



Mystery Press

Mystery Writers Ink

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Quote

"It's not what you are that holds you back. It's what you think you are not. . . . Denis Waitley"

Message from the President

by Suzanne Stengl

Since our last newsletter, we've held our New Member Orientation, listened to a Hacker, and learned how to make GMC charts for our characters.

At our next meeting in March, we will storyboard those charts. Don't worry if you missed out on the character creation - we'll give you a completed chart - and you can learn how to use storyboarding and stick-it notes to come up with a rough

draft of your novel. This technique is also useful for finding the holes, the weak spots, in a finished draft.

For this year we've continued with our plan for 50% General Writing topics and 50% outside speakers. Be sure to let the Board know if this balance works for you.

Our next meeting will also have our first Book Sale. Come early for best selection!

White Hat Hacking

by Dee Van Dyk

The FBI reports its number one Internet crime is identity theft. In keeping with our worst nightmares, a social insurance number and a name are enough to make you vulnerable to skilled hackers.

Say the word 'hacker' and people immediately think of a socially maladjusted computer geek out to rule the world from his dark basement. Not so, says Steve, a white-hat hacker and January's Mystery Writers' speaker. And, in fact, Steve's own conservative and respectable appearance bear out his claim.

For many of us - gingerly tip-toeing around the Internet and living in fear of news about the latest virus/worm attack and its ultimate effect on our e-mail address book - the motivation of a hacker is a mystery. According to Steve, although different hacker groups have different motivations, they generally share a common trait. Curiosity. Beyond that, different gradients of the hacking world often have different motivations,

recognition and financial gain among them.

Remember "Mafia Boy" who successfully took down Yahoo! and E-bay? He was eventually caught because he bragged in a chat room to an FBI agent masquerading as a 14-year-old kid.

The world of hacking breaks down roughly into four overlapping categories: Script Kiddies, Hackers, Elite and Hacktivists. These categories vary widely in skill level and in the respect accorded them.

Script Kiddies are the dilettantes of the hacking world. Unsophisticated dabblers, Script Kiddies look for the easy targets, sometimes pulling the tools they need off a checklist of items from a website.

A Hacker is a Script Kiddy with targets, focus and technique. An Elite is the hacker who creates the scripts, the cream of the cracker crop and the hacktivist works to bring attention to a political or social cause.

A brief evening with Steve only served to illustrate how complex a hacker's world can be and how interesting a hacker can be. If you gravitate - as many of us do! - to character driven stories, the computer world seems rife with character and characters.

An example? Even Hackers have conferences! And, due to their particular skill set, their conferences feature 'free' pay per view and long distance phone service. Steve's most notable conference is the annual Def Con conference which



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attracts hackers from all over the world and would certainly capture the attention of organizations like the FBI. And it does, as evidenced by Def Con's "Spot the Fed" game. Hackers who successfully identify an FBI agent are rewarded with an "I Spotted the Fed" T-shirt. The ill-concealed Fed has to wear an "I Am a Fed" T-shirt.

Steve suggests the following for those who would like to know more about the world of hacking:

www.securityfocus.com
www.packetstormsecurity

"Secrets & Lies: Digital Security in a Networked World", by Bruce Schneier (ISBN: 0471253111)

Got questions?



Drop us a line at
mysterywritersink@hotmail.com

Everything I Know About Writing I Learned from Swimming

by Terri Baker

Swimming, writing. On the surface, the two seem disparate. Are they? As a writer/swimming instructor/lifeguard, I've observed some fundamental similarities between the two. One's physical, requiring stamina and technique; the other, well, requires stamina and technique.

Whenever you've visited a pool, or passed it at the fitness center on the way to the gym, haven't you seen those funny-looking people with a cap over their heads resembling a bad imitation of Mike Meyers' bald masquerade?

Goggles obscure their eyes far worse than those Coke-bottle-bottom glasses. Then there's the exercise itself. Back and forth, back and forth—it's like watching a tennis match between Stephen Hawking and Dr. Ruth.

Hate to admit it, but I'm one of those alien-looking, water creatures. My inspiration, my sanity and my peace of mind spring from a hard swim at the pool.

Besides this physical experience I've also taught all kinds of swimmers. From beginners to advanced, from adults who couldn't put their face in the water to teenage girls who ask, "Do I, like, have to get my hair wet?"

