If abuse is ruled out, then the child may, again, be taken to a psychiatrist to get him to deal with reality in a more mature manner.

Even Harry Potter had to turn 13 before he could go to Hogwart's. The premise in those books is that magic is real, but the Dursley's (who have raised Harry), along with most of the rest of Mundania (the non-magic population), ignore it. And even though *Harry Potter* is less an adventure or quest than it is a coming of age story, he is still under watchful eyes, for good or evil, if only because of who his parents were.

Now let's consider adults. A person in his twenties is usually just starting out on his own. He probably has a job, bills, and perhaps even a social life. Disappearing for any length of time without a reasonable explanation results in lost jobs, loss of cars and other items bought on time, and a definite downward trend in the social life, not to mention the very real possibility of a call by worried friends or family reporting a missing person. Law enforcement officials won't exactly look favorably on tales of fighting dragons, rescuing fair maidens, or other "unlikely" scenarios as rational explanations for a person to go missing for extended periods.

Heroes don't usually have significant others. Indiana Jones doesn't have a girlfriend; neither does James Bond. Ian Fleming gave Bond a wife only to kill her immediately. What good is a secret agent if he's always worrying about the safety of his wife?

If we ignore the social reasons, there are still other, psychological reasons why a hero shouldn't have a family, particularly the older heroes. One very significant reason is distraction.

Imagine if you will, that our heroine, Magic Mary, will be gone for two months while on a quest for a magical amulet guaranteed to reverse pollution. She will leave behind two children, Difficult Debbie and Subdued Sam, and a devoted husband, Reliable Richard. Being a very good wife and mother, Magic Mary makes arrangements to call home every evening.

The first two or three calls are full of "I miss you" and "I love you." Then little Debbie gets in a fight at school, and during the ensuing ruckus stomps on a teacher's foot, breaking the poor woman's big toe. On top of that, the child refuses to apologize and spits in the principal's face while waiting for Reliable Richard to pick up her up. What's Mary's most logical reaction? To speed home as fast as possible and get her little girl out of trouble, or to hurry home to apply some corrective influence to the child's posterior. In either case, the end result is that Mary would rush home.

But Mary can't go home, not now any way. She's on a vital quest, one that will save the world. So Mary just puts Debbie and her temper tantrums out of her mind and pursues her goal. It would take an exceptionally strong, perhaps even unfeeling, mother to push those worries aside.

Months later Mary is within sight of the amulet but must fight off a hoard of goblins and two very disgruntled dragons to get to it, but it's time to call home. Does Mary hold up her hands and say, "Wait a minute, guys, gotta' call home. Take a five minute break." I don't think so. If she did our poor suffering reader would chuck the book in the fireplace and say good riddance.

So Mary can't call this time, even though she's called every single day at this time for two months. What happens at home? Does Richard think, "Well, she must be out of range or her batteries have run down." Not likely. He's more likely to think something along the lines of, "Ohmigod, she's been hurt. Why did I let her go? What am I going to tell the kids? What'll I tell our friends who think she's off taking care of her sick mother?"

When Mary finally is able to call, or shows up at home, she may have some major reassuring to do or she may find that Reliable Richard is tired of being reliable and

wants a wife who stays at home and doesn't worry him or the children or complicate their lives so much.

So while it's true that families can be the source of a great deal of pleasure, for heroes there are some very good reasons why they shouldn't have them.

Where Have all the Families Gone

By Valerie Serdy

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Family relationships are among the hardest to maintain, yet they form some of the strongest bonds. Many families have unspoken rules and protocols to rival an international dinner, spelling disaster for the suitor who comes to take away Mama's baby. Our relationships with our parents are usually the first social relationships we learn and therefore tend to define how we interact with others. Our relationships with our siblings help define how we relate to our peers. Having children ourselves tends to completely redefine our relationship with our parents. So why do so few protagonists in fantasy novels have a family?

In fact, the only book I've read recently that had any family was Barbara Hambly's *Stranger at the Wedding*. And even then Kyra has abandoned her family for various reasons. Only as the novel unfolds and we see her return to her estranged family do we begin to see familial involvement in Kyra's life and the novel's plot.

That's only one novel out of seven I looked at. Those aren't good odds when you consider we all come from somewhere. We have parents, grandparents, uncles, and sisters. My cousin liked pulling and twisting my toes whenever we got in wrestling matches. My aunt smokes like a chimney, eats only macaroni and cheese, and is plump enough to hug comfortably without straining to reach around her. My mom likes watching birds and walking through cemeteries; my sister catalogs the gifts she receives and how much those gifts cost to determine whether she's been slighted. I love them all. I miss being near them, although some days, I'm very very glad there's half a continent between us.

It's a very complex and contradictory set of emotions I hold for my family. If I didn't love them so much, I couldn't possibly get so mad at the things they do or say. If I didn't love

them so much, I couldn't possibly care what they think of my life. And I'm not alone in this. Most of my friends have equally complex feelings about their own families. So why are so many characters in fantasy novels orphans? Why do so many other characters happily (and easily!) chuck it all for their dreams?

Perhaps because it's just hard to write believable relationships and additional family characters. Letting those family members mess with your carefully constructed plot is hard.

Imagine your main character has children. If Mom and Dad must leave the village to go on quest, they must either arrange childcare or take little Baby along with them. If Mom arranges childcare, as she travels she will likely feel a barrage of emotions: anger that she must leave, guilt that she left her child behind, worry, homesickness, sadness. It takes a skilled writer to interweave these emotions such that we know what Mom is feeling and how those feelings affect her decisions and actions without boring us to tears by belaboring the point.

Now imagine Mom decides to take Baby along on her quest. You as the writer must portray that child believably. Children in fiction often come across as props that can serve the same function as a family pet: cute and loved but without much intelligence. One a meager step above pet status, some children are simply comic relief. Aw, look at the cute thing Baby said. Often, children become mouthpieces for the writer. We all know the "innocence" of childhood. Writers (and TV writers especially) have been known to throw their own words into the innocent mouth of babes to make a point about the various ills of society.

But it isn't just writing child characters realistically that's hard. Children are inherently chaotic and your plot will take twists and turns because of that. If Mom decides to take Baby along on her quest, Mom still has to teach Baby proper manners when begging for supplies, social mores when talking to whores and thieves for more information, not to mention Baby's ABCs. Children get sick, have temper tantrums, run off on their own, and repeat your words at the most inopportune times. They get scared and have

nightmares; they run into your arms for hugs. This too, is part of writing child characters believably.

But maybe you think this children stuff is too hard to write about or it doesn't make sense for your 16-year-old protagonist to have children of her own. That's all right. But remember each of us *is* a child. We all started somewhere with a mother and father. We may have never met them, we may not like them now, we may love them with all our hearts. The relationship between child and parent is demanding, complicated, heart-breaking, and loving. We may not have resolved entirely how we feel about our parents, and judging from some of the titles available on the self-help bookshelves, it will take a long time for some of us to do so (*Toxic Parents* and *Divorcing Your Parents* to name a couple). Our feelings for our parents are often a bundle of contradictions. At various times, I've thought of my parents as brilliant and abusive, omnipotent and impotent, insightful and obtuse. Even the kids I know who are adopted feel the same things for their adopted parents that I feel for my biological parents. But often, they also feel a sense of loss or not belonging because they didn't know their biological parents.

Our relationships with our parents tend to color our entire outlook on life: they are the first close relationships we ever make. We often avoid or embrace people based on how they remind us of our parents. We sometimes vow to do things differently than our parents. And true to the contradictions that surround our feelings, we accept that the things our parents have done are good and we'd like to be more like them. We often involve them in our lives as we move through major life-changing events, asking them to our weddings, calling them for advice when our first baby screams through the night. We are often defined by our parents and our relationship to them.

So why do so few characters in fantasy fiction have parents (or at least parents they interact with)? Perhaps, as with characters having children, it's just too hard to write that relationship believably. If I haven't resolved my own feelings about my parents it's hard to know how my characters should act. And then, too, my plot gets complicated: if handled poorly, it could be boring or pedestrian for an adventuring character to have

bouts of homesickness and wish they could ask Mom for some advice, or maybe just get a hot home-cooked meal.

And that's too bad, really. If most genre writers continue to avoid writing family relationships, I feel we're failing. The old adage is to write what you know. But if I refuse to look closely at my own family relationships, I hide a part of me from my reader (and myself). If I don't examine these relationships closely, I may never understand why critiques come back stating that the relationships I've depicted don't seem real.

In order to improve our craft, we must reach for those challenges placed before us. How can we expect to write realistic relationships if we avoid examining the most important relationships in our lives? If the job of a writer is to shine truths on various aspects of humanity, how can we claim to do that if all our characters are orphans? If we claim to write realistic worlds, our world-building is lacking when our characters do not have a family to lean on when times get tough.

And lest you think I'm all talk, my own current work-in-progress centers on my main character's desire to pull her estranged family back together. Her life is convoluted by the presence of her father, three brothers, and her eldest brother's new wife. It's hard. I've had to face some of my feelings about my own father while writing this. It's cathartic and maddening and a challenge I'm glad I took up. Most days.

