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**A Resource For Writers**

**May/June 2004**

**Featuring:**

**Leading us to Sanctuary: An Interview with Lynn Abbey**

**Setting Wise Goalposts By Darwin A. Garrison**

**Catching the Cat's Tale By Karen Eck**

**Diary of a Non Short Story Writer By Valerie Comer**

**From First to Final: Steps for Honing Your Short Story  
By Margaret McGaffey Fisk**

**And much more!**

## **Issue # 21, March/April 2004**

Editor's Note:  
[Writing Lengths](#)

[About this issue](#)

Interview:  
[Leading us to Sanctuary:  
An Interview with  
Lynn Abbey](#)

Workshop:  
[Almost Random Events](#)

Theme Articles:

[Setting Wise Goalposts](#)  
By Darwin A. Garrison

[Catching the Cat's Tale](#)  
By Karen Eck

[Diary of a Non Short Story Writer](#)  
By Valerie Comer

[From First to Final:  
Steps for Honing Your Short Story](#)  
By Margaret McGaffey Fisk

[Conquering the Short Story](#)  
By D.M. Bonanno

[Advantages of Short Story Writing](#)  
By Leigha Dickens

[The Short Story:  
Science Fiction's Lifeblood](#)  
By Cheryl Peugh

[The Delicacy of Short Stories](#)  
By Lazette Gifford

Advanced Writing:

[Namestorming](#)  
By Leah Tribolo

[Finding Ta Taglegebol](#)

By Steven Swain

[Getting \(Think\) Tanked](#)

By Jon Chaisson

[Research and Worldbuilding  
for Those Who Hate Libraries](#)

By Betty L. Meshack

Reviews

Book Review:

[The Well-Fed Writer](#)

Reviewed by Joshua Johnston

Website Review:

[Websites for Christian Writers of Genre Fiction](#)

By Valerie Comer

Market Review:

[Mar's Market Report](#)

[# 3](#)

By Margaret McGaffey Fisk

[Good News from Forward Motion](#)

[Submission and Guidelines](#)

[Join Forward Motion](#)

[Masthead](#)

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## About This Issue

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May/June 2004

Issue # 21

Theme: Writing Shorter Fiction

Welcome to Issue # 21!

For most writers the creation of short stories is either a gift or something unfathomable. In this issue you get to glimpse into the making of short stories and how writers approach them.

We also have a wonderful interview from writer Lynn Abbey, and some great articles outside the theme.

As we near the middle of the year, I hope that you have found Vision helpful in meeting your personal goals for the year, and that we've provided you with help and inspiration. Here's hoping that the second half of 2004 goes well for all of us!

#### Upcoming Themes for Vision in 2004:

- July/August -- The Fine Points of Critiquing

(June 10 deadline)

- September/October -- Essentials of Marketing

(August 10 deadline)

- November/December -- Toys for Writers

(October 10 deadline)

#### **Upcoming Events at Forward Motion:**

- Back to School for Busy Writers features a class on building primitive shelters.

- May Challenge -- It's the dreaded Story-a-day challenge! Are you brave enough (or crazy enough) to write as many as five short stories a week? They need only be at least 500 words, and we do take the weekends off!

Come and join us for this fun and insanity -- and much more!

<http://fmwriters.com>

## Note from the Editor

### Writing Lengths

By Lazette Gifford

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I love to write short stories.

I love to write novels.

All right. Yes. **I love to write.** I don't worry about what sort of idea I'm getting when one pops up, whether that's genre or length. A story will be as long as it needs to be, and forcing a short story into a novel or a novel into a short story isn't doing the story idea justice. I often play with the length within the definition of novel, novella, novelette, short story and flash -- but the idea itself will usually fall clearly into one of these lengths.

For those who aren't certain about the different lengths, here are the SFWA® (Science Fiction Writers of America) word count guidelines:

- Novel -- 40,000 words or more
- Novella -- 17,500 - 39,999 words
- Novelette -- 7,500 -17,499 words
- Short Story -- 7,499 words or fewer

In addition I'd add the Flash Fiction length which is usually 1000 words or less, most often defined by the publication. Some are as little as 100 words.

Obviously, novels are rarely as short as 40,000 words, and magazine editors will often say they take short stories up to 10,000 words or more. You cannot use this chart as the final say -- but it does give a writer some idea of the general lengths to work with.

For many years I was told I was a natural novelists -- that is one of those people who just naturally write novels rather than short stories. But I found, instead, that I am a natural story teller. The length was a product of the story, and it just took me a while to find short stories I wanted to tell.

Don't be afraid to try a length you've never attempted before. Don't be afraid to write the stories you imagine, no matter where they take you or how long they require you to work.

And you will find that within those lengths fall wondrous tales, pretty stories, and dangerous dreams.

They are all yours for the taking. Let your imagination loose of the fetters imposed by length, genre, and other conventions -- and tell the



tales you want. They will not all sell, but sometimes the joy is just in the telling.

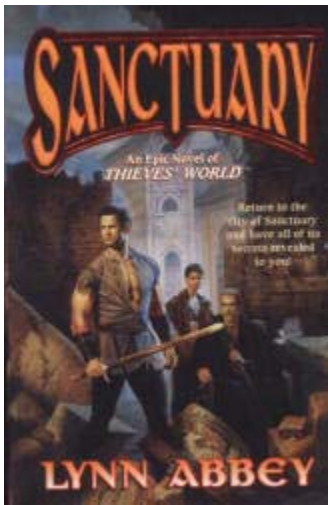
Have fun,

**Zette**

## Leading us to Sanctuary: An Interview with Lynn Abbey

Interviewed by Lazette Gifford

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Lynn Abbey is returning to her roots... but those roots are in Sanctuary, a town filled with dark magic, notorious thieves, and wondrous tales. With the revival of the famous (or perhaps infamous) Thieves' World books, Lynn Abbey has begun the publication of a very popular series of stories, long missed by readers.

However, if the Thieves' World Series is the only writing you associate with Lynn Abbey then you are missing a wonderful array of fantasy novels. Lynn's unique, exciting stories are filled with wonderful adventures and great characters. From the publication of her first book, *Daughter of the Bright Moon*, fans have looked forward to each new tale.

Be sure to visit The Worlds of Lynn Abbey (<http://www.lynnabbey.com/>) to keep up on her latest work in both her standalone novels and the Thieves' World books.

**Vision:** Let's start out with a simple question that's sometimes hard to answer: When did you start writing and what drew you to it?

**Lynn:** My parents might say that I started telling stories when I learned to talk and decided that I'd become a writer the day I recognized a typewriter, but my professional career began in early 1977 when I was recuperating from an auto accident. With one ankle broken and the other severely sprained (not to mention a fractured skull) I found myself taking advantage of friends' hospitality. For several weeks I lived on a sofa at Bob Asprin's house, reading my way through his library of SF and Fantasy while he was at work. As the haze receded, I began to think that I could write a novel, too.

The truth is that I wasn't very good at it, but I had an unfair advantage: that auto accident? It occurred while I was on my way to the airport to pick up Gordon Dickson, who was coming in to Ann Arbor for the annual SF convention. Gentleman that he was, Gordie felt the need to do *something* for the fan who'd wracked up her car and body on his behalf and I was not so far

gone that I didn't immediately think of "free advice from an established author."

Gordie stuck with me for the better part of a year. He later admitted that he'd done his best to discourage me, but I'm dense when it comes to discouragement and never picked up on his many hints.

Persistence pays and so does a willingness to follow directions. Each time Gordie told me to do a rewrite, I went home and did my best. After several false starts he encouraged me to have a go at chapter two; after that it was, in his own words, "clickety bang."

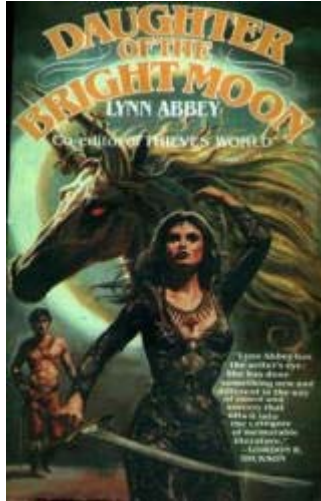
As to why writing and not some other form of creative endeavor, I think the answer lies in my high-school sophomore English class. We were give that hoary old assignment: write a short story. I'll date myself here, but the Berlin Wall had just gone up and I decided to write a short story about a group of friends whose lives had been divided and who devised a plan to bring the East Berliners to the West. I gave them a simple plan that involved a river, never mind that I still don't know if there *is* a useful river flowing through Berlin. (A clear indication that I'd

eventually find a home in fantasy fiction.) It took a while to write; I'd guess it was about five thousand words long -- fairly lengthy for a high-school assignment -- when I turned it in.

My teacher decided that some of stories needed to be read aloud. I clearly remember that most of the stories which preceded mine were "frame" stories that began with "I went to bed" and ended with "and then I realized it had all been a dream." Superficially, they were much more fantastic than mine and I was starting to worry that I'd blown the assignment. Then it was my turn and I read without interruption -- I mean totally without interruption: there wasn't a sound in the classroom until I finished and then my fellow students and my teacher *applauded*.

There is nothing that compares to an unexpected round of applause and I had never gotten one before. It was as though someone had flicked a light switch. I'm no athlete and my piano lessons were going nowhere; I got good marks in school, but there were always kids who outshined me -- until I wrote a short story. Suddenly, I knew there was something I was good at. It wasn't something I imagined I could turn into a career, but that

bedrock faith that I *could* write was what blinded me to Gordie's attempts to discourage me.



A good fifteen years had passed between my short story and what would become DAUGHTER OF THE BRIGHT MOON, during which time I'd written no fiction, unless one counts a few under-researched term papers and my journal.. The process of getting two college degrees had stunted and twisted my

"natural" style, but with Gordie's help, I recovered it and never looked back.

**Vision:** Would you like to tell us about writer Gordon Dickson and your first novel publication?

**Lynn:** I guess I've already answered part of this question. I was one of those rare and fortunate writers who did not go through an amateur period of creating unpublished/unpublishable fiction. The idea that I *could* write had been part of me, but I didn't actually start writing with professional intent until a golden opportunity fell (crashed) into my lap.

Gordie had mentored many other authors before he agreed to mentor me and had evolved a mentoring style which emphasized asking questions: What were you trying to achieve here? (Or, in my case, Don't you think that adding characters... dialog... a hint of a plot?) It was a very gentle strategy because it didn't involve him giving his opinions (I never guessed how hopeless he thought I was in the beginning) and it allowed me (and his other mentorees) to find solutions in our own words.

When gentle questions didn't work, Gordie would take a problematic chunk of prose and run it through his typewriter (this was pre-computers, of course) and rearrange it. He rarely added or subtracted words, just changed the order of the sentences, then he'd hand it back. Flaws of style and sequence would fairly leap off the page and the means to correct them would, too. Looking back on the process, I realize that his rearranging tactic was just another way to keep his opinions to himself and let me find the answers that worked for me.

The final tactic I remember Gordie using didn't come into play until there was a substantial piece of prose under consideration. Again, in retrospect I know what he saw: a plot had bogged down, character motivation had become obscured, or the logic of

cause and effect had evaporated. Gordie could have gone after the problem piece by piece, but experience had convinced him that the best way to solve the problem was to suggest something absurd, to recommend a turn of plot or character which he knew would be utterly unacceptable. The idea was that in the process of defending the integrity of my story, I would clean up the structural problems without focusing on them. And it worked -- I've used it myself with the writers I've mentored.

The actual process of selling my first novel was exciting at the time, but the market has changed so much that there's nothing useful left in the tale. That sale, though, changed my interaction with my mentor. I was no longer an apprentice but had become a journeyman and we talked less about specifics, more about the craft of writing in general.

Gordie said that the journeyman stage would last until I'd published (not written, but published) a million words. He likened it to a cabinetmaker or other artisan. In the beginning, every time the cabinetmaker began a new job, he spent as much time out in the toolshed grinding out the tools he'd need to solve the problems that particular job presented. Gradually -- and unconsciously -- he'd spend less time grinding new tools until,



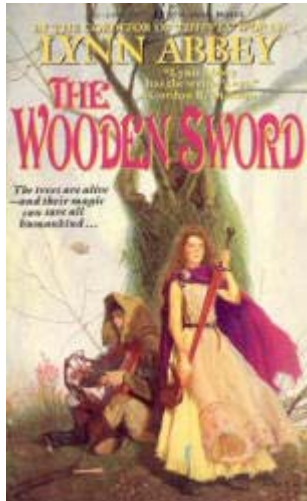
around the millionth word, he'd find himself in need of a new tool and, returning to the toolshed, he'd realize that the grinders were covered with dust.

It took me about twelve years to reach my million-word mark and when I got there I found that, as usual, Gordie had been there first. The challenge now is to continue to challenge myself in ways that get me back into my toolshed because it's possible to become so comfortable with one's style and structure that one ceases to grow.

**Vision:** Fantasy seems to be your genre of choice. Do you like to write in any other genres? What is it about fantasy that draws you to write in that genre?

**Lynn:** I've thought about writing in other genres, but my imagination just doesn't seem to lead me in other directions. Actually, I don't so much think of myself a fantasy writer as a writer of histories of places that don't exist. I'd like to write the histories of places and people that have existed, but I've never been satisfied with the completeness of my research. In order to feel free enough to write at all, I have to give my research a "twist" that allows me to say, Okay, this is NOT 12th century

France; I don't have to have the background nailed down perfectly; I can wing it.



The only market for the histories of places that don't exist is the Fantasy half of SF/Fantasy. Writing genre fantasy requires a few more research "twists," most of them involving magic. By the time I start the first draft, whatever magic system I've built is meant to seem fundamental to the world I've created, but it's really an afterthought. I have a problematic relationship with magic: when push comes to shove, I don't believe in it. When I set out to write a new novel and I reach the moment when it's time to add the "magic," in my own mind I'm adding "science." My magic is always empirical -- it can be analyzed and replicated and there is always a specific "engine" driving it. Nothing happens that breaks the "rules."

After twenty-plus years, my "tool set" has gotten seriously biased in favor of genre fantasy. A year or so ago, I considered writing a "mainstream" novel and, despite several time-consuming efforts, I just couldn't come up with a concept that made my ears wiggle and didn't involve fantasy-genre

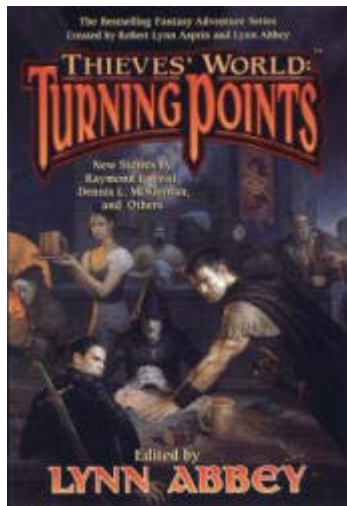
elements. I delved a bit into what mainstreamers call "magical realism," thinking that it might work for me, but "magical realism" is based on magical magic, that is, the happening of things that cannot be explained by the characters and are not explained by the author. This is not my kind of magic, so "magical realism" wasn't an option and I returned to the fantasy fold.

I've also thought about writing on the SF side of the house -- the process by which I create my magic systems shouldn't really be that much different from the processes by which SF authors overcome the constraints of  $E=mc^2$ . As a result, I do have a small collection of traditional SF ideas which I've never been able to sell. I'm known as a fantasy writer and neither my agent nor my editors want to risk my "brand" (such as it is) by jumping genre. If I want to write SF, I'll have to write it under another name.

When I started out, I thought being a writer was all about *writing*. Writing is important, but the business of a writer is publishing and the realities of publishing can be very limiting, even unpleasant. I'm not constrained by being a genre writer. Any story I can imagine, I can cast as a fantasy novel and

probably get it published. Were I to decide that I didn't want to be a genre writer, or that I wanted to switch genres, I'd be looking at starting over and when one expects the royalties to pay the rent, that's just not practical.

**Vision:** Why did you decide to bring back the Thieves' World series? How does working on the new incarnation compare to working on the old ones? Have you enjoyed getting back into the world?



**Lynn:** Ah, Thieves' World... otherwise known as the project that ate my life in the Eighties. For me the rise and fall of the 1980s incarnation of TW was deeply personal and intertwined with the rise and fall of my marriage to co-editor, Robert Asprin. Suffice to say that when the marriage began to go south, one of the first casualties was Thieves' World, which ceased publication a good five years before the divorce was finalized. By the time the divorce was final there was very little perceived value left in TW both from a New York publisher's perspective and from my own.

In the "who gets what" negotiations that accompany all divorces, Thieves' World was pretty much an afterthought: something that wound up on my side of the ledger along with other responsibilities and debts. I did not imagine that there would be any future value in the milieu and frequently swore that "pigs would fly" before I stuck my hand in to *that* meat grinder. But time really can heal wounds and by the mid-90s, when I realized that I was signing books that were older than the readers offering them to me, I began to reconsider my position.

Resurrecting Thieves' World was an arduous project made easier when we secured the interest of Tom Doherty at Tor Books. Tom had been the publisher at Ace when Ace published volume one of the original series (which no one, at the time, suspected would become a series). He was willing to take a chance on a package of old and new material.

A dozen years is a long time in the world of publishing. The market is more fragmented and competitive than ever, and overall readership is down. Finding a niche is the first challenge; inserting a book into that niche is the second. Our strategy was to level the playing field by advancing the milieu chronology a

character generation and inviting a mix of old and new writers to create stories in the reshaped milieu.

It's been great to work cooperatively with a group of talented authors again, but the book world has become an unforgiving place and it remains to be seen if Thieves' World can reestablish a toehold in a sufficient number of imaginations to become a regularly scheduled product. If enjoyment were sufficient, then we'd be home free with a solid core of writers and a host city that, for me anyway, is endlessly exciting.

