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Welcome...

Dear Reader

Any of you who read my introduction letter last month (I hope one or two of you do!) will remember I was beating the drum for trying something different and the benefits it can bring to your writing. Well we're putting our money where my mouth is again this month with our exciting *Inspiring Ideas* supplement, which I hope will encourage you to try writing in styles and ways you might not otherwise consider. Or perhaps the prompts will inspire you to cover different themes or settings?

Meanwhile, here in the main mag, our lead features highlight ten ways to improve your prose technique and how to pitch your articles to editors successfully, not to mention all our usual expert advice articles and competition and market leads in *Writers' News*.

So we're giving you new ideas of what to write, showing you how to write it better, telling you where to get published and helping you pitch it to them! If that's not inspiring, I don't know what is. Now it's over to you for the fun/difficult part... get writing!



**TAP HERE
 TO WATCH
 A WELCOME FROM
 THE EDITOR**

Jonathan Telfer
 Editor



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HELEN CORNER-BRYANT

Helen Corner-Bryant spent a number of years at Penguin working in editorial before setting up Cornerstones Literary Consultancy in 1998. In 2016, she opened Cornerstones US, creating the world's first transatlantic literary consultancy. Cornerstones is known for teaching self-editing techniques, providing feedback on all types of genres, scouting for agents, and launching many writers. See:

www.cornerstones.co.uk and
www.cornerstonesUS.com



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KERRIE FLANAGAN

Kerrie Flanagan is a freelance writer, publisher and writing consultant from the United States. She is the author of seven books including *Write Away: A Year of Musings and Motivations for Writers* and *100 Haiku for the 80s Generation* published under her label, Hot Chocolate Press. She also founded the Northern Colorado Writers and now consults independently and appears at writing conferences across the US. **www.KerrieFlanagan.com**



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AMY SPARKES

Amy Sparkes is a children's author, represented by Julia Churchill at AM Heath Literary Agency. Her books include *Do Not Enter the Monster Zoo*, *Ellie's Magic Wellies*, *Hodge the Hedgehog* and *Pirate Blunderbeard: Worst. Pirate. Ever.* She loves school visits and regularly runs creative writing workshops for both children and aspiring children's authors. She is also the driving force and creator behind our *Writing Magazine* Picture Book Prize.

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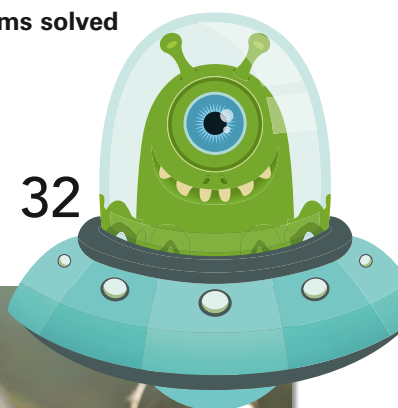
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WIN!
A comprehensive Lulu publishing deal in our exclusive competition
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THE WORLD OF WRITING



This month the challenges in Writing Land include drizzle, dysentery and absquatled hornswogglers, discovered by **Derek Hudson**

When punctuation came to a full stop

'Lots of 20th-century authors obviously just thought 'To hell with punctuation,' wrote Ana Sampson on the Interesting Literature website, reviewing *The Accidental Apostrophe: ... And Other Misadventures in Punctuation* by Caroline Taggart.

'Most notably James Joyce in *Ulysses*. Many people regard this as the greatest novel of the century, but it certainly isn't the easiest to read. Joyce referred to inverted commas as "perverted commas" and didn't use them – he introduced a piece of dialogue with an em dash, and did nothing to indicate where the dialogue ended and narrative resumed. He didn't care for hyphens, either, writing wonderful words such as *bullockbefriending* and *gigglegold*, but also baffling ones such as *hangerson* and *halffed*. Oh, and he left out the apostrophe in *I'll, I've* and *I'd*.

'More recently, Will Self's *Shark*, published in 2014, begins (without a capital letter) in the middle of a sentence and is written as one 466-page paragraph, with no chapter breaks and again no quotation marks. Who knows? It may catch on.'

The book mentioned other writing customs of old, including:

- The Victorians were crazy about hyphens.
- Charles Dickens could work six semi-colons into a single sentence.
- We used to put apostrophes in words like 'cello and 'bus, and full stops after gym. or deli. to show that they were abbreviations
- We used to put a full stop in Mr. and Mrs.

Interesting Literature was set up in 2012 by Dr Oliver Tearle, lecturer in English at Loughborough University, and freelance writer.

Lucky six



Author William Boyd, the author of eleven novels, including *A Good Man in Africa*, winner of the Whitbread Award and the Somerset Maugham Award, 'knew from a very early age that he wanted to be a novelist'

But, he told Julia Llewellyn Smith who interviewed him for *The Sunday Times*: 'My father thought I should have a proper job, a proper salary, a proper pension. The idea of being a writer struck him as the height of foolhardiness. He died very young (58), so he never saw how things worked out.'

Julia said that William Boyd's 'fluke' was to be born into the generation when novelists were household names. He featured on the legendary Granta 1983 young British novelists list alongside Martin Amis, Salman Rushdie, Kazuo Ishiguro, 'to name a few'.

William told her: 'We were very lucky. For ten years literary fiction was the thing, paperback imprints were starting up, advances were huge, every publisher wanted the spin to their list so the literary novelists suddenly found themselves in demand with auction bids for the next novel... But then, slowly, it died away. My agent said there are may be six literary novelists, now, including me, who can make a living from their novels, who don't have any other jobs.'

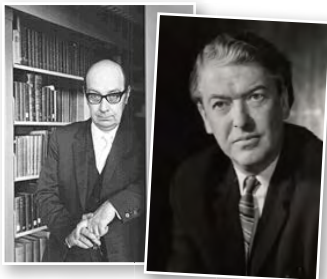


Figures of speech



HE TRIED FLOATING HIS BRIGHT IDEA WHILE STILL ALL AT SEA. IT SANK LIKE A STONE.

The literary attractions of drizzle and dysentery



Enlightening as ever, Sam Leith, in the *Guardian*, told his readers that one of the saddest things he faced as a literary journalist was the realisation that the Collected Letters, as a

genre of published book, was almost certainly dying out. He went on: 'If you read the great epistolary friendships – Robert Lowell and Elizabeth Bishop, say, or Kingsley Amis and Philip Larkin – you will see what we have lost. In our letters we are doing what [William] Hazlitt [1778-1830] called "writing to the moment": the quick of life is in them, and all its absurdity.

'That sense of a lifelong conversation comes poignantly through in the last letter from Larkin to Amis. Dictating from his deathbed, Larkin ended his last letter to his friend: "You will excuse the absence of the usual valediction, Yours ever, Philip." Every letter that he'd sent Amis for decades had ended in the word "bum". But out of consideration for the sensibilities of the woman who'd be transcribing his tape, Larkin omitted it. Eleven days later he was dead.'

Sam Leith, literary editor of *The Spectator*, added: 'Always remember that your job, writing to a friend, is to entertain. That can mean revelling in the odd pratfall. In *London Fields*, Martin Amis offered the best postcard-writing advice I've ever read: "The letter with the foreign postmark that tells of good weather, pleasant food and comfortable accommodation," he warned, "isn't nearly as much fun to read, or to write, as the letter that tells of rotting chalets, dysentery and drizzle."



News from elsewhere

Jane Shilling observed in the *Daily Telegraph* that 'Britain's oldest postcard publisher, J Salmon, was closing down.'

Jane thought this was sad news. Perhaps texting your mother a photo of yourself from the Grand Canyon does the job as well as a card, she wrote. 'The postcard "wish you were here" signifies that we were thinking about its recipient; the selfie, that we were thinking mostly about ourselves.'

She added: 'The technology is efficient, but it lacks the human touch,' and 'our children will no more miss postcards... than we miss quill pens.'

Gee Whizz, the hornswoggler has absquatulated



That's the Way It Crumbles: The American Conquest of English by Matthew Engel describes the stealthy way in which our language is being colonised.

Words which have been knocking at the door of

British English dictionaries include *absquatulate* (to abscond), and *hornswoggler* (a cheat).

Matthew, a former *Guardian* journalist, who calls the encroachment "self-imposed verbal enslavement", claims that he is not anti-American, merely a concerned witness of the cultural invasion.

His book recalls that in the 1820s, an English writer in the *New Monthly Magazine* highlighted some of the Americanisms which were crossing the Atlantic.

These included *happifying*, *governmental*, *deputize*, *slangwhanger*, *squiggle*, *slush* and *squirm*.

The author noted that these were now integrated into English, apart from 'happifying', and 'slangwhanger', or a rude and obnoxious speaker.



How turn ups started a newspaper trend

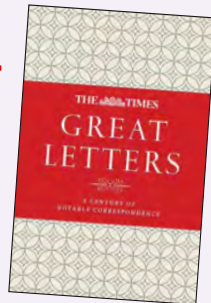
A letter to *The Times* in 1977 from *ITN* journalist and broadcaster Reginald Bosanquet (1932-1981) asking why Second World War generals had such childish nicknames as Jumbo, Squealer, Pip, Boy, Bubbles and so on, caught the attention of book reviewer Ysenda Maxtone Graham.

Ysenda, who has written widely for newspapers and magazines, described how it sparked a 'spirited reply from Whacko Simpson, and another from a retired captain who had served on the staffs of Monkey Morgan, Windy Gale, Jorrocks Horrocks and Fairy Fairhurst'.

Her review of *The Times Great Letters: A Century of Notable Correspondence*, edited by James Owen, appeared in *The Times* itself, and had much to say about the 'bottom right hand corner' letters which often turned into letters chains 'about the minor concerns of the moment, be it how to make porridge or the true origin of the word marmalade'. And sometimes the names given to Army top brass, of course.

'When was the first bottom right hand corner letters chain? It seems to have been in 1952, on the origin of trouser turn-ups.

'Owen chooses (pleasingly) to devote a section to this chain of twenty letters: the assistant editor of *The Outfitter* saying that turn-ups were first used by Cambridge undergraduates in 1898, another person saying it was Oscar Wilde and his friends displaying their high embroidered socks..., another saying it started when Edward VII who, when Prince of Wales, turned up his trousers to cross a muddy square.'





LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

We want to hear your news and views on the writing world, your advice for fellow writers – and don't forget to tell us what you would like to see featured in a future issue...

Write to: Letters to the editor, *Writing Magazine*, Warners Group Publications plc, 5th Floor, 31-32 Park Row, Leeds LS1 5JD; email: letters@writersnews.co.uk. (Include your name and address when emailing letters. Ensure all

letters, a maximum of 250 words, are exclusive to *Writing Magazine*. Letters may be edited.)

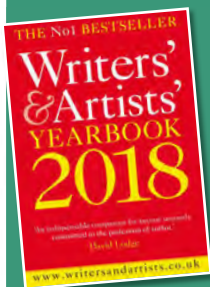
When referring to previous articles/letters, please state month of publication and page number.

★ STAR LETTER ★

GETTING ON

*I sit down to write, all ready and willing,
And wouldn't you know, but the phone starts its ringing.
I answer and say I don't have PPI,
So I'm ready to write now, and finally I
Shall compose my opus, shall pen a great piece
Until a ring at the door once again breaks my peace.
No, I don't need some jobs done, I don't need windows done.
Frankly (I don't say this) you're a pain in the bum.
I just want to sit and begin to jot down
Some choice words of genius, my mark of renown.
But more phone calls (the kids), guilt-laden laundry,
Just keep coming up – an invasion of ordinary.
I want to write something, to pen my refrain,
But wouldn't you know it, here's LIFE again.
I'm fairly confident others among the *Writing Magazine* readership
will find a lot of that all-too-familiar.*

ROBERT KIBBLE
Slough, Berkshire



The star letter each month earns a copy of the *Writers' & Artists' Yearbook 2018*, courtesy of Bloomsbury.

www.writersandartists.co.uk

AN OCEAN OF DIFFERENCE

I sighed with relief when I read Anne Wilson's letter, (WM, Dec). I have come across similar problems with other transatlantic books. I have lived in the US and the UK as well as obtaining a degree in American Studies so I automatically cringe at misplaced phrases or details from either side of the pond.

For me *Fifty Shades of Grey* felt inaccurate in its setting. EL James wrote about placing bacon under a grill, common in UK cookers, but I have yet to enter an American home with a similar facility. They usually put bacon on top of a grill. Likewise, I was sceptical about Ana's near miss at a pedestrian crossing. In my observations Americans do not cross the roads at will like we do in the UK. In fact you could be arrested for 'jaywalking' in the US so it's doubtful behaviour.

Perhaps I am just FS bashing but it made me think about *Writing Wrongs* (WM, Nov). To 'write what you know' is more than life experience. It is to research the missing details that will allow the reader to seamlessly enter the imagined world of the author. Would FS appear more realistic to me if it had been set in Britain? Probably, but that would have been a different story.

So I am left asking why some authors callously set novels abroad? Is it to appeal to a larger market or themselves? Sadly I suspect it is down to improving numbers.

DHALEEN DEVENISH
Hove, East Sussex

I couldn't agree with Anne Wilson more. I do not know which book she is referring to, but the sheer fact it has reached 'bestseller' status with such an obvious error astounds me. Anne is certainly not 'splitting hairs', of course it matters how authentic a character is.

I am surprised it was not immediately spotted by the publisher. I appreciate this sounds as though I am going off on a tangent but it makes me question, is it because the author is already a success, and the publishers assume the audience will buy it anyway?

SHARON CAREY
Runcorn, Cheshire

ONE GOOD DEED

I've entered plenty of writing competitions in my time, but never thought to run one of my own.

I was following the story of Baby D (Daniel Farbrace) online, and when I heard that he had sadly died I wanted to do something special to support the family.

After talking to Daniel's parents, I decided to run a flash fiction competition, seeking uplifting stories to honour and remember Daniel.

Wow, what a response the competition had! 45 entries from all over the world, 45 beautiful, funny, surreal and touching stories came in, along with more than 45 good deeds/donations in Daniel's name.

Running this competition showed me two things, first how kind and generous the writing community is, with their actions and their words. Secondly, how little there is between competition entries. I had thought it would be easy to put aside weaker stories, but truthfully there were none.

In the end we chose the story that moved us the most and you can read it at <https://gaynor69.wixsite.com/astoryfordaniel>

Thank you to *Writing Magazine* and everybody else who shared or supported the competition.

GAYNOR JONES
Failsworth, Manchester

GETTING ROUND TO IT

1997: The first time I put pen to paper. I was thirteen, and my idea of writing was merely the ramblings of a teenage girl with the world on her shoulders. Much has changed since then; I grew up, started a family, got a 'real' job, went to uni, but my love to read and write never waned.

You see, I thought that the world of artists, authors and creative producers was exactly that: another world. One that I never placed myself within. I promised myself over and over again, that one day I would pick up the pen, or indeed the paintbrush, and dreamt of seeing my name in lights – but I never quite found the time to write; the time to put a wealth of dreams onto paper, as I told myself I was too busy.

2017: I pick up *Writing Magazine* and find myself immersed in this 'alien' world and suddenly I have picked it all back up again. You see, the encouraging words and wealth of ideas and advice within *WM* has indirectly created my website, my first draft, my business cards, my first synopsis, my ebooks, my marketing... the list goes on!

So thank you *WM* for inspiring me to pick up the pen again. After all, what's twenty years between friends?

SOPHIA JEVONE
Hartlepool, Co Durham

What a difference a year makes.

This time last year, I was telling a friend about my dream of becoming a published author. I was working on my third novel and honing my craft in anticipation of the day when something I wrote was good enough to be sent out. My friend, much wiser than me, suggested that to realise my dream, I would have to throw open the drawers of my digital writing desk and start building a writing CV.

That same day, I went out and bought a copy of *Writing Magazine*. The *Writers' News* section was a treasure trove of inspiration but I was also intimidated. It had been years since I'd written short stories and what on earth was flash fiction? The next day, I wrote a short story. A week later, another one. I also subscribed to *Writing Magazine* so the inspiration and the opportunities kept coming every month.

A year on, I've been placed in two novel opening competitions, been long-listed in competitions and had my flash fiction story picked up for an anthology. But most exciting of all, a publisher I contacted regarding one of my novels recognised my name from a competition and asked to see the manuscript that was placed. After a tense wait, I'm about to sign my very first publishing contract!

All this because of a piece of good advice and a subscription to the *Writing Magazine*. Thank you.

LAURA LAAKSO
St Albans, Hertfordshire

I loved EJ More's letter (*WM*, Dec). Her determination is infectious. Four months ago I bought a new puppy for my husband and took some time to settle him in. I thought I'd start writing the book I'd always wanted to write. Four months later, 30,000 words later. Eight drafts and numerous rewrites later I have half written my novel and have a constructive draft for the second half. I have entered it into a competition where I can enter the first 30,000 words. I am now slowly trying to complete it. I don't know where this is going, but I have a strong determination and a lot of patience and a sense of humour.

What helped me to start was concentrating on two members of my family in my mind who would enjoy reading my manuscript and forgetting everyone else. This really helped me and I was off. Where this journey takes me I don't know but I have found a lovely new hobby, and soon will be having a lovely log cabin built at the end of my garden. A big thank you to our Jack Russell pup who started me off.

LM GOODIER
Burmarsh, Kent

I first subscribed to *Writing Magazine* back in October 2014 after a spinal injury laid me up for six months.

During this time I was motivated to enter the subscriber competitions, which eventually led me to write my first book of short stories for my son. It was published on Amazon as *Joshua's Train Adventures* and although it has not sold many copies they now have one in my local library and my son's school.

I can't explain the feeling of seeing your own book in your local children's library. I persevered but then work commitments took over and writing was sidelined, I suppose like many of your readers.

I cancelled my subscription to *Writing Magazine* as I thought, wrongly, that it was just something else stopping me from actually writing that bestseller. How wrong was I! I haven't written anything since leaving and recently resubscribed to the magazine to see if it would help.

As soon as it came it was like meeting an old friend and I read it from cover to cover. It not only got my creative juices flowing again but I have just finished my first draft of a short story for the Real Time Competition. I found that the deadline spurred me on to write. I also found that handwriting the first draft really made the creative process flow.

One of the main attractions as a subscriber is the competitions. They are free and really simple to upload. I can't believe the ridiculous entry prices and conditions for some competitions.

Thank you for getting me writing again.

PAUL PERRY
Halesowen, West Midlands

FINDING YOUR VOICE

Sometimes boredom is a godsend!

Last week for medical reasons I was chained to the house. I dimly remembered from years back that on modern computers a writer can dictate text which will be printed on the screen as you speak. Believing that it took some steady practice for the computer to understand one's pronunciation, I had done nothing about it.

However, I thought, let's give this thing a try. Using an eight year old iMac I found 'Dictation' under Edit and up popped a little microphone. I was away.

I wonder how many writers use this fun way of recording their story? I have never heard it mentioned and despite (or even because) of some of the hilarious misinterpretations that jump onto my screen, I now almost

always use it for email. Speaking the punctuation is a little different but it really is magic to watch your thoughts appear in front of you.