Adding family back to my work has given it a depth I never would have believed possible. By working to reconnect with and save her family, my main character has inner conflict helping to drive the external conflict and bring it home on a more personal level. Her quest matters not just to her, not just to the faceless people of her village, but also to her family. By exploring her familial relationships, I have more material to use when she falls in love and rejects that love from fear. I feel my story has an added level of realism and, perhaps, more honesty than some of the other fantasy fiction I've read. And if that honesty exists, if my themes reach out to an editor and later a reader who willingly buys a copy, well, that's all any writer can ask for.

Children Are Characters Too

By Andi Ward

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Children are people. People in fiction are characters. Characters have personalities, lives, hopes, goals, attitudes, and voices. Children certainly do too, and theirs are often more pronounced than adults. Therefore, it seems that children should be easy to write. After all, they don't have much back-story--they haven't lived that long. Their emotions tend to be out there for people to see. Children have few inhibitions about what they will say or what they will do. They are totally unabashed, self-absorbed little people.

They're also scary to portray because they are so raw, uninhibited, and open. Many authors tend to define "uninhibited" by having that character speak whatever the author wants them to say, on whatever subject pleases them, but this is only making the character a mouthpiece for the author's personal views. To be uninhibited is not to expect any consequences for what is said or done. Writing from a child's POV is to forget what it is to be an adult and worry about what everyone else will think about you. To be completely selfish and unashamed of it --to be child-like, not childish.

Children are people, but they are not "comfortable-to-write" adults. They are complex and mystifying, as adults are, but in ways that befuddle many adult writers. Adults see the world through filters they have learned through their life experiences and through what they have been taught is "proper" by their society. It's extremely hard to drop those filters when writing and when creating characters of any type. It's hard to forget personal bias when viewing a character who has not had the same experiences. This is a talent that all authors must cultivate to create any character, not just the child character.

I have heard that writers who don't have children, or have had no exposure to children, should not write them, because they will never be able to create them properly. I say that is an excuse, a cop-out, not a reason why they shouldn't write children as well as

other characters. Consider: What author has full exposure to any character not themselves? Female authors may live with their husbands and sons, but do they truly understand how the male mind and heart works? The same is true for male authors who write female characters. Authors who write stories set in far-flung times, whether historical or speculative, have no true exposure to those character's experiences, thoughts, feelings or society. And if full exposure were a mandatory element for writing a character, then there would never be any non-human characters, whether creatures found on Earth or sentient beings from another planet or dimension. Why should writing child characters be given an excuse that creating no other type of character receives?

In writing children, it is important to remember that they are characters. They may be challenging characters, but they are still characters to be drawn by the author as other characters are.

Blood is Thicker Than Water

By Bryn Neuenschwander

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Generation one: three characters.

Generation two: eight characters.

Generation three: twenty characters.

What made me think giving my main character a large family was a good idea?

Generally naming the members of the family is easy. You have your main character (MC), his father, his mother, and maybe an aunt or grandfather who is important enough to merit a name. But now I'm thirty-one characters in and I haven't even started to think about whether any of Saoran's siblings (she's my MC) and cousins have had children yet. Probably. So they'll need names, and so will the husbands and wives of all these people -- and that will just take care of Saoran's family. After that, I get to think about the family she's marrying into.

My problems don't stop with the names, either. They're only the beginning. Not all of these people will be major players in the story, of course, but enough of them will need details beyond a name to make my task monumental. There's the younger brother Saoran doesn't get along with, and the maternal cousin who's trying to manipulate her, and the aunt widely believed to be crazy, and the disaffected and ambitious half-sister . . . the list goes on and on, and it's only getting longer.

Why on earth would I put myself through this torture?

Anyone who has read Orson Scott Card's novels *Speaker for the Dead*, *Xenocide*, and *Children of the Mind* remembers the Ribeira family. It's hard to imagine those books

without Novinha's brilliant and unstable children. Yet in the original draft of *Speaker for the Dead*, they were hardly characters at all; they were cardboard cutouts, made because Novinha was Catholic and therefore should have a family. When Card stopped and devoted some attention to them, however, building them up into characters in their own right, they gave the novel a depth and a resonance it had previously been lacking.

It wasn't an easy task for him, either. Novinha has six children, but as Card points out in the novel's introduction, six children are not just six more characters. They're six more points in the web of relationships that makes up the novel. When you have two characters of real importance, it's easy; there's one relationship to think about. Three characters means three relationships, plus the way all three of them interact together. Four, then, means six two-person relationships, four three-person relationships, and one of all four together.

This is quickly getting out of hand.

I can't even do the math to figure out how many relationships there would be in a family of thirty-one people. It's not that many, of course; only one of Saoran's grandparents is still alive (two haven't even been named), and an aunt and an uncle are likewise dead. Not only can I whittle down the family that way, I can also relegate many of the cousins and cousins' spouses and the like to the sidelines as spear-carriers. Not all of them, though. And those who remain are more than enough to keep me very busy.

There is a reason, however, for me to do this. Card's Novinha was Catholic, and therefore, for accuracy's sake, he had to either give her kids, explain why she didn't have any, or change the way the Catholic church views contraception. Rather than take the easy way out, he embraced that cultural detail, and the result was a much richer novel.

That richness is what I'm after. My character lives in a setting that is comparable to the Renaissance-period -- i.e., well before reliable birth control. Moreover, she's a princess. Royal families have long used children as pawns in foreign relations, and this

world is no different. In fact, since the country is split into rival courts, intermarriage is a crucial part of diplomacy. The ruling class is infested with people related to Saoran. This is realistic, good for the novel, and a huge pain in the neck for me.

It's worth it, though. Which will hurt more: for Saoran to be betrayed by a friend who is not her kin, or for her to be betrayed by a friend who is her cousin? When it's her turn to be the one using people as pawns, will it be harder for her to send someone into a loveless diplomatic marriage when that someone is a relative she grew up with? Blood is thicker than water, and it makes treachery all the more painful.

What characters should logically be members of large families? Nearly all characters in a pre-modern society will be part of a large family, unless you're going all the way back to hunter-gatherers. Also, anyone who follows a religion that either values family or prohibits interfering with it, or those among a group of colonists or settlers. Characters who must have extensive interaction with their community could benefit from having some kin there; if the MC is off on a journey across the world or fighting for survival in the wilderness, it's less useful, unless she's locked in a cabin in the middle of a blizzard and her only company is her siblings.

Even in a contemporary novel, however, family can be a great way to differentiate your character from all those only children populating other books. It makes for richer backstory, even if inventing it drives you mad. It gives your reader a feeling that there's a world beyond the boundaries of your story, one you could tell other stories about if you were so inclined. Working with a large family can be an enormous challenge, but the payoff is worth it, as the intricate relationships play out and transform your novel from a simple tune to a symphony.

Speaker for the Dead

ISBN: 0312937385

Publisher: Doherty, Tom Associates, LLC

Xenocide

ISBN: 0312861877

Publisher: St. Martin's Press, Inc.

Children of the Mind

ISBN: 0812522397

Publisher: Doherty, Tom Associates, LLC

Fantasy Movies and the Star Wars Effect

By Forward Motion Community Members

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Star Wars had an exceptional impact on the SF community, for both good and bad. Following the release and unexpected popularity of the movie, the entire genre began to feel the force. Not only did the media tie-in (Sci-Fi) market expand (having been almost entirely Star Trek until now), but the film also had a ripple effect on the writing of traditional SF material. If nothing else, space opera had a powerful resurgence, which also gave rise to counter material, like cyberpunk.

This year we've seen two powerful fantasy movies released that drew exceptional attention again. Will they have the same effects on the fantasy writing market that Star Wars had on SF? It is unlikely that either will do much for the media tie-ins, since neither of these movies is likely to spin off that kind of writing material. However, will Lord of The Rings spawn a new round of quest novels? Will Harry Potter inspire a surge of children's fantasy, or even urban fantasy?

Here are questions asked of the writers at Forward Motion:

1. Will the movies have as much general effect as Star Wars had with SF by making fantasy more accepted by the general population?
2. Will the movies trigger a resurgence in the fantasy publishing field?
3. Will the market favor one kind of fantasy over another?
4. Are the movies and their popularity going to change or influence the type of material YOU are going to write?

5. Had you read the books before you saw the movies? Were you already influenced toward writing material inspired by that reading?
6. Did either of the movies make you WANT to go out and write something?

From Justin Stanchfield:

Will the movies have as much general effect as Star Wars had with SF by making fantasy more accepted by the general population?

I don't think any movie can ever generate the same impact Star Wars did. The original Star Wars became a hit despite the media, not because of it. I remember every critic except Rona Barret panning the film until the public groundswell had already carried it into becoming the greatest sleeper in film history. Today, every movie has so many tie-ins - Burger King, McDonald's, etc. - before it's even released that the public is essentially tired of it before it opens. And I think that spills into writing as well, unfortunately.