At the moment, Thieves' World stands right on the edge. The sales figures for volume two of the new anthology *Enemies of Fortune*, which will come out this December, will tip the scales one way or the other. From a purely selfish point of view, I urge everyone whoever enjoyed a visit to Sanctuary to come back and see what we're up to.

**Vision:** Has working as an editor on such a famous series like Thieves' World presented you with any specific problems?

**Lynn:** I'm a writer first and an editor second... or maybe third or even fourth. Successful editing requires a very specific set of skills and I don't claim to have all of them at my command. I'm

also fortunate in that, because Thieves' World has always been an "invitation only" anthology, my reading is pre-screened. It takes a special talent to read dozens and dozens of stories looking for the handful that merit inclusion in a magazine or anthology.

That said, the challenges that arise in Thieves' World tend to fall into two categories: continuity and compatibility.

Continuity problems are fairly straightforward, with absolute conflicts being the easiest to resolve. If writer A and writer B both lay claim to the same piece of real estate or character, it's usually possible to come up with a chronology that allows both stories to exist. Failing that, there's always the "but little did he/she know" clause that allows a bit of drama in one story to be completely reworked in a subsequent story. (This is also known as the "best laid plans gang oft awry" rule.)

It's a bit more complicated when an author does something hard to ignore -- plagues, natural disasters, the night it rained fish in Sanctuary... When a story like that arrives, either it's got to be the last story in the volume or every other author has to have a whack at rewriting their story to incorporate the "big event."

This happened in TURNING POINTS when Dennis McKiernan decided not only to feature a major single-elimination martial competition, but to frame his story with a combination lunar/solar eclipse cycle. Fortunately, he got his story in very early and the other writers in the volume were able to incorporate both the competition and the eclipses.

Dennis also fell victim to the "but little did he know" clause. In his story, Soldt, Sanctuary's resident swordmaster and assassin, loses the final duel of the competition. It works dramatically, but it's a bit out of character, so in the published anthology there's a scene at the very beginning of the book, setting up the dynamics of the eclipses to come, where Soldt learns that he's expected to throw the final duel so the powers-that-be can find out what other characters are up to. Nothing in Dennis' story changed, not even the final scene where Soldt wakes up with a drug-hangover and vows that someone's going to pay for the indignity.

Compatibility problems are touchier because the Thieves' World ground rules allow author A to make use of author B's character. Sometimes author A does something that sends author B right through the roof and the editor has to scramble to



play peacemaker. The classic compatibility problem happened early on in the first series. Andy Offutt had created a thief, Hanse Shadowspawn, and was having ten kinds of fun dragging Hanse through the mud (Andy freely admitted that Hanse incorporated all the traits of every bully who'd ever given him grief in school). Then we invited Janet Morris to play in the sandbox and she ante'd up Tempus Thales, the baddest bully on the block, and more beside.

Janet read about Hanse and thought, What a neat character! Tempus will take this young punk under his wing, both professionally and romantically. Janet politely asked us to clear this with Andy and that Southern gentleman of the old school just about melted the phone when asked if Hanse was up for an affair with Tempus. (But the really interesting thing about this was that it permanently changed Andy's perspective on Hanse. Suddenly Andy realized how emotionally dangerous the life of a gutter-rat could be and things began to change... Take a look at Andy's stories in the first three volumes to see the transformation.)

**Vision:** As an editor, what advice can you give to new writers? Can you explain about the differences between an open anthology and ones like Thieves' World which are invitation only?

**Lynn:** Some of the best advice I can give an aspiring author is trivial. Most times an editor doesn't know you from a hole in the wall when he/she opens the envelope containing your story. That manuscript is your avatar -- it stands for you and makes your first impression. And, as the old saw goes, you only get one chance to make a first impression. So, go the extra step to insure that you don't start at a disadvantage. We used to recommend that you put a new ribbon in your typewriter before typing the final draft of a story. No one uses a ribbon typewriter any more, but your final draft is not the time to try to wring a few more sheets out of your inkjet cartridge.

Don't forget the standard things everyone tells you: use an easily read font, preferably at 12-pitch, never less than 10; 3/4" margins are a minimum, 1" are better; double space your lines; make use of your spellchecker! Unless your return address says United Kingdom, try to conform to standard American style (that's color, not colour; gray, not grey).

Yes, it's true that you're trying to stand out from the crowd, but leave that challenge for your story, not your format.

Oh, and very important, if you're submitting to a particular editor, get the gender and spelling right. I know it's a silly mistake when I get something addressed to Lynn Abby or Lynne Abbey, but I notice it every time and it tweaks my mood as I start to read and you never want to tweak an editor's mood.

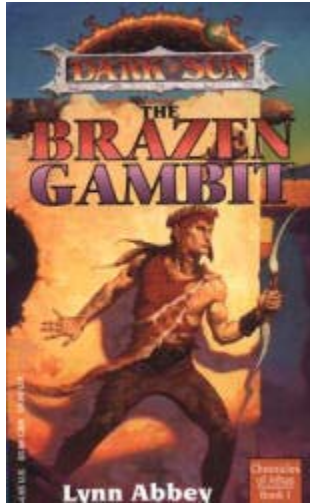
As for the differences between open anthologies and invitation-only anthologies... they're pretty much self explanatory. Editors of open anthologies actively seek submissions from all comers, established and unknown (they may not have a level playing field behind the invitation, but they are willing to read whatever the tide washes up at their feet). Open anthology editors usually seek to spread the word that they're reading and the minimal requirements for submission.

Editors of invitation-only anthologies tend to be a secretive lot. We're looking for very specific things in our story mix and know the "voices" we're looking for to round out the chorus. Additionally, an anthology like Thieves' World operates on a time lag... ideally, the writers are hard at work on the next volume's

stories when readers first lay their hands on the current volume. There's almost no chance that an unsolicited story will mesh with the next volume's storylines.

But, if there's a "closed," invitation-only anthology out there that draws you like a magnet, then your best course is to contact the editor and offer selections from your already written (preferably already published) prose and ask to be considered for a future volume. I do keep a small file of samples from not-yet-invited authors. The cold, cruel fact is that I wouldn't be doing any of them a favor if I asked for a story. In the hierarchy of publishing, unless you've already got a substantial body of publishing work, producing stories for a pre-made milieu, be it Thieves' World, Star Trek, or Forgotten Realms, is going to be a negative credential, something to be overcome when you try to market your own stories.

**Vision:** You have worked extensively in universes that were not fully your own (such as Thieves World and Forgotten Realms). Do you find that there are any specific things that give you trouble? How did you get involved in writing for those types of books?



**Lynn:** It's true I've done a lot of shared-worlds and work-for-hire. Ask me if I think it's always been good for my career and the unequivocal answer is No, but it's paid the bills when the bills need to be paid. I've developed a reputation as someone who can turn a sow's ear into a silk purse when it comes to pulling a story out of a murky milieu and that keeps my name in circulation. (I guess it's good to be known for something?)

Contractual considerations are very important in shared-world or work-for-hire situations. I make sure I know exactly what's expected and, when possible, I try to get it written into the contract that if the powers-that-be sign off on a detailed outline of the project and I deliver a book that conforms to that outline, then the powers-that-be can't meddle with it or call for rewrites. That's the most annoying risk that I find associated with work-for-hire situations: somebody's always trying to move the goal posts. It's a good idea to nail those suckers down before I start the first draft.

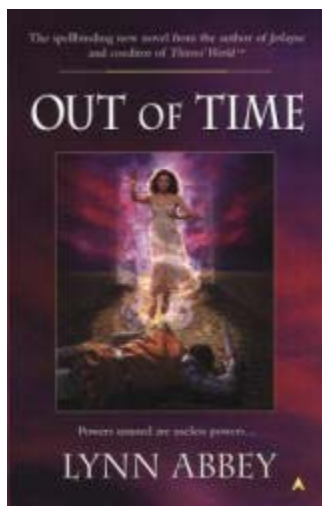
Money is another thing. You usually don't get the copyright or reprint rights in a shared-world or work-for-hire situation (Thieves' World is an exception), so your ability to make additional money off your work is limited. My agent usually tries for a higher royalty. At the very least, we want the advance money up-front.

While there are exceptions, the quality of editing in the work-for-hire world is generally a few notches below what you'd find elsewhere and I've had a few run-ins with editors who thought they were really collaborators. That can be very annoying. It can be worse than annoying when you don't have an agent running interference for you or you don't have the financial freedom to walk away from a project that's turning sour. (I always make sure I have an escape clause that allows me to pull my name off a project if I have to abandon it.)

Truth is, the money can be decent, but I really don't recommend the work-for-hire route as an entry into publishing. Too many things can go wrong. It's harder to get stand-alone material published, but it's worth the wait and effort, and then, if you really want to do a Star Trek novel, you can pretty much dictate the terms.

Thieves' World, by the way, was my entry into the work-for-hire world. Because I'd been involved in the creation of a successful shared-world it was assumed that I'd know the rules in other shared worlds so the invitations flowed my way. It was a classic case of being in the right place at the right time with the right credentials -- but it still wasn't the best thing for my career.

**Vision:** You have a unique relationship with the Emma Merrigan books. Would you like to tell us about those stories?



**Lynn:** Ah, Emma Merrigan and the TIME books. I'm not sure how much of the background I can admit to. Suffice to say that things had gotten a bit rocky between ACE books and myself. We were arguing over two outstanding books from an old contract. They didn't want the books

originally on the table (the second and third books in the SIEGE OF SHADOWS trilogy) and weren't showing enthusiasm for anything else I suggested. So I asked them, Well, what would you like me to write for you? I got a request for a contemporary fantasy, possibly involving a mother and her daughter, and witchcraft. I swallowed the impulse to say that sounded a lot

like a book I'd written for them back in 1982 called *The GUARDIANS* and got to work on a story.

They had had very specific complaints about the believability of my protagonists, so I decided to play it safe and model my new heroine on the most believable character I knew: myself. Emma is not an autobiographical character, but we do have a lot in common. Whenever Emma has to react to something, she reacts the way I would react.

To be honest, as I wrote *OUT OF TIME*, I was hoping ACE would reject the book. I was in a rather manic and not terribly mature mood as I wrote and, ironically, the whole process was very liberating. I took risks with the style and characterization (and the parameters I'd been given) and, before long, I was having serious fun.

One of the risks I took was turning one of the classic fairy-tale tropes on its head. Fairy-tales (and modern fantasies in general) tend to be about young people on the brink of adulthood discovering their destiny, powers, whatever. In modeling Emma after myself, I had a heroine who was far enough into her adulthood to be thinking about golden years and



retirement plans. She had a dull life, but it was the life she'd built for herself and she was determined to be content with it. And, of course, I had to shake it down to its foundations. Emma discovers the paranormal powers she should have discovered back in junior high... she also discovers the mother whom she never knew (remember, ACE wanted a mother-daughter angle) and who happens to look not a day over twenty-five.

The power Emma discovers is the ability (and obligation) to walk through time to trace a curse to its historical origin and "mooting" it in the moment of its creation. A mooted curse ceases to exist in the present and the formerly cursed individual is set free. There's more to it, of course, and it gives me the opportunity to indulge one of my great passions: the collection of historical trivia. In OUT OF TIME Emma unravels a domestic tragedy in 11th century England, in BEHIND TIME she deals with 17th century Paris, in TAKING TIME (which was published in April) the focus is on a series of forest fire in the Thumb region of Michigan, and in DOWN TIME, Emma tries to take a vacation and winds up digging into the dark shadows of colonial Nassau. And she does all of this while trying to hold down a job in the

library at a Midwest university, among other details of ordinary life.

**Vision:** Once upon a time you lived in a unique three-person writing community with authors Jane Fancher and C.J. Cherryh. What was it like to live in the company of two other writers?

**Lynn:** It was a lot of fun and it was more than three authors, it was three authors and several hundred characters. Mealtime conversations could bound and rebound over several universes as well kept track of one another's projects. Fortunately, none of us do voices.

Friends who are not writers try to be sympathetic and understanding of a writer's mood, but, truly, it takes one to know one. Carolyn, Jane and I didn't have to waste time explaining things. There was (and, over a greater distance, there still is) instant understanding when a scene stagnated, an editor balked, or you were holding a brand-new book in your hands for the first time.

Our little writer's colony existed for about three years and it would take nearly that long to share the stories we accumulated. There was the time I was home by myself for a

weekend and, in the course of feeding Jane and Carolyn's cats, managed to let a pair of mallards into their living room and leave them there overnight, or the nights when dying cutworms invaded my bedroom, our marathon holiday decorating binges, and the many, many times we thrashed out a recalcitrant plot.

I went to Oklahoma to recover from a shattering divorce and I couldn't have found a better, safer haven, but in time I realized that I needed to be closer to my parents, which entailed moving to Florida. A few years later, Jane and Carolyn moved to Washington state -- so these days we're about as far apart as you can be and still be in the continental US, but the friendship and camaraderie persists.

**Vision:** I seem to remember you once saying that you wrote to support your research habit. Is that still true?

**Lynn:** That's probably an exaggeration -- my writing has to support more than my research habit, but I love to curl up with a book about some dusty corner of history. There are some periods I come back to again and again (we'll deal with that in question 12) but I'm always trolling for trivia. When I was working on TAKING TIME, for example, and I needed a plot

complication, I remembered reading that someone was blaming the Great Chicago Fire on the breakup of comet Biela. Sure enough, a little Internet review and I was able to work a little astronomy into my forest fires. I don't think I'd have uncovered Biela by doing research *for* TAKING TIME, but because I'm constantly sifting through neat stuff and have a good memory for odd information, I was able to recall Biela when I needed it.

Right now I'm reading a book called *Salt: A World History* by Mark Kurlansky. The title's accurate -- the book's about all the ways salt has figured in history, from the Roman's taste for garum to the cultures that have used salt as currency, plus how (and more importantly why) the Chinese make thousand-year eggs. I just know that some of this information is going to make it into a book someday.

Last year I went on a Venice jag and now I'm planning a fantasy that's set in an environment that's not quite Venice but owes a lot to last year's reading.

**Vision:** Do you have any advice or tips for writers that can help them with research?

**Lynn:** I hate to admit this, but organization helps. I have a computerized database of "stuff." (The program I use is askSAM for Windows.) Whenever I encounter an article that makes my ears wiggle, I give it a number, write a summary for my database and put the article in a file cabinet. Searching the database is faster and easier than trying to have a fancy filing system. Once I know that article 1389 has the comet information I want, it's just a matter of flipping through the file cabinet until I find it. (Or the bookshelves, because books are in there, too.)

When I started the database my computer was an Apple ][ and I was storing the database on 5 1/4" floppies. My computer's a lot faster now and, with a 60 gig hard-drive, conserving storage space is no longer an overriding concern so, sometimes, I scan the whole article into the database or download it from the Internet.

Nothing is too obscure for my interest... you just never know when some quirk of science or history is going to prove useful. It's also true that the act of creating a database record helps solidify my memory of the oddity I'm preserving for future use.

In the last few years I've become more reliant on the Internet for research. I'm addicted to Google. I Google everything from neighborhood restaurants to deep historical questions, but I try not to rely on something that I can only source to the Internet unless the source is impeccable -- a university website or something similar. There's a lot of hearsay and worse out on the Internet and, though, I write fiction, I like to think that my background information is solid.

I operate on what I call a "10th grade standard" -- that is, if a high-school sophomore reads, say, *BEHIND TIME* instead of her world history text and faces a pop quiz on seventeenth century Paris the next morning, she's not going to fail if she relies on what I wrote. I find this is a good benchmark for how much evidence of research is enough in a fiction project.

C. J. Cherryh had the best answer to the questions of what and when to research. She pointed out that there are two professions where it's useful to know how to crack a safe... and only one of them is legal. For a good fiction writer -- and that includes writers of SF and Fantasy -- there is simply no such thing as useless research. I never pass up an opportunity to learn how something is made or used. Even if it's something

that I won't likely use directly in my fiction, I'll pick up cues for craft and attitude that I can incorporate into any invented background.

**Vision:** Tell us about your interest in Eleanor of Aquitaine.

**Lynn:** I got caught up in Eleanor's story back in college when I first ran across her second husband, Henry II. Optional reading for the course included Amy Kelley's "Eleanor and the Four Kings," a book that's a little dated now, but still a good introduction to the life of this amazing woman.

Eleanor would have been amazing no matter her century, but for the twelfth century she was downright scary. The prevailing culture just didn't have a pigeon-hole shaped to hold her. The powers-that-were spent half a century trying to clip her wings. Henry put her under house arrest for twenty years because, as skilled a king and emperor as he was, he couldn't rule his lands once she declared her opposition to him. (One of the questions one has to ask is how different the map of Europe would look today, if Henry had managed to remain faithful to a woman who was, it must be acknowledged, a good fifteen or so years older than him?)

Part of the fascination with Eleanor is that most of what's known about her was preserved by those who considered her an abomination to the name of womanhood, and just possibly in league with the devil himself. It's very hard to reach through and find the real woman behind the propaganda. My guess is that Katherine Hepburn came close enough in "The Lion in Winter," which ranks among my favorite movies and without which no Christmas is complete. (Her line, "How, from where we began, did we reach *this* Christmas?" has accurately summed up a good many years of my own life.) I understand some bright light in Hollywood has decided we need a new "Lion in Winter" and has cast Glenn Close as Eleanor... I'll probably go see it, and probably wish I hadn't.

If all my dreams come true, I'll have a chance to write a straight-up historical about Eleanor before senility sets in. It won't be an easy task... the primary sources are hard to come by and my Latin's gotten very rusty over the years. More likely, I'll figure out a way to capture her life "sideways," through a fantasy-laced book.