So far, I've not used it for short stories but I think that will come as I now know I need to have my brain ahead of the computer, not so much ahead of my fingers. That is probably a case of practice and/or conditioning.

I was delighted to explain all about this little genie hiding behind our screens to an elderly neighbour, (who has the use of only one finger.) He is already captivated by the ease with which he can now contact his friends or enact his business requirements.

Goodbye boredom.

PAMELLA LAIRD
Orewa, New Zealand



All's fair

The world's biggest booktrade fest provides food for thought for **Michael Allen**

A few references in recent book-trade blogs have reminded me that the Frankfurt Book Fair is now over for another year. Should I have needed any further prompting, there was a useful column about the Fair by literary agent Piers Blofeld in the December issue of this very magazine.

The Frankfurt Buchmesse, as the Germans call it, is still the largest and most important annual gathering of book-trade people in Europe. Its substantial website describes it as 'a meeting place for the industry's experts and the most important marketplace for books, media, rights and licences worldwide. Be they publishers, booksellers, agents, film producers or authors – each year in October, they all come together and create something new.' And, as Piers made clear, it's a spot where literary agents work extremely hard at selling their writers' books on a face-to-face basis. In short, anyone who matters in the book trade is very likely to be there.

I have never actually been to Frankfurt myself, but for about twenty years, give or take, I certainly went to the London equivalent. The London Book Fair also claims to be 'the global marketplace for rights negotiation and the sale and distribution of content across print, audio, TV, film and digital channels'. Next year, our own Fair will take place from 10-12 April at Olympia, West London. You don't need any special credentials to get in, and so for any writer living within a reasonable travelling distance from London it's well worth a visit. The 2018 website already gives a long list of events.

Before we forget Frankfurt, however, let's see what we can learn from the 2017 event. One important fact for writers, perhaps, is that the bosses of two of the biggest publishers in the world, Penguin Random House and Simon and Schuster, both thought it

worth their while to go to Frankfurt in person and address the assembled masses; and both CEOs had enlightening things to say.

Markus Dohle is head of PRH, and he is said to have delivered a speech of 'virtually unqualified optimism'. No fears here, apparently, that the growth of digital technology is going to damage profits in the long-established, traditional publishers. Hmm. Well, we shall see.

Carolyn Reidy is CEO of Simon and Schuster, which has for decades been publishing books which often dominate the bestseller lists in multiple countries. And she, some observers might think, was more realistic than Dohle.

To begin with, she made it plain that the self-publishing share of the American market is now 'huge, no matter what statistics you use'. More specifically, she stated that, in the romance genre, self-publishers have now stolen almost all the business from the traditional firms who were once in charge. The people who buy and read these books, said Ms Reidy, 'are consumers who, if they wanted a book, used to come to us, and now they go elsewhere'.

All of which suggests that those writers who are rejecting the traditional route to publication may not be as dumb and misguided as some observers would have us believe.

Okay. Pause there. And now ask yourself, in the light of these professionals' comments, what sort of strategy should be adopted by young(ish) and new(ish) fiction writers who have ambitions to make writing a full-time activity – a full-time activity being defined here as one which will pay, over the thick end of a working

lifetime, enough money to support a family and provide a pension at the end of it. Just like a day job.

This problem was never easy. And developing a viable strategy to achieve it today will certainly involve a great deal of time and research. Mike

Shatzkin, a man with fifty years of involvement in publishing behind him, has surveyed the recent view from Frankfurt, and declared that 'the business just keeps getting a little bit harder day by day.'

The first thing a writer needs to do, I suggest, is to clarify their own mind about what they want to get out of a writing career. Is it money, fame, literary reputation, or just the satisfaction of 'expressing yourself'? (Because you aren't likely to achieve all of these at once.) This choice of aims and objectives is an issue which I first dealt with fifteen years ago in *The Truth about Writing*. That little book is still available through Amazon, and most of the reader/reviewers have found it useful.

Next, a writer really needs to know as much as possible about the modern publishing scene – which is where places like Frankfurt come in handy. If you do manage to finish your novel (or non-fiction book), is it sensible to offer it to agents and publishers immediately, or should you go down the self-publishing route first (and perhaps always)? The answer will vary according to the nature of the book you have written, and according to what you hope to achieve in your writing career. But as your eventual course of action is going to require time, energy, and commitment, it's probably best to have a hard think about these things before you begin the actual writing.

So: next year's London Book Fair will, as usual, provide much food for thought. **WA**

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The first thing a writer needs to do is clarify their own mind about what they want to get out of a writing career

On Writing

Tony Rossiter explores great words from great writers

“”

Details fascinate me. I love to pile up details. They create an atmosphere.

MURIEL SPARK

Details create atmosphere – no doubt about it. Whether you're writing about the past or the present, whether you're writing a whodunit or a romcom, detail is how you can create an atmosphere and bring the time and the place you're writing about to life.

Let's look at a few well-known examples. In *Wolf Hall* Hilary Mantel excels at the small, telling detail. We can almost smell the rain-drenched wool cloaks and feel the sharp fibres of rushes under our feet. Tracy Chevalier's *Girl with a Pearl Earring* gives us a feeling of real authenticity, with its fascinating domestic details of daily life in Delft in the 17th century, plus lots of technical detail about the process of painting and the way Vermeer prepared his paint. In Thomas Hardy's Wessex novels the detail of his Dorset landscape is described with a naturalist's eye. Ian Rankin's Rebus novels give us an authentic feel for the sights and sounds and smells of the non-touristy parts of Edinburgh, with their down-at-heel pubs and their graffiti-ridden housing estates. In *Bridget Jones's Diary* Helen Fielding lists Bridget's New Year's resolutions, giving us enough detail to make us pretty sure that she won't keep any of them (*'drink no more than fourteen units of alcohol a week; reduce circumference of thighs by 3 inches'*).

These are widely different writers, writing in many different genres, but in each case the specific detail enables us to build up an authentic picture of the scene. It goes without saying that the detail must be 100% accurate. If you're writing about the past, do your research. If you get it wrong, you can bet your bottom dollar that someone, somewhere will pick it up and let you know about it. And if one little detail is shown to be wrong, your readers may question the authenticity of everything else.

Unusual little details are most likely to stick in the mind. But don't overdo it. You don't want to overwhelm your readers with so much detailed description that they're tempted to skip it. The detail needs to be specific and vivid, but it does not need to be extensive. For Stephen King, good description consists of 'a few well-chosen details that will stand for everything else'. One or two sentences may be enough. **WM**



From the OTHER SIDE OF THE DESK

Agent Piers Blofeld is disturbed by writers losing out to internet piracy

I am sure I am not alone in thinking that the last decade has felt like a combination of fighting off the effects of the crash of 2009 while simultaneously trying to adapt to and make use of disruptive technologies which I neither asked for or much liked.

For agents, this period of change was intensified by the rise of ebooks and the emergence of the indie author – probably the biggest single shift in the structure of publishing since the paperback. Back in 2010-12, when disruption and disintermediation were the buzzwords of the day, it became fashionable to question the value that agents and even publishers brought to the chain. All an author needed now was Amazon and a Twitter account and they could find their readers on their own, thank you very much.

Whatever the virtues of self publishing, that spirit of disruption has been a powerful force. Part of that strength came from the fact that it was philosophically allied to a current of thinking which also had a lot of pull a few years back: which was the move to get rid off, or at the very least radically reassess, the very notion of copyright.

However intellectually bankrupt that idea may have been – for all those who are not holding a candle for the good old days of property as theft and the dictatorship of the proletariat – it chimed with the spirit of the times. At that point who knew how far the disruption of the internet would reach? So much seemed possible...

With the benefit of a few years of reality, far from being radical – or even left wing – it can now be interpreted as a handy legitimiser of the increasingly pervasive culture of piracy on the internet. Anyone who has teenagers will know (or should know) that they are illegally streaming vast amounts of content from the internet – whether it is the latest episode of *Game of Thrones* or a game of football. It is an activity that has become utterly normalised.

It is hard to feel sorry for HBO or the Premier League, and it would be easy to assume that people who read books are a) grown ups and b) too nice to engage in piracy at anything like a similar level so it is shocking to discover that current estimates show that 17% of ebooks are pirated. What shocks me even more is that some of the most pirated ebooks are by authors who write series fiction. In other words, these are their own fans who are stealing from them and who seem to feel that it is okay to take the benefit from someone else's labour without paying from it. Indeed, not just okay, but their right.

There are people who are happy to talk openly about their piracy on fan forums and chat rooms – who are even prepared to attack an author for having the temerity to suggest that paying them for their work might be the right thing to do.

While much ink has been expended on the subject of how going online can seem to make people's moral compass go haywire, for me there is a deeper worry. This defiant sense of the right to commit piracy suggests a shift to a society where consumption is no longer simply a choice – it is a right and putting a barrier in the way of that right places the moral burden not on the thief, but on the selfish author for daring to assert their right to be paid for their hard work. **WM**



STRENGTHEN YOUR FICTION

Hone your prose to make it really effective with a writing workout from author and publisher **Kerrie Flanagan**

Strong writing packs a punch and has a better chance of resonating with readers. It creates vivid imagery, an engaging story and intriguing characters. With the right tools and knowledge, strengthening your writing is easier than you may think. Here are ten specific techniques to make you a stronger writer.

1 Use strong verbs. Avoid passive verbs.

Strong verbs make your writing tighter and clearer. William Zinsser in his book, *On Writing Well*, states: 'Verbs are the most important of all

your tools. They push the sentence forward and give it momentum. Active verbs push hard: passive verbs tug fitfully.'

In contrast, passive verbs slow down readers and clutter writing.

Instead of writing *The milk had been knocked over by a cat*, change it to *The cat knocked over the milk*. The word *had been* are unnecessary and end up dragging the sentence out. It is the cat who is doing the action so it should be the focus, not the milk.

The forms of the verb *to be* are helping verbs, used with a past participle to create passive voice. If you see sentences with them, rework them where possible to make them

more active.

Continuous verbs can also slow down your action in a similar way, as in the below example:

- **Continuous:** *Sam was searching for an agent for his manuscript.*
- **Simple:** *Sam searched for an agent for his manuscript.*

You may sometimes have need for the continuous tense, but simple past usually feels cleaner.

2 Vary sentence structure

A well-written piece is more than just stringing together a series of words into sentences and paragraphs. You want to create a flow and rhythm for the reader. A paragraph containing

nothing but long sentences is cumbersome to read, while one with only short sentences feels choppy. A combination of the two is best to create effective fluency for your reader. It breaks up the monotony and presents the information in an easy to follow format.

3 Use effective dialogue

Dialogue serves a bigger purpose than simple conversation. It creates mood, enhances setting, unveils backstory, provides insights into the characters, explains your world and propels a story forward.

Dialogue tags should only be used when necessary and when they are, it is a basic, *said* or *asked*. Words like *murmured*, *shrieked*, *demanded* or *inquired* slow down the pace and stand out. *Said* becomes background and allows the great dialogue to speak for itself.

4 Start strong

Where to begin or not to begin—that is the question. Many writers fall short when starting a story. There is a strong urge to give all the background, set up the scene, and gently introduce the reader to the characters and their world. The writer knows how the murder happens and gets solved, how the hero and heroine get together at the end. The author knows it all. The reader enters the world completely in the dark. The tendency is to want to turn on the light. The danger is when that becomes a floodlight illuminating everything.

In media res is a Latin phrase that means ‘in the middle of things’ and is an effective way to start. Drop your readers into the middle of a scene, already in progress. Hook them and compel them to keep reading. It does not mean, let me overload you with the history of every character and the location this scene takes place.

Think about a stage play. The actors come on to the stage and begin. They don’t take a minute to introduce themselves and their characters. They start with action or dialogue.

So, how do you know where to start? Step back and take an honest look at your work. Where does it begin to get interesting? Where does it start to flow? You want this to be

as close to the inciting incident as possible, that point where something happens to the main character to flip her world upside down and she can’t go back to the way things used to be. She must move forward. Think about *The Wizard of Oz*. When the tornado hits, Dorothy ends up in a strange

*How do you know where to start?
Step back and take an honest look at your work.
Where does it begin to get interesting?
Where does it start to flow?*

land and her life is forever changed. This is her inciting incident. We don’t need a big set up that tells us all about her, Auntie Em and the farm. All we need is a glimpse into her current life before the cyclone hits.

5 Master the use of backstory

Backstory is all the events that happened to a character in the past, before the current timeline of the story. New writers tend to want to explain too much of a character’s history. Some of it has no relevance to the story. It can also slow down the pace. When we meet new people in real life we don’t know everything about them. The same thing happens in fiction. The history of a character should reveal itself naturally over the course of the novel. Trust your reader to put the pieces together.

6 Implement point of view description

Description sets the scene. It paints a picture of the world you created and the characters that live there. But when the narrative stops in order to describe a room or person the flow of the story is interrupted. This type of description can be skimmed or even skipped and the reader won’t miss out on key elements of your plot.

However, there is a way to add description and setting to your writing and make it an integral part of the story. It is done through a character’s point of view. When done well, it not only helps describe the scene, but it reveals things about the character. It shows the reader how the character is interacting with her environment and what she notices. It

adds another layer and even becomes necessary to the story.

For example, let’s say there is a beautiful sunset over the mountains casting a pink glow over a small town. You can stop and describe the town, the colours of the sunset, the small shops and the kind of people there.

But what if instead you describe it through your character’s eyes? Think about her mood, her personality and her state of mind. It will impact what she notices. For instance, how would these two female characters describe the same mountain town?

- A woman who just got a diagnosis of cancer from the doctor.
- A woman who just flew in from New York City and has never seen the Rocky Mountains.

The woman with the recent cancer diagnosis is going to see/feel things differently than the woman who has never seen the mountains. The woman with cancer may describe the scene this way:

The mountains loomed over her as she worked her way through the town, past all the cute shops she would have gone in last week. Even yesterday she would have been tempted to stop. But today all that changed. The setting sun cast an eerie glow on the street, reminding her of the impending darkness, urging her toward her car that sat alone in the small parking lot.

In comparison, the woman having her first experience in the mountains might describe it like this:

She stopped to breathe it all in and smiled. The snow-capped mountains stood tall and majestic, watching over the small town. The red, pink and orange clouds lit up the sky. She marvelled at the beauty and then inhaled the clean, crisp air. The residents all seemed to be wearing jeans, long sleeved shirt and a vest of some kind. She wondered if they even knew how lucky they were to live in such an amazing place.

7 Avoid adverbs

Stephen King believes the road to hell is paved with adverbs. Regardless of whether or not you ever find out if this is indeed true, the statement is a strong one that rings true. Adverbs are words or phrases that modify a verb, adjective or other adverbs. Most of the time these are 'ly' words like *quickly*, *slowly*, *happily*... It is usually possible to avoid an adverb by using stronger words for a description instead.

- With adverb: *Elizabeth ate her lunch quickly so she wouldn't be late for another meeting.*

- Without adverb: *Elizabeth*

Don't say you were a bit confused and sort of tired and a little depressed and somewhat annoyed. Be confused. Be tired. Be depressed.

gobbled her lunch while watching the clock, determined not to be late for another meeting.

Some writers go overboard with adverbs as dialogue tags and you find their main characters speaking, *quietly*, *humbly*, *emphatically*... It is better to find a different way to describe how the words are being said than with adverbs. See also point 3!

- With adverb: *'I am so glad to see you,' she said happily.*

- Without adverb: *She smiled. 'I am glad to see you.'*

8 Beware of echo and crutch words

These are words that get repeated or show up frequently in your writing. An echo word is the same word that shows up two or more times within a couple of paragraphs.

- Original ('lifestyle' is an echo):

Dawn loves her lifestyle and doesn't plan to give it up any time soon. She is grateful she had the chance to travel, experience the nomadic lifestyle and continue to build her career. Her new outlook on life enables her to embrace each day, make time for the people who are important to her and to not let opportunities pass her by.

- Rewrite: *Dawn is grateful she had the chance to travel, experience the nomadic lifestyle and further her career. She now embraces each day, makes time for the people who are important to her and does not let opportunities pass her by.*

Crutch words are those go-to words we rely on and use a lot throughout our writing that are unnecessary. Common ones include: *that*, *just*, *really*, *actually*, *very*, *anyway*, *so*. It is important to identify your crutch words and during the revision stage, delete them. Using the search/find feature is an easy way to do this.

9 Write Tight

To tighten your writing, avoid vague language and empty words. For instance, the phrases *the truth is* or *the fact is* are not needed. Vague words dilute your writing and weaken the points and information you are conveying. William Zinsser states: 'Don't say you were a bit confused and sort of tired and a little depressed and somewhat annoyed. Be confused. Be tired. Be depressed. Be annoyed. Don't hedge your prose with timidities.

Good writing is lean and confident.'

Once you get your initial ideas down on the page it is good to go back and rid your article of these unnecessary words and phrases. It strengthens your writing and your reader will appreciate it.

10 Show and tell

The adage 'show don't tell' is thrown around a lot in the writing world. And yes, there is truth to this statement. Saying *Evan was shy* or *Mary became angry* gives us an idea about these two, but it doesn't give us a great visual. Instead it would be better to say: *Evan stood in the corner far away from the dozen people visiting with one another. He played with the string on his hoodie, hoping to blend into the wall.*

Or: *Mary pounded the desk with her fist before storming out of the room.*

In each of these examples we get a clearer image of what these emotions looked like for these characters.

However, always showing without any telling has the potential to bog down your story. Showing takes more words and sometimes you need to say something as simple as *Jordan picked up the remote control and turned the television back on*. Telling is also an effective way to show passage of time. *He grabbed his backpack and drove to the coffee shop where his friend waited for him*. If every sentence is packed with adjectives and lengthy imagery, you risk losing your reader. Good writers understand there is a balance between showing and telling.

Before submitting to agents, editors or readers, you want your writing to be as strong as possible. By incorporating these ten techniques, you can be confident you are putting out your best work. [Ww](#)



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Murder in mind



Rizzoli and Isles creator
Tess Gerritsen talks
murder, medicine, movie
making and memory with
Tina Jackson

The woman sitting opposite me is exactly what you'd hope for in a medical professional: alert, intelligent and precise, but also warm and engaged. Her neat, elegant appearance inspires confidence. Her curiosity about human nature is boundless and her knowledge deep and wide-ranging.

But although this woman is a doctor, she's not a practising one. She's American crime novelist Tess Gerritsen, the creator of Rizzoli and Isles and the author of some of the most gripping, edgy crime fiction on the shelves. Tess's first-hand medical knowledge means that her books are grounded in clinical, scientific detail of medicine and autopsies that gives absolute credibility to the scenarios she creates, not to mention skin-crawling tension.