Will the movies trigger a resurgence in the fantasy publishing field?

Definitely, at least in the short term. The Harry Potter books were a huge shot in the arm for kids' fantasy, and I'd guess publishers will want to ride the movies' tails as each is released.

Will the market favor one kind of fantasy over another?

I'd hate to predict either way. It might actually make it harder now to sell a quest novel simply because so many will be hitting editor's desks at the same time.

Are the movies and their popularity going to change or influence the type of material you are going to write?

Chasing a trend is never a good idea, so I don't think so.

Had you read the books before you saw the movies? Were you already influenced toward writing material inspired by that reading?

I read LOTR and the Silmarilion years ago when I was in my early twenties and was enormously influenced by them, though I kind of fell out of hard fantasy afterwards. I read Harry Potter before I saw the movie, then immediately afterwards read it again, out loud to my wife and daughter. I'm going to reread LOTR, especially since I have a new copy coming.

Did either of the movies make you want to go out and write something?

Yep. I'm dying to try something with elves! Uh, writing about elves that is. <G>

From Jim Mills

I tend to agree with Justin on most points...

Will the movies have as much general effect as Star Wars had with SF by making fantasy more accepted by the general population?

I think so... or close, anyway. I think you'll start seeing more sword and sorcery kids cartoons and maybe some TV shows for adults, too. Whether they'll be successful or not remains to be seen.

Will the movies trigger a resurgence in the fantasy publishing field?

I think so. I think there will be those who want to have the success Rowling had... or at least a portion of the market... both writers and publishers.

Will the market favor one kind of fantasy over another?

Epic or High Fantasy (LotR) has long been more popular, but Harry Potter is more Contemporary Fantasy. I think we may see some interest rise in the latter, but I'm not sure how much.

Are the movies and their popularity going to change or influence the type of material you are going to write?

Probably not to a great extent. My personal favorite is Contemporary Fantasy, though my current WIP is High Fantasy. I'll probably stick with contemporary, but with an adult orientation rather than juvenile.

Had you read the books before you saw the movies? Were you already influenced toward writing material inspired by that reading?

I read LotR (7 times) and the Silmarilion years ago and was influenced by them. I haven't read Harry Potter yet. I think reading LotR has influenced my writing over the years, but not so much now as it once did.

Did either of the movies make you want to go out and write something?

In and of themselves, no. I write because I love telling stories. The movies haven't influenced that too much.

From BJ Steeves

1) Will the movies have as much general effect as Star Wars had with SF by making fantasy more accepted by the general population? Will the movies trigger a resurgence in the fantasy publishing field?

These movies will have some effect in the fantasy genre being more accepted, but the effect that Star Wars had on the movie industry was in the special effects.

George Lucas had to invent all the techniques for doing these special effects, and this has had the greatest impact on movies today, and not all good either.

Many movies made recently have been all special effects and no story. I think this, more than anything else, has held back the acceptance of fantasy stories.

2) Will the market favor one kind of fantasy over another?

Yes, I believe that the Action/Adventure/Quest types will become the dominant type of fantasy movie. It seems unless there is something really exciting to see on the screen, other fantasy types will be ignored.

Good examples of movies that fit this Action/Adventure/Quest type: Tomb Raider, Lord of the Rings, Conan the Barbarian, etc...

3) Are the movies and their popularity going to change or influence the type of material you are going to write?

Not really, I write the type of material that I myself like to read. It is really what I write about best.

4) Had you read the books before you saw the movies? Were you already influenced toward writing material inspired by that reading?

When a movie is based on a book, I almost always have read the book long before seeing the movie. And in almost all cases, I have been disappointed in the movie.

And yes, those readings are what got me interested in writing in the first place.

5) Did either of the movies make you want to go out and write something?

If there is anything that these movies influenced in my writing, is to try to be a little different. These fantasy types will now be overdone in massive volumes.

From Robert A. Sloan:

From the perspective of someone who hasn't seen either of the two new movies:

My prediction is that they will spark renewed general interest in fantasy. They are both major blockbuster hits. "Something like Lord of the Rings" or "Sorta like Harry Potter" will come into word-of-mouth descriptions of books, sometimes with a very tenuous comparison and sometimes just as a genre tag.

I tend to agree there won't be media tie-ins per se - but without those, a lot of other fantasy books will wind up filling that potential market.

I'm also not as down on media tie-ins as some people because I indiscriminately pick those up when I'm looking for SF/F in used bookstore bins because most of what's there isn't SF/F. If a particular book looks good, I'll buy it. If I don't like the idea, or skim and don't like the prose, I don't. Quality seems to vary within media tie-ins as much as in anything else, so now I look at them for the unexpected gem that happens to be in that shared universe.

I think of those book-spawning movies and TV series as just that in a way - comparable to Thieves' World or Wild Cards, because functionally that's what the author's doing by writing in a universe he or she didn't create. Each author contributes something to the canon. They are a different literary form, a group production. Sometimes that generates brilliant individual pieces, and sometimes it generates regurgitated crud derived from someone else's derivative work. If I liked someone's media novel I'd definitely check out his original fiction.

From Shane P. Carr:

I think over the past year we have seen a renewed interest in fantasy, and I believe it was largely due to Harry Potter as well as the hype surrounding the Lord of the Rings. Thankfully both movies did their respective novels justice. Although LOTR didn't quite

have the depth of the trilogy, it was still a strong rendition and one of the best fantasy movies ever made.

I think in lieu of the darker times we are now living in, more and more people are looking for escapism and renewed hope. In most fantasy, good always triumphs over evil and that is something people really need to see and be inspired by.

Harry Potter got young people to read again which was an incredible feat in itself during this age of TV and video games. It was through their dedication to the series that the movie was made and I thought it was a nice reward.

As for Lord of the Rings, the movie has made thousands of people run to bookstores everywhere and buy the trilogy. The trilogy was on Amazon and BN's bestseller lists for most of the later part of 2001 and is still selling in large quantities.

I have also seen numerous new fantasy authors on the scene over the past year, and quite a few have been really original takes on the fantasy genre.

I think many young people were introduced to the fantasy genre thanks to the quality movie versions of LOTR and Potter...and I really think this new interest will lead to more and more fantasy on the scene. Hopefully it will also give people the strength to live in our now darker world.

From Fred Phillips:

1. Will the movies have as much general effect as Star Wars had with SF by making fantasy more accepted by the general population?

Yes, I think so. I've always felt Star Wars was more fantasy than science fiction anyway, but I think the general public thinks anything with spaceships is sf. What you have to remember about Star Wars, though, is that it also inspired some

really horrible sci fi films. I think a lot of those movies hurt the genre and made it seem "cheesy" to a lot of non sci-fi fans.

2. Will the movies trigger a resurgence in the fantasy publishing field?

Maybe. If you've watched the bestseller lists recently, you've already seen a renewed interest in The Lord of the Rings from people who have seen the movie. I think the real question is how many of those people will enjoy those books and look for more like them. If that happens, I think it will be a very good thing for the fantasy genre. But that leads me to the concerns of question 3.

3. Will the market favor one kind of fantasy over another?

If LOTR's success causes a surge in the fantasy genre, it does worry me that some publishers might look over an original manuscript for a Tolkienesque story that might hit bigger with people who are looking for more LOTR-type books. Of course, there's a long history of Tolkien knock-offs in the fantasy genre -- some of them are among the more popular writers out there -- and it doesn't seem to have hurt the genre.

4. Are the movies and their popularity going to change or influence the type of material YOU are going to write?

No. I've already been profoundly influenced by Tolkien, and to a lesser extent by Rowling. Tolkien's The Hobbit was the book that made me want to write fantasy, so he's probably had more influence on my work than anyone else. But, at the same time, I don't write Tolkienesque fiction. Influence and imitation are not the same thing. In truth, I think there are very few successful fantasy writers who haven't already been influenced by Tolkien in one way or another. I can't see where a movie version of a book a writer already loved (or hated) would sway them one way or the other. The fantasy genre has a long history of works that are very

derivative of Tolkien, and I think we've already started to see the same thing happening with Harry Potter. The success of the movies may spur someone who has never attempted to write fantasy before in that direction, but for someone who is already writing fantasy, I don't think it will have a big impact.

5. Had you read the books before you saw the movies? Were you already influenced toward writing material inspired by that reading?

I think I already answered this in question 4... oops. But, the answer is yes. I've read *The Lord of the Rings* at least a dozen times and all of the *Harry Potter* books once. Tolkien has been a great influence. Rowling, to a lesser extent, even though I think they're wonderful books.

6. Did either of the movies make you WANT to go out and write something?

Oddly enough, not really. I've seen movies that had that effect, but these didn't. Maybe it's because I'd already been inspired by the books. They really made me want to write, really pushed me to put my butt in the chair and put some words on paper. I left both movies thinking they were outstanding and looking forward to the next installment, but it didn't really spur me to write.