**Vision:** Would you like to explain about the little old lady from Schenectady?

**Lynn:** If you write, one of the questions you're always trying to answer is, Where do you get your ideas? And, if you write, you know how pointless a question this is and how difficult it is to answer. You can try a serious answer, giving credit to the hard work that underlies creativity and the need for maintaining a prepared mind; or you can resort to sarcasm. One of the sarcastic answers in circulation is that as authors we subscribe to a service run by a little old lady in Schenectady from which we get a plain brown envelope filled with ideas at set intervals. Another is that we get them by climbing to the top of the nearest steeple and casting a baboon's knucklebones by moonlight.

The truth of the matter is that ideas are a writer's cheapest commodity. If I never had another idea, I still couldn't write my way through all the notions rattling around in my hindbrain this morning. Ideas aren't magical; the only tricky part is holding on to one long enough to get it written down. But neophyte writers tend to believe that there is something magical about ideas and that if they can just get a hold of a good one, then their futures are ensured.

Enter the Internet. Before I started writing I programmed mainframe computers for a living, so, when the sudden buzz back in the mid-90s was creating a personal website, I wanted to incorporate something a little extra. This, of course, required chasing down an idea which turned out to be using a pseudo-random number generator to mix up some standard fiction tropes and present them as the idea-basis for a story.

It took me about three days to put the generator together, another day to gussy it up as the "Schenectady Steeple." The telling irony is that will work as advertised. A writer has to add a tremendous amount of imagination to what the generator supplies, but if you're desperate for an IDEA to act as a framework for your story, the Steeple will provide it. I've gotten e-mail reports from writers' groups and English classes that have used the Steeple as an exercise in story mechanics.

I think of it as my little contribution to Internet culture and the demystification of the writing process.

**Vision:** Which do you prefer to write, short stories or novels, and where does editing fit into the picture?

**Lynn:** Preference really has nothing to do with it. I think in terms of novels. When I have an idea, it goes from vague, cloudy notion to 100,000 words in a heartbeat. If I aim for a short-story idea, I then get to spend the next portion of my life removing 90,000 words from what my imagination generated. Which is to say that, for me, writing a short story is much, much harder than writing a novel. I wish I knew *how* to imagine a short story, because I rather like the form, but they're too time-consuming for me to write on a regular basis.

That said, from an editorial perspective, I can usually tell the difference between a short story idea and a novel-length one when someone describes the idea to me. Think of a dark room and a lightbulb coming on. A short story idea focuses on the lightbulb, a novel idea focuses on the revealed room. A good short-story writer has an instinct for sketching in just enough background to ground the specific story.

If plot, setting, and character are the three elements of fiction, a short-story writer is often a pole-sitter, and, like pole-sitting, short-story writing requires an exquisite sense of balance. Novelists, frankly, can get away with more. A novel can have a

dull spot or two, because the reader has made a different commitment.

I've read short stories that are as dense as a 19th century novel and novels that really are short stories filled with a lot of helium. In the right hands, both extremes can be commercially viable, though the over-expanded short story is a riskier endeavor -- the literary equivalent of pixelation can occur when a story is expanded beyond its "ideal" length and readers can feel cheated, never a desirable thing.

A good editor -- and I don't claim to be one -- can deduce the "ideal" elements of a writer's style and story and administer the necessary guidance to trick the writer into revealing it.

**Vision:** You seem to like to write sets of books. Is this something you would suggest for new writers?

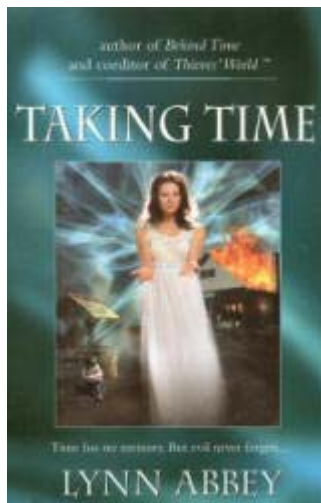
**Lynn:** I write sets of books, but I've also written a lot of orphans.

The attraction of books in sets is that once you've invested hundreds of hours in creating a coherent universe your story's grown to around a half-million words and can't be written as

anything less than a trilogy. The attraction of stand-alone material is that you'll never find yourself in the situation where only the middle book of your trilogy is available from the publisher. A compromise is to create your world and then set an open-ended series of loosely connected stories there; this allows you to reuse your world but, in theory, frees you from needing six inches of retail shelf space to make a sale.

My sense of the current marketplace is that the compromise position is the safest course. Publishers want to know that there's a potential for "more," but are leery of the commitment necessary to promote a tightly interwoven trilogy, at least for a newly acquired author.

**Vision:** What publications should your fans look for in the future?



**Lynn:** I'm trying to keep busy. TAKING TIME, the third book about Emma Merrigan, was released by ACE in April of this year (2004). They've got the manuscript for the fourth book, DOWN TIME, but haven't given me a publication date; I suspect late 2004 or first quarter 2005. I'm not sure if there's a

fifth Emma book on the horizon. I'm actually without an active ACE contract for the first time in my career and it's a very strange feeling. I'm hopeful my agent can negotiate more Emma books, but that's up in the air right now.

There's another Thieves' World anthology in the pipeline. ENEMIES OF FORTUNE, featuring stories by C. J. Cherryh, Steven Brust, Dennis McKiernan, and Robin Bailey among others, will hit the stands this December. I'm hopeful that there'll be more TW anthologies. The situation's a little iffy right now. The market's soft and Tor hasn't seen the numbers that it would like to see. But I'm going to scramble for some licensing deals over the next few months. With luck, we'll capture the elusive momentum and keep the stories rolling.

I've just concluded negotiations to resurrect Rifkind, the protagonist from my first books, DAUGHTER OF THE BRIGHT MOON and BLACK FLAME. It's been a long time since I've written old-fashioned sword and sorcery; I'm hoping it's like riding a bicycle. The working title is RIFKIND'S CHALLENGE. She's back in the Wet-Lands, determined to rescue the kidnapped daughter of a friend and discovering that the more things change, the more they stay the same. It promises to be

a lot of fun. The manuscript is due in December, but I hope to have it finished before then. A 2005 publication is likely, with Tor putting out a hard-cover edition first, followed by the mass market nine months later.

I'm doing some world building in my spare time. I started with the Italian Renaissance in general and Venice in particular and have been mixing in other elements for the last several months. I've finished the first draft of the "first act" of the story and turned it over to my agent for marketing. The working title is CHASING FATE and so far the response has been good. If all goes well, we'll have contracts by the end of this year and a book by some time in 2005.

**Vision:** Thank you to Lynn for a wonderful Interview!

Check out information about Lynn Abbey's work and her upcoming projects, as well as ISBN's and ordering information for her books at her website: <http://www.lynnabbey.com/>

## Workshop: *Almost* Random Events

By Lazette Gifford

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A story should rarely, of course, have truly random events thrown in. Some forms of literary fiction may do all right in that respect, but most fiction needs a control of chaos of events, not the creation of it.

However, sometimes a little something *unexpected* can liven up a spot where you are just not sure what to do next. This often happens at the end of one phase and before the next big step. Transitions... how to get from one spot to another? Sometimes it seems as though the story just comes to a dead stop. Holly Lisle says to throw in naked women with machine guns. Others say alligators. However, all you really need is an obstacle for your characters to overcome -- a challenge to get them moving again, and still interesting to the reader. Characters in motion tend to stay that way if they have something interesting to do.

But once again, remember that the obstacle cannot be truly random. It has to fit into your story in some way, and overcoming it has to bring your character closer to a goal -- or at least appear to in some way, even if it turns out to be a blind alley.



One of the ways to come up with random events is to have a not-so-random list ready to take you over the hurdles. Sometimes even when an author outlines, she can still hit a point in the story where things grind to a halt and there seems no way to move on to the next step. There is no current conflict, and a story is about conflict.

There are two answers at this point. The first is to jump the transition and get to the next scene:

*Four days later they stood at the door to the lair.*

But maybe you don't want them to get there that quickly. Maybe your story still needs a bit more conflict to develop the characters, or a few more adventures along the way to fill out a novel length story. Perhaps all *you* need is a bit of random thought to get you moving on the next idea.

So here is how to create some. And if you do the preliminary work before you even outline, you might find that this helps you fill in a few spots as you go along.

The first trick is to recognize a spot where you are stuck. There are a couple different types of stuck:

1. Don't know what to do next.

2. Don't know how to get to the next step.

In the case of #1, this exercise might at least get your mind moving along the right path, even if you decide not to use what you get out of it. Knowing what won't work can often lead to deciding what can.

In the second case, you need to be a little more careful and decide if you have a transition that needs to be filled, or a spot that you need to skip to get to the action again. Filling in spots with needless clutter does not always help the story. Balance is the hard part.

On the other hand, you can always write the scene and take it out later if you feel it really doesn't work. It's as important to get the writer moving as it is the story, and if coming up with something that you discard during editing is the key to keeping going, then jump in. You never know what might help.

So here is the very simple way to do it:

First you make a list of six types of trouble that could affect your story, based on the basics of your plot and your characters. Maybe you will write vampire attack for an event in a dark fantasy. Or perhaps you will have a systems failure for an sf story, or a magical

attack for a disaster in a fantasy. The trick is to list out things that could happen in your story.

The list below might be used for a generic modern day adventure of some sort.

### **1. Transportation Trouble**

- a. Break down/Sabotage
- b. Theft
- c. Road/trail destruction

### **2. Weather**

- a. Rain
- b. Drought
- c. Flood

### **3. People**

- a. Neighbor
- b. Relative

- c. Authority

#### **4. Accident**

- a. Main Character
- b. Stranger
- c. Friend/relative

#### **5. Enemy**

- a. Hunting MC
- b. Accidentally crossing paths
- c. Minion of enemy

#### **6. Disaster**

- a. Earthquake
- b. Flood
- c. Fire

Use two six sided dice, preferably of different colors, or throw one at a time. The first throw chooses the general type of disaster (1-6), the second chooses the specifics (a=1 or 2, b=3 or 4, c=5 or 6).

So, how does that help? Well, let's say the list above is to a story about a cop who has been on the case of a serial killer. The last point in the story says she has just gotten home from the latest murder scene. She has a new clue, but doesn't know how it fits. She will have another new clue at the next murder scene... but that won't be for a few days.

You need her to do something in the meantime. Something that appears random, but --

So you throw the dice... #4 is Accident, and b for Stranger.

So...

The cop is home. She's pondering what the new clue in the case means. She's thinking about going to work in the morning and playing with the computers.

Then she hears a crash outside her apartment -- and looks to see two cars smashed into each other. She calls it in, and then, cursing, goes down to the street...

Only the accident isn't an accident, exactly. One of the cars was driven by the serial killer who knows that the cop has gotten close to the truth. The killer needed to draw her out of the building and her padlocked apartment, with the security cams in the halls.

And now that she's on the street... well?

As you can see, this is not totally random. It's just a way to trick your writing brain into looking at a new scenario and fitting it into the story. Sometimes the idea just will not work. Roll the dice again.

Creating 'random' events will not work for every writer. But sometimes they can be just the key to move your story forward rather than to let it languish.

One last thought: If you are someone with role playing games around, you likely have a number of dice of various types. I used six-sided because they are the most likely to be on hand in most houses. However, I have twenty-sided, hundred-sided, etc. You can make out far more extensive 'random' lists than mine. The trick, though, is to make certain that the things listed remain true to your story's setting.

This is not a replacement for plotting. A novel with nothing but random encounters isn't a story -- it's just a list of events. However, those encounters might just help you move past that dead spot in the outline or the story writing. Sometimes a nudge is all we really need.

## Setting Wise Goalposts

By Darwin A. Garrison

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Not too long ago, I found myself banging my head against the refrigerator at one in the morning. Though I woke the cat and induced a throbbing headache, I failed to produce a solution to my dilemma: my short story refused to fit in the five-pound sack of a ten thousand word limit. In fact, all clues indicated that I was going to need a forklift and special trailer permit for the manuscript.

What went wrong?

Many beginning writers face similar challenges. "I just can't do short stories," is a common refrain on newsgroups. Fortunately, that statement is false. Anyone can do short stories. There is, however, a secret:

You have to set your goalposts properly.

No, I do not expect you to give up writing and take up place kicking for the NFL. The goalposts in question are your story topic and facet.



A little bit of searching will lead you to a variety of word count based definitions for short stories. Many of them dance around a ten thousand word limit break between shorts and novellas -- or is it novelettes? I can never remember, and that's the point. I believe that a short story is a conceptual construct, not a word count limit.

A Darwin definition: A short story is a piece of prose that tells a story (one story) with primary focus on a single facet (only one!) of the tale.

Clear as mud, right? Okay, maybe not.

Here's what I'm getting at: a novel or novella has enough room for an author to explore characterization, plot detail, societal nuances, variations in nature as they affect characters, and on and on and on. There can be multiple sub-stories and plots linked and twisting around inside it doing all sorts of unrelated things until the story all comes together (or not, which is frustrating as all get out) in the end.

A short story, a story that a reader should not have to set aside a weekend to read, has to be focused. You cannot go gallivanting off to explore every character's deeper emotional needs and development, or to follow the evolution of the local ruling government to explain one nitpicking detail of social interaction unless that is the single facet you have defined for the story!

Now, like all things, you cannot slap this down as a hard and fast rule. Stories are living things. They grow and mature on their own sometimes, using the author as their conduit to reality. However, when you are getting ready to write... before the first word hits the screen or paper... you need to have a very clear idea of the story you are going to tell and the facet through which you wish to tell it.

Let's do a hypothetical example:

Let's say you have a five thousand word limit, for a fantasy magazine perhaps, and the editor is looking for non-stereotypical dragon stories. (Hey! Work with me here!)

First thing you have to come up with is the story idea. Worry about the world and window dressing later. For now, just focus on the core concept. DO NOT go crazy with a complicated plot! Do your best to keep the plot twists to one or two.

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Story concept:

A boy who is harassed by street gangs in some major U.S. city finds an unlikely refuge in the main library basement with a studious dragon and a janitor who may be a wizard. When his new friends are

threatened with exposure, he finds the courage to fight in their defense. Twist: The two never needed his help. They set things up to help the boy find his courage and become a strong person for defending good.

\*\*

Whew! Okay, that's over. Now you have to decide how to tell the story, the facet of the gem through which the actions will be viewed. This relates primarily to point of view, but it also governs how you look at the events occurring in the story. Novels often have a variety of facets to explore the complex worlds they comprise. If you start jumping facets in a short, your word count is likely to explode and cause refrigerator dents.

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Facet:

Tell the story third person from the boy's point of view. Explore his fears and challenges. Let his wonder show. Bring his fledgling courage to the fore in spite of the potential consequences. Let him discover the hero that lives inside him.

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Once you have both the facet and story defined, print them out and pin them above your computer where you can see them. Check this paper frequently as you type.

Now for the bad news: you are still going to come in over your limit.

Sorry, that's just the way life is. You will add a little detail here, explain a bit there, and maybe even go so far as to develop a believable villain. You'll end up at a couple of hundred, a thousand, maybe even two thousand words or more over your limit. It's as inevitable as corruption in politics.

So what now?

Here's what you do: print the story out. Reach up over your computer and take down your goalposts. Set the two side by side. Get out a red felt tipped marker or an orange highlighter.

Then go through the story backwards and find everything that doesn't move your story closer to your facet. If it doesn't move towards where you wanted to go, it may be nice but it's hardly necessary. The one lesson I learned in high school English is this: "Cut! Cut! Cut! Less is more!"

I know the process is painful, but it is also cathartic. You will eventually discover that you can cram the same meaning into far fewer words than you ever dreamed possible. You can even do some exercises to help train yourself, such as writing a story in one thousand words and then condensing it down to seven hundred fifty, five hundred, and even two hundred fifty words.

So set your goalposts properly, and you won't have to be a million-dollar place kicker to write good shorts! Or is that wear good shorts? Maybe have clean shorts? Mom would appreciate that...

## Catching the Cat's Tale

By Karen Eck

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Underfoot, my cat, was so focused on her tail that she noticed nothing but the twitch and sway of it. Enticing. Distant. Out of reach. No matter how hard she tried, she could not capture it. Tumbling across the floor, she bit and pawed, but the tail remained uncaught. With a sudden moment of inspiration, she flung herself over backwards. Still, the tail taunted her. She curled on the floor and watched as it twitched before her, searching for the answer to her dilemma. As I watched her, I wondered what she would do if she caught it.

How often do you find yourself chasing your tale? You know the beginning, the middle is in sight but the end is just out of reach. So, you chase it. And the circles begin. Sometimes we spend so much time circling the events that we never really hunt down the story in them.

Maggie slapped George. Here you have an event wrapped in possibility. Show the heart of the matter. Are women allowed to slap men? Has she always been a loving wife? Does he even know her? What does this slap mean? Why would she do it? As we answer these

questions we draw the mind in to the premise. No longer is it just an event, it is a story.

Does your tale taunt you? As you write, do you find your efforts fruitless, resulting only in frustration? Where is the source of a tale well told? Ask yourself why the tale twitches and you will find yourself nearing the answer.

Maggie is in love. She has vowed never to touch a man, for any reason, because her mother and sister were victimized when she was a child. Her resolve has softened with George, but how can she break her vow? Tearing down the defense she has erected around her heart is shattering her confidence and as she walks toward him, she realizes she doesn't know how to tell him what is going on.

We have now added a depth to the motive for the slap, but why does she do it? With this question in mind, I wrote the scene below.

Maggie hesitated for a moment behind a column watching the soldiers and easily picking out George. He would leave at dawn. She could do nothing about it. And when he was gone... oh, she would more than pay for this love with regret; of this she had no doubt. Around him, other soldiers joked and wrestled. Another

battle finished; the grateful townsfolk freed. The soldiers held no regrets of death this night, and all because of her assistance.

Contrast and urgency are both a draw to the reader. The relaxed attitude of the soldiers stands in direct contrast to the turmoil of our heroine as she contemplates losing something of value.

George was walking toward her. Should she tell him she had changed her mind about marrying him?

Compare the last two sentences with the following paragraph. Which one draws you in?