Tess's new book, *I Know A Secret*, is the twelfth Rizzoli and Isles title, and without giving too much of the game away, there's some no-holds-barred horrible stuff in there in a case that involves homicide detective Jane Rizzoli and medical examiner Maura Isles in the world of indie horror film making, ritual abuse, and the iconography associated with the gruesome deaths of Catholic martyrs.

Tess is in the UK on a book tour but, she's also been making a film with her son, Josh Gerritsen, about pigs, and why in some cultures,



LISTEN

TAP HERE
To hear an
extract from
*I Know
A Secret*

they're considered unclean, and not eaten. 'As an Asian, we see it as the most delicious meat, so what are the reasons? The idea of pigs intrigued me. They're so put down, and yet so intelligent and so much like us in certain ways.'

A jumping off point for Tess, who used to watch horror films with her mother, was being involved in making another film with Josh: the indie horror *Island Zero*.

'We made a horror film, and it's with an agent,' she says. 'The idea was to have a good time as a family and I've always loved horror films. So we hired four or five professional actors and shot the film in nineteen days. It introduced me to the world of indie horror film-making. They're viewed as somewhat eccentric – the majority are women, which I never knew. And I thought, that's really a wonderful background for an atmosphere I could use in a novel.'

But the key inspiration came when she was on holiday in Italy. 'I was looking at sacred art in museums. I got a little bored of seeing Madonnas and saints and so I picked up a book on how to read a painting. And I began to see more and more of the symbols associated with each saint, and the way they told their story – and I thought, what if the killer did the same thing at a crime scene? Leave clues based on religious art as a message for someone.'

Although each book takes Rizzoli and Isles into new aspects of the dark side of human nature, Tess's trademark use of medical procedures gives an overarching identity to the series. 'I don't practice medicine any more but because I am a doctor I think about the human body differently from other people,' says Tess. 'So I'm going into Maura's head – you have a more methodical way of looking at a body than other people. I remember times as a doctor when it would be very upsetting to almost everyone: it's blood, an operating table, someone dying. You just have to get to work and get on with it. And that's how I see some scenes for Maura.'

These scenes aren't a challenge for her in writing terms. 'I find those scenes easier to write than love scenes! There, you're always in danger of going into purple prose. But I don't worry about going there with a bloody scene!'

One of the key themes in *I Know a Secret* is the unreliability of memory. It

hooks directly into a formative event in Tess's own life.

'I actually am a victim of false memory syndrome,' she says. She drops it into the conversation as if she's talking about the weather, but what follows is as startling and shocking as anything in her books. 'We had a family friend who went to prison for viciously murdering his sister in law.'

The woman, Janet Bokey Hee, was found dead in the bathroom of her San Diego home on the night 31 October 1972. She'd been tortured before being murdered. Her brother-in-law Michael Hee was the killer. The murder brought deep shame to the Chinese-American community in which Tess grew up.

'I grew up knowing this man,' says Tess. 'On the day he murdered his sister in law, he came for a visit to our house, bringing Halloween biscuits and sweets, and for twenty, thirty years, I had a very vivid memory of that visit. I grew up thinking how normal people can do these things.'

But Tess, who was a student at the time, was not at home on the day Michael Hee visited her house with Halloween cookies. 'I was asked to write an article and I realised, as I went to the archives to research it, that I could not have been there. I was a freshman at college – but my mother had described it to me so vividly and so often, that I believed I was there. And then I began to read about satanic ritual abuse trials in the 1980s and 90s where innocent people were accused of doing terrible things, and were persecuted, and spent time in jail. The children were questioned in suggestive ways that led to their answers. And I thought, what happens to these children ten, twenty years later? Thinking, what happened? What did I do? It was really disturbing to think that we can't trust our memories about something that has happened.'

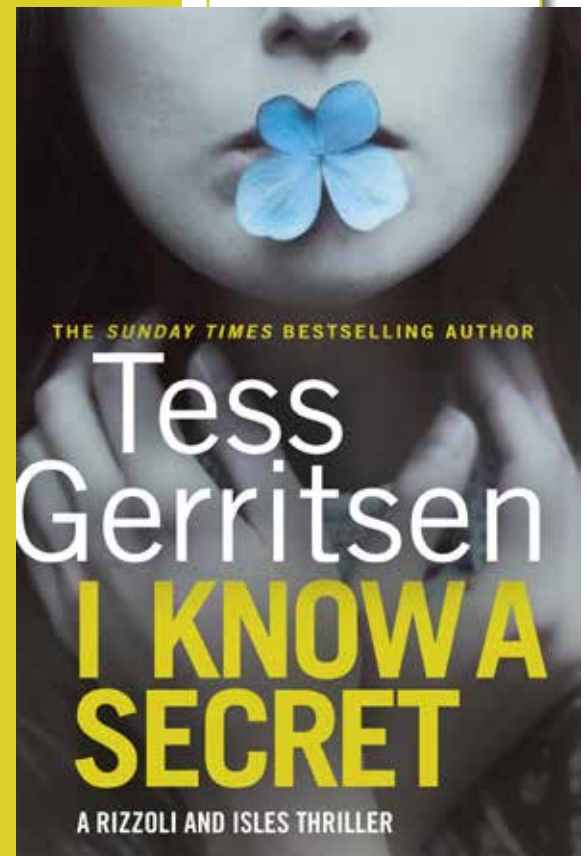
The episode with Michael Hee raised the definitive issue that Tess has been trying to solve in each crime novel she writes. 'In a way, I think I'm trying to answer that question from my childhood: why did such a horrible man do such a horrible

“I think I’m trying to answer that question from my childhood: why did such a horrible man do such a horrible thing? And every crime book is that. It’s not the crime itself that we read for.”



WATCH

Tap Here to watch Tess discussing the writing of *I Know a Secret*





“I want to be in the mind of my medical examiner who has to come in and do a job... I’m embodying Maura, and she is like me. We believe in science and logic. We like to think we can solve the world though science and logic, even though we can’t.”

thing? And every crime book is that. It’s not the crime itself that we read for. It’s the human side, how it affects the investigator, the survivors. What turns an ordinary person into a monster. We read it for the people. Murder is all about simple anatomy, isn’t it? The methods vary but it’s a taking of life and there are a limited amount of ways to do it. It’s the motive.’

She smiles, finding a glimmer of light in the darkness she’s discussing. ‘It’s a bit like romance: there’s a limited number of ways to have sex, but what we want is to know why people fall in love.’

Tess’s first medical thriller *Harvest* was published in 1996. ‘Medicine just came along with the stories. The real challenge for doctors who write novels is translating medical terminology and not being boring. Medical science adds believability. I take great comfort in science. Memory is unreliable but if we have DNA, fingerprints etc, the truth really lies in evidence. We all see through imperfect eyes when it comes to something that happened.’

Tess always wanted to be a writer – ‘I wrote my first story at age seven – I’ve spoken to other writers and they say they wrote their first book at that age, it must be the age for writers!’

She went to medical school and

became a doctor, and when she went back to writing, she didn’t write crime, or use any of her medical knowledge in her fiction. ‘I started writing romantic suspense, and I had nine novels that I didn’t use medicine in. You don’t think your job is interesting to others, it’s just what you do. When I wrote *Harvest* my agent was shocked to discover I was a doctor, and she said if you can reveal how a profession works, that’s really interesting to read.’

Jane Rizzoli and Maura Isles started life as minor characters in Tess’s fiction, and took on lives of their own, both as individuals and as a pair. ‘Rizzoli and Isles first emerged when I wrote *The Surgeon*. Jane was a secondary character in that story. She wasn’t very likeable, or very beautiful, she was a kind of an anti-heroine, but by the end of the story, when she was supposed to die, I liked her. I liked her spunk. She intrigued me. Maura was in *The Apprentice*, a small part, and I thought, you’re interesting. Characters can happen like that – but when you aren’t planning it. My favourite characters are all walk-on parts who deserved a life of their own.’

Tess continued to write the series ‘because I wanted to know what happened to Jane and Maura and their relationship. We need to

keep characters' lives evolving and changing – nothing is static. It's like real life. There are always surprises.'

Each Rizzoli and Isles story is 'pretty much inspired by the crime story'. Tess says each novel's plot: 'Depends on the story but many come from ideas, from a crime or something that I've read. I have this folder of ideas and for *I Know a Secret* I pulled out the articles about satanic ritual abuse trials and with the ideas about religious art, the two things came together.'

Although each of Tess's novels involves solving crime, she sees herself more as a writer of psychological thrillers. 'The crime is of no interest unless there's a real emotional interest,' she says. 'Crime novels tell us what we value most. In a culture that doesn't value women, you see more women getting hurt and less punishment – you see what the punishment is for the victim. My theory about crime writing is that we read to see who we identify with – and the people we identify with tend to be the victim. We read books where we can see ourselves. Women read them because we're facing our fears.' It's worth noting that the readers queuing to meet Tess in the Sheffield branch of Waterstones where we meet are predominantly female.

As an undergraduate Tess studied anthropology. 'Learning to immerse yourself in another culture, trying to understand how people think, is great training for a writer,' she says.

It's particularly applicable when she's creating the antagonists in her books. 'The toughest thing is finding a believable motive. We have to find a way of understanding. For the killer who is a sociopath, who kills for enjoyment, you have to get in their heads – I view them as a different species, and that's the least interesting reason for killing – that someone is different. The most interesting reasons are the lengths a person will go to in order to protect a child.'

Tess's writing encompasses varying degrees of sociopathy. 'I have to be very analytical and understand what it is to be a sociopath – getting by using other people. There's a character in *I Know a Secret* who's a functioning sociopath. You sort of understand it – it's not always nice



or comfortable but there's a logic to how she lives her life. That's much more interesting than a character who's just evil. I'm very curious about how people go through life passing as other people. As normal. How do they fool us?'

Although she's got a reputation for laying bare the gory details of crime, even Tess has her limits. 'There are things I won't do. I won't put a character through the loss of a child. But I put them through everything else. If a child has to die in a story it's always off stage – I can't stand the thought of it. I don't show torture on the page – if that happens it's off stage.'


She approaches the writing of scenes readers find disturbing from the perspective of a physician. 'I want to be in the mind of my medical examiner who has to come in and do a job. That probably makes me sound clinical. I'm embodying Maura, and she is like me. We believe in science and logic. We like to think we can solve the world though science and logic, even though we can't.'

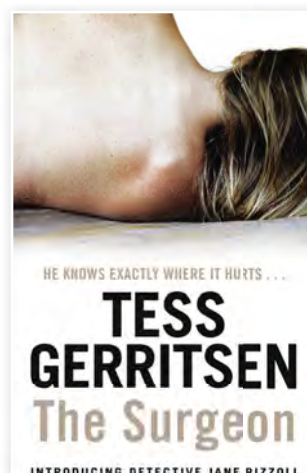
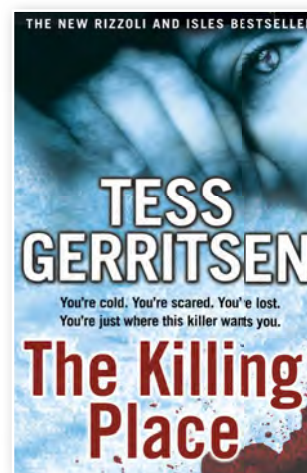
She plots one book at time. 'But

my plotting is, I come up with an idea!' she laughs. 'Maybe a third of a story. I write beginning to end without stopping for a first draft and eventually the plot reveals itself to me. In *I Know a Secret* I didn't know who the bad guy was until two thirds of the way through. But if you don't know, the reader will be surprised too!'

With this in mind, her advice to writers is to keep going. 'Don't stop to revise. If you stop to revise you'll end up revising the first three chapters again and again. Get that story down – no-one will see it.'

She practises what she preaches. 'The first draft is so imperfect and it changes all the time. I'll write notes saying "I have to fix this". Then I do a second draft, and I'm cleaning things up. It takes about six months to write that first draft. It is terrifying but I've done it 27 times and I have to trust the process.'

She says it never gets easier, but she's learned to go with her flow. 'Every time I think, this is a disaster,' she confesses. 'But I've done it before – and I have to trust that I can do it again.' 



Little (story) boxes

Build up your full-length fiction with workmanlike advice from **Adrian Magson**

There's a misconception I've discovered among some non-writers as to how a book gets written. The idea seems to be that we sit down one morning after our Marmite soldiers and tea, flex our fingers... and the story unrolls before us. All we have to do (they assume) is bang out the words on their keyboard until it's done, send it off to the agent or publisher, and retire to a quiet spot with a glass of something refreshing to wait for the next idea to pop up.

To be fair to those who see the process this way, why on earth should they think any differently? After all, it's a question of perception, and about as clear as alchemy. And being a writer doesn't compare to say, carrying furniture up and down stairs or ditch digging, both of which entail a fair bit of grunting and muttering (although getting too close to a submission deadline has been known to produce a lot of both, in my experience).

I think most writers, given the chance, would love to see the entire story laid out and ready to type, from Chapter 1 right to THE END. Unfortunately it rarely happens. Instead, what we get is snatches of ideas flashing by, mostly unrelated and hard to catch, like confetti in a stiff breeze. It can be very confusing – and frustrating. However, there is a way of helping this process along, and making sense of all that confetti. It means working in stages so that, in effect, you can roll out the story... eventually. So how do we go about it?

Well, picture a scene. Any scene that has occurred to you. At most times in the writing process, whether in the staring-into-the-distance stage or at any point throughout, you will experience image flashes. These might

be vague but interesting ideas, whether action, dialogue or background-building narrative, which jump out to taunt you, seemingly unbidden. They're not unbidden at all, of course; this is how that vague nugget of an idea that you had, maybe days, weeks, months ago, is starting to 'cook'. It's part of what writing is all about, and is an essential process in the craft. But instead of being in a convenient and logical order, the ideas are in a series of what I like to think of as boxes linked together by a common, but as-yet undefined thread. As US singer Pete Seeger sang in Malvina Reynolds' *Little Boxes*, they can be of different colours, all made out of ticky-tacky and all looking just the same. What we have to do is work on these boxes and determine their place in the storyline.

It means looking at a scene to find where it really belongs in relation to others. (There's absolutely nothing wrong, incidentally, with writing a scene out of order, as long as you do it and are happy with it. Then you can get to work on another one.)

This is story-building at its most basic. A friend once suggested that it's like playing with Lego; dig into the box and pull out a random number of pieces, and you'll be surprised by what you end up with. As long as it's interesting, you can't go wrong.

As we all know, a book consists of a number of chapters (or boxes), each one containing action, dialogue or narrative which builds the background and the sequence of events. One chapter leads in turn to another, whether sequentially in terms of the characters or scene, or to bring in a change of viewpoint, and so on and so forth. You know how it goes.

The essence here is, don't overreach

yourself, but work on what you can see and deal with that box first. See where it leads and how it fits with others, and before you know it, you've got a sequence of events and a story which is growing in scope and detail.

Even at this stage the structure and direction might not be totally clear. Some boxes might be out of order. But this is where the power of good editing resides; read and re-read, and you'll begin to see where you can add colour, depth and characterisation, where there are holes or where you may have to shuffle the boxes around to make sense of the timeline.

What next? Repeat as before. The likelihood is that while you were working on that last scene, you'll have begun to experience sparks of ideas for future scenes. If so, make notes before they vanish! Work on them as little or as much as you feel comfortable, then go back and see where they connect and fit. This process may at times seem slow, but the word count will grow quickly, believe me. This is where action breeds reaction and where you can find yourself beginning to experience the rush of a story growing in detail, pace and purpose.

There's nothing quite like it in my view, and it's the most exciting part of the writing process. [W.M.](#)



TOP TIPS

- Trying to visualise the whole storyline in one go can be confusing. Break it down to manageable parts.
- Work on one scene and see where it leads, where it will fit.
- Writing is all about making something happen. Write one scene and you'll inevitably find others leading you on.
- Treat chapters and scenes like boxes, each one related to the next and the next.

ASK A LITERARY CONSULTANT



How do you juggle different points of view in your novel? Editorial consultant **Helen Corner-Bryant** offers some guidelines

Q I want to write a novel from different points of view. How do I make them all sound different and still make the novel seem consistent, without making it seem like different stories tacked together?

A There are no set rules with Point of View (POV) – it comes down to personal preference and what most suits your story and the genre. However, there are some guidelines and pros and cons to consider.

How many characters will each have a voice/POV? Are these all necessary and will they deliver the best dramatic punch to each scene? Will too many character voices dilute the drama and become confusing for the reader? This is often the case if you switch POV mid scene.

Which POV will you use? Intimate third person for all of them; for your protagonist and/or main character(s), secondary characters? Will they all be in the first person, the 'I' voice (not necessarily advisable) or will you have a mix? Here, I think it comes down to balance. Perhaps your protagonist or MC is in first person – perhaps she's an unreliable narrator – and the supporting characters are in third to illuminate her further and drive other plot threads. Or will you have an omniscient POV to introduce each character/scene and to lead your main characters through the story (think Dan Brown).

Clear signposting: Avoid head-

hopping mid-scene and make use of scene breaks or new chapters. I've come across a few books that do this successfully (usually crime) without disorientating the reader. I generally experience wandering POV with authors who are at the beginning of their writing journey. These authors may not even realise they're doing it, nor the consequences. If, however, head-hopping is a conscious decision and done with precision and you're satisfied that the drama remains heightened then it can work.

The genre, setting and overarching plot is all-important. George RR Martin and his *A Song of Ice and Fire* series is a good example. There are factions and powerful families (not to mention dragons!) in his fantasy world all vying for power. Then there is the overarching plot where the White Walkers threaten to destroy everything unless the humans come together and defeat them. But how do you defeat an army of the dead? The stakes are high, the characters are wildly different and colourful – some vile, some heroic, some a bit of both – and Martin's 'world' is the setting and the glue. The driving factor is who will reign supreme and the emotional pull is who can you trust?

Take also Naomi Alderman's *The Power*: the overriding concept is that women are more powerful than men with their ability to control electricity. She uses a third person narrator in the present tense for some of her characters,

allowing a more externalised perspective; when she wants to allow the reader to be closer to a main character (who is not necessarily her protagonist), she uses third person limited. Again, this alternative reality thriller traverses different settings with an eventual merging of plot and characters. She also has a strong theme at the core: would the world be a better place if it was run by women, or does power corrupt all?

If you're struggling with a character's voice or they're feeling inconsistent, try switching from third to first and vice versa. Remember to keep them distinct using unique descriptions and ways of behaving so the reader can distinguish between your characters when you switch POV. If you're worried about the characters feeling tacked on, it's possible you're not under their skin enough. Or perhaps there is a different character who should take centre stage for a particular plot point. Or the overriding plot isn't strong enough to engage all your characters with an increasing sense of tension. Have a look at structure as well. Do your plot points occur in the right order and are they seen through the strongest character? Does it have a rhythm and a tension – glue that keeps those pages turning?