Introduction to Horror Part 2: Plot and Character in Horror Fiction

by Teresa Hopper

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Anyone who writes or reads much horror knows that a stereotype exists amongst some non-horror readers. Horror is seen as a somewhat inferior form of fiction – trashy, with unrealistic characters who do stupid things to sustain unfeasible plots. It isn't seen as serious fiction. The sad fact is that in the past there has been a lot of bad horror fiction published, which has been guilty of all those things. Maybe you think that writing horror is an easy option, because anyone can write about a woman running around in her nightie screaming, can't they? Well I am here to tell you that writing horror isn't an easy option; in fact, it isn't easy at all, not if you want to do it well.

And how do you do it well? You make your characters as real and your plots as original and convincing as possible. All writers of fiction strive for this, but as a horror writer you have an extra mountain to climb, because you're fighting against reality – you're taking the reader's own world and saying to them 'ah, but things are not as you think' which is completely different to setting a novel in a fantasy or SF world that has been created. As a reader I will accept that a fantasy world can have monsters in it much easier than I would accept the same about my world.

Characters

So how do you make your characters as real as possible? Well, the first thing to do is to avoid the character stereotypes that seem to crop up regularly in horror fiction. We've all seen the Catholic Priest Experiencing Doubt, the Tortured Main Character, the Virginal Heroine, the Cynical and Unbelieving Police Chief, and many more. Real people aren't like this. They're not stereotypes -- they are as multi-faceted as you or I. You need to

give your characters a good and a bad side, hopes and dreams, and you need to know their past, their triumphs and failures. You need to know not just what they are like when things are going well for them, but also when the car has broken down and the kids are screaming. The more you know about your characters, the better you will understand their fears, weaknesses and terrors.

One of the 'sins' that some horror authors have committed in the past is to have the characters behave in unrealistic or stupid ways just to advance the plot. How many times have you read a book and thought how unlikely someone's actions were? If I heard noises coming from my cellar, I certainly wouldn't go down there alone, I'd lock the door and get the hell out. Don't make your character go into a vampire nest in the middle of the night either, even with a stake and garlic and holy water. The sensible thing would be to wait until dawn. Or if your character has to do something that might seem stupid, give them a damn good reason why they're doing it. No readers are going to root for stupid characters.

And don't do this for your heroes only – make your villains just as real, interesting, and hard to kill. I've lost count of the number of times I've read novels where the author has created a weak villain too easy for the hero to defeat. A great villain can make a story - would *Silence Of The Lambs* have been as compelling without Hannibal Lector? Of course not.

Another thing I hate as a reader is for the author to have built up a great, scary, powerful villain who the hero struggles against during most of the novel, and who at the end is beaten far too easily. That's just laziness on the part of the author. There are authors that I won't even read anymore because I know their endings will be weak and frustrating. Strive to make your endings as good as possible, and don't allow your fiction to be ruined by cop-out endings.

Another way to get great characters is to learn from the best. Some writers regularly create fantastic characters who seem as if they could almost step off the page. Look at your favourite characters in fiction, and try to work out what it is about them that makes

them real. For me that would be most characters by Stephen King and Terry Pratchett (though he doesn't write horror); I would love to have their skills with characters.

Plot

It is much harder to discuss plot techniques, because everyone works out their plots differently./ Some people have hugely detailed outlines in place before they start writing the manuscript, and barely deviate from them. For others outlines are anathema, and they won't even use them, preferring to let the story evolve as they go. There is no right way. The best thing to do is try various systems and see what works best for you. But even if you use an outline, remember that there's nothing stopping you from changing it if a brilliant idea hits.

No matter how you work out your plot, the main thing to bear in mind is to be original. It is frequently said that there are only a few plots in the world, and while this is true, don't let this discourage you. You can make your writing original by adding your own personal take on a familiar plot. We all know the familiar horror plot devices: happy families moving into haunted houses, naive people abusing ouija boards, charismatic vampires, vengeful witches, demon lovers, etc. These have all been used since the beginning of the genre, but that's not to say you can't still employ them successfully -- you just have to think of a unique way of looking at the subject. Look at Anne Rice, who has made the vampire genre her own. Try to reach beyond what has been done before.

If you take both of these areas into account and you write stories with strong, original plots and people them with realistic and interesting characters, you will be well on the way to writing good horror fiction. And who knows, maybe even getting published.

Here are some further resources that I've found very useful when working on plotting and characterisation:

This is a great character workshop by Holly:

<http://www.hollylisle.com/fm/Workshops/deeper-people.html>

And this is Holly's plotting workshop:

<http://www.hollylisle.com/fm/Workshops/plot-outline.html>

'On Writing' by Stephen King (ISBN: 0340820462)

Reflections of Starlight

By Nic Bronson

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I've heard a lot of things about poets.

I've heard that they're depressive, suicidal, with sick twisted minds; that they're happy people who just like the sound of rhymes; that they're deep, intelligent social critics who explore the nuances of our society; and that they're slightly crazed individuals pattering out little ditties that make sense to no one but themselves.

Guess what? It's all true. And like it or not, I'm a poet.

For me, writing poetry started a few years ago. Though I'd been writing in some form or another (and indeed, a few poems), I actually produced the majority of my work to date over a three-year period, from 1997 - 1999, the final years of high school. School was never fun for me, and I swung between hopeless depression and slightly less hopeless depression, and though I'm not sure exactly how it happened, one day in 1997 I started to write poetry and forgot to stop.

It was almost therapeutic, a way to deal with my emotions by immortalizing them on paper. I'd never read many poems, so I fairly quickly developed my own, somewhat technically flawed style, . It wasn't until much later that I started reading and refining my work into something I'm proud enough to show others.

Since then I've finished a book, though it's never been published and I doubt it ever will. But it is for me a poetical documentation of that period of my life, to its somewhat happier conclusion.

There have been many influences on my poetry since I first put pen to paper, and while I just fell into it, it's been some of those great poets of history that really inspired me to keep going. I've always liked rhyming poetry: in fact 99% of my poetry is in rhyming form, so first on my list were some of the great English poets and their works: Banjo Patterson's "The Great Australian poet," Edgar Allen Poe's "The Raven," Samuel Taylor Coleridge with his "Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner" and the opium-induced "Kubla-Khan," and just about anything by Robert Browning, to name a few.

A lot of my work around 1999 was inspired, at least in part, by Baudelaire, one of the greatest unappreciated poets of the 19th century who is only now being recognized for his morbid genius, which went unappreciated in the time where French Romantic poetry was in ascendance. He was unafraid to write about death, tragedy, and the sorrow of the human condition, and the beauty he found in these neglected topics.

A lot of my late work, however, has been inspired by poets much older than those so far listed, and my current work shows their influence as I take my poetry far more seriously than I ever did before. The social criticism, epic scope, and hitting imagery of Dante's Divine Comedy and Homer's Illiad and Odyssey inspired me to do more than just capture a feeling or situation, but rather try to explore a more complex theme or set of themes. The shorts "Absurdity I - VIII," "Raining Dreams," and my current work in progress, "Heaven and Earth," are all part of a planned collection called *Absurdity*, a comment on modern life.

Poetry is beautiful and mournful, depressing and uplifting, flowing and stilted, philosophical and simple. It's a paradox that cannot easily be defined. Like life.

But Is It Romance?

An outsider's look at the genre

By Lazette Gifford

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Writing fascinates me: All writing, and all books. I want to know everything I can about how the different genres work. I was recently surprised (even shocked) to find out how little I know about the romance field. After considerable discussion on several mailing lists, checking through books, and haunting web sites, I now comprehend Romance a little better.

There are guidelines that define any genre, but there are also rules in Romance that go beyond this. Learning them helped me to better understand the field, and to discover what is and isn't considered romance in the current publishing world. In this article I'm going to cover just three of these rules. There is, as in any genre, leeway within different publishing houses on how strictly some of the rules are enforced, but knowing what they are will better help a new Romance writer breaking into the market.

The most important rule: HEA

You've written a novel about two kids who grow up next door to each other, fall madly in love in their teens, marry and have a wonderful life, until the tragic death of the husband in a car accident. Is it romance?

No. The story fails in what is the most important of the romance rules -- Happily Ever After. Modern romance novels must have a happily ever after ending in order to be considered part of this genre. That is the element the readers are looking for when they pick up the novel. It might be considered fairy tales for adults.

How about a book where a woman meets a wonderful man at the place where she works, but for some reason the romance doesn't happen. She goes off and marries someone else, with whom she is in love. And then the man comes back into her life, and she finds herself torn between the two?

This is also not a romance by the normal definition. The woman cannot have two love interests, and she cannot be forced to choose between them. With the above example, it's obvious that someone is not going to live happily ever after, even if it isn't the heroine.

However, by following the rules, a story that starts with that initial contact, then summarizes a marriage that ends in either divorce (or even death) and the reunion with the original man could be a romance if it leads to an HEA ending for the two.