Sighing, she watched George shrug off a casual arm and turn away from the merry-making. He seemed solemn and distant, so changed from the confident leader who had planned the attack.

"My fault."

She started at the sound of her voice in the shadows, but could not deny the truth of her words. Why had she rejected his offer of marriage? Why had her hope fallen on this one, of all men? No retreat. No denial. She would have to choose happiness or live with regret for the rest of her life. But how could she so suddenly change?



Spectators unconsciously add feeling and emotion into a scene in real life. Have you ever seen someone at a party and just known they were unhappy? As we write, we want the reader to experience the same reaction, and feel part of the story by pinching the nerves that bring the right response.

She drew in a breath and pushed out of the shadows, dodging her way through the crowd of men. He saw her, and froze. What should she do? His eyes gleamed with a terrifying light that threatened to tear her heart from her body and bind it forever to his own. He moved, a slight motion of his hand toward her. As it dropped in obvious acceptance of her rejection the night before, she felt the loneliness well up to cut her off from the world.

"No!" She flung herself forward and her hand rose of its own accord, striking his face just below the eye. The sting of her palm sang with the beat of her heart as his arms tightened convulsively around her. She kissed him then, where the mark of her broken vow promised a future she had never dared imagine.

It's okay to leave the reader saying, "What? Why did she slap him?" I don't think Maggie knows why, but her confusion and her rejection of the idea that she had lost him drove the story to this point. A little

mystery in your characters will leave them less predictable and, in consequence, more real. Use that mystery and make sure you, at least, have a good grasp of the reasons events happen.

As far as illustrations go, this one is exaggerated to show the point I hope to make. A single slap becomes a story when it is endowed with purpose, history, meaning and feeling.

No, I haven't forgotten Underfoot's plight. She made one last grab for the tail and bit down, hard. With a yowl, she fled the premises. She had made a discovery. I hope we have as well. Tails, when bitten, hurt. For your tale to capture its audience, you need to punch the nerves.

Novels are made up of stories woven together into a larger frame. Maintaining this height of emotional response for an entire novel would be overkill. As in all things, moderation is the key.

So what does a story need? I'll tell you what I always search for when writing: Life, Action, Emotion, Change, Depth and Perception. A story without these is empty; it holds little for the reader even if the overall concept is astonishing and unexplored in the history of writing.

Some writers can become so immersed in the 'what' of their plots, that the 'why' and 'who' fade into meaningless forms as they try to hold together the brilliant plot. Avoid that trap by finding the nerve center and writing from it. Remember, each scene is a story all its own.

## Diary of a Non Short Story Writer

By Valerie Comer

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**March 1:** Zette has posted the monthly challenge. As always, I pop over to the forum and have a peek. What is it this time? Drat. Another short story. I don't do short stories. Wait. A short story for a children's market? I've done a few of those, way back. W-a-y back. Too far back. I should forget it.

**March 1, later:** March Madness has also been posted. How many words am I crazy enough to try to write in one week? Twice I've managed close to 7K in a day and lived. Surely I can manage 21K in a week! But I have no novel to write. I'm re-writing, and that doesn't produce new words. There's always a back-to-school class to write, and maybe a Vision article, and the new scenes to go in my rewrite. It might be enough. And I can always do that short story challenge.

**March 2:** Okay, signed up for both. What, am I crazy or something? It's not like I don't have plenty to do already. I have no idea what to base my story on. And it's not like the measly words for a kids' short story are going to help with the word count for March Madness or

anything. They'll probably be slow words. Can I delete my thread? Not without someone noticing. I should have thought about it longer.

**March 5:** I rewrote a scene in Heaven can Wait today in which Dhana's robo-cat is an object lesson for why God made people with a free will, rather than as robots. I wonder if I could take this robo-cat and plug it into a short story? Maybe there is hope yet.

**March 6:** It's not a robo-cat; it's a robo-pup! And a real dog, and two boys who have gone exploring without permission...

**March 10:** I went to the library on my lunch hour to have a look at the current Writer's Market resource guide. There are lots of places to send kids' stories in Christian markets. But 500-700 words? This robo-pup story will be for older kids, so can I please make it longer? Hmm, I find four markets that will accept up to approximately 1500 words. That will have to be the top. Can it be done?

**March 11:** Okay, what have we got so far? What are the boys like? Why are they here? Why haven't their parents clued in to what their sons are doing? Wait a minute. What are the sons doing? Hmm.

**March 12:** I'm in chat, and Zette says she is writing a post to ask for Vision articles on writing short stories. I tell her that I won't be

submitting one, since this is my first short in more than ten years. She comes back with, Why not an article on writing the first short in more than ten years? Yeah, right. She's desperate. (Note from editor -- Was not! Just, you know, helping her get that word count. Really.)

I can't remember what motivated me to sign up in the first place. A pip, she suggests? She's probably right. Some of us will do nearly anything for a pip... (Another note from editor: Pips are little graphics for signatures at Forward Motion. It's amazing what some writers will do to add more to their signature file. I'm doing a research paper...)

**March 16:** It's time to get this story rolling! Can I weave my lesson in without getting wordy? Do they want a lesson? Check my notes from Writer's Digest. Yes, these markets do. But not preachy. Well, that's good, because there are no words to spare, after all! Can I make three scenes out of this?

**March 18:** Why did I sign up for this again? The pip. Right. And now I've said I'd write the article, too. The story, Valerie. What are those boys really up to?

**March 19:** A plan! I have a plan and an outline. Do writers need outlines for short stories? Well, it's a short outline.

**March 23:** Isn't it ridiculous to wait until March Madness to write this story? It will be barely a drop in the bucket compared to the total number of words I have pledged to write. And I have that new book that's been playing at the back of my brain, which will be much better material for March Madness. Just get the story over with. Just write it.

**March 24, 9:30 am:** March Madness starts tomorrow. Today is my last chance to write the story before it starts. I'm going for it.

**March 25, 10 am:** Hmm. I write two sentences, and discover that this story wants to be told from a first person POV. Just try to get in a twelve-year-old boy's head.

**March 25, 11:30:** Argh. Word count 1383, and I still have to tie the thing up. I need a break. What's for lunch?

**March 25, 1:30:** 1603 words. Surely I'll be able to cut a hundred words or two? And I'm not sure it hangs together right. No, Valerie, leave it alone. The piece needs to rest. Close the file.

**March 26:** It's a good thing I didn't leave it until March Madness to write, as I just discovered that only words in one project count. Whew, I'm glad it's already written.

**April 1:** March Madness is done. I just read through the short story. I'm reasonably impressed; it has decent bones. A bit of cutting and tweaking is in order. There's no room for Jesse to munch that apple, and Rube's lack of ability in treading water can be tightened up. He doesn't have to almost drown three times to get the point across.

**April 2:** Brushed through the story again, and sent it off for crit. I'm not completely sure about the ending. 1500 hundred words is not very many; you have to get every single one of them right. And I wish I could think of a catchier title than Choices.

**April 6:** My critter caught a couple of places that needed first aid, especially where I hadn't made the join seamless when I deleted some of Rube's thrashing in the water. I took another stab at the last paragraph, too. Heh. It is also now under 1500 words. And what do you mean I use too many exclamation points? Not me! You must be mistaken! I don't have bad habits like that! Er, yes. I'll have a closer look at that.

**April 7:** Does a short story need a cover letter? What does Writer's Digest say? Nothing about cover letters, just to send complete manuscript. Okay. I've had another run through the story, and



discovered that I had the word 'right' three times in one paragraph. What can I use instead?

**April 7, later:** My first choice magazine does not have their specific guidelines listed on the website. If I send away for the guidelines, I won't get them in time to complete the challenge. Then I won't get a pip. But if I use the wrong format, they won't accept the story for sure. But what are the odds they'll buy the first story I've ever submitted to them, anyway? At least the pip is a sure thing, if I just pop the story in the mail. But selling stories pays better than a pip does. This magazine pays \$200-\$450 for a story. That's real money. Dilemmas.

**April 8:** Okay, my second choice magazine does have the guidelines posted, and they pay about \$200. Guess what? Their list of themes denotes September's theme as making wise choices! Maybe I stand a chance. Only, their upper word limit is 1400, and I'm currently at 1483. How picky are they? Hmm. I guess I'm off to cut more words.

**April 8, later:** 1390! I'm proud of myself. I've set up the headers and footers and the rest of the formatting. Now to print it out.

**April 11:** It's back from another crit. It seems I have a bit more work to do. Now I've cut so many words that the purpose of the story has

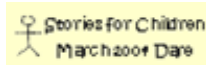
gotten muddled in places. I think if I reversed some of the boys' characteristics, it would help to clarify things. I hope.

**April 12:** I think it's stronger now. I'll send it out for one more check. I've bought my American stamps for the SASE, and I've figured out how to print out a professional looking envelope. Now I just need the final copy to go in it.

**April 13:** This is it. I've had a final poke and prod at the story. I've held my breath and hit 'print'. The words did not morph into something new and strange when they hit real paper. Now I am folding it into thirds. The envelope is sitting right beside it, ready to go. Dare I seal it? Are those words really going to stay put?

**April 14:** I slid it through the slot at the post office. Will every story I write be this hard to part with? The guidelines say they will get back to me in about six weeks. Can I wait that long? Do I have a choice? Oh, but there is instant gratification in this world. The pip! I must go on-line and collect it. It's real. It's tangible.

**April 15:** Hey, I had an idea! I bet this could make a cool short story. You see, there's this little girl and...



(The Pip)

(Final note from editor: I wonder if Valerie realizes that this month is the Short Story a Day dare....)

## From First to Final: Steps for Honing Your Short Story

By Margaret McGaffey Fisk

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Short stories require tight ideas that can be told in approximately one-to-five scenes. For science fiction and fantasy, this is complicated by the need to provide a sense of the distinctive properties separating the story world from real life. Most writers accomplish this effect by using familiar fantasy or science fiction motifs around one unique idea.

A short story, because of its length, can be written relatively quickly; however, what most writers produce in that short time is a rough draft. Therefore, the critical element in short story writing is often the edit process.

My edit process, detailed below, can span several months or a few short weeks depending on deadlines.

### **Step One: Do Your Initial Edit**

This is a crucial step because simple errors, such as using "with" instead of "will" for example, can confuse your critiquers and make it harder for them to focus on places where you truly need their help.

You want to avoid asking for help with obvious rough drafts because they create a poor impression, indicating that you either do not care enough or cannot do better. Neither will help you in the long run. This is especially important with online critique groups where professional writers and editors could see your work.

There is another benefit of taking the time to make your story as good as you can before soliciting feedback. If you can make the reviewing process fun for your reviewers, they will look for more of your work.

1. Reread the story yourself as if you found it in a magazine.
2. Think about the story. Can you identify the plot? Was the background clear?

You may not be able to answer these questions completely but should still ask them in case some problems are obvious.

3. Fix the plot or character problems you found yourself.
4. Check for typos, misused words or awkward phrasing. Here is where you should check for overuse of "that," "was," ellipses and other traditional "do not's."

Note I said overuse. None of the traditional things to avoid are hideous when used correctly and sparingly.

## **Step Two: Get Some Feedback**

I strongly recommend getting someone else to read your short stories. The short story market is difficult both because the competition is steep and because there are very few well-paying markets for short works. Whether you are a new writer or one with several publishing credits, getting feedback on at least some of your stories keeps you aware of bad habits you may have, whether old or new ones. Your story only has one chance with each editor you send it to, with rare exceptions, so you should do your best to polish before you submit it.

Even an experienced writer can miss things in her own work. The mind fills in concepts or changes words before they get to your conscious awareness. Though getting and giving critiques may seem a big drain on your time, that story only has six-to-ten top markets, and if an editor receives it with glaring errors, there is little chance it will stand out among the other three hundred or more received that month.

[A quick word on critiquing:](#)

Especially for short story writing, critiquing others' work, that of both those starting on the path and those at or above your current skill level, is an excellent way to recognize weaknesses in your own writing. You can improve your skill more by critiquing than by receiving critiques. Though the critiques may help that particular story, what you learn while critiquing others can improve all stories to come and even older stories that are given new life through an edit pass.

I would recommend a writing group, whether in person or online, when you seek comments. Though you might receive some harsh critiques that bruise your ego, it is better to hear the comments from a critiquer than an editor. A single, detailed, if harsh, critique received before submission is worth its weight in gold. When you open that hoped for but dreaded SASE, the words "did not stand out" or "did not hold my interest" give little information to aid you in resolving the problems. You are equally unlikely to get a detailed and in-depth critique from those close to you because, whatever their intentions, they do not want to hurt you. Therefore, seeking a group of writers to give you an initial review is optimal.

Finally, to receive critiques, you often must give them in advance. Not everyone will return your efforts or return them promptly so expect to

do two-to-three critiques for every one you need. My preference is to receive four-to-five critiques per story. Too few and it is difficult to tell a critiquer's personal bias from a true problem with the story. One person might have missed a clue, but if everyone else saw it easily, the first might have skimmed. Too many critiques and implementing changes can become so overwhelming you shelve the story not because it is lacking, but because you cannot face the necessary work.

### **Step Three: Use the Feedback to Craft Your Final Version**

Note: This process is an electronic-only edit, though the steps can be modified for use with a paper copy.

A few things to remember before you reread the stack of feedback you have received:

- \* Everything written there is about a single story and does not reflect on your past, current or future work beyond that piece.
- \* Each reviewer can only provide opinions. It is up to you to agree with an opinion and implement a change, or reject it. A word of caution, however: rejecting changes because you do not like them, or because fixing them would be too much work, may result in a weaker,



potentially unpublishable story. There are also those opinions that, while they do not resonate with you now, you cannot quite throw away. Those you should keep in a separate pile for later review. You may not be strong enough a writer yet to appreciate what that person said but you are in the process of improving and may be able to use the feedback later.

\* You do not have to make all the suggested changes. This is critical enough to emphasize. You must keep your initial vision in mind as you revise and only adopt those suggestions that work toward your vision of the short story.

And finally, on to the edit.

I have a specific series of steps I follow that have allowed me to significantly improve stories, sometimes taking them from 1st or 2nd draft to final in one sitting. I recently had a short story accepted after a marathon effort using this technique to get it edited and in before the deadline.

1. Choose appropriate music. Not everyone requires this step, but I use music to focus. Cat Stevens and Deidre McCalla are my current short story writing artists. When they come out of the speakers, my mind pushes away novels and other concepts in favor of short stories.

2. Read all the feedback. This step puts the comments you have received at the top of your mind so when you actually approach the story itself, you are already thinking of ways to resolve the issues.
3. Copy the general comments into a separate file.
4. Implement line edits using some form of edit tracking, whether Microsoft Word's redlining or putting them in another font color. This is how you should make all changes through this process.
5. Save the modified copy with a date stamp and "b" to indicate it is the first version with changes then save again as "c" for the copy you will work on next. This allows you to go back a step at any time if you change your mind and reduces your lost work should the file become corrupt.
6. Read the redlined file and accept or reject each line edit change. Sometimes multiple line edit suggestions will be made for one section. This is when you choose between them. Save the file with accepted line changes and then save again labeled with a "d."
7. In your general comments file, organize the comments by topic.
8. Review the organized general comments and select which ones to follow based on how they resonate with your story vision. Also,

make notes on how you plan to address those you agree with and mark those you plan not to implement.

9. Make your changes based on the general comments in your "d" story file. Save that version then save again as "e."

10. Accept all changes so that no edit marks remain on the story and then save. This is a little more complicated when not using Word's redlining, but you may be able to search for the font color to ensure you've found them all.

11. Read the clean, changed copy aloud, marking the text whenever you stumble or get confused. Reading aloud helps distance you from what you thought you wrote and focus on what really appears on the page.

12. Go through your marks and fix minor errors, typos, and the like, which involve minimal decision-making.

13. Take a walk, watch a television program, read for a little or whatever you do to step away from the story.

14. Read it over one more time and fix or reject all the changes you made.

### **Step Four: Submit for a Critique or to a Market**

Your edit is done. You have made the story as good as it can be based on your current skill level and the feedback you have received. Now you can choose to submit to a market or, if your changes were significant, send it through for another round of critiques. Either way, your story has advanced several drafts and should be closer to, or at, publishable status.

## Conquering the Short Story

By D.M. Bonanno

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Mountain? No Problem. Molehill? Run!

Many writers can come up with a novel idea, plot out a basic outline or background and develop a cast of life-like characters without tearing out their hair. They're ready and eager to get the novel going. When it comes to short story writing, though, some of these same writers choke.

I know because I choked. I spent years struggling to write short stories because my ideas were either novels in disguise or incomplete stories. I frequently said, "I'm not good at writing short stories," when in fact I just hadn't figured out the method that worked best for me.

There are many sources of help for the person who wants to write short stories. *Handbook of Short Story Writing*, written by a conglomerate of writers, focuses on various aspects of short story telling. Damon Knight's *Creating Short Fiction* covers the entire process from writing exercises to idea construction to writing and revision. *Finding the Elusive Short Story*, written by Lazette Gifford

and located on <http://www.fmwriters.com>, focuses on the point of the short story: story is event.

Each of these sources brought me to an understanding of forming sensible goals for short story telling. I reached a point where I finished stories instead of abandoning them as failures, but I didn't like them. I didn't even show them to my trusted first readers. How could I when the stories didn't live up to my own expectations?

I scoured these sources again, highlighted critical points, and devised my own method. So far, it's working. Prior to developing this method, I could complete one to two short stories a year, with half a dozen failed efforts in between. In three months, I started and completed five short stories using this method.

### **Method of Short Story Planning**

What does a short story require in order to be told as it deserves? Several components should be readily accessible at every stage of the short story, from the spark of the idea all the way through revision. I created a template in Microsoft Word containing these components. When I'm ready to work on an idea, I open my template and save it as a "*Story Title* Notes" file. I plug what I know of the story into the template and complete the rest of the information as I work it out in

my head. This exercise can take as much as a few hours, but when I've completed the template, I can clearly see my goals for the story. The strong points will shine and the weak points will be gaping holes on the page. At this point, I know what requires fixing before I attempt the first draft.