Once you're satisfied with your choices and the story sets your pulse racing and you believe in your characters – that they each feel consistent and authentic, that you're rooting for them and they truly drive the plot forward – then you're on the right track. **W.M.**

If you have a query

We're here to help, on any question about the writing and publishing process. Please email: jtelfer@writersnews.co.uk or tweet @writingmagazine with #askalitconsult #wmcornier



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How I got published

The author's debut was actually her sixth novel, she tells **Dolores Gordon-Smith**

As a child I read everything I could, from books at the breakfast table to the labels on shampoo bottles. I knew I wanted to be a writer. However, I was a young girl from Oldham. I thought that all novelists were aristocrats who only wrote about boarding school and spies. I tried to stifle my longing, but it never went away.

It was in my twenties, doing a job I hated, that I finally plucked up the courage to try writing a novel. I taught myself to touch type and camped out in WH Smith at lunchtime, where I browsed the books, read blurbs and swatted up on the literary agents noted in the authors' acknowledgements.

The first three novels I wrote were practice runs. From them I learned what I liked to write – warm-hearted, accessible, quirky fiction. A handful of agents took the time to give words of encouragement alongside their rejections, so I didn't feel too down-hearted.

Novels four and five found me an agent, but I didn't get that elusive publishing deal. So I entered a few short story competitions instead. When I won three of them, it boosted my confidence.

Now it was time to get strategic and to raise my game! If my novels about young women hadn't made it, I would write about an old man. I love jewellery and own a charm bracelet, so I wrote about that. A close friend sadly died so I wrote about bereavement. I used *Chocolat*, *Slumdog Millionaire* and Tom Hanks movies as my benchmark and set my sights on finding a new agent.

The Curious Charms of Arthur Pepper took eighteen months to complete. I wrote it whilst working part-time as a communications manager for the Co-op. I submitted sample chapters to five agents and when four requested to read the book, I just knew that Clare Wallace at Darley Anderson was the right one to represent it.

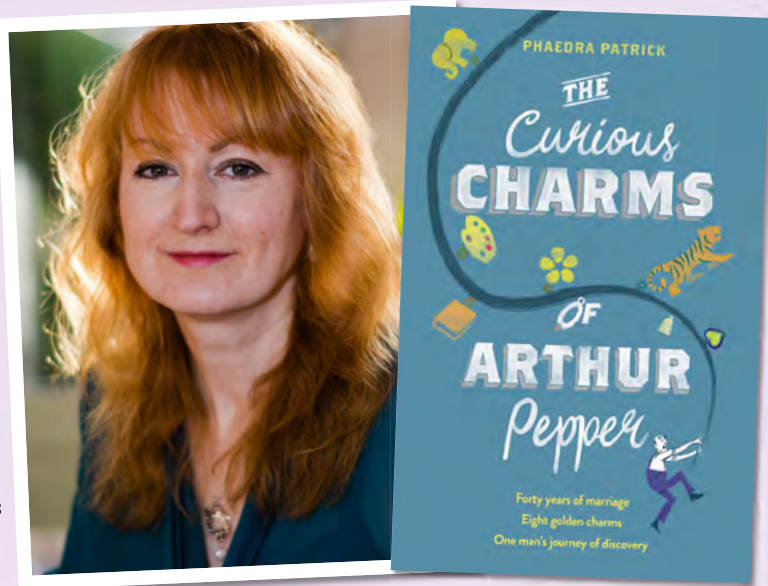
And with this sixth novel, I finally did it. The book has now been snapped up in eighteen countries worldwide, which seems so surreal for a book about a humble Yorkshireman.

I left my job last year and am still getting used to being a full-time writer. After such a long journey to get here, I'm determined to enjoy every moment of it.'

Website: www.phaedra-patrick.com

PHAEDRA'S TOP TIPS:

- Write when you can, on sticky notes, on the back of envelopes. Do it on your commute, waiting for your bath to run, in the supermarket queue. It all mounts up.
- Write the book you want to write, from your heart. Don't be led by what's selling at the moment as books can take a long time to come to market. If you see 'X' on a bookshelf in a shop, by the time you've written and tried to sell 'the next X' then the market may have moved onto 'Y'. Think about what books you like to read. Write your own list of all the things you like to find in a novel. My own includes – quirky characters, twists, fun animals, small towns, modern-day settings, North of England, characters who undergo a transformation, etc. Stick your own list to your wall and use it as a blueprint for your book.
- Not sure what to write? Think of five people who inspire you, five favourite objects, five gorgeous locations and five lovely books. Mix and match to see what ideas spring forward.



**Sally Williamson,
Phaedra's
editor, MIRA:**

'I loved *The Curious Charms of Arthur Pepper* as soon as I started reading. Phaedra Patrick's writing is so subtle, beautiful and engaging, and her characterisation is the best I've ever seen. Immediately, Arthur Pepper was a real life person to me and the opening chapter hooked me in right away. Here is this grieving older man, lonely and stuck in a bit of a rut, but the way Phaedra tells his story is with utter warmth, humour and delicate poignancy – you are always rooting for Arthur but never pitying him. It's a glorious, uplifting and life-affirming and I immediately wanted to tell everyone I knew about Arthur's journey.

'Sixty-nine-year-old Arthur Pepper gets out of bed at precisely 7:30am, just as he did when his wife, Miriam, was alive. He dresses in the same grey slacks and mustard tank top and heads out to his garden. But on the one-year anniversary of Miriam's death, something changes. Sorting through Miriam's possessions, Arthur finds an exquisite gold charm bracelet he's never seen before.

'What follows is an unforgettable odyssey that takes Arthur from London to Paris and as far as India in an epic quest to find out the story behind each of the charms – and the truth about his wife's secret life before they met. It's a journey that leads him to find hope, healing and self-discovery in the most unexpected places.'

Editorial calendar

Strong forward planning will greatly improve your chances with freelance submissions. Here are some themes to consider for the coming months.



1 April

April Fool! What's the best April Fool's Day prank?



1 April

The Royal Airforce was founded 100 years ago



2 April

French singer-songwriter and libertine Serge Gainsbourg would have been 90

2 April

Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, had its world première in Washington DC 50 years ago. The accompanying novel, by Arthur C Clarke was, like the film, effectively a collaboration between the two, and was published in June 1968.



4 April

The great American poet and civil rights activist Maya Angelou would have been 90



4 April

Civil rights figurehead Martin Luther King was assassinated 50 years ago



4 April

The CND peace symbol was first displayed in public in the UK 60 years ago during the anti-nuclear march from London to Aldermaston.

23 April

The decimalisation process began in the UK fifty years ago with the introduction of 5p and 10p coins



28 April

Much loved fantasy author Terry Pratchett would have been 70



29 April

25 years ago, the Queen announced that Buckingham Palace would open to the public for the first time. The adult entry fee was £8.



29 April

Hippies musical *Hair* premièred on Broadway 50 years ago



Looking ahead

In May 2019 it will be 200 years since the birth of Queen Victoria – if you have any new or unusual insights into her life and reign, this is a good time to write them up.

Perfect pitch

Give your freelance writing the best chance of success by taking Sophie Beal's advice on pitching feature articles to editors

A few years ago, I assumed you needed a journalism degree and experience before an editor would let you write a feature. I'm pleased to tell you I was wrong. All it can take is the right idea and an email.

Ideas

These may arrive unprompted, perhaps while you're taking a shower or walking the dog. Or you may need to search for them. Train yourself to see every slightly unusual event and new piece of information as a potential feature. As American writer Monica Johnson said: 'Writers... draw inspiration from their own lives, which frankly might be more interesting than fiction.'

Questions to generate ideas for pitches

- What would I like to read about?
- What's my current preoccupation?
- What did I last need to research on the internet?
- Is there a subject that a particular magazine hasn't covered recently?
- Is there something I know more about than most people?
- Are there any significant anniversaries coming up? (See the editorial calendar on page 23)
- Am I in a position to offer clarity on something in the news?

Finding a market

Once you have your idea, you need a market, if you haven't one in mind already. Look through the racks at WH Smiths or Tesco, or online, for suitable magazines or newspapers. Or subscribe to a site like Readly that provides access to many titles online.

Finding a hook

Editors can usually tell if you've read an issue. You're less likely to suggest a subject covered recently, and more likely to understand the outlet's readership and why they would be interested in your article (the all-important 'hook').

Finding contacts

Most of the time, you can find contact details on the magazine's website or inside the issue. However, sometimes this is generic (eg editorial@toocleverforyou.com) and gives you no idea of the person you are addressing. A named contact suggests professionalism, but with some of the bigger magazines and newspapers, you may need advanced

investigative skills beyond reading the *Writer's & Artist's Yearbook* to find them. Twitter is a good place to find them. Or pick up the phone and ask for a name.

Creating a portfolio

Editors need some evidence you can write. The more work you've published, the easier it is for them to commission you. But you have to start somewhere.

Think about setting up a blog. This allows you to publish what you want when you want, the new writer's equivalent of a demo-tape, something you can easily link in an email. If you succeed in maintaining a regular schedule, it may reassure an editor you can keep a deadline.

As for seeing your work in a magazine or newspaper for the first time, once you've learnt how to do it well, keep sending out pitches until someone gives you a chance. For me, my first acceptance was from *WM's* editor. With one writing credit from this title, it was so much easier to approach others.

If an editor likes your idea, but feels a little skittish about commissioning a newbie, they may ask you to write the piece 'on spec'. This means that you take the risk of writing the article. You're only paid if they can publish it. But if they do, you have started your portfolio.

Journalists used to carry scrapbooks of 'clippings' around. Nowadays it's easy to upload them online, eg on Wordpress, Clippings.me or Squarespace. Keep your portfolio up to date and link to it in your pitches. Perhaps incorporate it into your email signature.

Initiating a relationship

It's easiest to think about your first pitch as beginning a business relationship. While you're trying to find suitable markets for your work, they would like to find new talent.

Fortune may favour the brave newbie who phones, but most editors seem to prefer pitches by email that they can look at when they have time.

Pitch your idea to one similar outlet at a time. Give the editor a chance to answer, before you try elsewhere.

Format

There is no real consensus on a perfect letter. Editors are human beings with their own likes and dislikes. As you're strangers,

there's no way of guessing them all. Simply, do your best to come across as a sane human being who not only has a good idea, but knows where to put a full stop. I owe a lot to fellow *WM* contributor and writing group member, Gary Dalkin, who showed me how he did it.

Tip to the grammatically-challenged: I used to spend ages crafting the perfect pitch, only to find some glaring grammar mistake a few minutes after I'd sent it. I now have the Grammarly add-on for my browser – worth every second of the download time.

Suggested format

- 1 Professional greeting eg 'Dear Mr Hislop', rather than 'Hey guys! How are things?'
- 2 Introduce pitch with its hook.
- 3 Brief description of article contents.
- 4 Reason you might be a good person to write it.
- 5 'Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.'
- 6 Sincerely, Email signature.

Two of my own examples

- I'm interested in history, particularly narratives of 19th-century game-changers. My husband pointed out that the US treasury were about to put Harriet Tubman on their \$20 bill and suggested I pitch her story to UK history magazines.

Dear Ms –,

In April, the US treasury announced the face of Harriet Tubman, a runaway slave, will be printed on the \$20 bill. I am writing to suggest a feature on the part she played in the American Civil War. She had already made her reputation before the war, guiding approximately 70 slaves to freedom in Canada. Once it started, she gained a unique position of trust with newly freed slaves and Union leadership and helped to recruit the first black regiments and map out rebel held areas.

In 1863, she led three ships containing new African-American soldiers up the Combahee River, around rebel underwater mines. Without loss of Union life, they rescued 750 slaves, setting fire to plantations as they left.

I have written features for *History Scotland*, *BRITAIN* and *Writing Magazine*. I've attached a pdf writing sample.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Sophie Beal

I think this is one of my better early pitches. (From motives of pure vanity, I've edited it and spared you several other more embarrassing ones.) As you can see, there's a strong hook. The US were bestowing an immense honour on a woman little known to most British readers. And then you find out why.

I didn't think my History GCSE would impress the editor, so I mentioned my writing credits. At this point, only my *Writing Magazine* article was published, so my portfolio was a single pdf. But it was enough. This story is now on the *BBC History Extra* website.

- Our local department store believes they employed the first store Father Christmas. Looking into it, I found there was even more to the story. This is the email I wrote to *Dorset Life*.

Dear –,

Selling Christmas is not a new idea. In December 1885, the first in-store Santa arrived at Beale's Fancy Fair in Bournemouth.

In 1912, Cyril Beale joined the business as marketing manager. That December, Father Christmas drew up in a horse and carriage. The next year, he flew over the store in an aeroplane. By the fifties, the Beales department store Christmas procession looked like 'something out of *It's a Knockout*' with papier maché models only limited in size by the height of the tram wires.

I am writing to suggest a historical piece for your Christmas issue. I propose approaching Beales for archive photos, including one of Santa standing by his aeroplane.

I have written features for *Britain*, *History Scotland* and *Writing Magazine*.

Thank you for your consideration.

Best wishes,

Pitch aftercare

You've sold your story. Make sure you send the editor the article they now expect. As Neil Gaiman said in a 2012 commencement speech: 'People keep working, in a freelance world... because their work is good, and because they are easy to get along with, and because they deliver the work on time.'

Before you start work, clarify the editor's vision for the piece. This may be very different from your original suggestion. I once pitched to *Artists & Illustrators* and received a commission for a travel article instead.


You need to ask about word count and deadline. Keep to both. The editor will curse you, not thank you, for an extra long article. They will have to spend extra time cutting it down. And don't overcommit yourself. Until you know how fast you can produce 'clean copy', take on one article at a time. Eventually, as you learn and improve, you'll find yourself capable of taking on more. If you can, file your copy early. Give yourself plenty of time for unforeseen difficulties and amendments.

If for some reason you don't think you'll meet the deadline, let the editor know as soon as possible. Respect the job they have to do, which is to fill their magazine with good quality copy and produce the issues on time.

No response?

If you have heard nothing within a week or two, it's okay to follow up with a polite email, something like 'Have you had any thoughts about my pitch?' And then if you still don't hear back, 'I'm just following up on my pitch. I know you're busy, so if I don't hear from you within the next seven days, I'll assume you're passing.'

Editors receive hundreds of suggestions a month. If they're not interested in an article, they may never write back. To their credit however, they often do, with an explanation of why they can't offer you a commission: your idea may not fit their next few themes; they may have just accepted a similar piece; you may have misunderstood the magazine's remit; their budget may be too small. Sometimes, they like the idea, but there just isn't space.

If you hear 'no' or nothing, do not assume you suck. Try another outlet. Or the same magazine, with a different idea. The editor was not saying 'no' to you, just that particular pitch. Remember Winston Churchill's words: 'Success consists of going from failure to failure without loss of enthusiasm.' 

The style & technique of **WILKIE COLLINS**

Tony Rossiter takes a look at the first full-length English detective novel



Look in any bookshop or library – chances are, you'll find more shelves devoted to crime than to any other genre. Today there are scores of bestselling crime novels, with countless sub-genres, but 150 years ago it was a new phenomenon. For TS Eliot, *The Moonstone* was 'the first, the longest, and the best of modern English

detective novels... a genre invented by Collins'. Dorothy L Sayers described it as 'probably the very finest detective story ever written'.

Beginnings

The son of an artist, Collins had a bohemian background. At boarding school in Highbury he was bullied by a boy who forced him to tell him a story every night before allowing him to

go to sleep: 'It was this brute who first awakened in me, his poor little victim, a power of which but for him I might never have been aware... When I left school I continued storytelling for my own pleasure'. On leaving school he spent five years as clerk to a firm of tea merchants before studying law at Lincoln's Inn. Called to the bar in 1851 he never formally practised law, but he drew on his legal knowledge in many of his novels.

His first story, *The Last Stage Coachman*, was published in 1843,

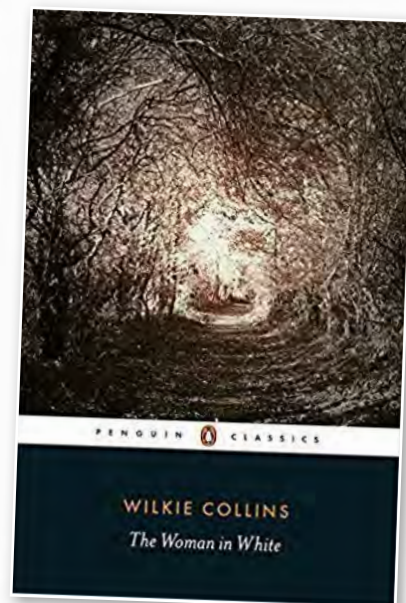
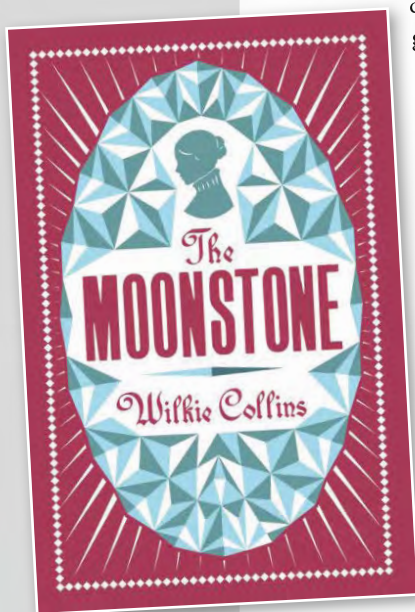
when he was nineteen. His first novel (*Ioláni, or Tahiti as It Was; a Romance*) was written the following year, but was rejected and remained unpublished during his lifetime. His first published book was about his father. *Memoirs of the Life of William Collins, Esq, RA* came out in 1848, a year after his father's death. His first published novels were *Antonina* (1850) and *Basil* (1852), but 1851 was the most important year for him. That was when he met Charles Dickens, who became a lifelong friend and occasional collaborator. The following year his story *A Terribly Strange Bed* was his first contribution to *Household Words*, the weekly magazine which Dickens edited. During the 1850s his short stories, essays and articles were published in this and various other magazines and in 1856 his novel *A Rogue's Life* was serialised in *Household Words*. He also wrote plays, some independently and some with Dickens, and sometimes collaborated with Dickens in their production. *The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices*, based on a walking tour of the north of England which Collins and Dickens had made together, was serialised in *Household Words* in 1857.

In the 1860s he produced the four bestselling novels generally regarded as the best and most enduring of his career: *The Woman in White* (1860), *No Name* (1862), *Armadale* (1866) and *The Moonstone* (1868). In this article I'll focus on the latter, which first appeared as a serial in Dickens' magazine *All the Year Round*. These 'sensation' novels, as they were called at the time, were hugely popular,

but after Collins' death in 1889 they were dismissed as melodrama and declined sharply in popularity. Nowadays they are generally regarded as classic masterpieces – forerunners of today's psychological crime novels. After *The Moonstone*, Collins, affected by the death in 1870 of his friend and mentor Dickens, produced novels with far less excitement and much more overt social commentary. Not surprisingly, these proved to be much less popular and Collins fell out of favour.