Books like *Gone with the Wind*, which was once considered romance, no longer fit into that category, while *Jane Eyre* still does. What these other books have become is not as well defined, but some have suggested 'Relationship Stories' as a term for the novels where something -- especially the ending -- does not follow the romance rules. This tag might best describe all types of stories that involve romantic associations, whether they are accepted romance or outside those bounds.

Rule # 2: I only have eyes for you...

According to many of the people I discussed with this, once the hero and heroine meet, there should be no other love interests, even if the two do not 'hit it off' at first. The relationship, both ups and downs, is the focus of a romance story, and in the end the HEA factor has to be apparent in either a marriage or the knowledge that the marriage will occur. This is why my second story idea (listed above) could not be a romance. The woman would be torn between two men she loved, violating this rule.

Relationships in today's romances are rarely chaste. The actual level of sexual content depends on the guidelines of the publishing company, and this is something that the new romance writer needs to take into account. Some romance lines want a certain

level of graphic description while others want all such description to end at the bedroom door, so to speak. As the types of sexual activities inch away from 'accepted' practice, the book moves from romance to erotica.

In romance as it is written today, the sexual content must be both consensual and meaningful to the relationship. Books that just throw bodies together are not romances. Romance stories concentrate on both the mental and physical aspects of the relationship.

Rule # 3: POV

Most readers of present-day romance want to identify with the woman, and from that aspect they are uninterested in the hero's POV. Finding out what the hero is thinking isn't important. Besides, part of the allure of romance is the mystery of the chase, and that can be much harder to maintain if the reader knows too much about the other character.

This is apparently not a carved-in-stone rule. Many writers, and readers, accept head hopping in romance. Some said that third person from the heroine's POV is much better than a first person account. But overall, it seems that most prefer the POV to be entirely from the woman's eyes.

Romance and Mainstream

While these may be rules for writing in the regular romance category, there is a section of mainstream publishing that is romance without the rules. Several novels have hit the bestseller lists that would be considered romance except for the HEA rule. Some are romance in feel, but not by the rules. *The Bridges of Madison County* is probably one of the more famous examples of this type of book.

There are authors who insist that their work, even without an HEA ending, is still romance. They are in a minority, and from what I've seen, are often at odds with the others over this subject. Finding print romance publishers who are willing to step outside

the rules is rare (although Harlequin's new Red Dress line seems to be heading this way), and so it appears that many of these writers are turning to epubublishing and finding their audience on the Internet. As often happens, epubublishing companies are willing to take chances with material that doesn't fall within the normal boundaries. If their reading public continues to grow, it may be that this type of book will find its way into a recognized subcategory of romance, along with the Regency, paranormal and other types. Each of these subgroups have their own set of personal rules as well, and anyone who wants to write within these tags should study the types of books that are published.

For those who write the non-HEA books, but aren't as insistent on the Romance tag, there are other publishing opportunities, though it might lose them a large part of a voracious readership. The ability to have 'Romance' listed on the spine of a book (or the ebook tag) can make a big difference in sales. At the same time, however, the readers of this genre have helped to define what it is, and putting something under the romance tag that doesn't meet their expectations is not going to instantly win them over to a new type of romance.

Romance, like all genres, should always have a fringe group that is testing the boundaries and 'drawing outside the lines.' They are, in fact, part of what helps define the core. Any time the fringe disappears it is a sure sign that the genre is in decline. Whether or not the larger group accepts the fringe material is not important. The current style of romance grew from just such groups that had stepped away from the 'girl running away from the front of the castle' gothics and the polite adventures of Mary Stewart. It is an evolving genre.

Know what you are writing before you send it to a publisher

There is no rule that says you cannot write whatever story you want, bending the rules in anyway that suits you. However, if you've read this article, you should now realize that there are restrictions to what you can rightfully call romance. And because of that, a writer needs to be fully aware of what type of material any publisher accepts. Always

read the publisher's guidelines. Even if they say they are looking for romance, there is a chance that they will have a qualifier.

Romance, despite what at first look like restrictive rules, is filled with an incredible range of material. Sub-genres include historical romance, Regency (a very specialized type of historical), fantasy romance, sf romance, paranormal romance, and even a special category for time travel romance. There are others as well, that fall just within the accepted range of material.

There are even new publishers, mostly on the Internet, who specialize in gay and lesbian romance stories that would never make it in the normal print market. This is (as I've said in other articles) the place where niche markets can grow.

Understanding your market is important to writers of any type of book, but as I studied romance I was surprised to learn how complex writing for this genre really is. I hope that this article has helped define some of the core needs for anyone who would like to be published in romance -- which is, by the way, the largest selling genre on the market.

Romance Writers of America is an expansive and helpful organization for those writing within the genre. I urge anyone who is even considering writing romance to go and check out their site at <http://www.rwanational.org/>

The best description of romance that I found comes (paraphrased) from RWA's web site: Romance is a central love story with an emotionally satisfying and optimistic ending.

(Thank you to the people of both the EPIC mailing list and the E-Spec mailing list for help in answering questions and interesting me enough to search out this information, as well as all the people who privately emailed me on this subject.)

Axial Tilt and Things

By Bob Billing

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Axial tilt for a world is actually very easy to work out. Your imaginary planet has an axial tilt, which is a number that you can choose to suit the story. Think of the planet as going around the sun in a big, flat ellipse. Then think of the axis about which the planet rotates. The axial tilt is the angle between the axis of rotation of the planet and an imaginary line sticking straight up out of the plane of the orbit.

Now imagine that you are standing at the North Pole. The sun runs around the horizon clockwise every day and at the same time it bobs up and down every year. At midsummer it is above the horizon by a certain angle, which is exactly the same as the axial tilt. At midwinter it is below the horizon by the same amount. At the equinoxes it is exactly on the horizon. At the South Pole the same thing happens but the seasons are reversed and the sun runs around the horizon in the opposite direction.

At the equator the sun goes more or less overhead every day, but the path it takes through the sky swings right and left by the same angle - the axial tilt - every year.

You can now add arctic and Antarctic circles. These are separated from the poles by - you've guessed it - the axial tilt, the same angle again. Within these circles you get both midnight sun and continuous darkness at different times of the year. The further you go towards the pole the longer the midnight sun and continuous darkness phases until at the pole the sun rises and sets once per year. In this area you could get - if you choose the right numbers - five months of darkness, a month of lengthening days, five months of continuous daylight and a month of shortening days. The sun would never get very high above the horizon so it would be perishing cold.

Now add a moon. This will orbit the planet in another ellipse, with its own tilt. If the moon orbits the planet in the same plane as the planet orbits the sun it'll be lower and lower on the horizon as you get closer to the poles, behaving more or less like the sun. But if you tip up the moon's orbit so that it orbits in a different plane it'll move between the northern and southern hemispheres. This won't be quite at the rate of once a month; in fact it'll either do one more north-south cycle or one less than it does cycles through its phases in a year.

The easiest way to understand this is to get a globe of the world and an electric torch (flashlight). Put the globe on a table, turn off the lights and rotate the globe - this will give you the daily cycle. Now walk around the table carrying the torch and you'll see the yearly cycle.

What would happen on a planet with a 90 degree axial tilt - in other words, a planet with the axis of rotation pointed through its sun?

Imagine you are at the South Pole in December (I'll use our months to illustrate the point, even though our calendar wouldn't really apply). The sun would be the South Pole star and would hang motionless overhead. Shadows wouldn't move at all, so the sunlight would burn what are effectively photographic images of them into the vegetation.

Then as the year advanced the sun would begin to do small circles in the sky, slowly spiralling down to the horizon. Around the end of March it would begin to graze the horizon all the way around (rather like Earth's midnight sun). Allowing for variations in ground level it would then flicker on and off for several days. Most of April would be twilight, and then the stars would come out and stay visible until about the middle of August when the twilight would start again, followed by a sunrise in late September. The sun would then spiral up the sky again, coming to rest as the pole star in December.

At the north pole the same thing would happen with the seasons reversed.

At the equator in December the sun would hang on the southern horizon, never quite setting due to refraction. Then it would begin to spiral outwards clockwise until it began to rise and set. It would rise higher every day until late March, when it would pass directly overhead. It would then move north until late September when it would spiral anticlockwise to a halt on the northern horizon. It would then hang motionless for a while before spiralling outwards again.

At the equator the sky would be light all day from November to mid-February and from May to the middle of August, stars only being visible outside these periods.

I'd suspect that the seasonal temperature changes would make life outside a narrow band around the equator very difficult. However given a natural heat source, such as a volcano, it might be possible to survive the dark winter. The limited habitable area could lead to population pressure problems. I can see dissidents being driven out to die in the temperature changes, then building a civilisation around a heat source. When the heat source begins to fail...

Writing Mysteries for Children's Magazines

by Ron Brown

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Like many, I grew up reading the exploits of The Hardy Boys and Encyclopedia Brown. I loved to gather clues with the young sleuths and strive to solve the mystery before the last page. Children today have the same desires, and magazines that target this audience are seeking good mysteries for their pages.