An annotated version of my template is included below.

\* \* \*

#### Components of the Notes File

**Idea:** Simplified description of the story idea.

**Theme:** The focus of the story; the point it makes.

**Plot:** Usually several sentences long, this component is the key. If it needs more than a paragraph, that's the first clue that it's too complicated for a short story. I either scale it back to accommodate the Idea more realistically or drop the idea into my novel ideas file for future development.

**Setting:** General feel or mood of the surroundings. Identifying where and how the mood will change keeps me on track from beginning to end. It's easy to forget this in the excitement of writing and the

resulting short stories are the primary culprits, who aren't worthy of occupying my trash bin.

**Scene Location:** Physical description of the story location. Knowing what exists around the characters, I can maintain consistency with symbolic objects and places. If there's more than one location, I write a paragraph (or bulleted list) about each. This can be especially helpful in echoing the opening in the closing, a powerful tool in short story writing.

**Conflict:** Conflict can be internal or external, though most of the time I document both kinds. I bold it or type it in color. I refer to this when writing character actions and dialogue. Without conflict driving the characters onward, the story will be lifeless.

**Event:** I try to describe the event in one or two sentences, but here is where I must exercise control. The event is the whole point of the short story and what sets it apart from a novel. A novel or novella tells a story of several events often leading up to one enormously critical event. If I can't focus on one event here, then this isn't meant to be a short story. However, I try to flesh it out some more before I discard it. Sometimes I find that the story I wanted to write isn't quite the event I thought it was.



**Characters:** For each character in the story, I define personality, unusual behaviors, drives, and emotional state. I include additional information that pertains to the character's role in the story as well. Deciding on these basics ahead of the first draft clearly illustrates the changes the characters experience so that I can write them better the first time.

**Background:** The most terrifying thing about a short story is that there isn't much room to tell it. It doesn't exist in a hole, though, so I need to know what has happened to create this event I want to write. Summarization is enough, but I bullet or highlight the points I need to work into the story naturally. Using this information as secrets that are revealed at various points increases suspense and strengthens the story.

**Outline:** Bulleting this section guides me through the story from point to point. Generally, I use ten points to identify the flow of the story, breaking it into action and dialogue that need to be included for the story to work. When writing the first draft, these events can change drastically, but this is the map that directs me from the beginning to a definite end.

\* \* \*

Nothing in this Notes file ever nails my characters to one path. I keep this file open while I write the first draft and update it as I explore the changes I am compelled to make. This document is a guide and its purpose is to show me the story I intend to write. I can identify potential problems before writing in order to deal with them before I become frustrated. If I wait for these problems to arise during the writing phase, chances are I won't finish the story.

Using this method, I use my creative energy to develop the story's full potential, breaking through problems and filtering through unnecessary information. All it takes is about two single-spaced pages. I can now enjoy writing a short story and no longer have to wait for inspiration to complete one. I don't agonize over a ruined first draft anymore. I write to my full expectations.

## **Revisions**

This method has also served me well in revising weak stories. In the past month alone, I have salvaged two such projects and wrote them to completion.

This method is my salvation, but it may not be yours. Use what you can take from it. Remove what doesn't help you and add what you need to truly understand what you're about to write. If my method

doesn't work for you, I urge you to devise your own. Analyze your weaknesses and break them down into manageable chunks. Climb your molehill.

Conquer that short story.

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2. *Handbook of Short Story Writing*, Edited by Frank A. Dickson and Sandra Smythe (Writer's Digest Books) ISBN 0-89879-049-2
3. "Finding the Elusive Short Story" by Lazette Gifford, <http://www.fmwriters.com>. (Site log-in necessary to view class)

## Advantages of Short Story Writing

By Leigha Dickens

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So you want to be a writer? That's quite a lofty ambition. It takes hard work, dedication, and time. Sometimes it can take years to complete a novel, and it can be even harder to get one sold and actually begin a successful career. It can be very rewarding to have a published novel, but also frustrating trying to get there.

However, there's another part of the field of writing that is often overlooked, a whole section that can be a powerful tool for writers making a career. When you're aspiring to be a published writer, don't overlook the short story.

People have been telling short stories for as long as they have been around to do so. Cavemen painted the stories of successful or memorable hunting trips on cave walls. Ancient Greeks and Romans compiled hundreds of stories about the gods and goddesses they worshipped, and their mythology is still widely read today. In Native American cultures it was common for people to gather around a wise storyteller, who would pull an article, such as a feather or a claw, out of a bag, and tell a story about the animal it came from. Even today

we gather around campfires and listen as our friends tell us ghost stories.

None of these stories are ever extremely long and complicated -- otherwise the listener might become confused or lose interest -- but the form has always been something that most people enjoy.

This is the power of a short story. In the written form, Edgar Allen Poe defined a short story as a piece that can be read in one sitting. The writer doesn't spend a lot of time in development of a complicated plot and many characters; instead she focuses on one main concept and finds a way to effectively tell it. The number of magazines, journals, and anthologies that exist in the publishing industry suggest that this is a thriving medium for writers.

The written short story as we know it today is relatively new. Writers like Poe and Edith Wharton in the mid 1800s strove to make it popular by writing short stories themselves. Poe edited several magazines of short works, and many nonfiction books follow the rules for short stories that he laid out. It is through his efforts that we have the short story market we have today.

From the commercial aspect of being a writer, the short story market has much to offer. Short stories take much less time to write than

novels, so you can get something completed quickly and have it on its way to the publisher. They are short, neat and compact, so it's possible to get many written within one year and they can be a good way to gain recognition in the field of publishing.

It is sad but true that more and more professional markets for novels refuse to accept unsolicited submissions, from writers without an agent. This closes the door on many new writers. However, most short story markets aren't closed like this, so they give new writers a place to submit work and begin a career. Credentials gained through short story publishing can help increase a writer's chance of finding a good agent who will help her get through the "no unsolicited submissions" bar with a novel.

This is only the commercial aspect, of course. Artistically, short stories give writers a chance to express those ideas they could partially form but perhaps not develop into the complexity of a whole novel.

It can be a challenge to write a short story. They have a strict form, which is often best limited to a few scenes and often few characters besides the main character and an antagonist. Yet at the same time they open many possibilities to singularly explore a plot, character, or concept. As a writer, it is your challenge to focus on your concept and

employ all of your creative power into presenting the idea in the magical way that great writers do.

## The Short Story: Science Fiction's Lifeblood

By Cheryl Peugh

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The first magazine that contained nothing but science fiction hit the newsstands in April, 1926. The name of the magazine was *Amazing Stories*, and Hugo Gernsback was its editor. *Amazing* did not remain solitary for long. Other science fiction magazines, one a little-known magazine named *Astounding Stories*, soon shared shelf-space.

*Amazing* and *Astounding* were part of a breed of magazines generally referred to as pulps, named for the kind of cheap paper publishing companies used at the time. Pulps crowded the shelves during the 1920s and 1930s. Romances snuggled next to Detectives, which shouldered next to Sports, and so on. Since broadcast television did not yet exist, people passed the time by reading, and what many read was pulp fiction. Not only that, Western lovers wanted to read Westerns, mystery lovers wanted to read mysteries, and sports lovers wanted to read about sports. Pulp editors soon learned to tailor their magazines to genres. Inevitably, this led to magazines dedicated to science fiction.



The most distinguishing characteristic about science-fictional pulps was the short story. Magazines in other genres also contained short stories, but were better known for serials, sometimes carrying particular characters through many sets of adventures. What set science fiction apart from these other genres was its speculative nature. Editors, writers, and readers found that within the realm of science, both real and imagined, existed endless possibilities for story ideas. During the '30s and '40s, no one understood that fact better than John W. Campbell, Jr, one of science fiction's more colorful and famous editors.

When Campbell came in as editor of *Astounding Stories* in 1938, he changed the name of the magazine to *Astounding Science Fiction* to reflect the new direction he planned for it.

Campbell wanted science fiction short stories that dealt with science in a more realistic way. He favored stories that introduced a scientific idea and explored its ramifications. He encouraged speculation, but speculation grounded in science. "Space opera," where the science is only tangential to the story, was out, and "hard science fiction," where science is the pivotal element in the story, was in. Campbell developed some of the most well-known and respected authors in the science fiction field while he edited *Astounding*.

Science fiction magazines still maintain a struggling existence against formidable competition in the form of movies, television, and video games. Other genre magazines have gone the way of the dodo bird, but several science fiction magazines, both professional and semi-professional, are still in the market.

So why do science fiction magazines still exist? One answer is that science fiction thrives on short stories. Science fiction is particularly suited for short stories, because the idea that is being presented is more important than the other elements of story. Short story structure does not allow for much world-building, more than one or two characters, or more than one main idea. That idea has to be presented immediately and dealt with in the space of a few paragraphs. Some of the best science fiction short stories in existence are no more than a few idea-driven pages that raise thought-provoking questions.

A good example, and probably the shortest, is Fredric Brown's classic, *The Last Man on Earth*. The entire text is two sentences. "The last man on Earth sat alone in his room. There came a knock on the door...."

This little short, originally published in *Space on My Hands* (Original publication in 1953, recently republished by Buccaneer Books, Inc. ISBN: 0899683320 ), is famous and often quoted, both verbally and in print. The speculation generated by this short explains why it's still around. These two sentences raise a number of questions in the readers' minds-- about why he's the last man on Earth, why he's alone, about who or what is knocking on the door.

Short stories like this, and other classic shorts, have kept science fiction fresh and able to grab our attention. Within the pages of *Astounding Science Fiction*, now known as *Analog*, and within other existing magazines, science fiction is alive and well. In these days of twenty-minute-and-under attention spans, the short story is still quick entertainment, and the science fiction short story is still the best way to advance new and exciting ideas about the nature of science, and explore the impact of those ideas on the world around us.

And that's why the short story has been, and still is, science fiction's lifeblood.

## The Delicacy of Short Stories

By Lazette Gifford

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Short stories are the appetizers of the writing world. While some people can live on this fare indefinitely, for many people the short story only whets the appetite for something with more meat. However, in our rushed world, filled with far too many distractions, the short story is often the first choice of the reading public, and introduces many fans to new ideas, writers and genres.

There is one fallacy that needs to be addressed: short stories are not easier to write than novels. To do either properly requires the same basic knowledge of composition, but the techniques of production differ. Working with short stories is not an introduction to writing novels except in a very limited way. It can help a writer learn to work within boundaries, and to draw the picture with as few lines as possible. It can help perfect voice and character creation -- but it cannot teach you to write novels any more than writing novels can teach you to write short stories. They are not the same animals, even if they do have some basics in common.

For decades (yes, decades) I wrote almost nothing but novels. A few fell into the novella length, but the number of shorter works could be counted on one hand, and none of them had worked.

And then one day it *clicked*.

I had been doing a particular writing exercise for several months. It was to write the first line of a story every day. Just write down a line that I thought would make a good opening to a story.

After a little while I expanded it to the first 100 words. I had done that for several weeks when it happened: I saw how the 100 words leapt right into the heart of the story. I wrote four short stories that day. I later (after many rewrites, expansion and edits) sold three of those four.

So what was it I saw?

Simplicity, and the art of getting straight to the heart of the matter without dwelling on anything that isn't relevant to that single story event. A short story writer is looking at a defining moment in the character's life and very little more.

When writing a short story, the author isn't looking at how the war changed the empire, but rather how the single battle changed the

man. Short stories are about an experience that changes the life of the main character, and so the story doesn't wander away from him, and we don't care about many of the things that might be added into a novel.

I'm going to go through a very simple story idea and show how I would create a story out of it. This story has nothing extraordinary about it -- I'm just using the plot to show the steps.

Background:

The town of Perilous had been settled a hundred years before by the survivors of a lost fleet filled with Peril Pilgrims. Their ships had been swept off course by a late summer storm. The place where they finally made landfall had been full of storms, swamps, vipers, and fevers. Being Peril Pilgrims, though, they had decided this was the will of their God. They stayed. They made it work.

In some ways a novel writer could use something like this paragraph to introduce the world of his manuscript. It might not be a bad opening, even, to bring the reader straight into the settlement. However, in a short story or novel, the plot is far more likely about someone rather than something. As interesting as the settlement

might be, it is unlikely that the settlement is the focus of the adventure. It's just the setting.

Instead, there will be someone who carries the story, the Point of View character.

An opening:

Star leapt the muddy street in three quick bounds, cursing himself for not leaving Perilous during the summer. Although he had never been here before, Star had heard about the city from his uncle. The town might be half under water before the rains ended in another two cycles. By then the vipers would own the streets, having found their way back from the few swamps left at the edges of the settlement. Perilous was not a place to stay during the rains.

That gives us a glimpse of the character, and a bit about the settlement, although not as much information as the background gave us. However, here is where you start looking at the differences between the short story and the novel.

If I were writing this as a novel, I would have something odd happen right away that would draw the reader's attention to the adventure.

However, after that initial odd moment, I would step back just a little and introduce the reader to more of the other characters and the setting -- including how it had been settled. The 'oddness' would then come in little pieces, building up along with a portrait of the character, the town and the other people. Novels have mountains and valleys, high conflict points and moments of relative calm.

But this is about short story writing. So what would I do with this one?

First would be defining the event around which the story is going to take place. In this case, because we want to waste nothing, the event should include rain, swamp and vipers -- and peril, of course, but a story would hardly be worth reading (at least in most genres) without it.

Event:

Star, an itinerant trader and former thief, finds himself blackmailed by a local townsman and forced to break into the Temple of Peril and steal a magical amulet for a local citizen.

Now I have a single event to work with and some stipulations that will also go with it. Someone knows about Star's past. Do they know him?



Or do they see a scar, a brand, or something of the like that marks him as a thief from a foreign country?

The Temple of Peril will have been founded at the place where the first of the ships made landfall. This will mean a... well, a perilous journey out into the wilds beyond the city walls, and very likely at night as well.

The outline of a short story opening might be something like this:

Star hurries across the street. On reaching the other side, he is grabbed and pulled into an alley. Magic blinds him to the faces and even the voices are distorted. Someone rips the collar of his shirt, uncovering his bird tattoo. They know what he is and that could mean his instant death since the Bird Guild is an illegal organization of thieves.

Star no longer steals because he injured his hands. But these people don't want to hear about his problems. They want him to go to the Temple of Peril and retrieve an amulet of power that has been in the keeping of the priests. Either that or they give him over to the guard.

He agrees, thinking that by morning he'll have found his way out of Perilous and disappeared again. Unfortunately, they use his word to bind him with magic. He has no choice, and fighting the compulsion is very painful.

All of the above material should take no more than a couple pages. By keeping the story tight at this point you raise the tension. We don't need to know more about the people who grab Star than he does. We don't need to see more of the town than where he walks. We don't even have to know much about his past as a thief, although it might be good to have one of the people point out that only very good thieves are allowed the tattoo.

In a novel you might have him approached by someone first, with a more civilized request that he would like to hire Star to steal something. Star would say no. But because he was not threatened, he might feel he has time to complete the business that brought him to Perilous. Perhaps he works in the family merchant business now, and his future depends on how well he does, so he's not willing to back out of the town. Maybe he'd even try to find out who wants to hire him.

But again, that would be a 'novel' approach, starting far back from the defining event. The short story must stay with the event.

This might be the middle:

Star makes the dangerous trip over the wall, through the swamp and to the temple. There will be many dangers along the way, but the worst will be when he gets to the amulet.

That's when the priests find him. No one had ever gotten this far before, and they're impressed -- not that it will save him. What did Frislin promise for stealing this? Star: Not to kill me. Priest: Others came for wealth. Star: My life is worth more to me than baubles. Priest: This will give Frislin control over the vipers. We cannot let it happen. He was one of our own, but we drove him out.

Star doesn't know about Frislin, but used time during conversation to measure weaknesses and find escape. He is wounded as he goes up the wall to the window. In the swamp, blood draws vipers. Panicked, he yells for them to get away -- and they do. He has the power of amulet.

Vipers about to kill priest who follows. Star saves him, but then nearly kills the priest when he tries to take the amulet -- but that, again, is the compulsion. Together they go back to town.

Okay, so now Star has the amulet. But he doesn't really want to give it to this man who used him, right?

We come to the ending, which is really rather obvious:

One question needs to be answered. If the snakes are a problem that endangers others, why don't the priests use the amulet to get rid of all vipers? Did once, but Perilous was then overrun by rats and other vermin. Balance in nature. Too much use of amulet creates another kind of imbalance -- and having used it twice tonight calling in dangerous storms.

Magic used to control Star means he must give the amulet to Frislin. However, refuses to go into building where Frislin is waiting. The priest is afraid that the magic compulsion will kill him, but Star points out if he dies than priest is free to take the amulet back. Frislin won't let that happen.

The priest hears a sound in alley behind them. Star tells him not to look back, and at the same time orders 'to keep still and wait.' Silence in the alley now.

Frislin comes out. Star orders vipers to attack. Frislin demands the amulet, even after attacked and dying. Star finally too weak to hold on -- and Frislin grabs and orders vipers to kill everyone.

Star gets it back. Orders them away, but they are reluctant and he is weak. One grabs his arm, sinks teeth into his wrist, wraps around his arm. Star still trying to order others away as he falls unconscious.

Now we have the final step, the denouement that ties up the story. In a novel this would likely be a final chapter that shows or indicates how the rest of the main character's life is going to go, or how the world survived. But in a short story we need only indicate how this event is resolved.

Star, barely conscious, is dragged before the Captain of the Guard. While there are bandages on his arm and his leg (wound from temple), but captain can clearly see the bird tattoo. Orders him executed.

However, the priests arrive after taking the amulet back where it belongs. They point out that the Captain has no right to judge one of their brothers. Captain doesn't believe Star is one of

them. Priest carefully pulls away bandages at wrist to show a tattoo of a viper around his arm, a sign of their order.