The Moonstone

In *The Moonstone* we can see the origins of many of the conventions and features we have come to expect in any traditional detective story: a robbery committed in an English country house which, it soon becomes clear, is 'an inside job'; a closed community of suspects, all with motive and opportunity for the



crime; a gentleman amateur sleuth; an incompetent local policeman; a celebrated professional detective who takes over the investigation and interrogates the suspects; plentiful red herrings; a reconstruction of the crime; and a final twist in the plot. It's a formula that has been used over the years, with a variation or two, by countless writers of detective novels.

The theft of the moonstone is the crime around which the story revolves. It's a large Indian diamond of great Hindu religious significance. Rachel Verinder has inherited the diamond from her uncle, a corrupt British army officer who stole it during a military campaign in India. Her eighteenth birthday is celebrated by a large party, and she wears the moonstone on her dress; the following morning, it has disappeared. The stone's Indian origins and the circumstances surrounding its seizure imbue the story with the exotic mystery of the east. In the epilogue the moonstone's journey is brought to a satisfying conclusion with its return to India and restoration to its rightful place in the forehead of the statue of a Hindu god.

The incompetent local policeman who initially investigates the theft is soon replaced by a famous detective from London, Sergeant Cuff, who was modelled on the real-life Detective Inspector Whicher of Scotland Yard. Cuff fails to find the thief, but he is the catalyst for uncovering hidden secrets of several of the guests at the birthday party. What began as the story of a theft deepens to take in obsessive sexual passion, suicide, embezzlement and murder. Experienced devotees of detective fiction may perhaps be able to sort out the real clues from the false trails and to have a fair idea of whodunit, but the ingenuity of how it was done is likely to baffle most readers.

Multiple narrators

In his preamble to *The Woman in White* Collins had drawn on his legal training by pointing out that 'the story here presented will be told by more than one pen, as the story of an offence against the laws is told in Court by more than one witness'. He followed the same technique – the

use of multiple narrators – in *The Moonstone*. The story is told through a succession of different characters and Collins succeeds in giving each one of them their own distinct voice. He is thus able to vary the tone and tempo of the plot, while at the same time maintaining the narrative drive of the story. The first narrator is Gabriel Betteredge, House-Steward of the Verinder family home where the crime takes place. He is an appealing character: a faithful, opinionated old retainer whose main pleasures in life are smoking his pipe and reading *Robinson Crusoe*. The seventy-page narrative of Miss Clack (the portion of the book that most appealed to Victorian readers) was dictated by Collins from his bed while he was suffering from rheumatic gout. Miss Clack, a poor cousin of Rachel, is a religious crank who plagues her relatives with unwanted religious tracts; she condemns herself out of her own mouth as she reveals her meddling, hypocritical character. The sections of the story told by Gabriel Betteredge and Miss Clack are full of both humour and pathos – qualities underlined and reinforced by their contrast with the testimony of other narrators. The plot of *The Moonstone* unfolds entirely through the accounts of witnesses and participants. The reader has to piece it all together.

Characterisation

Sergeant Cuff is a clever, highly intelligent detective with a track record of success, but it's his integrity and humanity that makes him such an attractive figure. He's an intriguing, slightly eccentric character who spends as much time discussing rose-growing with the gardener as he does interviewing the suspects. He can be seen as the first in a long line of fictional detectives with unlikely hobbies, from Holmes's beekeeping to Dalglish's poetry. He's undoubtedly the character on whom many readers – especially gardening enthusiasts – will dote.

Collins had the ability to create really convincing – often unconventional and difficult – female characters, and those in *The Moonstone* are cleverly drawn. He gives us a poignant depiction of

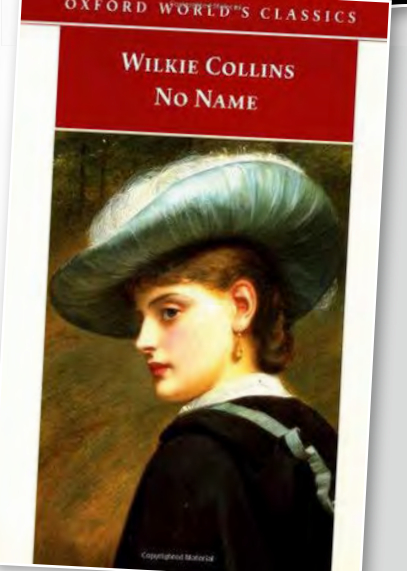
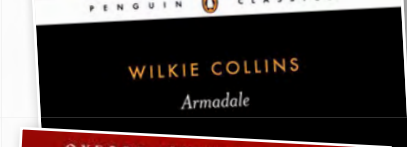
thwarted love and its tragic result in his believable and moving portrayal of the servant Rosanna Spearman, who *had been a thief, and not being of the sort that get up Companies in the City, and rob from thousands, instead of robbing from one, the law laid hold of her*. Rachel Verinder is a beautiful but perverse heroine.

Ill health and hard work

Throughout his life Collins stood out against bourgeois conformity. He had an unconventional life-style, maintaining two families simultaneously but never marrying. He suffered from chronic ill health and was frequently plagued by neuralgia and rheumatic gout. Despite this, he was Dickens's equal when it came to hard work, and he produced a prodigious amount of writing. He took large doses of laudanum to combat his disabling complaints and, as a result, became an opium addict and suffered from paranoid delusions. This personal medical history had a huge influence on the plot of *The Moonstone*. Unbeknown to his readers, Collins was writing from direct personal experience: he knew all about the narcotically induced trances which play a major part in unravelling the mystery of the moonstone's theft. He was the first to introduce into the novel the astounding idea that a person might not know what he or she had done. Described by one critic as the inventor of the 'psychological thriller', he was the trail-blazer for later novelists who combined narrative suspense with psychological complexity.' 



LISTEN
TAP HERE
To hear an
extract from
The Moonstone



Red Editing Pen

Each month, we give you a few sentences which would all benefit from some careful use of your red editing pen. As writers and regular readers of *Writing Magazine*, you should not find any of these too difficult. But if you would welcome a little help, you can always check out Richard Bell's suggested solutions set out below:

Here are this month's examples:

- 1 Although she was a comparative newcomer to the company, Rose had somehow wrestled control of the editorial department from the girl who had been in charge for years.
- 2 Long before he started work on his non-fiction book, Clive aimed to martial all his facts and reference sources into a manageable order
- 3 Robert had not completed any of the work he needed to do in preparation for the meeting, so he quickly invented an entirely fictional cold and excused himself on the grounds of illness.



SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS

1 To wrestle is to force someone into a particular position by grappling with them. And Rose forced her rival into a position of no longer being in control of the department, and no doubt a good deal of metaphorical grappling was involved. But it was metaphorical, not physical, grappling that would be involved here, so *wrestled* is not the word we should be using, but *wrested*. Sentence one should therefore read: *Rose had somehow wrested control of the editorial department*. To wrest means to take control after a considerable effort, and we can be reasonably sure that Rose did just that.

2 For all we know, Clive's book (which is such an important part of sentence two) may be about battles, weapons, or any other martial subject, because *martial* is an adjective that means relating to warfare. It can also become part of a noun, as in *martial law*. Martial is not, however, a verb, which we are using it as here. What we should be saying is *to marshal all his facts* because *marshal* is a verb

meaning to arrange things in a particular order. Its early use was mainly in the context of marshalling troops (certainly a martial thing to do!) but it has since come into more general use, as in the expression to marshal one's thoughts, and the noun marshalling yard, the place where railway trucks and wagons are 'marshalled' into trains.

3 When we write a piece of fiction we invent a great many untrue things – people, places, events, all of them are untrue and purely fictional. So if we refer to the city of Barchester, it is fictional but exists, in a series of novels by Anthony Trollope. But, when we make up something that does not even have any existence in a piece of fiction then it is *fictitious*. There is no doubt that Robert's 'cold' was fabricated. It was something he made up in order to give himself an excuse for not attending a meeting for which he was not ready. In sentence three, therefore, we should not refer to an *entirely fictional cold* but to an *entirely fictitious cold*.

WIN! £500

IN CASH PRIZES & PUBLICATION

Dialogue-only SHORT STORY COMPETITION

£250
TO BE
WON

SEE P91
FOR ENTRY
DETAILS, FULL
RULES AND
ENTRY FORMS

Strong dialogue is the foundation of a great story, but we want you to go one step further for this month's competition, in which your entire story must contain only dialogue – no descriptions, no 'he said', just let the characters do the talking. The winner will receive £200 and publication in *Writing Magazine*, with £50 and publication online for the runner-up. Your story should be 1,500-1,700 words. The closing date is 15 February 2018.

STILL TIME TO ENTER

£250
TO BE
WON

With its closing date of 15 January, there's still time to enter last month's **Open Short Story Competition**, for stories on any theme.

Prizes and length are as above. See p91 for entry details.

Competition winner

NOSTALGIA STORY

EXPERT
analysis

To read the judge's
analysis at:
[http://writ.rs/
wmjan18](http://writ.rs/wmjan18)

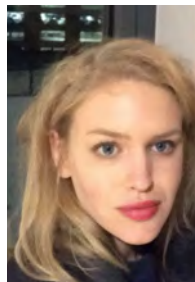
Kermesse

by Imogen Robinson

It had become tradition fairly quickly although I don't think that was ever the intention. Summer and six of us piled into the car in a sticky flurry of pillows and tennis racquets and a Michelin atlas stuffed in the seat pocket. A ferry crossing and a long drive and steak haché at the service station, more driving until we arrived at a campsite that looked and felt and sounded and smelt the same as they always did. They were unremarkable holidays in many respects but I can remark on all of them and I can do this because I remember the boys.

First there was Ruud and I met him in the Dordogne. Beautiful, Dutch, year younger than me. Blonde hair and angel eyes, too young to give a shit but I put the work in nonetheless. He was good at table tennis so I got good at table tennis and I got his address and wrote to him but he never replied. The next year was Redmar. Taller, older, also good at table tennis but I was too now so that was fine. We stole a slimy kiss outside the wash block and then he whispered goodbye, pressed his Limp Bizkit business card in my hand.

I emailed him at the address



Imogen Robinson lives and works in London, where she is the editorial assistant for *The Femedic*, an educational site that aims to dispel taboos surrounding women's health. In her spare time, Imogen enjoys reading and writing, and has a particular interest in narrative non-fiction. This is the first time she has entered her work into competition and she is thrilled to have won.

provided on the Limp Bizkit business card, too bad we are not yet eighteen, he replied. I'm 27 now and it's still too bad really. Bas was after Redmar and he was Dutch too. Darker hair and browner eyes and another secret snog as the Pyrenees groaned in the background and the rain came in a tunnel that was as damp and delightful as the snog.

This year it was the Ardèche, hot, dry, lethargic. It was my last summer holiday with the family but I didn't know it then, thought I had a few more left. The last Eurocamp and the last predictable cacophony of giggles as four children in one small tent compartment became increasingly hysterical until a shout would come from my parents' room, shut up, stop talking, grow up.

I was a bit older now so the threats

to shut me up were a withdrawal of beer or no kir at the restaurant or you can't stay out late tomorrow if you don't bloody stop. They remained the same as ever for my younger siblings, no pizza snacks, no sirop de menthe, I'm not taking you to the pool tomorrow, well I don't even like the pool anyway, more giggles, thunder, sleep.

We went to the kermesse at the campsite but we didn't know what a kermesse was. I hoped there would be alcohol and my older sister hoped the same I imagine but she never said. Some younger kids hung around, it was 10pm and I envied the lackadaisical parenting they enjoyed. Even now my curfew was 11 and I thought this unjust but we had to get up early to climb a mountain, which seemed an odd choice of holiday

activity really.

A French teenager commandeered the pin the tail on the donkey. He had a long flop of hair and a symmetrical face, looked like a pop star but he wasn't one because he was commandeering the pin the tail on the donkey. Would you like to pin the tail on the donkey, he asked. He must have spoken English because my French wasn't great back then and I don't think I knew the word for pin, or tail, but I can't remember what his voice was like.

Anyway, go on then I said. He spun me round and round and round four times or even five. Held my hand with the pin and tail in it and manoeuvred it gently onto his crotch which was silly really because I was holding a pin. In any case I knew that wasn't where I was supposed to pin the tail so I wrestled out of his grasp. I caught his eye and it was the first time I ever saw that glance, or at least saw that glance thrown so forcefully and with such intention. Now I'm much older it scares me when I see that glance.

I didn't care though and I wanted to snog him. I wanted to snog everyone as it happens, because there's nothing much else to do when you're a teenager and keeping a tally of house party hand jobs seemed to be the most efficient way of giving life a semblance of structure. We found a group of kids and wandered to the basketball court where we may have played basketball I don't remember. But I do remember it was cold and I said I'm cold.

His name was Clement, which I knew because someone called him Clement, not because he told me, and he decided to be noble and give me his clothes. He took them off still looking at me and I thought he would stop after his jumper but he didn't he just kept taking off his clothes until he had no more on. I was unsure if I was supposed to put

on all the clothes or just the jumper so I put them all on and to be fair it was warmer then. The younger kids laughed and pointed at his naked shivering body, which was illuminated every now and then by a dying lamp.

It was quite funny to be honest and I really fancied him and he gave me a hug in the dark and I felt his penis press into my leg but I didn't think much of it, in fact I just wanted him to kiss me so he did.

It was 11 though and I had to go back to the tent. I don't know why I stuck so solidly to the curfew as it wasn't really in my nature to obey these sorts of rules but maybe I wanted my kir tomorrow so I left him in the dark by the basketball court and thought I will never see him again, which was satisfyingly poignant.

Me and my sister grabbed our toothbrushes from the tent and headed to the wash block. She slipped into a cubicle, me next door, but I couldn't close the door to my cubicle. I pulled it hard but he'd followed us and he stopped it closing with his foot, quite assertively actually, and pulled it open and squeezed in.

I tried to think of something to say but I didn't have time because his tongue was in my mouth and he tasted like Pringles so I guess he must have just eaten some. In all honesty I was a bit taken aback because this meant I had to rearrange the ending of this particular tryst in my mind and I thought it had been quite romantic until now.


But anyway we snogged for a bit then he picked me up and put me in the sink and pulled off my pants and clawed at my insides. This in itself wasn't particularly novel and I thought maybe we would have sex but he just kept on clawing in motions that became increasingly frenetic and I wondered if he really knew what he was doing because I didn't know what he was doing.

The tap in the sink jabbed in my back and I was actually getting quite bored and it hurt a bit and the tap kept jabbing and his fingers got rougher and my wash bag fell on the floor and my pink toothbrush lay by the door of the cubicle, which was quite poetic really.

I could hear my sister frozen, stifling a cautious giggle next door until she said I'll just see you back at the tent okay and she left. I couldn't reply because I didn't know if I would go back to the tent to tell the truth. But then it still hurt and I said okay I have to go and he said why and I couldn't be bothered to tell him about the mountain so I said I just do and pushed him off and put on my pants and left and ran back to the tent. I forgot to get my toothbrush so I had to pretend I had it for the rest of the holiday, which was annoying.

The next morning a faint scent of barbecue still held and steam was rising off the tents giving the entire campsite the air of a prehistoric village. I saw him again which was a surprise because I hadn't been looking out for him. He was clutching a croissant, which was very French of him I thought.

I said hello, gave him a hug and his sweatshirt smelt like the kermesse. I made a stranger take a photo of us together although I'm not sure why and now I'm quite embarrassed that I did that. He gave me his email address and we parted ways for the third time and I thought I must have loved him. I planned out our future together and counted the hairpin turns as my dad drove us to the mountain that we had got up early to climb.

A week later we arrived home and I emailed Clement and told him I missed him, which in hindsight was an odd thing to say as we hadn't ever really had a conversation. I was happy when he replied but when I opened the email it just said I'm sorry I don't know who you are. 

Runner-up in the Nostalgia Competition, whose story is published on www.writers-online.co.uk, was **Jon Markes**, York. Also shortlisted were: **Liz Carter**, Wellington, Shropshire; **Alexis Cunningham**, Woodston, Cambridgeshire; **Sharon Haston**, Falkirk, Stirlingshire; **Jonathan Herbert**, Middleham, North Yorkshire; **Jitka Hlouskova**, Mikulovice, Czech Republic; **B Holland**, Kilburn, York; **Val Ormrod**, Clanna, Gloucestershire; **Kate Prince**, Swindon, Wiltshire; **Bryan Webster**, Horsham, West Sussex.



FIRST PRIZE
Game Nearly Over
by Karen Pailing



*The galaxy's not what it used to be;
once, there were so many stars
that the sky, late at night, would be bathed in their light;
I think I might head back to Mars.*

*It's not as if anyone's listening;
they noticed us when there were two
hundred thousand or three, but now it's just me,
and what can one alien do?*

*It wasn't like this when we landed;
no Martian was ever alone;
not an instant was dull when our saucers were full
and besides, we could always phone home.*

*But then earthlings invented computers
and now they're all glued to their screens,
where they're wiping us out, and I'm starting to doubt
that they've ever grown out of their teens.*

*And you can't force an earthling to listen,
though we've kept coming up with new ways:
but they're harder to scare, and they don't seem to care
that their planet has seen better days.*

*There have been a few lighter moments
and, at times, I admit we've had fun
at the earthlings' expense - they've got no common sense.
(And you should see how fast they can run.)*

*When we trampled their barley in circles
their puzzlement had us in fits
and they never worked out why we all fell about
when they smashed their potatoes to bits.*

*But I'll soon be the last Martian standing -
the one they'll seek out and destroy.
It might look like a game, but the rules aren't the same
as when I was a little green boy.*

The best medicine

Alison Chisholm chortles as she
examines the winners of *Writing Magazine's*
competition for funny poems

If laughter is the best medicine, judging the humour themed poetry competition for *Writing Magazine* leaves you bouncing with health. Many of the entries involved laugh-aloud wit, and there were few that did not raise a smile or a giggle.

Humour is subjective. We are all amused by different things. Equally, we are all left cold by different things. As writers cannot possibly know how readers will be affected, the only recourse is for them to write what they themselves find funny. Adjudicators, however, must try to be objective, and ask not what makes me laugh, but what will make somebody laugh?

The humour in the entries arose from a wide variety of subjects and treatments. Some poems appeared serious, but concluded in a hilarious punchline. Several used puns and other forms of wordplay to create their effect. There were jokes in verse, funny anecdotes, and some worryingly honest assessments of the human condition, with all its anxieties and frailties. It's good to be able to say that not a single poem was set aside because it had nothing to offer the reader.

It was interesting to see how contemporary culture works its way into humorous poetry. A sizeable proportion of entries dealt with the principles of automated paying in shops, and there were unexpected items in a few different bagging areas.

Food fads received several mentions, alongside the pursuit of health and fitness, and the question of how to deal with a person's ashes concerned more than one poet.

Poetry communicates its message most effectively when there is universal identification with its contents. Many of the funniest pieces were rooted in those subjects common to all. There would be nothing funny about gymnasia, salad, ashes or serve-yourself tills, except that they are so immediately recognisable; making them ideal subject matter for humorous poems.