The challenges to writing a good mystery for a children's magazine are many. First, the word count is often limited. Children's magazines usually want shorter works that can be completed by a younger reader in a single sitting. As a result, few will accept stories longer than two thousand words. Even in the shorter story, however a good mystery will still contain the elements of setting and character in addition to a good plot.

The second challenge is the degree of tension allowed. Though murder is the staple of the adult mystery, and even young adult mysteries frequent the waters of such issues as death and kidnapping, these themes are not generally appropriate for children's magazines. The target audience, children eight to twelve, is not likely to be able to relate to the issues of such works. A tough situation for a child in the age group would be a missing bike, or the accusation of cheating in school. The readers will be able to immediately identify with the anguish of the situation.

Now, with the degree of problem set, and the understanding of the tight word constraint, the writer of the children's mystery must construct a plot that is not only digestible and believable, but also involves enough twists to be interesting. False leads are key to this element. If the young reader detects the red herring, he or she will feel like the detective in the story. If not, the surprise ending will entertain the reader as well.

The last element is the most important: Creating a detective that engages the reader. Avoid clichés. Encyclopedia Brown has been done, as has the Scooby-Doo gang, and such clichés no longer appeal to editors. The child detective agency has lost its attraction along with the bookworm who lives with his books only to emerge with a crucial fact needed to solve the riddle.

A good character is well rounded. Different cultures, backgrounds, and abilities should all be used. The one thing that must remain, though, is the ability to solve the mystery. A story that involves the young detective who is given the answer by an adult will fail. The child must use her own brainpower to solve the problem.

With these points in mind, a good mystery for children should be within your reach. Once you have a story in hand, you can begin looking at such magazines as *Cricket*, *Highlights for Children*, *Hopscotch*, and *Boy's Quest*. These magazines are always looking for new mysteries.

Good luck and good writing.

Happenings Around The Young Writer's Scene

by Vicki McElfresh

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We have announcements to make!

Newcomers to the Forward Motion Community who are under the age of 18 might not be aware that there is board just for them. The Young Writer's board features discussions, crit circles, and activities especially geared towards younger writers. There are some exciting things starting to happen at the Young Writer's Scene, and we hope that those in this age group will join us

Three new junior moderators have been added to help initiate ideas and offer assistance to other folks who find their way to the Young Writers' Section. Julia Pass, Ernst-Jan Heinsz, and Nathan Garrod have all been doing a wonderful job of coming up with new ideas and offering a helping hand. I'm looking forward to working with all three of them to develop and expand this area of Forward Motion

In addition to the new moderators, there are some interesting activities going on. Currently, the Young Writers' Round Robin is well under way. The round robin, titled *A Fate Worse Than Being a Boy*, is being written a paragraph at a time by several members of the YWS. At the moment, there are eight people signed up. Our goal is to complete a short story of at least 1000 words.

The crit circle also shows a resurgence of interest after being neglected for a time. There are five active members at the moment and there are more who have expressed an interest in joining. If you have material that you would like to have critiqued by people your own age, this is the place to go!

Another feature of YWS that isn't so new is the novel workshop, which was started last year as a forum to discuss difficulties in novel writing. The workshop features sections for world-building, characterization, plotting, and submission. This is one feature of the board I hope to see active again in the coming months.

The Young Writers' Board gives younger writers a chance to work with their peers on material that is of interest to them. All writers eighteen and below are welcome and encouraged to join the board. The more who join, the more fun we'll have!

I'm very excited by all the new things happening around YWS, and I hope to see more new faces on the board soon. I hope you come over and join the fun!

Piracy on the High Bandwidth

by John Savage, Esq.

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“John Savage” practices intellectual property and publishing law, complex litigation, and appellate litigation. He maintains an acerbic website at <http://savage.authorslawyer.com>, and frequently comments on legal issues of interest to writers both on the website and elsewhere. In his mundane identity, he is one of Harlan Ellison’s attorneys in the ongoing internet piracy lawsuit (Ellison v. Robertson et al.).

In the last year or so, several authors I know have suffered the ravages of intellectual property pirates. This article should help writers understand their rights and how to enforce them. We’ll start off with a few examples, then issue some letters of marque and reprisal of our own.

“Stand by to Be Boarded!”

One pirate—we’ll call him Captain Bigbluebeard—had acquired years-old submissions to a small-press horror magazine that folded. Bigbluebeard then created a webzine on GeoCities, and posted these stories with full attribution—and an admission *on the webzine page* that the materials were posted without permission.

Nobody said you had to be bright to be a pirate. And therein lies the rub. Traditional print publishing requires a wad of cash and at least the intelligence of a French poodle for distribution. Electronic publishing requires less—far less. A fourth-grader can master enough of the WYSIWYG hypertext editors available today to turn an electronic file into a web page, and probably has enough savvy to use a free service provider. Distribution then takes care of itself to an extent impossible with paper products.

A second pirate—Captain Brazennads—was moderately more clever, and probably hurt the author’s feelings a lot more than did Captain Bigbluebeard. This author posted a

short novel on the Web. The pirate copied the short novel, posted it on his own Web page, and claimed authorship of the novel. The author discovered the pirate by accident. Public pressure resulted in removal from the website and some public embarrassment for the pirate, including expulsion from his otherwise-unrelated writing group.

Then there are the corporate pirates. Speculative fiction very nearly had one recently: Wizards of the Coast. Some time after Wizards acquired TSR, Wizards announced that it would issue a CD-ROM containing all of the editorial material from the first 100 issues of *The Dragon*, the premier D&D magazine. Most issues contained a short piece of hero-based fantasy fiction.

The CD-ROM itself raised a few eyebrows. What angered writers, though, was that Wizards proposed to distribute this CD-ROM without paying a cent more to the fiction writers, even though the fiction writing contract was not an “all rights” contract. Wizards (and other reissuers of print materials as electronic products) claim that the CD-ROM was not a new publication, but just a reissue and recompilation of *The Dragon*.²⁸[1] If the CD-ROM is not a new publication, no additional payment is due under either the terms of the contract or general copyright and publishing law. (Whether publishers are ethically bound to do so is for another time.) Shortly after an unrelated court decision that rejected Wizards’ theory, Wizards capitulated.²⁹[2] But Wizards was not the first, and will not be the last, to make this claim.

Returning Fire

Have the Internet and electronic publishing and “reissues” made protecting intellectual property impossible? No. Writers can take several steps to protect themselves from pirates, and instead make the pirates walk the plank.

Insist on a written contract. Writers should, of course, be thrilled when they make their first sales. However, just submitting an item for publication does *not* give the recipient the right to publish it without the author’s further approval; actual approval is *not* implicit in the submission. A submission of a story for publication is an offer of merchandise on

terms to be negotiated. When the editor accepts the publication, he or she states the terms of acceptance, which must be ratified by the author. The Uniform Commercial Code goes into the details of contract formation and validity in mindnumbing detail. There are lots of exceptions to every rule, and different states interpret these “uniform” provisions slightly differently.

The Copyright Act technically prohibits any transfer of *any* part of a copyright without a signed, written agreement.³⁰[3] As one federal court noted a few years ago:

Common sense tells us that agreements should routinely be put in writing. This simple practice prevents misunderstanding by spelling out the terms of a deal in black and white...³¹[4]

Technically, a publisher needs only a distribution right, not the whole copyright, to publish a story, a novel, or anything else. Unfortunately, the courts have allowed various “industry standards” to determine rights, and have seldom provided a definition. For example, the phrase “First North American Serial Rights” is not defined in the Copyright Act, or anywhere else that has the force of law. (Even “published” was not defined until the 1990s!) At the very least, follow the sale of a story up with a letter that states what distribution rights the publisher is allowed.

Writers should demand written contracts even when the editor is a close friend and requested the story. If the editor keels over, someone else may have to handle the editor’s assets—which certainly include literary properties. Bankruptcy can make things even more convoluted. If a publisher declares bankruptcy, the trustee will auction off every asset to the highest bidder.³²[5]

Do not transfer all rights. In his column in *Speculations*, Mike Resnick says that professional writers reject quarter-cent-a-word sales. I suggest that professional writers reject all-rights sales. Simple enough? The Wizards of the Coast controversy shows exactly why. The only people who will get payment from Wizards for the CD-ROM publication are the fiction writers, because TSR imposed an “all submissions become the property of TSR” clause on everyone else.

There are two exceptions—and only two exceptions—to this rule. The first is media fiction. Media fiction, whether derived from games, movies, TV shows, or whatever, is not independently conceived for copyright purposes, no matter how much effort and originality the writer puts into his or her work. Media fiction is a derivative work, and the creator of the media property has the master copyright (although the writer has a second, subordinate copyright in the exact derivative work). For all practical purposes, the media fiction writer *never had* “all rights.” The second exception is the publisher’s offer of so much money for all rights that the writer will never have to work again—at least mid-six figures up front, with a continuing royalty and an equitable split of derivative rights sales.