Star goes with him. Star: You lied to save me. Priest: No. All who choose to live their lives in peril are of our community. We are the balance for those who live safely in their cottages, fearing little more than an early frost. Besides, the Viper chose you. It is part of you now, and it is a perilous ally.

Star can feel the snake move on his arm, and knows that he is not destined to be a trader.

There we have a story about a defining moment for a character. The character faced a single dangerous event and is changed in the end. Star has left the Bird Guild and become part of the Brotherhood of Peril, and with the snake around his wrist, the reader knows that his life is not going to be easy.

In a novel, Star's story could have begun when he joined the Bird Guild. It could have gone through his many successes, and the injury that drove him away from his former life. We could have seen how he had reluctantly went to work for his uncle, taking ship to foreign lands even though the tattoo could have brought him death. Obviously the tattoo cannot be removed -- magical protected. I would have to work

that into the short story as well, or else he's just stupid or suicidal not to have done something about it, especially in a world with magic.

This is not a great story, but it does show the pattern by which a single event in a character's life can be pulled out of a larger tapestry and used. The elements introduced in a short story will be limited. For instance, even though we know Star is in Perilous to do some trading, we aren't going to look into that part of his life at all, except to mention it. We are not going to deal with Frislin and the power he holds in the town, or more than mention that he was a priest who had been driven away from the temple by the others. We aren't going to deal much at all with the single priest who becomes an ally. All of these might make good additions to a novel, but this story has only one goal -- for Star to deal with the compulsion to steal the amulet.

A short story appetizer is just as much a part of the feast of fiction reading and writing as the novel. Even if you prefer to write novels, an occasional shorter work can be a good exercise in restraint.

## Namestorming

### Naming your characters appropriately

By Leah Tribolo

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(Originally published in Writer's Digest)

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Namestorming is about more than giving your character a name. Namestorming is about selecting a name that reflects not only the character, but also that character's role within the book. Like brainstorming, namestorming is a creative process that should leave you with many ideas to decide between, once you have decided on what your goals for that character are.

A name shapes how the world perceives your characters.

The name John is very simple. It doesn't carry a lot of baggage or expectations. Neither does Sara, Jane, George or Bob. Suffixes such as Jr. Sr. and IV appended to a name to add some weight. For instance, John doesn't blend in so much and is more regal with IV added to it. Jr. gives John a sense of youth while Sr. creates a feeling of age.

A simple and well-used name like Emily is perfect for a secondary character. Alternate spellings can bring attention to a self-effacing



name. Emalee or Emeli gives Emily some flair, perhaps consider Blaike for Blake if the character needs to be noticed.

Aurora and Rahvindra stand out. A name that is wildly different from others will be taken note of by the reader. They will wonder what the special reason is. When naming characters, ask yourself: Why is that character noticeable? Is there a reason that drives the plot forward? If not, consider changing it to something more subdued. Names should be reflective of the character and the role they play within your piece, but they should never dominate the story.

Your main characters should have names that are noticeable and unique.

The names should fit within the framework of the story not drawing attention to themselves, just to the character. A good rule for shorter pieces is that no other character should have a name beginning with the same letter as it takes away from the power of their names.

Consider a name that will be changeable depending on who is speaking to your main character. The name Elizabeth is very flexible. It can be Liz, Beth, Betty, Eliza, Liza or Elizabeth, all of which suggest a different mood. Elizabeth could be Beth to her mother, Liz to her

friends and Liza to her boyfriend and co-workers, making her a more dynamic character.

Names create mood and they help suggest personality, but they do not make the character. This can be useful when creating a villain. Why not give him a name that sounds innocent; the name a loving parent gave their child before he or she grew up and became the antagonist of your story.

Ethnic names can be used to frame a neighbourhood that your character enters marking him as an outsider. This can be useful in showing that the reality of John Smith is not the reality of Akira Nomiku and the culture he lives within.

Different genres have different expectations and standards.

Suspense can be increased in mystery and crime stories by making a character stand out to draw suspicion away from another character. Science fiction and fantasy generally have characters with names that increase the feel of being somewhere other than Earth, in the present day. A mainstream story set in Nigeria will have characters with different names than one set in the United States. European names tend to be homogenous within their countries, while American names

can have more diversity owing to the varied origins of the settlers. Read your genre and find out what the norms your readers expect are.

Naming characters appropriately is an important part of fiction writing. In fact, it is just like naming a baby. The name will follow the character for the rest of his or her life. So get namestorming and find one that suits your characters.

Sites to start your search for the right names:


 [www.eponym.org](http://www.eponym.org)

 [www.cool-baby-names.com](http://www.cool-baby-names.com)

 [www.babynamecenter.com](http://www.babynamecenter.com)

 [www.writerbuddy.com/characters/index.htm](http://www.writerbuddy.com/characters/index.htm)

 [www.babynamelocator.com](http://www.babynamelocator.com)

 [www.123-baby-names.com](http://www.123-baby-names.com)

 [www.zoope.com](http://www.zoope.com)

## Finding Ta Taglegebol

By Steven Swain

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One problem many Fantasy and Science Fiction authors face is how to give their world the depth and the feeling of solidness that authors of other genres often take for granted. I gave a general overview of the problem and suggestions on how to solve it in Issue 14 of Vision -- <http://fmwriters.com/Visionback/Issue14/wbnotall.htm>. In that article, I made a comparison between the histories of England, Egypt, and Babylon. The problem with that, of course, is how to make one of your civilizations seem almost as mysterious and ancient as Babylon. I faced that problem myself in one of my novels. I wanted to introduce a certain city almost in passing without spending a lot of time on it. It had to be mysterious, but it had to be known to the reader so that when the story led the character to that general area, the reader would know what the ruins might be.

I chose to make the reference so obscure that the character did not hear about it in everyday conversation. (After all, when was the last time you heard about Babylon in everyday conversation as opposed to Egypt or England?) This limited my options. I finally decided to have

the character "come across" a manuscript fragment. How I did this isn't important to this discussion. What is important is this manuscript fragment was very small. I quote it here:

*...many legends of the lost city of Ta Taglegebol. There is little evidence that remains to show that Ta Taglegebol truly existed. However, among these, there is this: an old scroll, its author unknown but appearing not to be a native of Ta Taglegebol. There are several tales in the scroll. This tale is of the funeral of the ruler of Ta Taglegebol. I will not tell it to you, but will merely let you read it for yourself.*

*- Gfolura, Editor of ...*

Even I, the author of this paragraph, have several thoughts when I read this. I want to know more. I want to know where Ta Taglegebol was supposed to be. Did it exist? What was the tale? Was the ruler male or female? Was this scroll written when Ta Taglegebol was new or old?

I, of course, needed to answer certain questions for my own knowledge so I could use them later on in the novel. But the reader already knows several things from that paragraph. The city is "lost." It was called Ta Taglegebol. There are many legends about it. The people

that lived there are not immortal. (Not always a given with a "lost city" in a fantasy novel.) The city was "run" by a single ruler. The ruler was the ruler of the city, so it was most likely a city-state. Either that, or perhaps the nation/kingdom had the same name. And, finally, it was considered important enough at one time for the editor of *something* to mention it. And that editor took the evidence that it truly existed seriously.

That's a lot of information, isn't it? It sure didn't seem like it when you first read it, did it? In the article I referenced in the first paragraph, I said that the author needs to be judicious in which facts he doles out. I certainly had to. In fact, I had to restrain myself from actually writing out all the tales of the entire scroll. It would have been fun, yes, but it would have defeated my purpose. I wanted Ta Taglegebol to have the same "aura" as Babylon instead of the "aura" of Egypt, much less that of England.

Of course, given that this was for a novel, I couldn't throw that in without a good reason. Now that my character was aware of Ta Taglegebol I let him find more bits and pieces of Ta Taglegebol as he went along. I tried to be careful in what I had my character find out so that the information was seemingly unrelated except that it related to

Ta Taglegebol. Some of the information was less substantial than the manuscript fragment, some of it more substantial.

For example, I had the character find a reference to "the sorcerers of Ta Taglegebol." Later I had the character learn a little bit about Ta Taglegebol's trade. In particular I had him hear about "the ever-sharp knives of Ta Taglegebol." I am obviously simplifying things a little bit for this article, but you can see how with little bits and pieces of information you can have the reader's curiosity increase along with the character's curiosity.

Now, reading this, it may not sound like very much cultural and scenery information is being presented to create "word pictures." But remember we are dealing with Babylon-like amounts of information. To carry the analogy further, I am fitting in the Ta Taglegebol facts along with the much more plentiful "England" and "Egypt" amounts of information. I had the character's home nation and culture be the equivalent of Egypt and the place where he was traveling be the equivalent of England. I had it set up this way so that the reader was finding out the most information about the immediate surroundings and culture. The character's home culture provided the frame of reference that influenced how he perceived the immediate

surroundings, but other than that wasn't very important. Therefore it only needed to be the equivalent of Egypt.

I know as well as anyone else how tempting it can be to fill in the blanks just to satisfy my own curiosity if no one else's. Imagine if I had filled in some blanks in that manuscript fragment. This is what it could have looked like:

*There are many legends of the lost city of Ta Taglegebol. Since Ta Taglegebol was destroyed, its trade famous trade routes went elsewhere. As time passed, people forgot where Ta Taglegebol was located, but there are some who say it lies to the far south. There is little hard evidence that remains to show that Ta Taglegebol truly existed. Exist it did, however, and we do have some evidence. Among these is this, the most well known: an old scroll, its author attributed as Parco Molo who appears not to be a native of Ta Taglegebol. There are nine tales in the scroll. This tale is of the funeral of Tagy Etbol, the Enten Ta -- or ruler -- of Ta Taglegebol. I will not tell it to you myself, but will merely let you read it for yourself.*

*- Gfolura, Editor of the Encyclopedia of Antiquity*

And then I proceeded to tell at least the tale of the funeral; fascinating information all of it. However, in the end, it proved irrelevant to my



purposes. It would have added at least a couple thousand words to my manuscript without any problem apart from the near doubling of the editor's note, but if I did this, Ta Taglegebol would have lost some of its aura of mystery and approached the level of the merely exotic. In that case, I'd have the equivalent of one England and two Egypts. There is nothing inherently wrong in this, of course, but that's not what I wanted.

The key is to decide what level of familiarity you want the character and, ultimately, the reader to have with a given culture. And then -- and here is the tough part -- STICK to it. Don't change it no matter how tempting it is to elaborate on something here, throw in an extra paragraph there, or show off your worldbuilding before you're ready for it. Too many writers I know have to fight the temptation -- with varying degrees of success -- to give the reader all the information they have on a place or character or culture the minute it is introduced. RESTRAIN YOURSELF. Be disciplined. And the rewards you reap will be much more satisfying than the momentary thrill of giving the reader so much information they're convinced Ta Taglegebol is a thriving metropolis next door and the character is a blind idiot for not seeing it.

## Getting (Think) Tanked

By Jon Chaisson

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As a writer, sometimes I feel like I'm the only one around. The odd guy out, parked in front of the computer at all hours, typing furiously away at my latest work in progress, yet somehow blissfully happy committing so many hours to this craft. So many hours spent alone, curled up with a good book that just happens to be my own. Kind of a morose way to look at writing, but sometimes it's like that when I'm particularly busy with a project.

And then there's the chat room on Friday nights.

Think Tank, a round table discussion featured in the Forward Motion Community chat rooms at various times on the weekend, is sometimes my only way of reaching out to the rest of the world from the comfort of my own. Its current version, developed by sf writer Sheila Kelly (also known as S.L. Veihl, author of the *Stardoc* series), is like walking into a conference room with your writing peers who are all there to help you enhance your craft. All one has to do to prepare for it is to have one question dealing with writing. It can be anything from how to get my character out of a jam to asking what the others' favorite

writing software might be. Ten minutes later and you have more information (not to mention a handful of bon mots) than you know what to do with, all contributed by that night's participants. It's an online chat session Dorothy Parker would be proud of.

When the deadline loomed over my head for this Vision article, I was stuck for ideas...I wasn't much of a short story writer, so I couldn't really work with that theme. However, I did want to write something serious and relevant...and something where I wasn't referring to my present work in progress. So a few weeks ago I joined a session and posed this question: *why do you come to Think Tank, and how does it help with your writing?*

The most common reason my fellow writers gave me was the help and support of their fellow writers. Nearly everyone said that the suggestions they receive are things they never would have thought of. 'Jumpstarting the muse' (as *khazell1* put it) in directions that they wouldn't expect, opening their story idea to different avenues that may be an even better path than the one they'd originally had. Equally as important is perhaps not getting a complete answer but 'unblocking' the writer to find their own solution (as said by *Barbara*). In the form of a Think Tank session, this informality is different from a critique in that one isn't actually critiquing a person's writing, but

feeding it and moving it along. As a writer, this is one of the most important things we have to deal with; an idea that goes nowhere is a story that falls flat immediately.

The reason most people stay with Think Tank is because of the camaraderie and the fact that helping other writers is as important as having them help you. I personally try to make it to the Friday night edition because it's almost like going to a writer's session at the local bookstore. I know all the people there, we all have a good sense of humor, and we all have a great time. I know I'll get a serious answer from one person, a silly one from another, and plenty of other suggestions in between. But in the end, I'll have at least a few nuggets of ideas to use for whatever project I may be working on.

The same goes with my suggestions for others. We all do our best to come up with something workable for a fellow writer--it's almost a sickness, the way some writers are more than willing to hand over their two cents to another writer, but it's just the way we're all wired, I guess. As writers, we've all read enough novels where we'd have made the plot go in a different direction that we're more than willing to 'inflict' it on other writers who haven't finished the story yet. That isn't to say that's a bad thing; the writer has the last word anyway (pardon the pun). But we're not greedy in our success, because we

understand how difficult it is to get published. Paying it forward is the only way we all survive.

\* \* \*

I didn't write this article to sing the praises of Think Tank, but to offer my own experiences with a writing circle that works for me. Some may still want the experience of warm bodies sitting next to them, reading their rough drafts and offering critiques or suggestions, and some may prefer the online chats. Still others may want a more involved bbs site where snippets are posted and extensive critiques are given. I chose Think Tank because it's like a bunch of friends getting together at a local bar to talk shop. Nothing is taken too seriously...that is, except for the suggestions that could possibly take my novel in precisely the direction I wanted it to go.

There are plenty of writing sites out there; it's just a matter of trying to find the one that's right for you. I'd stayed at one site for nearly a year while I perfected my craft--that is, made myself take it a little more seriously--until I jumped over to the Forward Motion site. Find one that you're comfortable with, and remember that you're not there for the long haul. You have no commitments to this site other than that you're part of a community. If you want help or critiques, be

prepared to give as well as receive. Soon you'll find out how friendly this field really is. We're all here to help each other. Other than that, remember to have fun! There's nothing more important than keeping your love for writing alive by participating in its growth.

Like I said, pay it forward. You'll get more than you bargained for.

## Research and Worldbuilding for Those Who Hate Libraries

By Betty L. Meshack

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A fiction writer has the luxury of making it all up. She can create religions, governments, races, histories and myths, geologies, star systems, and technologies directly from her imagination. And who can check the facts? The writer made it all up. Well, readers often check facts internal to the book. And the writer will be punished with bad reviews or low sales if the internal logic of the story fails to hang together. Even non-genre writers must, at a minimum, place their characters firmly in the world if the characters are to breathe and live convincingly enough to make the reader care about the writer's idea and theme as they are developed in the work.

If the writer's worldbuilding is done well, readers will, more often than not, suspend disbelief. Indeed, if the time, place, and manner of life of the characters are done well, the writer's fiction could even spawn a new religion in the analog world, as happened during the 1960's with Robert Heinlein's publication of *Stranger in a Strange Land* (Ace Books ISBN 0441790348). The fiction could become a cherished icon of a

political movement as did Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Little Brown & Co. ISBN 0446310786), Ralph Ellison's *The Invisible Man* (Vintage ISBN 0679732764), and Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (Bantam Classics ISBN 0553212451). George Orwell's *1984* (Econo-Clad Books ISBN 0881030368) has even become a shorthand literary reference for politically totalitarian states that use language to control populations. So rich was Orwell's worldbuilding that a sixty second commercial was able to visually capture its flavor to sell a product virtually without words. How did these writers develop the information they used to create worlds beyond their own imaginations and knowledge? They did research as journalists, they were keen observers of life as they lived it, and they went to archives and libraries.

So where does today's busy fiction writer go for the real world information that can inform her writing and make it live? In the past, our mythical writer would have spent two or more years getting details right, while traveling from city to city, library to library, and archive to archive. She would have spent vast amounts of money and time on research. Depending on the subject matter, that kind of research may still be necessary. However, for the person who wishes to write, two years spent researching delays the process. Fortunately, a tool has been developed over the last twenty years that can help shorten the



research and worldbuilding process significantly. The World Wide Web provides a new means for our writer to rapidly locate and digest vast amounts of information digitally tailored to her interests -- and for free.

I've spent more than my fair share of hours in the stacks of libraries looking for obscure references while sneezing from allergies. When the hunt went well, it was not unusual to end up with ten or twenty huge reference books in front of me, index cards marking the passages I needed to copy out for a paper or article. The task of copying the quotation and citing it according to the dictates of the *The Bluebook: A Uniform System of Citation* (17th ed., 2004 Harvard Law School) often added to the pressure. The internet has changed all of that for me. I have purchased several books that I use as references, but to fact check or find obscure references, I now use the Internet for much of my research and worldbuilding. With the Internet I now am able to locate the basic facts I need within moments of asking a question, incorporate them into my worldbuilding, and move on.