Inevitably, some poems missed a place on the shortlist because they were in need of more revision. There were poems whose wording or crafting needed attention, and where a simple final read before submission could have eliminated typos and omissions. Poems made haphazard use of punctuation, and wandered between precise and sloppy grammar. Poems inexplicably changed the register of their voice, moving from formal to casual or slang for no apparent reason.

The area where humour is more demanding than other approaches is in the precision of application of a set form or pattern. Poems that begin in rhyming couplets and then change to alternating rhymed lines, or use a metrical pattern in the opening stanzas and then lose it towards the end, cannot help but hinder the smooth reading that adds to the joy of

humorous poetry.

Although poems were welcomed in any form, rhymed pieces predominated, and both of the prizewinning poems reflect this. Karen Pailing of Southport, Merseyside comes first with *Game Nearly Over*. The narrator is a Martian, almost the last of his race, looking back with nostalgia to the days when his compatriots invaded the earth.

The poem begins with the cliché that 'things ain't what they used to be' twisted to give it an original slant, becoming *The galaxy's not what it used to be*. This sets the scene from the start, and each stanza allows the narrator his memories and moans, his identity providing fun for the reader with its inevitable parallels with human experience.

While each stanza is complete in itself, there's a clear route through the poem, an ordered path with a logical movement from one idea to the next. We see the Martian's current situation, the history that led up to it, a diversion into the lighter moments, and a final comment. The security this set route provides gives the reader confidence in the account – and yes, that's important, even in a fantasy situation.

There are plenty of familiar allusions for readers to recognise, from referencing the film *ET* to unexplained crop circles and advertisements for instant mashed potato. These do more than jog memories in today's readers. They also fix the poem in a timescale, so that interested readers in the future will identify the end of the 20th/start of 21st century from the references.

One of the delights of this poem is the apparent ease of its flow, with its metrical regularity. *Game Nearly Over* reads aloud beautifully, the rhythms carrying the voice along.

The rhyme structuring is equally impressive. The second and fourth lines of each quatrain stanza rhyme together, and there's internal rhyme in each third line. The latter helps the cohesion of the poem, and again, adds to its effectiveness when read aloud.

The tone of this poem is deliciously conversational. The Martian is articulate and has some interesting points to make. He elicits the reader's

sympathies, even when admitting *we've had fun / at the earthlings' expense*. You can't help feeling sorry for him as his hordes of fellow Martians have dwindled to a few, and our hero will end up all alone. For as the little green man points out, *the rules aren't the same / as when I was a little green boy*.


The second prize goes to Jinny Thomas of Beaumaris, Anglesey, for a clever and witty sonnet that reminds readers of TS Eliot's *Four Quartets* – only this time we're looking at *Four Courgettes*. For some reason, certain vegetables are funny. Sprouts and cabbage, for example, only have to be mentioned to raise a smile, and the same seems true of courgettes. We meet them in their struggle under the soil, and learn that their growth promises summer and a *fruitful autumn*.

The dedication of a poem to the courgettes gives them mystique and kudos... while it ends with the rider that the poet's next work will be in celebration of potatoes. Fame is fleeting.

This brilliantly absurd idea is clothed in a beautifully crafted Elizabethan sonnet. The metre is precise, and the direction through the poem is well controlled and easy to follow. Rhyming is natural, and culminates in the stunning rhyme of *zucchini* with *Seamus Heaney* – a pairing to recall and chuckle over in the future.

The poet's voice is assured, with fun simmering below the surface. The opening and closing of the sonnet address the readership directly, moving from the comment about Eliot – (*I'm sorry: I can't write like him at all*) to the celebratory *So, raise a glass*. The middle section comments on and finally speaks to the heroes of the piece, the courgettes themselves. The final couplet is exuberant.

The humour here raises a gentle smile rather than a great guffaw, but the poem has a feelgood quality the reader finds irresistible. You leave *Four Courgettes* amused and warmed by the experience.

Humour is not easy to write. Humorous poetry is harder to master than more heavyweight material. Everyone who entered this competition has the right to feel proud of their achievement. 



SECOND PRIZE *Four Courgettes* by Jinny Thomas



*I can't write TS Eliot's Four Quartets
(I'm sorry: I can't write like him at all),
but I will write instead of four courgettes,
who shouldered up the soil, and stretched up tall.*

*Today did not seem an auspicious day,
and cloudy, humid weather was foretold,
but my four heroes worked beneath the clay,
uncoiled beneath the soil, and stood up bold.*

*Oh, my Cucurbitae, I shed a tear
for this brave effort you've made for my sake.
Now I feel sure that summer will appear,
and fruitful autumn follow in her wake.*

*So, raise a glass; sing praise to my zucchini.
Next time I'll write of spuds, like Séamus Heaney.*



Also shortlisted were: **Tracy Davidson**, Stratford-on-Avon, Warwickshire; **Gillian Gardner**, Shrewsbury; **Daniel Hicks**, Diss, Norfolk; **Gillian Leaver**, Westhoughton, Greater Manchester; **Eunice Lorrimer-Roberts**, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk; **Christopher Melhuish**, North Walsham, Norfolk; **Angela G Pickering**, Ely, Cambridgeshire; **Joyce Reed**, Marple, Cheshire; **Christine Sarling**, Crawley, West Sussex; **Sim Smailes**, Braintree, Essex; **Sherri Turner**, Thames Ditton, Surrey.

Shelf life:

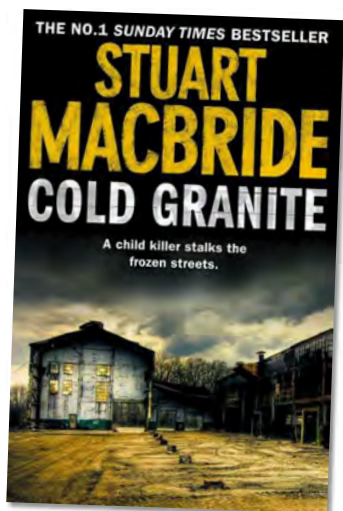


LISTEN

TAP HERE

To hear an extract from *Cold Granite*

STUART MACBRIDE



The Scottish crime writer shares his five favourite reads with **Judith Spelman**

Stuart MacBride is a Scottish writer who is known for his crime thrillers set in Aberdeen that feature Detective Sergeant Logan McRae. He didn't start out to be a writer and attempted a variety of jobs including working as a graphic designer, a web designer, an actor, an undertaker and even a project manager for a very large IT company. At one stage in his life he began to study architecture at Herriot Watt University in Edinburgh but soon found it was not what he wanted as a career and so went off to work

offshore. His book, *Cold Granite*, was snapped up by HarperCollins and since 2005 he has written at least a book a year, winning three awards – for the best first novel, the CWA Dagger in the Library Award and the ITV Crime Thriller Award – as well as being nominated for many more. When he is researching, he works closely with local police and forensic specialists. His latest book is called *Now We Are Dead*. It has strong suggestions of AA Milne's work, the specialist subject Stuart chose when he won *Celebrity Mastermind* in 2017.

WINNIE-THE-POOH AA Milne

Winnie-the-Pooh is the book that made me a reader. It's the very first book that I can remember reading and it made me think that books are great! I would so like to write a book that does that to somebody. I'd love to write a children's book that somebody would carry with them and it would be the thing that sparked the flame for them. It would be such a privilege to be able to do that. *Winnie-the-Pooh* doesn't patronise the child as a reader. It's within a small child's comfort zone and it dangles language in front of you in a way that a lot of other children's books don't. They are magical tales; they are like a hug and they are so endearing. When I read it now I see a lot of Milne's own life in it.



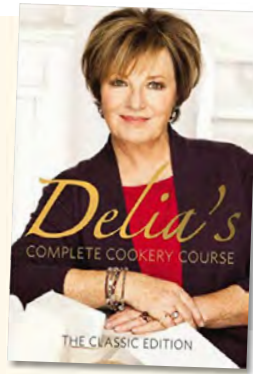
ELEKTRA: ASSASSIN Frank Miller, illustrated by Bill Sienkiewicz

This is a stunningly beautiful book. Apart from being a very innovative piece of storytelling. It's about a power struggle and satirises ultra-violence, politics, the portrayal of women and comic book clichés. Elektra has a simple mission: she has to rid the United States of an evil presidential candidate who is possessed by "The Beast", an ancient evil Elektra knows of old. As the plot develops Elektra escapes from an asylum and telepathically mind-switches with several other characters. It is a comic book for adults and shows the skill of the illustrator, Bill Sienkiewicz at its best.



DELIA SMITH'S COMPLETE COOKERY COURSE

We were given this as a wedding present 22 years ago. The outside cover and the spine have fallen off. You can tell which recipes we use most. I do a lot of cooking and I go to this for reference. I certainly wouldn't throw this away. It was first published in 1982 and contains all favourite tried and tested recipes. It is regularly revised and updated. I like the recipes because they are remarkably straightforward. You can't go wrong. Our favourite recipe from Delia is her cheese scones (which my wife, Fiona, pimps up to utter deliciousness!)



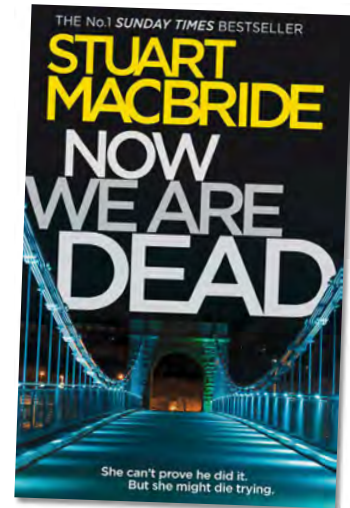
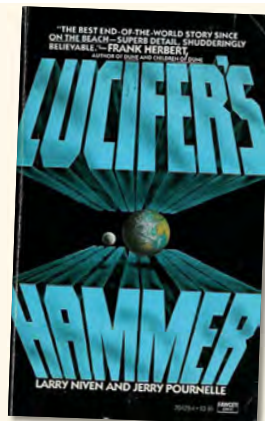
HARD FROST RD Wingfield

Many people have never heard of RD Wingfield but if you have seen *A Touch of Frost* on the telly, this was based on RD Wingfield's books. The books are head and shoulders above the telly series. And it comes back to being a first with me because that was the first time I had read a crime novel where the detective isn't just solving one crime. In the majority of crime fiction there is 'the murder' and that's all the guy does whereas with Frost, it just felt like a revelation. He starts off with a small crime and then there is the murder, and then there is another small crime and another, and then there's a big one. As the pressure is built up, there is not just an isolated incident he has to deal with. There is a continuum and then there is life. The dialogue is really good as well. People who work together don't just focus on what they are meant to be doing, they will bring up things from the past and make fun of each other. That's part of being a human being. And that's what I try to do in my books. This book probably has had the biggest influence on my writing.



LUCIFER'S HAMMER Larry Niven

Larry Niven in some ways was partly responsible for the collapse of the Soviet Union. He was part of Ronald Reagan's team that came up with the Star Wars defence system. This was a wonderful birthday present way back when I was seven or eight. I just loved his books and I have a massive quantity of them but my favourite is *Lucifer's Hammer* which is a massive tome. It's about an amateur astronomer, Tim Hamner, who co-discovers a new comet and a documentary producer persuades him to get his family company to sponsor a television series on the subject. Again, it's a clever science fiction book and very well written. It's about people not spaceships. There are predatory people out there and how far are you willing to go to keep yourself, your family and your society safe?



I was in my twenties and I hadn't particularly enjoyed English at school. There are so many people who haven't read books and there is something wrong with the school that turns people off when it comes to reading a book. I had a couple of friends who were writing fantasy novels for a hobby so I thought I'd give it a go. I didn't do the sensible thing and start with a short story, I wrote a full length comedy crime novel. I found I just loved writing. It was so much fun! But the book was terrible, absolutely awful. I thought it was the best thing in the world at the time. It was really, really bad but I enjoyed it so much. So I wrote another book and I got an agent with that second book who was a terrible agent so I fired him and wrote a third book and got a new agent who was much, much better. And I kept writing. And that's how I started.

'It is a slight bone of contention that I have a book written as Stuart B MacBride. I would rather not write under Stuart B MacBride, I would rather it was all just Stuart MacBride but that was the first book that I wrote. *Halfhead* is set in a slightly dystopian Glasgow. It's about convicted criminals who are surgically mutilated and lobotomised by the state and are then sent out to do menial jobs in the community so that everyone will know what happens when you break the law. I would love to write the book that doesn't exist but is fictionalised in the book I have written!

'If you want to write, then write. The only difference between people who are published writers and people who want to write a book is sitting with your backside in a chair. If you don't put the work in you won't ever have a book. It took me five books before I was published and that's a lot of hours with my backside in a chair. But if the backside is not in the chair in the first place, nothing will ever happen.'



UNDER THE microscope

James McCreet scrutinises the first 300 words of a reader's novella manuscript

Wake Me Before You Leave

On any other day this would have been a beautiful view.¹ I understand now why people, more often than not,² choose the west-facing side of the bridge to jump. To jump from the east would mean looking back at the city, which would be the last thing you'd want to see, figuratively speaking,³ if like me⁴ it was the very thing you were trying to escape.⁵

That is, of course,⁶ unless you were one of those ironic jumpers, out to make a point.⁷ In which case, knock yourself out.⁸ But me,⁹ I would much rather see the endless open ocean, the crystal clear sky¹⁰, and wonder at the sense of freedom it all brings, as I plunge through the air to my doom.¹¹

I've read it takes a shade under four seconds from the time you jump to the time you hit the water,¹² which isn't long in real terms.¹³ But under some conditions¹⁴ I imagine four seconds could feel much longer.¹⁵ What if after jumping – say one second after –¹⁶ you have a change of heart?¹⁷ Then, those last three seconds might feel like an eternity.¹⁸ Although not long enough to learn how to fly, I would guess.¹⁹

Some people pass out on the way down, some die on impact,²⁰ or so I've been led to believe.²¹ Either of those would be okay, I suppose,²² the former being painless and the latter quick, and both infinitely preferable to drowning.²³ And if those methods of dispatch²⁴ don't get you,²⁵ or the whirlpools don't suck you down and smash you against the concrete supports, there's always the clean-up crew, like dogs under the table at Christmas.²⁶ But I'm trying not to think about the sharks.²⁷

Great, so now I'm thinking about the sharks.²⁸

1 Not a bad start, though perhaps a little too tendentious. It nudges the reader into asking, "But why wasn't it beautiful?" Indeed, further reading suggests that the view itself is unchanged by the day. It's still a beautiful view, regardless of the narrator's intentions.

2 This sentence is a much stronger and more arresting opening line, though impaired by the first of many interjectory clauses that slow the pace and queer the tone. The 'more often than not' seems not to add anything useful to the sentence apart from establishing a narrative voice glibly at odds with the subject of suicide.

3 Another of the interjections, and another that adds little. The difference between literal and figurative further develops a comical tone that promises to be a mismatch with the subject.

4 Another interjection. They tend to dominate the narrative perspective, imposing the authorial voice too powerfully on the scene being described and minimising its importance. For clarity, you need commas either side of 'like me'.

5 And the rest of the sentence isn't grammatical. 'It' is not 'like me' – there's a subject/object confusion. The entire sentiment – noting the irony of which side to jump – is a difficult one for the reader to handle. On the one hand, we have a narrator apparently contemplating suicide, but on the other we're being asked to understand this as something of a humorous or ironic situation. It's a tricky balance. Are we supposed to care if the narrator lives or dies? Is the threat serious?

6 Another interjection that seems to add nothing. The 'of course' suggests an obviousness that really doesn't

Elinor Taylor, who writes as EJ More, is a nurse who writes in every spare minute she has. She's hoping to start work on a debut novel, but so far has concentrated on short stories, and has self published a collection called *Storms in Jars* on Amazon. Her novella, *Wake Me Before You Leave*, is about a man looking back on the life events and bad choices that have led him to contemplate suicide.



follow any logic except in the mind of the narrator. There's a danger of the perspective becoming something the reader begins to fight against because it seems unnatural and forced.

7 What's an 'ironic' jumper? Somebody who leaps to their death for a laugh? What point would they be making exactly? It's difficult to get a grip on this theme and how we're supposed to understand it. No comma is required after 'jumpers'.

8 The tone continues to be glib as the reader is asked to acquiesce in accepting that some people want to jump in an ironic sense.

9 The sentence means the same without 'But me' and is arguably better for its absence. It's becoming more and more difficult to believe that the narrator is genuinely considering suicide, and thus the whole premise begins to unravel.

10 This is cliché territory, especially the 'crystal clear' sky. By this, we normally mean a blue sky, but a crystal is typically transparently colourless – hence the redundancy of the cliché.

11 At this stage, I believe we've reached the crisis that's been coming since the first line. If we're being asked to accept that the imminent suicide of our narrator is genuine, then the humour makes it something we need not care about. The tension vanishes and so does the requirement to read on. We can't believe that such a chatty and sardonic narrator is suicidal. There will be no doom. It's simply a narrative conceit. No comma is required after 'brings'.

12 The tone continues glib. 'A shade under' is just a little too arch, delivered with a wink that may irritate.

13 Another interjection that would be better absent. What constitutes 'real terms' in this case? We sense that this is the cue for a wry meditation on relative duration.

14 Another interjected clause, which should really have commas before 'under' and after 'conditions'.

15 A statement that simultaneously states the obvious and misses the point. Nobody counts seconds (or thinks about them) when falling to their death.

16 Two more interjected clauses. Add a comma after 'if' for clarity.

17 A cliché. This is gallows humour, but it reinforces the point I've been making that we can't laugh and care at the same time.

18 This is sophistry at best and pub banter at worst. In the case of an actual suicide, it would be both horrific and not something anyone would have time to consider.

19 And here we reach the zenith (or nadir) of the humorous suicide conceit. It's clear that we're not supposed to take any of this seriously, and so the death of our narrator, or even its

possibility, is something we're not expected to care about. That makes the rest of the book tricky in terms of dramatic tension.

20 Semi-colon after 'down' and a dash after 'impact'.

21 The bantering quality of the narrative continues, as if the narrator himself isn't personally involved with the events taking place.

22 'Okay' being a concept the narrator accepts but which the reader may question. All of this might be more amusing if we didn't actually have a person on a bridge genuinely contemplating suicide. 'I suppose' is another of those chatty interjections that tell us the narrator doesn't really care – that all of this is ultimately hypothetical (even though he is on the bridge).

23 The thoughts appear to be those of someone who has not realistically considered the actuality of going ahead with this. I'd argue that anyone who has got as far as actually being on the bridge is beyond humour.

24 Another overtly arch construction that signals us to not take it seriously.

25 As is 'get you' as a synonym for dying horribly.

26 And the rest of the sentence doesn't make sense. Following a list of things that will kill you, the 'clean-up' crew appears to be another thing that will 'get you'. That can't be right. And how are they like dogs under the table? They're not going to eat the recovered corpse. They're not begging. They're not lurking. The simile just doesn't work.