Some publishers ask for more rights, claiming that they need the extra rights to help cover their own risks in publication. This is a barrel of weevil-ridden hardtack, even for the small press. Accounting rules do not allow a publisher to project future rights sales, or rely on those speculative sales for income; anything the publisher makes on additional rights sales is pure profit. It may be reasonable for a writer to split this profit with the publisher if the writer is unable to exploit these additional rights, although this is the exception. Anything more is, well, piracy.

Keep an eye out for the skull and crossbones. The two incidents described at the beginning of this article came at the authors out of the fog. In both incidents, someone came across the website itself and found the infringements. Web searches can be a more powerful, more certain, and more efficient tool than relying upon the denizens of the Rumor Mill (<http://www.speculations.com/rumormill>), although we’re a rough and ready crew, ready to board and scuttle any Internet pirate’s ship. Free web search software, such as WebFerret and Copernic (both for Windows), does an excellent job finding specific phrases. Once every three months, or more often if possible, search for your titles, for unique phrases and character names, and for your own name.

Of course, if you see what you believe to be an infringement of someone else’s copyright, let the author know. Don’t take action yourself without facts. Groundless accusations of copyright infringement can result in the accuser paying the wrongly

accused party's legal fees,³³[6] which could well be *far* higher than a mid-list writer would earn over the life of a novel.

Attack the pirates below the waterline. While it is often polite to write a letter or message demanding that the pirate stop the infringement, such a shot across the bow seldom suffices. The next step is complaining to someone with authority over the infringer's Internet account.

Some service providers, such as GeoCities, claim that they will not take action for copyright infringement unless the holder sends a copy of the copyright registration to GeoCities. Don't believe it. What these providers really mean is that they will not intervene in cases of disputed copyright ownership, such as Captain Brazennads' style of piracy. If there is no question of copyright ownership, as with Captain Bigbluebeard, the service provider will often sink the pirate when writers either send a demand letter by fax or mail, or have an attorney contact the service provider. This may be as simple as removing the infringing document itself. The service provider will directly contact the alleged infringer, even if the provider claims that "The complaint is being processed for further consideration; don't call us, we'll call you," or other such nonsense.

A letter to a service provider might read something like this:

1313 Mockingbird Lane
Hollywood, California 96969
(415) 555-1212

Billy Joe Bob's Feed Store and Internet Hookups
47 Technology Parkway
East Podunk, Nebraska 76543

Dear Sir or Madam:

A webpage hosted by your service
([http://www.billyjoebob.com/\[SpecificPageReference\]](http://www.billyjoebob.com/[SpecificPageReference]), retrieved [date and time])
is infringing upon my copyright in [description of work, including title, type of work, and year of creation]. I have attempted to resolve this directly with the

account holder without satisfaction. Please take appropriate action against [infringer] by at least removing the referenced page from your service.

Pursuant to 17 U.S.C. § 512, this letter serves as actual notice of infringement in the event of any legal proceedings. The information in this notification is accurate, and under penalty of perjury, I state that that I am the owner of an exclusive right that the specified page infringes.

Signed,

Arthur Author

Arthur Author

The last paragraph of the sample letter both reminds the service provider of its obligations and fulfills the requirements of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act. A webpage provider has control over the continuing contents of its pages, and the terms of service usually state that the provider will exercise that control. A court will not find copyright infringement unless the plaintiff proves that the infringer knew of the violation. The explicit notice of the violation notifies the provider of the infringement and makes it liable—except if the provider takes steps to control or remove the violation.³⁴[7] This is especially effective against Captain Bigbluebeard's provider, since Captain Bigbluebeard cannot contest the writer's copyright. It may be helpful against Captain Brazennad's provider, but it is less likely.

But to whom does one send the letter? One of the new requirements of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act is that all service providers must provide the name, address, and contact information for its representative who handles allegations of copyright infringement. The Register of Copyright is the definitive source for this information, which is posted online (<http://www.loc.gov/copyright/onlinesp/>) (requires Acrobat Reader, and is not appropriate for PDA use). NSI (<http://www.nsi.com>) also keeps a listing, but this listing often does not extend to vanity domains, and is of suspect timeliness.

Neither does the letter have to go through the mail, thereby taking a week or more. A faxed transmission is acceptable, and electronic mail that includes a digital signature is also acceptable. The key is to include all of the information. If Aunt Claudia, who has never used a computer before in her life, could find the infringement with the information provided in the letter, the letter is clear enough.

Follow the rules yourself. This is as much a matter of ethics as a matter of law. Writers should be scrupulous in the way they treat other writers' work. While "he did it, too" is not a defense to infringement, it is a mitigating circumstance that will reduce the damages awarded. What goes around, comes around: If Writer A does not treat Writer B's intellectual property as worth very much, Infringer's attorney will present evidence of that to reduce Writer A's damages at trial.

Conclusion

Writers are not powerless against Internet pirates. Understanding (and finding) the problem is the first step; reacting appropriately is the second. Simple precautions with your work and standing up for yourself will steady your ship. You should seek a copyright attorney's assistance for anything that goes beyond this article.

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Book review

Goal, Motivation & Conflict: The Building Blocks of Good Fiction

By Debra Dixon

Reviewed by Cassandra Ward

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Geared for the writer who is attempting to build their plot out of their characters, *Goal, Motivation & Conflict* (GMC to its friends) gives a basic structure to follow. GMC is more than just the title of the book; it is the entire process Dixon outlines as well.

Dixon breaks down conflict and plot into these three elements, all of which stem out of the main character(s) of the story. In her introduction, Dixon claims that understanding this principle can assist in developing both major and secondary characters, creating a synopsis, and tightening the middle of the story.

Using classic movies as examples (such as *The Wizard of Oz* and *Casablanca*), Dixon goes through and fills in the GMC chart. She outlines both the internal and external flow of the main character(s) in the movies to illustrate how the conflicts and situations of the story grows logically. Her explanations are clear and precise. The chart is simple to use (and to recreate in any word processor with a Table function) and yet presents the author with the opportunity to think about the characters' GMC from different angles. It might look extremely easy to fill in, but forces the writer to go outside their normal thinking to fill in the boxes.

Dixon has taught this as a workshop (and still does) for some time before putting this book together. She uses questions brought up during the workshops as further illustrations of her points and explanations.

I found *GMC* to be extremely thought-provoking and a good way to look at things to get the mind working. I, personally, have found it to be far more useful in working through individual scenes rather than the book-encompassing structure Dixon uses in her introduction. However, she does note that every writer is different and that this is a universal enough concept that every writer will find a place for it in his process. In this, I tend to agree. GMC is a fundamental principle which is found in every book, used differently by every author. Dixon also is the first author I have seen detail other necessities in fiction (such as "Black Moments" and "Character Turning Points"), which *GMC* is good at pointing out in clearer detail.

While *GMC* is a difficult book to locate (I ordered it directly from the publisher), I consider it a great addition to my writing repertoire. It has become a building block that I need no longer consciously consider, but is always there for me as I go through my process. I would strongly recommend that anyone who has challenges with making a character-based story/plot should take a look at this particular book.

Goal, Motivation & Conflict: The Building Blocks of Good Fiction

By Debra Dixon

© 1996 Publisher Gryphon Books for Writers (POB 172342; Memphis TN 38187-2342--order from the publisher directly)

ISBN 0-9654371-0-8

Cassandra (Andi) Ward earned her first rejection letter in 1976 and has not let that stop her. She is published in Romance (small press) and unpublished in Fantasy and Mystery as well. She is presently the Features Editor for *Visions* and is presently working on her eighteenth novel.

Discovering Forward Motion

By June Robertson

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As a writer, I'm more a solitary than a social person. Still, the need to share with others who love the same things I do can't be denied. It's nice to have a place to go where people will cheer for my successes and put their heads together to find a solution to the challenges that arise with every manuscript.

Early in the spring of 2001, I found myself in real need of this kind of support. I was planning a new novel and really wanted some writers to talk to while I worked on it. The Internet is the first place I looked -- it's as close as my office computer, always there, and I don't have to worry about the weather when I go there. I found a lot of different communities. Some offered detailed systems for critique. Others offered news. Some were in email list-serves, others on web sites, and still others in newsgroups. But Holly Lisle's Forward Motion was the most comprehensive and easiest to navigate that I found. Here's where I decided to hang out for a while.

What I discovered was the true community I'd been looking for. I could get answers to my research questions as well as market news. I could nearly always find someone to cheer or commiserate with in chat. There were classes as well, and fun things to do to spur myself on when I felt that dreaded writer's block coming on.

But most of all, what I found were friends -- friends who were also writers. These are the people to whom I run to announce my successes and cry over my failures. Home is where my husband, my son, my dogs and cats are, and that's great. Still, home without community can be lonely. Forward Motion has become my virtual community, my extended family. I love it here.