Today, I conduct much of the research for work as well as fiction writing on-line. In fact, while I don't really hate libraries, the hours that I could have spent finding the occurrences of solar eclipses for the last 1000 years have been better spent considering how to incorporate

the information I retrieved quickly from the Internet into my current work-in-progress. How did that happen? I obtained likely dates within a few minutes by conducting a plain-text search for "historical solar eclipses," which led me to several sites listing the dates of occurrences over the last 3000 years. One of those sites was "Solar Eclipses of Historical Interest" by Fred Espenak, at <http://sunearth.gsfc.nasa.gov/eclipse/SEhistory/SEhistory.html>. When I needed to learn about lunar eclipses, I performed a similar search and located "The Blessings of the Lunar Calendar" by Karima Burns (MH, ND), <http://www.islamonline.net/English/Science/2000/4/article6.shtml>, which describes the development and significance of the lunar calendar in the Islamic religion.

I've learned that just about any subject on which I need information to enrich my worldbuilding may be found on the Internet. For example, I needed to find likely names for Arab men and women. Using Google's search engine, I merely input "Arabic Names" and the following website is returned to me: Sudairy.com, maintained by Christina Sudairy, at <http://www.sudairy.com>, which lists not only feminine and masculine names but also words and phrases in Arabic as well as

recipes. While it was nice to have the names, I wondered about Arabic naming conventions. Placing that phrase into a search engine, I was rewarded with the website, "Period Arabic Names and Naming Practices" by Da'ud ibn Auda (David B. Appleton) © 2003, <http://www.sca.org/heraldry/laurel/names/arabic-naming2.htm>. I did the same kind of search for medieval Moorish names and came up with a site called "Memoriam Tempestatis", <http://memorium.puremagic.com/links.html>, a role playing game site which contains numerous links to medieval historical fact sites, which are useful for worldbuilding. Why was this important to me if I was writing fiction? Like the RPG members, I wanted the details to be right so that the knowledgeable reader would not be put off by simple errors and I could appear to be brilliant, erudite and culturally sensitive when I published my historical fantasy.

For my legal thriller and historical fantasy novels I've located several sites that have proved useful for me. This list is not exhaustive, but includes a variety of sources in a number of contexts.

Need a quick translation of Latin? Go to Latin Dictionary and Grammar Aid, <http://www.nd.edu/~archives/latgramm.htm>, a compilation website maintained by the University of Notre Dame.

For comparative religious history and mythology: The Catholic Encyclopedia (1908-14 on-line ed.), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/>, is an excellent source. You want to know the offices of the day? This is your source for the answer. Interested in the highlights of the papacy of Alexander VI? Again, you can find the answer here. Want to know what the gnostics believed and why they are considered heretics? Go to this site. (Newest print version is Berard Marthaler, ed. The New Catholic Encyclopedia: Jubilee Volume: The Wojtyla Years. Farmington Hills, Mich.: Gale Group, 2000, ISBN 0-7876-4787-X.)

I found similar sources regarding the proper forms for daily prayers in Islam (Salaat) as well. See, e.g., "How to perform Salaat, The Islamic Prayer Ritual" The Canadian Society of Muslims, <http://muslim-canada.org/index.html>. Compare "How to Pray the Rosary," The Rosary Center Homepage, <http://www.rosary-center.org/howto.htm>.

The complete works of Shakespeare may be found at The Bard Of Avon, Shakespeare In Stratford-upon-Avon, <http://www.shakespeare-w.com/english/shakespeare/index.html>, together with text analysis and translation into modern English. See also Shakes-Sphere, A Comprehensive Study Guide to the World of William Shakespeare,

maintained by Michael J. Cummings, <http://sites.microlink.net/zekscrab/>.

Mental Defects and Personality Disorders described according to the dictates of the American Psychiatric Association and DSM-IV may be found at Complete DSM-IV Diagnosis Criteria for Mental Disorders (DSM-IV Made Easy, The Clinician's Guide to Diagnosis) by James Morrison, M.D. (Guilford Press, ISBN 0898625688) at <http://www.geocities.com/morrison94/>. Ever wanted to know the differences between a schizophrenic and a victim of bi-polar disorder? This is your website. The author has provided a summary of his \$65.00 book on this website.

For a comprehensive site on illnesses, their symptoms, and the medications useful for treatment, go to RxMed: The Website for Family Physicians and You, <http://www.rxmed.com/>.

Ever wondered what the coroner looks for while conducting an autopsy? Here's your answer at Moyle Information Services for Law Enforcement, by Mike Moyle, a retired detective: <http://dmmoyle.com/didig.htm>.

Ever wanted the words to All God's Chilluns Got Shoes? Here's your source: Negro Spirituals.com, organized by The Spiritual Workshop,

<http://www.negrospirituals.com/news-song/>, which provides the history of and lyrics to many Negro Spirituals and hymns.

I wanted to find out the healing practices of the Fulani. After making this request I found a scholarly paper on-line, "Ethnoveterinary healing practices of Fulani pastoralists in Cameroon: combining the natural and the supernatural," by Mopoi Nuwanyakpa, Ngeh J. Toyang, Sali Django, Christopher Ndi, and Clare Wirmum, at Indigenous Knowledge and Development Monitor, July 2000, <http://www.nuffic.nl/ciran/ikdm/8-2/ngeh.html>.

Spanish architecture as well as some history is described along with illustrative color photographs at a travel website, All About Spain, <http://www.red2000.com/spain/primer/arch.html>.

Looking for information on daily life in ancient Japan? Try typing in "Ancient Japan" and you get this result: <http://search.netscape.com/ns/search?fromPage=nsBrowserRoll&query=ancient+japan>, a list of over 100 likely sources for information.

What historical facts were taught during the early 20th Century in Colleges and Universities? You might want to know the answer to this question to determine the knowledge base and historical blind spots of an educated gentleman (or lady) of 1910. The Great Republic I-IV, by

Master Historians, edited by Charles Morris (published early 1900's; Great Republic, ISBN 0671646648), which covers U.S. history from the colonial period through Thomas Jefferson's presidency, can answer this question and is online at:

[http://www.publicbookshelf.com/public\\_html/The Great Republic](http://www.publicbookshelf.com/public_html/The_Great_Republic)

[By the Master Historians Vol II/.](http://www.publicbookshelf.com/) See also The Public bookshelf,

<http://www.publicbookshelf.com/>, which alleges to be a collection of

some of the greatest books ever written; The 1911 Encyclopedia Britannica, <http://www.1911encyclopedia.org/>; and the on-line edition

of The Norton Anthology of English Literature I & II (7th ed.), edited by M.H. Abrahms (W.W. Norton & Co. ISBN 0393151107 & 0393947777),

<http://www.wwnorton.com/college/english/nael/welcome.htm>, which

covers historical topics from Middle Ages through the Twentieth Century. One thing to consider, however: these historical articles

may be biased but are not tainted by political correctness. As you browse the sections you might be surprised by the style of writing

compared with the texts used today. See also The Visigothic Code, translated by S.P. Scott (Boston Book Co. ISBN 0837712335),

<http://libro.uca.edu/vcode/visigoths.htm>, which records the legal and

juridical codes under which peoples of the Iberian Peninsula lived prior

to the invasion of the Saracens, and which formed the historical, political, and religious underpinnings of The Inquisition.

Want to know about women explorers? Go to the University of Pennsylvania's digital library site, a Celebration of Women Writers, <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/>, and you'll find out information about the 19th Century explorer, Mary Sheldon, <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/eagle/congress/sheldon-may.html>.

British Royal Navy slang can be found at the website <http://www.royal-navy.mod.uk/static/pages/348.html>.

The brave new world of the information highway provides many shortcuts for the on-line writer. If getting it right is important to you, then this is one tool you should put in your writer's toolbox. Want to check that the information you retrieve is correct? Check several sites for comparison. Of course the warning caveat emptor still applies; although you're not buying anything except information when you click on these websites, you still must be aware and wary of information you retrieve off the Internet -- but that is true with information you retrieve from books as well. Always consider the source.



The Internet will not replace the joy of holding real books in libraries or bookstores -- at least not yet. But when used creatively, it can save much legwork and time, and assist you in refining the research you actually need to conduct in a library.

Book Review  
The Well-Fed Writer:  
Financial Self-Sufficiency as a Freelance Writer  
in Six Months or Less

Reviewed by Joshua Johnston

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Have you ever thought about going solo as a writer? Surviving and living only by writing? That's a dream many writers share, until they find out the dire facts of life: most writers don't make enough to support themselves with writing. They must keep their day jobs *and* write, if they want to stay solvent.

A sad and depressing picture, isn't it? Peter Bowerman, author of **The Well-Fed Writer**, contends that it doesn't have to be that way. If you go the freelance commercial writer route, as he describes in his book, you stand a good chance of living by words alone.

The book comes recommended by Robert Bly, a well-known author of many books and contributing editor at Writer's Digest magazine. With such a stellar recommendation, you can't go wrong, right? Let's take a look and see.

Bowerman devotes the first couple chapters mostly to motivation and selling of the freelance commercial writer lifestyle. He doesn't

sugarcoat anything, yet he paints an attractive picture. Since many writers imagine being able to live off of fiction writing, he needs to sell the reader on writing nonfiction for a living, such as copywriting, advertisements, technical writing, etc. Those may sound boring, but if you're writing in the right area, they can be just as fulfilling, creative and enjoyable as fiction.

After he's sold you on the idea, he gets into more detail. Sections include how to create a portfolio -- even if you have no experience -- and find clients, how much to charge and how to ensure payment, how to deal with clients of various types and maintain relationships, and more. He doesn't go into great detail on copywriting terms, or terms for any other specific branch, though; he's focused on the business side; he provides nothing about *how* to write what you need to write, except for some excellent advice on information gathering.

Three appendices offer useful supplemental information: Appendix A has sample letters, contracts, brochures and direct mail pieces. Appendix B has various writing samples from real jobs. Appendix C has two interviews with "at home" moms who do freelance commercial writing, a special target audience of his.

His writing style is lively and chatty, with humor injected in liberal doses. He loves his subject, and it shows. You can't help but catch his enthusiasm and imagine yourself in his shoes.

All in all, the book is well-written and contains good information. The real test, of course, is does it work? The associated website (<http://www.wellfedwriter.com>) offers a CD and another book that include testimonials from people who have followed his advice. He uses his own advice, which is always a good thing; if you get advice that the advice-giver doesn't follow, it's rather suspect.

I plan on putting his advice to the test. He's got me convinced enough of the quality of his route that I feel fairly confident in following it.

ISBN: 0-9670598-4-4

SRP: \$19.95

## Websites for Christian Writers of Genre Fiction

By Valerie Comer

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Sometimes I feel very alone.

If you think that there is a stigma against science fiction and fantasy books being first class literature in *your* circle, try it on from a Christian perspective. Many Christians believe this group of genres is anti-Christian, and therefore evil. However, it is quite possible to read (and to write) in these genres within a Christian worldview.

What is Christian sf and fantasy?

Does a Christian worldview make the writing 'preachy', pushing biblical themes down the reader's throat? No, not at all. What is a Christian worldview, then? To write within a Christian worldview means, in my opinion, that at least one character or one segment of society has a belief in one true God who is portrayed as having created the world and is involved in the daily affairs of people. This basis is presented as positive, though not necessarily dwelt upon. Another way of 'defining' Christian worldview, is that of allowing your beliefs to stand as a 'spam filter', and permitting onto paper only the words that are acceptable to

your filter. It is a matter of what the writer wishes to promote and encourage with their writing.

#### Websites for writers

I have spent considerable hours researching this topic on the internet. One of the first websites I discovered is <http://www.christian-fandom.org/christian-fandom/>. This site is devoted to "the courteous and accurate representation of Christian viewpoints in the science fiction and fantasy community." One of its goals is to share information about existing SF and fantasy that is being done from a Christian perspective in all media (literary, music, art, etc.), and to encourage new artists. There are also recommendations for many novels that the hosts consider morally responsible, while not specifically Christian.

One of the best things about this site is the vast number of links in various categories. These include other Christian writing sites, ezines that cater to this market, and links to interviews with published authors. The interviews are particularly fascinating as they show the specific paths various other writers have taken from random ideas to published novels.

<http://christianfantasy.com> is a small website, which unfortunately has not been updated for quite some time. Beware of the many pop-up ads on this site. The forums here are quiet. The biggest benefit I found here are some concise goals and definitions for writing in the Christian fantasy, sf, romance, and horror genres. Again, this site has links that lead in new directions.

A much larger site is <http://christianfantasy.net>, which is dedicated to Christian readers of fantasy, rather than writers of it. It is the home of the Christian Guide to Fantasy, which contributes reviews of books based on three basic criteria: literary style, morality, and suitability for the targeted age group. As always, their opinions are not necessarily everyone's, but perhaps can serve a useful guideline. The forums on this site are quite active. Many further links are available. I learned about a number of published novels here that I had not seen before, enlarging my grasp of what has recently been printed. This site is maintained by Emily Snyder, a published author.

<http://xianworldview.com> is another interesting website. There are articles, which include book reviews and interviews. Also included is a forum. Although it doesn't look too active at this time (many of the posts were old), some of the archived discussions are very relevant

and interesting and/or helpful anyway. This is a site that published author Lars Walker frequents.

Refracted Light can be found at <http://www.pax-romana.net/refracted/>. Present on this site are two essays (more coming, they say) on the morality of the use of magic in fantasy stories. This author's viewpoint differs somewhat from the position taken by the writer at <http://www.christianfantasy.com>, as mentioned above.

More information for Christian writers can be found at <http://deep-magic.net>. The *writer's resource* section has a number of helpful articles. Best of all, this site boasts active forums for writers.

Another online community for Christian writers is <http://christianwriters.com>. Their main focus is on a more general, literary style, but they are also open to writers of sf and fantasy. There is a magazine associated with this site, and active forums.

The largest Christian writing site I have come across is <http://faithwriters.com>, with a listed membership five thousand strong. It is welcoming to writers in all genres, and has a weekly contest that can even net a writer a little extra cash. Because this site



boasts the largest membership and the most active forums, it would likely be the fastest place to get specific questions answered.

<http://www.billyates.com/cww/links.html> contains a comprehensive set of links for Christian writers in everything from newsgroups to publishers and magazines, as well as more general dictionary and grammar links.

### **Magazine Markets**

<http://www.deep-magic.net> is also home to a free monthly ezine, Deep Magic, which specializes in morally responsible fantasy and sf. They publish artwork and short stories in fantasy and sf, as well as articles on writing, but it is not a paying market. Deep Magic calls itself the site where minds may safely wander.

The home of SkySong Press is found at <http://www.bconnex.net/~skysong/>. They publish a semi-annual magazine called Dreams & Visions. This is a paying market; story length is 2-6000 words at \$.01 per word. SkySong, which has been in business since 1988, also publishes anthologies, and a few novels.

<http://home.quixnet.net/~dshelley/> is the home of Dragons, Knights, and Angels, a magazine of Christian fantasy and sf. This is a paying

market for a print magazine that is published quarterly. They buy poetry that fits the theme as well as short stories. The site does not give a specific pricing scale, saying only that compensation varies by publication and length.

<http://www.geocities.com/scifieditor/> is the home of the GateWay S-F magazine (Stories of Science and Faith). It is both a webzine and a print magazine, paying \$.05 per word, with a maximum of \$5.00 per story. They are requesting stories of 850-2500 words.

#### Novel Markets

Many Christian publishing houses will not accept unsolicited manuscripts or even queries. Agents are rarely used in this industry, either. How then can you get the attention of those in a position to purchase your work? *Writer's Edge* seems to give the most likely method of being discovered by these mainstream publishers. Their site is found at <http://www.writersedgeservice.com/>.

For a non-refundable fee of American \$79, Writer's Edge will evaluate your proposal and sample chapters. For those found unacceptable they promise a brief analysis of the writing as it relates to this select market. Those that they feel are professionally presented and have sales potential are listed in their monthly packet that goes out to over

90 Christian publishing houses. At this time, they report that over half of the submissions made to them make the cut and are seen by the various acquisitions editors. From there, the editor will contact the author directly if they are interested in seeing whole or partial manuscripts. Many of the publishers who work with Writer's Edge no longer accept manuscripts from any other source.

<http://www.stuartmarket.com/pubmain.htm> lists many links to member publishing houses of the CBA, although it is not a conclusive list. As I've already said, most do not accept direct submission, but there is still much useful information to be had by going directly to the individual sites.

Do mainstream Christian houses publish science fiction and fantasy? Not a lot, admittedly. Some high quality work is coming out; unfortunately, many Christians who enjoy these genres gave up on Christian bookstores years ago and thus are not aware of what is currently available. For this reason, sales are not as high as they could be. Demand must be created.

<http://www.edenstarbooks.com/> is an Amazon affiliate site specializing in Christian fantasy, science fiction, videos, and games. While I in no way wish to deny these folks the right to make a living in this manner,

greater changes in the publishing world will come at the local level, by readers ordering books through their town's Christian bookstore.

One way to put a finger on the pulse of demand is to attend a Christian writer's conference. When I ran a search on this phrase, there were a large amount of hits from all over the world. When you find one in your area, make certain that your genre is acceptable to the organizers before plunking down cash to attend. Because the larger conferences are attended by editors and agents, these can also provide a foot in the door towards publishing. A well-known annual conference at Mount Hermon, California, can be located at <http://www.mounthermon.org/writers/>.

Who publishes what -- where?

Bethany House publishes Kathy Tyers' Firebird sf series - an excellent read, by the way! They are also home to Thomas Locke's YA series *Spectrum Chronicles* and to Karen Hancock's fantasy series *Legends of the Guardian King*, as well as her sf novel *Arena*.

Emily Snyder's first book, *Niamh and the Hermit* was published by Arx Publishing, <http://www.arxpub.com>. Ted Dekker's *Black* series is published by W Publishing (<http://www.wpublishinggroup.com>). A Christian children's fantasy series by Jeri Massi has been published by

Bob Jones University Press (<http://www.bjup.com>). Zondervan (<http://www.zondervan.com>) has published some of Stephen Lawhead's books. Crossways Books (no website found) published Roger Elwood's *Angelwalk*.