27 I feel we're into the realms of absurdity now – the kind of absurdity that repels rather than entertains. If our narrator is so perturbed about

a grisly death, why is he being so comical about the whole thing? Why is he here at all?

28 He could have stayed at home and taken an overdose. Indeed, imagine the same scene narrated in a dim bathroom but with the same jaunty tone. How would that work?

IN SUMMARY

Humour is difficult. Writers like Terry Pratchett are masters of a dry, sardonic wit that's much emulated. It works in a fantasy world, but it becomes trickier to negotiate when transplanted to a world we're expected to recognise as real. A sardonic narrative perspective often causes the characters to become puppets of story – broad sketches who play their part.

The issue here – as noted in the comments – is that suicide and glibness are not a great match. Our narrator seems not to care about his own death, and so neither should we. That leaves us only with the narrative style as something to carry us through. Unfortunately, the numerous chatty interjections are too insistent. The authorial voice seems too pleased with itself and less interested in the reader's experience. It tries too hard to be amusing and tips the other way into irritation. It could work with a different topic and character, but not here. [Ww](#)

TAP HERE
to read James
McCreet's suggested
rewrite of this extract

- If you would like to submit an extract of your work in progress, send it by email, with synopsis and a brief biog, to:
jtelfer@writersnews.co.uk



As **Margaret James** makes her writing resolutions for the year ahead, she shares inspiring nuggets from authors about the importance of finding your own way of working

As 2018 opens its doors of opportunity for us all, it's time to make a few writing resolutions.

My own writing resolution for 2018 is to be realistic in my ambitions.

This doesn't mean I can't try something different, or that I'm not allowed to work that little bit harder in order to achieve my own personal best.

But I've never been a fan of setting myself (or anyone else) impossible goals. I feel doing that is also setting up myself (and them) for failure in an industry in which failing is often seen as being inevitable, at least now and again.

As a regular contributor to this magazine, over the years it's been my pleasure and privilege to talk to hundreds of published novelists about their writing lives. I'm now going to round up some of their best advice for us all to bear in mind.

Tom Bale reminds us that for writers losing heart occasionally is all part of the process. So, whenever we feel as if we're wasting our time, we need to be kind to ourselves and to remember the mood will almost certainly pass.

David Nicholls is strict about keeping his home and work lives separate and sticking to a nine to five routine. So, if you're finding it hard to juggle the writing and other aspects of your life, maybe try setting aside specific times for writing, rather than letting writing be something you do after you've done everything else? My own experience of life suggests there's never a time after I've done everything else! Also, on some of those difficult days mentioned by Tom Bale, the prospect of mucking out the cat's litter tray can seem much more attractive than sitting in front of a blank screen willing the words to flow. So that's often the

time to brace up and be strict with ourselves: that novel isn't going to materialise as if by magic.

Belinda Jones writes for the love of the process but she also feels that writing fiction – which she describes as a messy business – never gets any easier. I've certainly found this to be the case. So perhaps nobody should ever assume it's possible to crack this fiction-writing lark once and for all?

We should all be aware there's always something new to learn. Nicholas Sparks has written dozens of bestsellers and his novels sell in millions. But he still feels it is important to read and read and read because everything we read teaches us something. Nicholas aims to write new stories, to try out new things all the time, and – like David Nicholls – he's consistent in his work habits and he sticks to a routine, in his case working five or six days a week and aiming for

a minimum count of 2,000 words every working day.

Terri Nixon knows that whatever she achieves she'll never be really satisfied. But she says this dissatisfaction is what keeps her going. So maybe a degree of positive dissatisfaction could be just the thing to keep you going, too?

John Ironmonger trusts his characters to know where his stories are going. So perhaps we should all learn to trust our characters?

Minna Howard took a while to find a working method (to plan or not to plan, to focus on plot or to focus on character) that suited her own personality. But, once she did find it, she became a much happier writer. So, while it's always interesting to hear about how other people approach any challenge, maybe this year you could resolve to work in whatever way suits you?

Elizabeth Gill used to think she had to be at home in order to write, but nowadays she finds taking long walks and having adventures fires her imagination. Perhaps this year

you and maybe your dog too could get a lot more exercise?

After his first novel was published, Richard Parker was told by his agent to write something completely different – advice he decided to ignore because it didn't feel right for him. So maybe 2018 is the year in which you'll resolve to trust your own judgement?

Emma Hannigan urges us to be ourselves and not aspire to be the next JK Rowling or Marian Keyes because these positions have already been filled.

We all know writing can be a lonely occupation. This magazine is a community of writers but writers don't always manage to meet in person. So, if this applies to you, maybe this year you could join a face-to-face writing group? Or even start one? Georgia Hill really appreciates the company and friendship of other writers, so much so that she is currently involved in setting up a new writing group in her own part of the world. [Wm](#)

NOW TRY THIS

As I've already said, my primary resolution for 2018 is to be realistic in my writing ambitions, and this has to include not making too many resolutions!

So I'm going for a maximum of three. The second is to take pleasure in small successes, such as a positive review on Amazon or a single sale at a library event, and the third is to remember I can't please everyone in my writing or in my life.

What will your three resolutions be?

RELAX & WRITE DATES FOR YOUR DIARY 2018

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23rd-25th March- "Ticket To Write" with Simon Whaley

6th-8th April- "The Business of Writing" with Simon Whaley

6th-8th April- "Focus on Romantic Fiction" with
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I wish I'd known...

with Maddie Please

Some years ago I went to a writing workshop in Cheltenham where a very jaded editor told us we would probably write a million words before we came up with anything publishable, and in my case she was right! The books I wrote, the others I started and never finished, the short stories I entered for competitions: the word count added up.

'These are some of the things I wish I had known and advice I wish I had taken when I started out on my writing career. I might have saved myself a lot of time!'

- Plot properly. This increases the chances of finishing your book. If you were driving to Edinburgh tomorrow, you'd look at a map. That's what a plot is, a map of your story. When I found out how to plot it made all the difference.

- Get going. Don't go for the slow burn or the fascinating backstory like I did. Get in straight away with the party/ first meeting/discovery. My debut novel starts at what was originally Chapter 8 and the first seven chapters were worked in as backstory. It worked so much better.

- Get into Twitter. It's simple, free and invaluable for networking and promotion, whatever sort of publishing route you follow. Writing is lonely, but you can meet many like-minded people on Twitter who will cheer you on.

- This is an apprenticeship. Unless they are really fabulous and super clever, no one gets it right first time. I certainly didn't. My debut was in fact my eighth book.

- Formatting. Agents and publishers read lots of manuscripts. Don't put them off. They want double spacing, numbered pages and single speech marks. My punctuation was old fashioned and erratic.

- Read. Read the sort of books you want to write, so you know what publishers are after. There are a lot of books offering to teach writing. Some are a waste of money, but some are really helpful. One of the very best is Chris Manby's *Writing for Love*.

- Persevere. Sometimes I felt I was wasting my time. I submitted too soon and had loads of rejections. Looking at my early efforts I can understand why. It was mainly down to the first point on this list. But, if at first you don't succeed, keep going. Never give up. You will get there!

- Maddie Please's debut novel is *The Summer of Second Chances* [Wm](#)



In need of a twin

A reader is worried that her agent's advice to write concisely will alter her style, but **Jane Wenham Jones** advises her to embrace the edit

I have worked tirelessly to produce my first novel – following much of the advice you have given in previous issues – and it's now with an agent.

She, however, insists my novel is too 'wordy' and has ticked me off for writing a sentence containing nearly ninety words.

My view is that I am building up atmosphere and drama but she says my reader will lose interest in the plot if I do not write more concisely.

It's taken me years to find the courage to write my novel and I feel very downcast now, as I feel my agent has poured cold water on my efforts.

Should I take her advice and attempt to alter my entire writing style?

Or should I change agents?

RACHEL BARRY, SWINDON?

If I were you, Rachel, I would do neither. Firstly, you have done awfully well to get an agent – congratulations on that and if *Writing Magazine* has helped in any small way we are all suitably thrilled – so don't be too quick to dispatch her! Secondly, you can attend to a slight over-wordiness without altering your 'entire' writing style. I think the key word here is 'compromise'.

You sent me the sentence in question and yes, it is a long one, but because you write well, I personally think you get away with it. But that doesn't mean that in general, the advice given to you by your agent is not sound.

Shorter sentences are often better than very long ones. They not only keep the action zipping along, they are also easier to digest. Were you to do a public reading of this extract from your book you may well find yourself gasping for breath halfway through – I tried saying it all aloud and it was a struggle. So let us not be too black and white about this.

Your agent, I am sure, is not suggesting you write in a totally different way – if she didn't like your current style she wouldn't have taken you on – but simply pointing out that less is often more.

Of course your novel is very precious to you and you are bound to feel sensitive to perceived criticism. But try to look at it, not as 'cold water', but a constructive suggestion from a

professional reader – which is what your agent is. Her job is to sell your manuscript and she is therefore setting out to help you make it as appealing and readable as possible. If one of the ways you can do this is by putting in a few more full stops then that seems to me, a pretty small price to pay.

It is good discipline to try to write more concisely and you may be surprised at the results. I have recently had to cut a whopping 20,000 words from my latest novel – a task that seemed all but impossible when I started out, but which in fact was achieved without losing any of the storyline.

My editor, upon re-reading it, commented that it was 'zippier' but said she hadn't noticed at all where the words had gone. I did it by simply taking out the superfluous, being ruthless when I found I was waffling and constantly asking myself if every word was necessary.

As an exercise, let us take your letter above which is 125 words long. If it were important enough, you could easily express all that in half the length. If your life depended on it, you could probably get it down to a quarter.

For example, if you'd written: 'My agent has urged me write my first novel more concisely. I worry about compromising my style, feel disheartened and wonder if I should find someone else. What do you think?' (31 words) it would have elicited much the same answer.

Of course, creating atmosphere is important and I would generally counsel that rules are made to be broken in the pursuit of finding one's own unique writing voice. But it may be that you are still settling on yours and your agent's observation may turn out to be timely and helpful.

For what it's worth, whenever I have disagreed with or even dared to surreptitiously (I don't call her The Fearsome One for nothing) go against, the recommendations of my own dear representative, she has always, annoyingly, been proved right in the end. Most agents are hugely experienced in what works and what doesn't.

It is a huge achievement to finish a novel – especially if it took you courage to write. Don't let the ship be spoiled by a hapence worth of tar and a few hurt feelings now.

Why not just have a go at tightening up your prose? You can do this while still maintaining your 'style'.

Perhaps tackle the first three chapters. Shorten some sentences, sharpen up others. Check for weakeners and repetitions, unnecessary detail or explanation. Then read it back to yourself. You may be astonished at how your novel has been lifted. And gain a whole new appreciation of the role of the delete button.

If you do that and your agent still feels the novel needs work then only you can decide whether to trust her judgement. I would, however, remind you that if and when she places your manuscript, your editor is likely to require further changes still. It's all part of the process and if you want to be successful it is worth getting accustomed to the input of others, without taking it personally.

Ultimately, you and your agent share the same goal – to make your book the absolute best it can be. So yes, in the first instance I would say take her advice. And if I were going to have a flutter, I'd bet you'll be glad you did. Happy editing and good luck! **WJ**



Helpline

Your writing problems solved with advice from **Diana Cambridge**

Email your queries to Diana (please include hometown details) at: diana@dianacambridge.co.uk or send them to: Helpline, *Writing Magazine*, Warners Group Publications plc, 5th Floor, 31-32 Park Row, Leeds LS1 5JD. She will answer as many letters as she can on the page, but regrets that she cannot enter into individual correspondence. Publication of answers may take several months. Helpline cannot personally answer queries such as where to offer work, or comment on manuscripts, which you are asked not to send.

Q I have written features for women's magazines in the past, but am having very little luck as of late. I would be willing to invest in an agent to market them for me. How much should I expect to pay the agent – and would one take me on?

DAPHNE RICARDO, Birmingham

A I think it's unlikely – agents rarely take on magazine features unless they're dealing with a celebrity writer. Features are much less likely to be syndicated than they once were. The fees paid by magazines are not high, though they do vary. An agent normally takes ten per cent – so for a fee of say £100 it's not worth it. You would still be better marketing yourself – you'll know best which magazines your feature could appeal to.

Q I sent a feature to a mother and baby magazine and they sent a reply saying it was well written, but had been done before. This seems encouraging to me – but it's hard to find baby topics which haven't been done before! What are they looking for, exactly?

*JERRI JONES,
Coventry*

A It's true that in the area of motherhood, most topics will have been covered. But in a year of issues a magazine will have to cover the same subjects again, as new readers are drawn in when their children grow – and they're no longer babies, so don't fit the profile. Every new mum will face the same problems and pleasures. I would advise making sure you read as many copies of the magazine as possible, and really study the content. It is possible to revisit a 'done' topic but add your own twist to it – including the latest developments or a newsworthy angle, or adding anecdotes of your own. Generic information is rarely needed these days – it has to be up-to-date, personal, confessional or anecdotal.

Q If you're entering a travel writing comp, is it best to give the name of the travel company you go with? After all, they do most of the work. We go with Saga – very good. We do sometimes travel independently and I wonder if this would be better, as an option for a comp. We are both retired.

*STEVE GRANVILLE,
Whitchurch, Bristol*

A Take a look at the travel writing for seniors website (seniortravelexpert.com) – they have an annual free to enter contest, the content geared to over-55s (though there's no age restriction for entrants.)

They choose winners from both independent travellers and those on a tour. You can look at past successful entrants. A recent entry in fact described a Saga tour, giving both the weak points and the successful highlights – that's a good way to write travel.

Q I'm planning to see a writer-in-residence at an upcoming festival, but am unsure whether they will just talk or will look at a piece of writing and give close advice. Also, what sort of fee could they charge?

*ALISON PLENTY,
Battersea*

A Take a short piece with you, so they have something to look at – and maybe take three ideas in writing. The fee should be on the programme – some writers-in-residence are free, others charge a small fee, a few pounds. Check if the writer is inviting copy to be submitted before the meeting – if so you're in luck because you get a considered critique.

Q I have a friend who refuses to have anything to do with the internet. I have submitted short stories to contests for him before, but some competitions won't accept from third parties. And very few accept printed copies, though I notice with novels they do often ask for a paper version of, say, first 5,000 words. Even then, surely they would expect the author to be on email for easy communication? I am getting tired of explaining the advantages of being online to him – it feels as if he is living in the Dark Ages. And he is a good writer, so he's missing out.

*SONJA MOORE,
Southend-on-Sea*

A I agree with you – writers should be online if they are serious about their work and want to make the most of opportunities. Those that are resistant to this – and I have met several – aren't doing themselves any favours. But if there's a phobia about going online, it's often to do with the perceived expense and disruption of getting the internet set up. Yes, it's best to have a separate phone line, but you can buy a device, called a dongle, which you only attach when you're going online if you just can't face this. Most computer shops and phone providers should be able to set up a personal email for you. Yes, there are writing competitions which accept printed copies: but they will still usually ask for an email address. A dongle could cost from around £11 a month.



SUBSCRIBER SPOTLIGHT

Share your writing success stories. If you subscribe to *Writing Magazine* and would like to feature here, email Tina Jackson, tjackson@warnersgroup.co.uk

Rooting for the baddy

'Have you ever noticed that the "baddies" in books, plays and films are often more interesting characters than the "goodies"?' writes subscriber David Lawrence-Young.



'Bearing this in mind, I set out to write my biographical novel, *King John – Two-Time Loser*. This is the 18th historical novel I've written and the eighth to be published by Ravenswood Publishing, USA and edited by *WM's* Gary Dalkin.

'As a kid learning history, I was always told that King John was a bad king and probably the worst one ever to sit on the throne of England. The only redeeming feature of his reign was to seal (he never actually signed) the Magna Carta, and that was only because his noble barons forced him to. Rubbish! While carrying out the research for my book I found out that the knights had not done so out of altruistic or patriotic reasons. All they were thinking about was how to increase their own power and to pay fewer taxes.

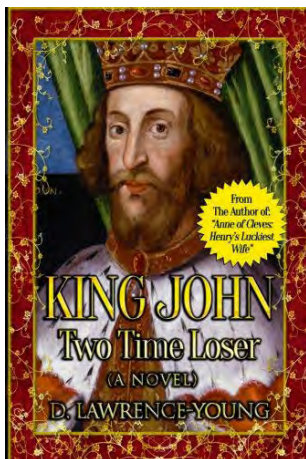
'I also discovered that much of what we were told about this allegedly Bad King was based on the contemporary Church chronicles. These were slanted heavily against him since he had seriously annoyed the Church by appointing his own man to be the new Archbishop of Canterbury and not the bishop that they had wanted.

'In addition, in the Church's eyes, John was far worse than his predecessor, big brother Richard the Lionheart. Despite John's declaration that he would lead a Crusade like his

brother, John never did so. The fact that Richard almost bankrupted England to pay for this foreign venture was not taken into account by the ecclesiastic authorities. And neither was the fact that Richard spent only six months of his ten-year reign actually living in England.

'All in all, apart from learning about England's supposedly Bad King John, I had a great time writing this novel.'

Website: dly-books.weebly.com



One dream at a time

'When I won my first writing competition I was so excited I ran all the way home,' writes subscriber Brendan O'Brien.

'I was eight years old. The fun fair was in town and we had to write an essay on it. I won a book of ten tickets for the rides.

'So writing was in my blood from a very young age. And I dreamed of being a writer. I wanted to be a writer – but somehow life got in the way.

'It was only when I got married and the children came along that I made any serious attempt to write *Dark September*, an alternative history WW2 thriller set in Wales. I always wrote in longhand but I hated typing it. When my agent demanded major changes I spent another year rewriting it. But she still wanted changes. It became too much. I parked it in a drawer for a few years.

'In the meantime I discovered that writing short stories is incredibly therapeutic. There are great ideas are all around us, little gems to be harvested.

'All my short stories are set in Ireland. I've written hundreds, most of which are still stuffed in drawers. Many have been published over the years in anthologies, e-zines and magazines, and my favourite twenty are now available in a self-published collection called *Dreamin' Dreams*.

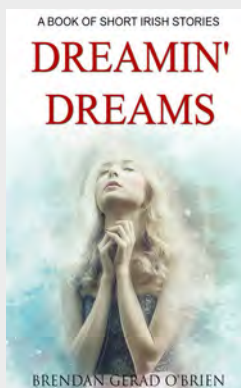
'They're all based on real people who've passed through my life at some time or other, and events that actually happened to me. Enhanced, of course, and sometimes exaggerated out of all proportion. The names are changed too because I don't earn enough to survive a lawsuit.

'The title comes from something my father said years ago when I got poor grades at school.

"What do you expect? You never do any studying. You just sits there, dreamin' dreams."

'*Dark September* is now published by Targear Publishing whose support I appreciate.