Teenage boys either want to race everyone in sight, certainly impressing those girls with mascara running down their cheeks, or they spend their time flexing the muscles they've earned from team sports—in the shallow end of the pool while blowing bubbles. So what does all this wet activity have to do with writing?

You have to take the plunge.

First rule of swimming: you must get wet. First rule of writing: you must write. Once a year won't do it, neither will once a month. Once a week is not enough. Once a day is best, but with periodic rests to keep you fresh.

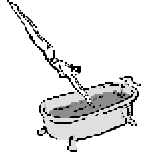
The right equipment will improve your chances of success.

Just like goggles, a bathing cap, flippers and flutter boards can help improve your stroke, so too will the

right computer, writing texts and research tools have a positive effect on your writing.

Check how deep the water is, and how cold, before you jump in.

Figure out what categories and genres appeal to you. What is their length? Does their sensuality run hot or cool?



Practice Makes Perfect

No one is a natural born swimmer. Some learn more quickly than others and some sink faster than others. Only practice can improve your ability.

Do you have the writing strengths to make it in your chosen category or genre? How can you better develop your writing strengths? The more you write, the better a writer you become. The more finished manuscripts you create, the more you will understand the story form as a whole and master it.

Isolate problem areas, work on them separately, before putting it all together.

Flutter boards are used during legs-only drills for swimmers. Pull buoys (these consist of two pieces of Styrofoam threaded together with rope) are wedged between your legs for arms-only drills. Writers' tools are usually books, like the Strunk and White's *Elements of Style*, an excellent dictionary or any Writer's Digest tome on the craft. Our drills cover punctuation and grammar, setting and description, through writing exercises. Drills work on specific skills to facilitate improvement,



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serving to elevate your finished product.

Cross-training helps strengthen your performance.

Just as Olympic swimmers cross-train with weights, running or Pilates, writers can cross-train by doing exercises (see above), writing articles (like this one) or volunteering at a local school to read or discuss writing with children.

A little competition helps you define your progress.

Pitting your abilities against others in a judged competition will delineate the progress you have made. Sure, it may tell you that you've not accomplished as much as you thought you had, but it might also illuminate those areas you need to work on (see above). Most writing contests give you feedback.

Given how much we work in isolation, such response for an unpublished writer is crucial. As you finish closer and closer to the top, performing better and better in the contests you enter, you'll know you're on your way. Soon those contest results will tell you when you're ready to send that manuscript off to an editor or an agent.

Every swimmer has their favorite stroke - front crawl, breaststroke, butterfly. It's the one at which they usually excel

Contemporary vs. historical, paranormal vs. inspirational. Find where your passion lies and swim—uh, go for it.

It is easier to correct bad habits if you've got a coach on deck

A mentor or critique group can also help you discover the strengths and weaknesses in your work. Sometimes a fresh eye is all you need to isolate words used too often or illuminate holes in your plot. Stephen King, in his autobiographical book *On Writing*, attests to the fact that he still has 10 friends read his work and submit comments before he sends the manuscript on to the publisher.

Watching swimmers at a meet, or even at the Olympics, is a good learning tool

We can always learn from those who excel in their sport or chosen profession. Therefore, read widely and voraciously. Books on bestseller lists, books reviewed in the paper, romance genre or mystery, non-fiction or fiction. Learn not to make the mistakes of the bad books you read; find out why and how that bestseller became one.

The more you swim, the better your physical condition will become.

The more you write, the stronger your writing will be. Your 'writing muscle' will become toned and efficient. Similes will rise to the surface and just the right words dive into your prose.

Sometimes you get water up your nose.

Rejections hurt. They are part of the process of getting wet.

Swimming is a very solitary sport. Join a conditioning group for camaraderie and support.

Just remember, if the conditioning group gets too big, the lanes become too crowded. The conditioning coach has little opportunity to focus on each individual. Criticism and support wanes. Some attend who simply want to improve their strokes. They're usually in the Slow Lane. Others are determined to improve their technique so as to better their performance in the next triathlon.

Critique groups help put the people element into writing. But numerous, diverse opinions can confuse the writer, make her lose her story's focus. Worse, too much overriding advice can take the soul of the story away from the writer.

Questions to ask yourself: Does each member of your critique group have similar goals? Or are some merely there to visit, to discuss their favorite authors or to exchange experiences? Manageable numbers and a similarity of goals within a critique group are musts.