Moody Press (<http://www.moodypress.org>) guidelines say they are open to YA fantasy. Xulon Press (<http://xulonpress.com>) is a Christian POD (print on demand) publisher.

Some Christian novelists have published through more traditional markets. Lars Walker's books are published by Baen. His personal website is <http://larswalker.com> and contains information about his books, as well as frank comments on his Christian beliefs.

As a side note, I recently had the opportunity to participate in live chat with Kathy Tyers (mentioned above), hosted by the folks at <http://omegasf.org>. Kathy feels that readers need to support Christian writers of sf and fantasy, in order to help create a greater demand for it. She also mentioned that, in her experience, editors at some publishing houses will still accept queries addressed specifically to them, and that it doesn't hurt to give them a direct contact. The chat transcript is on the site mentioned above. A Kathy Tyers' fan club is located at <http://members.aol.com/tzmaverick/private/page6.html>.

What then?

Possibilities for publishing sf and fantasy stories in the Christian marketplace have never been greater. If this is an area of writing that interests you, your carefully crafted story can win the recognition it deserves, and help to open the doors of acceptability even wider for other writers.

**Market Listing**

## Mar's Market Report # 3

By Margaret McGaffey Fisk

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Publication announcements from members of online writing communities are valuable resources for writers at the beginning of their careers. Though the communities may contain members at many levels of publication, overall, markets listed in these announcements tend to be open to new writers.

All the markets presented in this column came from a publication announcement. I receive announcements from various sources including Vision; The Critter's Workshop; Online Writing Workshop for Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror; and the SF and Fantasy Workshop. These announcements are all available online. They list markets at varying levels of payment so if you use these resources, be careful to research the market yourself before submitting. Even the list below should be used as a signpost, rather than a definitive answer about any market as situations do change. Reputable sites such as [www.ralan.com](http://www.ralan.com) are good places to get the latest news. Ralan's and

[Quintamid Market Database](#) have been known to have information not yet listed on the publisher website.

While many of the markets below don't offer "pro" rates, they all provide some compensation. In my opinion, offering payment is an indication of the editor/publisher's commitment and so markets with some compensation are more likely to stay around.

<b>Genre</b>	SF/Fantasy/Horror/Borderline
<b>Title</b>	The 3rd Alternative
<b>Editor</b>	Andy Cox, Editor
<b>Address</b>	The 3rd Alternative TTA Press 5 Martins Lane Witcham, Ely, Cambs CB6 2LB, UK
<b>Sub Email</b>	None
<b>Specifics</b>	Looking for modern science fiction, fantasy and horror as well as borderline material that has genre elements for all it's relatively mainstream. <a href="http://www.quintamid.com/q/mdb/10011">http://www.quintamid.com/q/mdb/10011</a> has details not on the site.
<b>Requirement</b>	Fiction up to 40,000 words
<b>Payment</b>	2 pence/wd (approximately \$0.04 US per word)
<b>URL for Site</b>	<a href="http://www.ttapress.com/pub/TTA.html">http://www.ttapress.com/pub/TTA.html</a>
<b>URL for Guidelines</b>	<a href="http://www.ttapress.com/pub/TTAguides.html">http://www.ttapress.com/pub/TTAguides.html</a>



<b>Genre</b>	Horror/dark mystery/suspense
<b>Title</b>	Cemetery Dance Magazine
<b>Editor</b>	Richard Chizmar, Editor-in-Chief
<b>Address</b>	Cemetery Dance Magazine Richard Chizmar, Editor-in-Chief P.O. Box 623 Forest Hill, MD 21050
<b>Sub Email</b>	None
<b>Specifics</b>	Horror, dark mystery and suspense stories that are powerful and emotional. Both psychological and supernatural stories are acceptable as well as suspense, mystery or crime with a horror element. This is a magazine where reading an issue is very important because their needs are specific.
<b>Requirement</b>	Up to 5000
<b>Payment</b>	3-5 cents per word plus two copies (max \$150)
<b>URL for Site</b>	<a href="http://www.cemeterydance.com/">http://www.cemeterydance.com/</a>
<b>URL for Guidelines</b>	<a href="http://www.cemeterydance.com/html/guidelines.html">http://www.cemeterydance.com/html/guidelines.html</a>

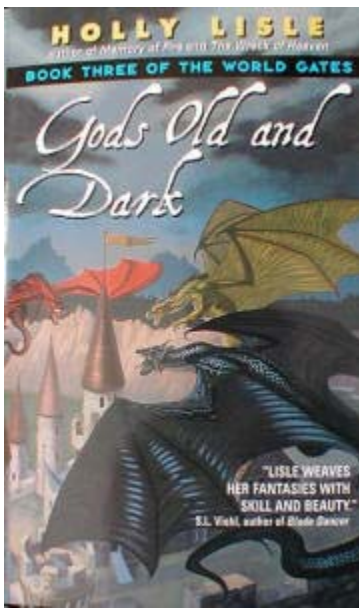
<b>Genre</b>	Fantasy/Science Fiction/Horror
<b>Title</b>	Aurealis
<b>Editor</b>	Jeremy Davies, Submissions Manager
<b>Address</b>	Chimaera Publications PO Box 2164 Mt Waverley, Victoria 3149, Australia
<b>Sub Email</b>	<a href="mailto:jk3cdavies@hotmail.com">jk3cdavies@hotmail.com</a> (queries about current submissions only)
<b>Specifics</b>	Looking for science fiction, fantasy or horror short stories, excluding stories derived from TV shows or other published works. Also accepts articles or reviews about Australian science fiction, fantasy or horror. Some Australian element is appreciated as long as it is integral to the plot. House Style Notes for spelling and punctuation are provided at <a href="http://aurealis.sf.org.au/housestyle.html">http://aurealis.sf.org.au/housestyle.html</a> . Closed to submissions between December 1st and February 1st. Note: new website address.
<b>Requirement</b>	Stories: 2000 to 8000 words, articles: 500 to 4000 words, reviews: 300 to 500 words.
<b>Payment</b>	Between \$20-\$60 Australian per 1000 words. Minimum payment of \$20 and contributor's copy (approximately \$15-\$46 US per 1000 words)
<b>URL for Site</b>	<a href="http://aurealis.sf.org.au/">http://aurealis.sf.org.au/</a>
<b>URL for Guidelines</b>	<a href="http://aurealis.sf.org.au/">http://aurealis.sf.org.au/</a>

<b>Genre</b>	Urban Horror
<b>Title</b>	City Slab
<b>Editor</b>	Dave Lindschmidt, Editor
<b>Address</b>	CITY SLAB PUBLICATIONS 1705 Summit Ave. Apt. #211 Seattle, WA 98122
<b>Sub Email</b>	<a href="mailto:submission@cityslab.com">submission@cityslab.com</a> (Must be pasted into the body)
<b>Specifics</b>	Looking for urban horror that is multi-leveled, taut and well thought out. Stories with a supernatural element are preferred as are omniscient or third person over first person but the critical element is the story must occur in an urban setting.
<b>Requirement</b>	Up to 5000 words
<b>Payment</b>	\$0.01 to \$0.05 per word
<b>URL for Site</b>	<a href="http://www.cityslab.com/">http://www.cityslab.com/</a>
<b>URL for Guidelines</b>	<a href="http://www.cityslab.com/guidelines.html">http://www.cityslab.com/guidelines.html</a>

<b>Genre</b>	Fantasy/Science Fiction/Horror
<b>Title</b>	Scrybe Press
<b>Editor</b>	Nathan Barker, Chrysann Castro (Senior Editor)
<b>Address</b>	Scrybe Press Attn: Editor 15 Cook St. Massena, NY 13662
<b>Sub Email</b>	<a href="mailto:editor@scrybepress.com">editor@scrybepress.com</a>
<b>Specifics</b>	Looking for science fiction, fantasy and supernatural horror short stories that are strong, character-driven fiction. They are not a magazine or anthology but a small press publisher of fiction in e-zine, small, mass-market formats and chapbooks. All accepted stories will be published electronically and in print. There are very specific submission procedures to follow so read the guidelines carefully. Also, they are currently accepting unsolicited submissions only from authors with at least 1 published sale or a HWA or SFWA membership. Unpublished authors are welcome to query by email.
<b>Requirement</b>	4500 to 50,000, though these guidelines are not set in stone
<b>Payment</b>	Initial contract fee of at least \$25 and 10%-15% Royalties on both electronic and print sales. The contract fee is not an advance against royalties, which begin with the first sale.
<b>URL for Site</b>	<a href="http://www.scrybepress.com/">http://www.scrybepress.com/</a>
<b>URL for Guidelines</b>	<a href="http://www.scrybepress.com/Submit/submissionguidelines.shtml">http://www.scrybepress.com/Submit/submissionguidelines.shtml</a>

## Good News From Forward Motion

Latest publishing news from our members.



Holly's latest book, Gods Old and Dark, is in the bookstores! If you can't find it order it from your local book stores! (This is better for authors than ordering on-line -- it keeps their numbers up where they count!)

***Holly Lisle's Talyn and Romantic Fantasy #2 have sold to Tor!***

S.L. Viehl (A.K.A. Gena Hale, Jessica Hall, Rebecca Kelly) has several sales to announce (and all of them were made within about one week - wow!):

Sold to Guideposts Book and Media Division, untitled book #5 in the Grace Chapel Inn series.

Sold to Science Fiction Book Club, rights to Bio Rescue as a featured alternate selection. Release date pending but probably in the early fall.

Sold: the first three books of my new vampire series to NAL. The first book will hit the shelves in June 2005, with follow-ups every six months thereafter.

We're working on creating a new pseudonym for the series. Yeah, another one. At this point I have more aliases than the average serial killer....

Sold: Four devotionals to Guideposts Book & Media, to be published in Daily Guideposts (these are annual, beautiful hardcover editions), with the theme of "Rejoicing in Hope."

Sold: StarDoc book six and book seven, to Ace Science Fiction. Details forthcoming. Option for my next SF standalone in hardcover.

The rest of Sheila's 2004 releases are:

- February -- Home for the Holidays (RK) HC
- March -- Into the Fire (JH) PB

- May -- Midsummer Melody (RK) HC
- July -- Blade Dancer (SLV) PB; Bio Rescue (SLV) HC
- August -- Untitled book #5 GCI (RK) HC
- October -- Heat of the Moment (JH) PB

HC=Hardcover PB=paperback

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Wen Spencer -- SF Romance Online voted TINKER (hardcover from Baen) the 2003 Sapphire Award.

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Justin Stanchfield placed a story with Albedo One, a really nifty Irish SF magazine.

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Be sure to check out hardbound book The Burning Land by Victoria Strauss!

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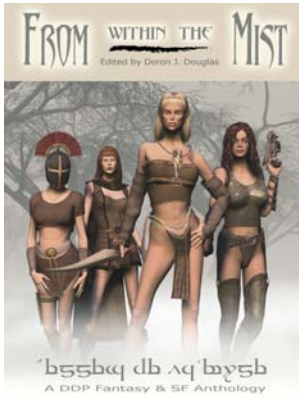
Gisele. L. Sold A poem titled Spider's New Home to the May/June 2005 issue of Wee Ones online magazine!

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Violet announced the sale of her short story Spider Queen which should appear on [www.gothicrevue.com](http://www.gothicrevue.com) in May.


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Lazette Gifford's If You Dream of Forests Green will appear in the summer issue at Fables.org. She will also be in Fable's 'Best of' print anthology (coming out sometime later this year) with Would That It Were.



The new print anthology version of From within the Mist is now released. It includes The Price of the Song and a second bonus story, Beloved of Mother in it.



 <p>(Order here)</p>	<p>A talented writer with a gift for worldbuilding... C.J. Cherryh</p>	<p>Blood, bullets, knives, explosives and a genderbender twist---with a healthy dose of heart. Works for me. Jane Fancher</p>	<p>Lazette Gifford writes edgy, make-you-think tales - - tough people in hard, strange places facing big trouble. And these two stories are some of her best -- excellent through and through -- Holly Lisle</p>
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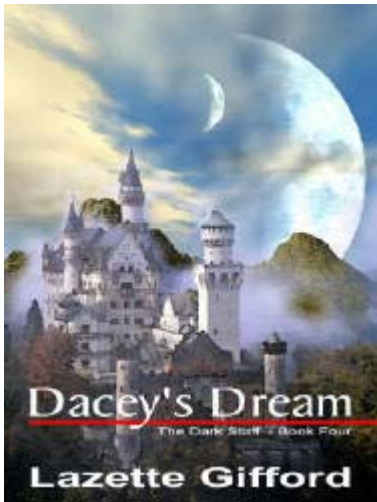
In 2039 Los Angeles, half ruined by devastating earthquakes, is in the hands of three policing forces - the National Feds, the State Militia and the city's own Local force, all of them squabbling over jurisdiction. Religious intolerance grows under the watchful eye of the CCP, and survival is a precarious game of chance and cunning.

And in this maelstrom of disaster, two Local detectives working on their first case together, try to find a drug dealer with a secret he's willing to sell -- if he lives long enough.

Unfortunately, Elias Singer is about to learn that his new partner has a dangerous secret all his own...

[Singer and St. Jude:](#)

[The Lost Cause](#)



Eons ago powerful mages cursed all magical beings to walk the land only in the dead of the night. The people of Dodano hide behind their shuttered windows and locked doors, never looking upon the creatures in the moon light.

Gradually growing to despise all magic, they have even turned against the mages and outlawed their powerful art.

However, now an evil that will not be stopped by mere locked doors is stalking the humans.

A shame that in their righteous zeal the people murdered the last true

mage, leaving only Dacey, the apprentice, to stand between them and destruction -- that is if they don't capture and kill him as well.

[Dacey's Dream](#)

## Submission and Guidelines

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

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

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

Read the guidelines and follow them. If you have a question about the guidelines, email me at [Vision@lazette.net](mailto:Vision@lazette.net) and ask.

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

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

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

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

Did I mention reading the guidelines?

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

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

Oh, and do go read the guidelines...

I am interested in all facets of writing, from first-person experience articles to genre-specific how-to's and informational articles about your area of specialization – whether that be history or science or nursing or long-distance running – and how and where your specialty can be used correctly by writers. Write something that will help other writers, and I'll be interested in taking a look.

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

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

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

If you have any questions, or wish to query about an article, email [Vision@lazette.net](mailto:Vision@lazette.net)

### *Guidelines:*

Articles must be at least 500 words with 2000 words as the 'soft' top. I'm willing to go over that count if the article needs it, but payment stops at 2000 words.

**Check your spelling and grammar!** Also, if you are from a country that does not use US spelling conventions, let me know in the email. That will stop me from making several 'corrections' before I realize they aren't mistakes.

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

Title

By

Your Name

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

Double space your manuscript.

Do **not** indent .

I would like submissions to be made in either Word Doc files, or .rtf files, and as attachments to the email. (I believe that WordPerfect allows .rtf saves, doesn't it?) If you use Works, a regular file will do, although (at least in the 4.5 version I have), this program also allows for an .rtf file save.

A plain text copy (.txt) can be sent, but be certain to mark any italics like this: *\*before and after the section in italics\**, and bold



likes this: **\_before and after anything in bold.\_** If you cannot do attachments, use the body of the letter as the last resort.

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

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

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


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

**An additional note to Word users:** You should turn off the 'smart quotes' option in Word which can be found under Tools-AutoCorrect and then the tabs AutoFormat while you type AND Autoformat. Also


uncheck the symbol replacement for --. While Smart Quotes look really neat on the screen, they sometimes translate to funny little squares that cannot be taken out with the 'find-replace' feature, but have to be hunted down by hand. If you are submitting anything electronically, you will very likely hear back from the editor on these. And remember -- a lot of print publishers are now asking for electronic copy for their end as well.

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

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



- Fantasy
- Historical Fiction
- Horror
- Poetry
- Romance
- Science Fiction



Suspense & Mystery

Young Adult & Children

Young Writer's Scene

And we are always interested in articles about the act and art of writing.

### **Upcoming Themes for Vision in 2004:**

- July/August -- The Fine Points of Critiquing (June 10 deadline)
- September/October -- Essentials of Marketing (August 10 deadline)
- November/December -- Toys for Writers (October 10 deadline)

Bear in mind that since we are now a paying market, the earlier material is likely to get a spot in the issue, while things coming in closer to the deadline will not unless there is still space -- and funds -- left for them.

Thank you!

Lazette Gifford

Managing Editor

Questions? Queries? Submissions? [Email me!](#)

## How to Join Forward Motion

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Writers are always welcome at Forward Motion, no matter what their level of experience. It doesn't matter if you are looking for answers to writing related problems, or just looking for a place where you can talk about WIPs and POVs with people who have a clue what it all means.

Holly Lisle created The Forward Motion Community as a place where she could stay in touch with readers, and to help others who shared her obsession find their way to living their dreams. The site has always been geared toward people who are serious about writing. We are very strict about copyright, and that means no fanfic can be posted, and we do not suggest vanity or self-publishing. Forward Motion's prime goal is to help people find their way to paying publication. Others who are only interested in improving their writing without seeking out publication are welcome as well, as long as they understand the core purpose of the site.

To participate in the public boards , all you have to do is read and post to them. If you register with the community, you gain access to several features, and can participate in critiquing, writing exercises, dares, and challenges. You will have to be logged in to gain access to the private boards.

Anyone may join the community. Simple click this link:

<http://fmwriters.com/community/dc/dcboard.php?az=register> and fill out an application. Membership is free and approval is automatic.

If you are interested in writing and in hanging around with other writers who are also serious about their work (though, well, not *too* serious), check the site out.

<http://fmwriters.com>

## Masthead

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

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

Lazette Gifford, Publisher and Editor

[Vision@lazette.net](mailto:Vision@lazette.net)

Copy Editor:

Ellen Wright

Copyright Information

Vision

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