THE GREAT REJECTION/ACCEPTANCE CHALLENGE

Sometimes the hardest thing isn't writing the story or book, but summoning the courage to send it out into the world. In the hope of encouraging our members to submit their work, Forward Motion is running The Great Rejection/Acceptance Challenge Rules are simple:

- Short story rejection - 1 point
- Short story acceptance - 2 points
- Poem rejection - .5
- Poem acceptance - 1
- Novellete rejection - 2
- Novellette accept - 4
- Novel rejection - 5
- Novel acceptance - 10

The Contest runs until midnight 31 December, 02 and is updated as quickly as Moderator Justin Stanchfield can type! Sign up and play at:

<http://www.network54.com/Hide/Forum/thread?forumid=64272&messageid=1009914696>

GENRE OF THE MONTH

Unfreeze the creative juices this year by trying your hand at something new. Forward Motion will tackle a new genre every month. January's genre was 'Twisted High Fantasy' -- don't know what that is? Don't know if you can write it? See what it's all about at:

<http://www.network54.com/Hide/Forum/message?forumid=64272&messageid=1010191180>

FORWARD MOTION MEMBERS HAVE FOUND THE JOYS OF WEBLOGS

These on-line journals give a glimpse into the exciting, painful, frustrating, joyous, and uplifting day-to-day lives of writers. Come and see what our writers are saying about their writing journeys.

<http://www.hollylisle.com/weblog/index.html>

SURVEYS

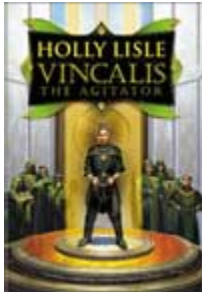
We've had some fun surveys in December and January. Among the latest is a discussion of our Vision theme for February/March -- what about families in fiction? Burning the Midnight Oil -- most of our writers seem to be night owls! Come by and participate in the community surveys. You may learn something new about yourself as a writer -- or just get a chuckle over how the rest of us 'do it'.

HERE'S ONE LAST CHALLENGE FOR YOU -- THE 50 CHARACTER TEST:

Moderator Jennifer St. Clair Bush brought this to Forward Motion. See if you can do it!

<http://www.network54.com/Hide/Forum/thread?forumid=64272&messageid=1011290478>

Good News from Forward Motion



Cover work for Holly's new novel, **Vincallis the Agitator**

Look for it in bookstores now!

Holly Lisle's acclaimed trilogy *THE SECRET TEXTS* is the epic adventure of heroes battling a resurrected evil that had nearly destroyed the world a millennium before. Now Holly Lisle take readers back to the days of that ancient apocalypse -- and to the decadent heart of a fantastic, doomed empire . . .

Glory of the Dragons

Based on a science of sorcery called Dragon magic, the Hars Ticularim is a miraculous place of mansions built on clouds and gardens blooming diamonds beneath canopies of captive stars. But this incomparable beauty hides a dark core: Dragon magic draws its power from the agony of slaves who are killed for sorcerous fuel. And for three thousand years, no one has dared question the empire's inhuman cruelty . . . until now.

Wraith, a boy with an uncanny power, seeks the art to foment a revolution within the Hars Ticularim. Solander, a brilliant young mage, believed he has discovered a totally new form of magic. Luercas, a sadistic noble, will commit any crime that furthers his ambition. All three are clever, resolute, driven -- and naive. For they challenge the rulers

of a globe-spanning power that has endured for millennia -- rulers who will do anything to stay in power forever . . .

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

Moderator S. L. Viehl has two new Releases:

- Dream Mountain (writing as Gena Hale) 10/10 published by Onyx (NAL)
- Shockball (StarDocIV) 11/09 published by Roc SF/F

And has sold:

- Melting the Iceman and two additional romance novels to Onyx (NAL)
 - A Matter of Consultation (AH short story) to Baen
-

Moderator Justin Stanchfield won the 'Detecting A Ghost' flash fiction contest at ShadowKeep. His story Waiting For The Thaw is in the March issue of [ShadowKeep](#). He also made a sale to Neverworlds!

Community Member Katherine has placed an article length non-fiction at Semiconductor Magazine.

And member Heidi announced the sale of a children's illustrated book to Illumination Arts, to be released in Spring, 2003. At the moment untitled the story is about:

The town of Kabbotzville is plagued by a problem. Each year, the Murkles lumber out of the sea toward the town. In droves they come, and, what's worse, they stink! But one little girl sees the problem differently, and helps

one baby Murkle to make his journey. Wonderful and unexpected things happen, but soon this leads to a new problem...

Community member Stephanie Caine reports her first sale of a short story. The acceptance comes from Winter Raven Magazine!

Assistant Site Host Lazette Gifford has several new pieces available through ezines and epublishers:

- The Last Days of Faneh-Thenyal, [Jintsu E-texts](#).
- the end of the world and we know it (aka the cockroach poem), [Shadowkeep](#)
- The Captain's Last Orders, [Lunacat.net](#)
- A Ride Through Hell and Back, [Alternate Realities](#)
- Into Darkness, [Fables](#)

She's also made a recently placed her eight book fantasy series, The Quest for the Dark Staff, with Double Dragon Ebooks and sold a young adult mystery/adventure novel, Good People of Coralville, to Writers Exchange Epublishing. She's also placed a short story, Broken Wings, which will appear in the March Issue of Alternate Realities.

Lazette's first novel, Silky, is available from Embiid Publishing.



(<http://www.embiid.net>)

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

--Holly Lisle, author of Courage of Falcons

Joining Forward Motion

About the Community

The community came into existence for several reasons. First, I hadn't been able to be a part of a writers' group or attend conventions in a few years, and knew that situation wouldn't be changing in the foreseeable future, and I missed the company of readers. Second, I am fortunate to be able to do the thing I enjoy most for a living, and I wanted to be able to help others who shared my obsession find their way to living their dreams. Third, I knew a lot of people -- writers and readers - - who I thought should meet each other.

When the Internet suddenly erupted with free, easy-to-use community-building tools, I suddenly had the solution to bringing those many people together and sharing what I knew with them and letting them share what they knew with me and each other.

The community has two sections -- public boards, which anyone can read and in most cases anyone can post to; and private boards, where writers can post sections of works-in-progress and receive critiques of them. The private areas require community membership and are password-protected to preserve all publication rights for each author's use.

To [participate in the public boards](#), all you have to do is read them and post to them. If you create a Network54 ID, you gain the ability to post in HTML and use signatures; if you join the community you can edit your posts. But in most cases there's no requirement to do either. (The Rants board, due to a short-lived problem with trolls, requires a Network54 login to post.)

To participate in the private portion of the community, you must [obtain a Network54 login](#) and use it to [join the community](#). You will have to be logged in to [gain access to the private boards](#).

Anyone may join. Membership is free and approval is automatic. The excellent [site moderators](#) can help you find your way to topics of interest to you, crit circles that can help you, and ongoing projects, challenges, exercises, workshops, articles, and contests that might inspire you.

We have a good group of people in the HollyLisle.com community. [Come look us over](#), introduce yourself, take part in a few conversations -- or jump straight into the deep water and start working on your book or short story.

We're here to help you make long-cherished dreams turn into reality. I hope you'll join us.

Holly Lisle

Awards & Kind Words

In the first year of publication, Forward Motion and Vision have received several nice awards and notices. Here are some of them:

One of the first official notice we received was from the much lamented Inklings:

A modest title for an incredible e-zine! Online in HTML or downloadable in PDF format, this 102-page publication is packed with excellent feature articles on sf/fantasy and other genres. It's hard to believe this is free!



Golden Crane Creativity Award -- given by Creativity-Portal.com

Golden Crane Creativity Award (GCCA) for providing free instructional information for arts, crafts, music, writing, and other creativity related topics.

We believe that sites like yours deserve special recognition for freely teaching people about your craft.



Outstanding Services to Writers Award -- given by WitchWords.com

Outstanding Services to Writers Award is for sites that provide outstanding resources to writers.

Masthead

Vision is published bi-monthly and gives preference to articles submitted by people who belong to the Forward Motion Writer's Community. [Joining the community is free](#), and it's a great resource for upcoming writers.

[Guidelines for Vision](#)

Holly Lisle And Lazette Gifford, Publishers

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Vision Editors:

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

- [Lazette Gifford \(zette\) -- Managing Editor, *Vision E-Zine*](#)
- [Dan Keene \(toesy\) -- Genre Editor, *Vision*](#)
- [June Robertson \(June889\)-- Community Editor, *Vision*](#)
- [Andi Ward \(Fetu\) -- Features Editor, *Vision*](#)

Forward Motion Moderators:

If you have any questions about the Forward Motion site, feel free to contact any of us.

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Copyright Information

Vision

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Guidelines

[Expanded Guidelines](#)

[Upcoming Themes](#)

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

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

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

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

If you sell a piece elsewhere after we have accepted it but before we have printed it, and you need to have us pull it in order to be able to make your sale, please let us know

immediately. We can pull a piece up to a few days before we go to press, but the longer you wait, the more difficult time we'll have getting another piece copyedited and ready to fill the slot your piece occupied.

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

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

We look forward to hearing from you.

Holly Lisle and Lazette Gifford
Publishers, Vision