Thanks to the hours I've spent in the pool, I'm confident in my swimming ability. Its physical benefits are not my sole reward. Similarly, the time I've devoted to writing has given me confidence in my abilities to write and, eventually, to sell my work.

Member News

Sharon Wildwind is presenting a one hour lecture, "Mystery Mania: What's Hot in Mysteries", at local Libraries this spring. See *Mystery Events at the Library* for details.





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Book Talk

by Sherile Reilly, Librarian

Orson Scott Card's book, *Characters and Viewpoint*, is one of the books in *The Elements of Fictions Writing* series. The author compares a symphony, which is a shared event, to writing fiction, which is a solitary art where we are both storyteller and writer.

This book isn't an easy read like an *Idiot's Guide to Characters and Viewpoint*. It's a set of tools for creating characters, situations and events, along with constructing the plot, scene and much more. There are three sections about characters: Inventing, Constructing and Performing. These sections are divided into very detailed chapters with very little white space on any page. Be prepared to read once to get an overview, then get out your pencil and paper and make notes as you study this book. It's in the MWI library and available for loan.

Give me a call at 286-6266 to reserve it.

Blue Pencil Café: Getting the Lead Out

The Alexandra Writers' Centre Society is pleased to offer its third Blue Pencil Café on April 2, 2003 at McNally Robinson from 7-10 p.m.

Blue Pencil is an opportunity for interested writers to bring in two poems or up to five pages of prose for critique by a published author. Our April authors include: Betty Jane Hegerat, Cecelia Frey, Cheryl Sikomas and Catherine Moss.

To book a Blue Pencil appointment, call Rebecca (264-4730) at the Alexandra Writers' Centre Society and watch the AWCS (www.alexandrawriters.org) website for updates.

A recommendation from Kathy Phillips of Spenser's Mystery Bookshop in Boston:

I'm in the process of reading catalogues to order stock for the store, and I've come across a new title that may be of interest to new writers. On sale July 29th: *THE SEVEN STEPS ON THE WRITER'S PATH: The Journey from Frustration to Fulfillment* by Nancy Pickard and Lynn Lott to be published by Ballantine at \$24.95.

I admire Nancy Pickard's books very much, and I'd particularly recommend *IOU* for an insightful, impassioned story of a woman dealing at an elemental level with the death of her mentally ill mother. A tour de force.

From Julie's Dictionary

By Julie Kirsch



I have often wondered what exactly politesse means. Was there even a difference between it and politeness? So, instead of tearing my hair out every time I saw it, I turned to my dictionary. **Politesse** is defined as a noun meaning formal politeness. Hmm, how Renaissance.

Lug a Mug

We don't have a storage area at our meeting place so please bring your own coffee cup. Enjoy a bottomless cup of coffee for only 25 cents! Styrofoam cups are available to the forgetful!



Book Sale at March Meeting!

We are having a fundraiser. Please donate your old mysteries to our book sale. Books will be on sale during the coffee break for \$2 each. However, if you come early and you see a book you must have, the price before 7 p.m. will be \$3 each.

It's a Mystery!

by Penny E. Grey

On January 18 at Calgary's Memorial Park Library, 15 men and women, brimming with ideas, gathered together to hear what local writer Eileen Coughlan, author of *Dying by Degrees*, had to say about writing a mystery. They were not disappointed.

An enthusiastic speaker, Eileen led informative discussions and exercises on relevant topics such as finding your story and developing your characters; she also provided useful tips to help get your mystery on paper. Above all, she emphasized the need to find your own way of doing things and to filter out the "must do's" and "don't do's" often found in writing books.

Eileen got us started by reminding us of one of the most useful ways to get an idea: ask yourself "What if?" Through exercises, we learned to



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create a one-liner sentence that says what your mystery is about - and then to expand that one-liner into a back-cover paragraph, which introduces your main characters and provides the hook that will reel in an agent and a publisher, and then your readers.

During the workshop, Eileen stressed character development. She suggested taking each of your main characters out for coffee and pretending to conduct an interview to find out everything you need to know about him or her. She suggested that one of the most important questions to ask each character is "What are you afraid of?". She also recommended Deb Dixon's Goal, Motivation and Conflict analysis to truly understand your characters and their role in your story, the killer and the victim included.

She reminded us that every mystery really has two stories: one from the killer's point of view and one from the sleuth's point of view. The writer must know both, but will choose which to reveal to the reader. This is largely the difference between a thriller and a typical mystery.

Eileen shared with us her own writing experiences and methods, and we went away with some very useful tips:

One, don't get bogged down doing research in the beginning: it just keeps you from writing. She suggested tagging places in your manuscript as you write to remind yourself where you need to do

research to get your facts straight and make your story credible.

Two, don't feel obligated to outline your story before you write. It may be useful for getting started, but your story will probably change as you write and your outline will end up in the trash can. To help with plotting, try dissecting a book similar to the one you want to write to find out how *that* author did it.

Eileen has found storyboarding to be useful, and also organizes her files into two main ones: main document, where the story is written; and story files, divided into research, characters, setting, plot and clues sub-files.

Three, if you know who the killer is before you begin to write, your writing may show it. If you let the story unfold as you write, the suspense *you* feel while figuring out the identity of the killer will show instead, and increase the suspense for the reader.

Thanks to Eileen's superb leadership, I was furiously noting ideas for my own novel throughout the workshop. Judging by the great ideas going around the room, all the participants were doing the same. Well done, Eileen!

Mystery Events at the Library

Full details are available on the Calgary Public Library website, www.calgarypubliclibrary.com.

Sharon Wildwild is presenting "Mystery Mania" at libraries this spring. She will be at the Louise Riley branch on March 13 (221-2046) and the Fish Creek branch on April 5 from 7-8p.m. (221-2090).

The Memorial Park Mystery Book Club will meet the last Saturday of the month from Jan.-May. Register at (221-2006).

CPL also offers free Classic Mystery films at Memorial Park Library at 1:30 p.m., Wednesdays in February and March. Call (221-2006) for info.

CPL offers presentations by various speakers, such as a Calgary homicide cop and other police officers. Example: CSI: The Facts of Forensics at W.R. Castell from 7-8:30 April 2 (register 260-2600).

Clues

By Susan Mills

Be our next "Mystery Sleuth".

Question: What outlaw, made famous by Hollywood movie screens, has ties to our Alberta heritage and maybe even got his push into crime here?



Hint: Famous Duos!

Submissions for Clues?
Email: quillpen@optonline.net



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Check out CPS Homicide Unit on March 27, 7-8 p.m. at the Fish Creek branch (221-2090).

Please note that people do need to register for most of these.

Spring Program Schedule

Thursday March 13, 2003

Old Y Centre
7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.
topic: Storyboarding
presenters: Sherile Reilly and Suzanne Stengl

Thursday April 10, 2003

Old Y Centre
7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.
topic: Forensic Pathology
presenter: Terri Biswanger
(see details following)

Thursday May 8, 2003

Old Y Centre
7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.
topic: shoplifting
presenter: to be announced

Thursday June 12, 2003

Old Y Centre
7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.
Annual General Meeting
topic: The Tax Mystery: Tax Handling For Writers
presenter: to be announced

April Meeting: Forensic Pathologist

Terri Biswanger has worked over 600 cases since she graduated with a BS in Forensic Science (Specialty in Criminalistics) from John Jay College of Criminal Justice,

CUNY. She interned at the Calgary Medical Examiners office and Kings County ME (Brooklyn), assisting in autopsies and field investigation and was employed with the Orange County Sheriff's Dept., California in Crime Scene Investigation.

Solved

We have a real "Mystery Sleuth" with a perfect two time win!

Question: Where is 'Sandstone' City and why is it so unique?



Answer: Sandstone City is a name applied to Calgary in the late 19th century. In 1886, after a terrible fire destroyed much of Calgary's business section, a city ordinance was passed stipulating that all large downtown buildings must be constructed of Paskapoo sandstone, abundt locally. Most buildings in prairie towns in those days were constructed of wood, hence making Calgary unique.

Penny Grey
Member, MWI



Mystery Writers Ink Society

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Mission Statement

Mystery Writers Ink shall support writers of mystery fiction by providing networking opportunities, educating, and informing writers about writing techniques, publishing and marketing.

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Memberships

are accepted between Sept 1 & Oct 31 of each year.
Published authors & past members may join at any time.
Full membership: \$35
Associate membership: \$45

Newsletter Submissions

Mystery Press is published quarterly in September, December, March and June.
Original material only please. Articles may not be reprinted without permission of the authors. INK reserves the right to edit submissions.

Deadline is the 15th of the month prior to that issue.

Please send submissions by E-mail to Julie Kirsch:
juliekirsch@hotmail.com