'My second thriller *Gallows Field* is also self-published via Kindle and CreateSpace. *A murder mystery set in Ireland in 1941. The music is loud. The singing is louder. Joe McCarthy is shot dead. And no one hears a thing.*



In the stars

'I am so thrilled every time I see another five-star review on Amazon for my novel *Still Breathing?*,' writes subscriber Jennifer Smith-Gilmour. 'After a few months I have 21 all saying they could not put this story down.'

'My first novel on Amazon, *The Wrong Life*, now has 42 five stars. It gained a top three book sticker. This makes me feel that I have found my writing voice and spurs me on to become better.'

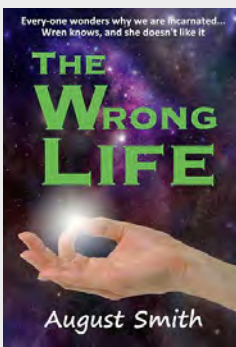
'I have started sending these novels out to agents but have no replies or just the standard letter. But I will keep trying. This is the advice given to me from Catherine Cookson by letter and in person from Barbara Taylor Bradford. "Never give up."

'In 1998 I was writing a humour column in *Your Cat* magazine and sent the idea of a book to Michael O'Mara books. Part of my book was also included in an anthology for Reader's Digest Books. I was writing for magazines then under the name of Jan D'Lord.

'I changed my writing name to August Smith when I saw my serious side coming out. *Still Breathing?* is the story of one mother's daring escape from domestic abuse, her struggle to stay hidden and the heart-wrenching price she has to pay. It is set in 1969 when the reaction to domestic abuse was not as it is now. I experienced this myself which is why the writing is so vivid.

'I admit that I can feel daunted by lack of interest from agents and endure periods of feeling "what's the use?". This magazine is a huge inspiration to getting back on track. I do not know if agents are put off by us writers publishing our novels on Amazon or encouraged by the good reviews, but it encourages me that at least some people are reading my work.

'I feel I have to write what I love to read, cliff-hanging and heart-tearing emotion that makes me feel totally involved with the characters and miss them when the book is finished. This is what I aim for.'



Taking place

'The book *Know Your Place* sprang from debates around June 2016's EU Referendum results,' writes subscriber Cath Bore.

'After 52% of the population voted Brexit, assumptions were made – in the media, for example, although it was by no means confined to there – about which way "the working class" had voted. Yet assuming the belief systems of people to be uniform just because they come from the same social class is highly problematic. It is simplistic and patronising. It's snobby, in fact.'

'So Nathan Connolly, editor of Dead Ink Books, inspired by the success of *The Good Immigrant* (Unbound), the award-winning collection of essays from immigrants and children of immigrants, put out a call for submissions for writers from working class backgrounds. The idea was to show that working class lives, attitudes and stories vary so much and can't be defined by a series of set, preconceived codes.'

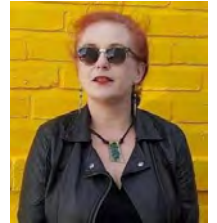
'I pitched my idea last July, and seven months later in Feb 2017 was asked by Dead Ink to expand it into an essay.'

'I wanted to concentrate on invisible women in society, those not seen or who are simply ignored. Women are ignored for many reasons, but I chose to look at those who clean for a living, who clean offices early morning before admin staff turn up for the day, supermarket cleaners weaving in and out between shoppers, mopping up spills, or the woman who works for the same family for years, dusting and hoovering their home weekly, but who doesn't get holiday or sick pay. I wanted to give all these women a voice. I touched on the same subject briefly in *Rants*, a feminist zine

edited by *Golden Boy* author Abigail Tarttelin published early last year, but wanted to explore the subject further.

'Happily, Dead Ink accepted my essay and now it is to be published in *Know Your Place*, alongside essays from Kit De Waal (author of *My Name is Leon*), poet Andrew McMillan, and others. I'm delighted this important and very necessary book is happening. And I am so very pleased to have work in it.'

Website: <https://cathbore.wordpress.com/>



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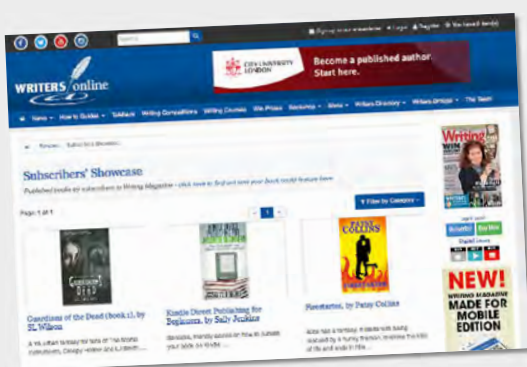
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When you're sending in submissions to appear on those pages, feel free to send us any additional content you have available. Whether it's an interview video, book trailer, podcast, audio extract or anything else, we'll give you as much exposure as we can through our digital edition and website. As ever, send your details to tjackson@warnersgroup.co.uk



Drawing on past experience

‘It was over twenty years ago that I first wrote a book about eating disorders,’ writes subscriber Louise V Taylor.

‘It was while I was recovering, waiting to see a specialist and I found writing about it therapeutic. The appointment with the specialist never came, so I muddled through on my own, but I was determined and I did recover... despite a very difficult home life and feeling very much alone, vulnerable and scared. At the time, my manuscript was rejected by a publisher. I lost confidence and it was consigned to the drawer.

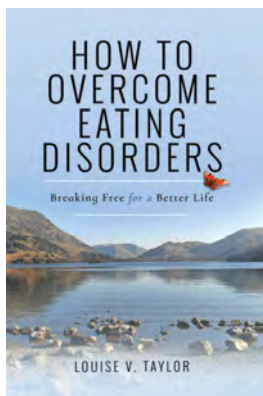
‘Twenty years later, when I saw Pen and Sword were introducing a new health imprint, I offered them a book on the subject. I said I had a draft and I’d get it up to date with all the latest science to support it, new and emerging treatments, and importantly, I’d be writing from the perspective of someone who completely understands what people with eating disorders are going through.

‘I’d also studied psychology and nutrition, which helped. They said “yes” and I signed the book deal. It was a real experience. Much of the book bears little resemblance to the original – treatments have moved on and there have been so many new scientific studies to draw from, but there are parts that don’t change, and it was a huge job merging my ageless insight with the latest thoughts on the topic.

‘The process wasn’t easy. There were things that were completely new to me – like indexing, and sorting out photography (I suspect it will be the most illustrated book on eating disorders ever published!). But it’s nice to see that after more than twenty years, my original manuscript came in very useful and I found a publisher for the final work. The case studies haven’t changed much.

My own story hasn’t changed, although I was able to add more insight in the final manuscript. So if you ever feel like giving up on a piece of work, that’s okay. But keep it somewhere safe. You never know when you might want to bring it back to life!’

Website: <https://sites.google.com/site/louisevtaylor1/home>



A career change for the better

‘I started writing in 2006 when I wrote my very first short story and decided that, as my career in nursing wasn’t working out quite as I had anticipated, I would become a writer instead,’ writes subscriber Sarah Purdue.

‘It was a secret dream I’ve had for as long as I can remember, having been an avid reader since I was a small child, but I always considered it a bit of a pipe dream!

‘I can only imagine my former English teacher raising an eyebrow in surprise. At school, I was very much in the “scientist” camp. I loved to read but I found school English frustrating (who says there is only one interpretation of what a book is about?) and my understanding of the “technical” side of English was somewhat lacking.

‘But In 2006 when I reached a decision that nursing was no longer for me, I decided to start to follow my dream. My parents, bless them, didn’t even raise an eyebrow as I told them that I was going to turn my back on my nursing career and pursue being a writer instead, despite having written only one short story since primary school!



‘Anyway, fast forward eleven years, one Masters in Writing for Children at the University of Winchester later, and here I am! I have had pocket novels published by *People’s Friend* and *My Weekly* and some of these have been accepted by Linford Romance for their large print range, that is mainly found in libraries.

‘Two months ago, I took the scary but exciting decision to leave my day job and so now write full time. I’ve made good use of that time finishing off my first chick-lit, romantic comedy, *Successfully Single*, which is now out as an ebook on Amazon and Kobo.

‘If you would like to know more about me, please visit my **website: www.moonwriting.co.uk**.’



Find time for a retreat

‘Two author friends and I have set up Chasing Time Writing Retreats and ran the first Stop The Clock retreat in September, as well as a Ghostly Gothic themed retreat at Halloween and a Writing Detox retreat in the new year,’ writes subscriber Elizabeth Frattaroli, an award-winning writer for children and young adults.

‘Sandra Ireland, (author of *Beneath The Skin*, published by Polygon), Dawn Geddes (freelance journalist, blogger, PR consultant and author represented by Sophie Hicks) and I, were inspired by the unique and atmospheric Rosely Country House Hotel, where we meet as part of Angus Writers’ Circle, and felt it would make the perfect setting for our new business venture. We also felt there was a lack of residential writing retreats in this part of the country, so are excited to welcome other writers onto our tutored retreats and to share our love of writing with them.

‘We are all passionate about writing and have complementary skills and varied writing expertise that we can bring to the table. Finding the time and space to prioritise writing is probably one of the top issues that all writers face and, as writers ourselves, this is something that we understand. Our retreats will give people the chance to take some time out, press pause, and focus solely on themselves and their creativity. We can’t wait to get going!’

Website: www.chasingtimescotland.wordpress.com



Winning at the womag game

'I have been writing stories for women's magazines for almost twenty years,' writes subscriber Linda Lewis.

'Since 2003, this has been my main source of income and I've sold about six hundred stories so far.

'I really enjoy teaching and running workshops. From 2011 to 2016, I ran courses at Swanwick and received glowing feedback. I was also a tutor for the Writers Bureau for about eighteen months.

'One thing that gives me enormous pleasure is helping other writers improve their craft and hopefully, get that sale or competition win. To that end, I have teamed up with another writer, Vanda Inman, and launched a new site. The idea is to provide writers with tips and ideas, as well as offering an affordable feedback service and modular courses. My books (*The Writer's Treasury of Ideas*, *Why Short Stories Get Rejected*, etc) will also be advertised there.

'Vanda has been writing courses for many years with her previous venture – Writespace. We met when I won one of her short story competitions.

'Inspired by Vanda, I have just written my first ever course which is all about stories with twist endings. Other courses are planned soon.

'There will also be competitions and challenges and an opportunity to ask questions.

'I feel that getting advice from people who have had success in your chosen area of writing is invaluable. I wouldn't be where I am now, selling an average of one story every seven to ten days, if I hadn't had help from Patricia Findel-Hawkins, a much published womag writer.

'I am excited by this new venture and hope that many of you will visit the site or get in touch via Facebook or Twitter. Happy writing!'

Website: www.vnlwritespace.com



Mapping out the writing process

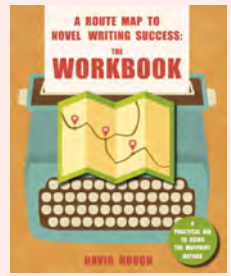
'I know of no one else who writes novels the way I do,' writes subscriber David Hough.

'And yet my way has resulted in getting 32 novels published in the UK and USA. I can easily complete at least two novels a year and that's why my UK publisher, Luscious Books, asked me to write a guidebook describing the way I do it. It's called *A Route Map to Novel Writing Success: How to Write a Novel Using the Waypoint Method*, and there's even a workbook to go with it.

'Of course I don't pretend that my way is the only sensible way to write a novel – that would be foolish – but it's a method that works, time and again. I've never experienced writer's block, so there must be something useful here for anyone who has yet to establish their own writing strategy.

'I started writing novels full-time after I retired, and all my novels have been published by mainstream publishers. So what's special about the way I do it? Basically, it all boils down to knowing exactly what you aim to achieve with your novel, and creating a structure to achieve it. And that's not difficult. My guidebook explains all the details and the accompanying workbook enables you to keep a clear record of exactly where you are going.'

Website: www.thenovelsfordavidhough.com



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CIRCLES' ROUNDUP

If your writing group would like to feature here, whether you need new members, have an event to publicise or to suggest tips for other groups, email Tina Jackson, tjackson@warnersgroup.co.uk



SPOTLIGHT ON...



Carlisle Writers' Group

Carlisle Writers' Group was created nearly thirty years ago by a small band of enthusiasts, writes *John Nevison*. Its aim was to collect together like-minded people, giving mutual support and encouragement. Writers come and go, but there is usually a core of two dozen members.

We meet every first and third Monday of the month at the RAOB Club in the city centre. (We have been here for four years – before, we were based in a room at the central fire station, and work often had to be suspended when an emergency call sent noisy fire engines out!). One element of our evening is the homework project, where we set, read out and have positive discussions about our work, as well as enjoying writing activities organised by members. Occasionally, guest authors and writers are invited to talk to us, or a special workshop takes place. CWG is not just confined to these sessions at our headquarters. We give regular readings at the Eden Valley Hospice and local WIs; we have worked in local primary schools; we have been involved in the autumn Borderlines Festival and fringe events; we have recorded many stories for Radio Cumbria.

We regularly bring out an anthology of our work. It's now three years since CWG released the self-published *Write Again!* in 2014; there are some new talents appearing for the first time in our recently-launched anthology *Write on the Edge*, which is now available from Amazon. You can find out more about us and our work on our regularly updated website at www.carlislewritersblogspot.com



Harpenden Writers

Harpenden Writers is a friendly mix of interested writers varying in age and experience, some of whom have published in books or magazines, while others attend for the pleasure of sharing their writing and exchanging ideas, writes *Joyce Bunting*.

They meet once a month with programmes that range from visiting speakers, to workshops and 'readarounds' when members enjoy listening to each other's work and, if requested, contributing helpful suggestions and criticisms.

On 3 November, the group launched an anthology of poetry and prose to celebrate their twentieth anniversary – *The Words*. The contents are as varied as the contributors. It is available from Lulu.com and Harpenden Writers' website.

New members are welcome to the group which meets on the first Friday morning of each month, except August.

Details: www.harpendenwriters.com; <https://www.facebook.com/HarpendenWriters/>, or phone Joyce Bunting on: 01582 760564

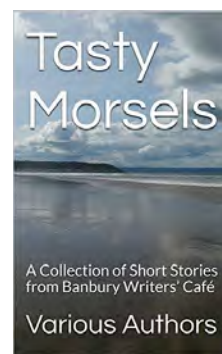


Banbury Writers Café

Banbury Writers' is a group of writers from Banbury and the surrounding areas who meet up once a fortnight on Wednesday evenings 7-9pm at The Artery in Parsons Street, Banbury, writes *Chloe Gilholy*. We meet up for tea and biscuits and read out some of the word we've done since the previous meet up. We normally do short stories under themes that we've all chosen as a group such as 'journey' and our current one, 'connections'. Entry is £3, and free to first-time members, and teas and coffees are cheap too. I've been to a few of the meetings and I think they're really nice and friendly. Be nice to get some new members.

In September we published an anthology, *Tasty Morsels*.

Our site: <https://banburywriterscafe.wordpress.com/about-us/>



READ ALL ABOUT IT!



Inspire your group to embrace the power of the press with an activity, from **Julie Phillips**

One of the many good things about writing is that you don't have to leave your house to do it if you don't want to. With the internet and TV at your disposal, it's relatively easy to research and write without always having to trudge along to your local library and struggle through pages and pages of heavy texts or do battle with the ancient microfilm machines.

For this workshop we are going to take advantage of what's available on your front doorstep. Delve into the pages of the local press, listen to local radio and peruse the pages of those free newsletters and magazines that frequent our letter boxes. Some content from these local publications can also be found on the internet, but for the purposes of this exercise we are going old school and looking at the physical papers. We will be cutting and pasting but without the aid of a computer.

About a week before you run this workshop, advise your group members to listen to local radio, noting down interesting stories, buy a local paper or look in the free local magazines and cut out a couple of headlines that appeal to them. It's important that they don't read the story attached to them. Then, they need to look in a different publication and read and cut out two local news stories that interest them.

At the meeting, ask them to place the headlines in front of them and for ten minutes write down ideas for possible stories or situations that might go with the

headline. It doesn't have to be non-fiction. Allow the group time to feed back their ideas and discuss them. Key questions to address could include: how difficult did they find the exercise and what were the sticking points for them? Did they think outside of the box or stick to what the headline seemed to be suggesting?

Now it's time to put the headlines to one side for a few minutes and pick up the couple of stories they also brought in. Ask them to read through them and think of suitable headlines to go with them. Ask them to feed back to the group – reading one of the news stories out first and then adding their headline. What elements of the news story did they pick out to include in their headline and why? Where there any clever headlines that used a play on words? What is it that makes a good headline?

The purpose of this workshop is to get the group thinking about what makes a good headline or title and what devices those writers creating them use to the best effect. Some headlines will leave a vital piece of information out, leading the reader on and teasing them to make them think the story is going to be juicier than it is. Other headlines might use a play on words or joke, while others are to the point and matter of fact. Which type of headline is the easiest or hardest to write, and why?

Next, ask the group to choose one of the headlines and write their own version of the story that could accompany that headline. Once they have done this, a few

group members might like to read theirs out. The rest of the group could then appraise the piece. Keeping in mind what they have learned about the power of a good headline.

Then, if there is time, ask the group to think of an event in their lives and be a journalist observing that event and reporting it for the newspaper. If people prefer, they can interview each other and write each other's story and headline instead – feeding back to the group at the end.

The workshop should encourage the group to think about headlines and titles and the power they have to either interest and hook the reader in to want to read the story. Pulling out the important pieces of a story or theme is essential so that readers are not misled, or put off. You don't want an all-singing, all-dancing headline to be followed by an uninspiring and boring story or vice versa.

By writing something about themselves or something that has happened to them or someone else they know, the workshop enables them to think like a journalist and focus on the 'newsworthy' or interesting bits of the story or a fresh and inspiring angle from which to write that story.

As an interesting piece of homework, the group could then look at their local pieces and find the national angle. Is there something in the story that might interest a wider audience that could pitch to a national newspaper or magazine? Editors are always looking out for fresh material to fill their pages and this workshop could inspire group members to pitch to editors for years to come. **WM**

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Writing – A Job with All Sorts of Opportunities for All Kinds of People

by Phil Busby

Do you fancy a challenge? What about the chance to make some money, get VIP access to major sporting and cultural events, or free holidays abroad? How would you like to look in the mirror and say, “Yeah – I did it!”

Well then, writing might be just up your street.

People have some funny ideas about writing. As a profession, it’s not just for ‘special’ folk. Anyone can do it. If you love words, and stories, and you’re not afraid of hard work, that’s all you need.

For the last 27 years The Writers Bureau has been helping new writers get started in the business. Writers like Louise Kennedy, who struck gold when she started blogging about her life on a boat from the viewpoint of ... her cat. Baily Boat Cat was picked up by a major publisher and turned into a book which now

“My tutor was lovely, encouraging and offered me great constructive criticism.”

sells world wide. “The Writers Bureau has given me the confidence to follow my dreams,” Louise says. “My tutor was lovely, encouraging and offered me great constructive criticism.”

Another WB student, Martin Read, wanted to keep active in his retirement and his writing led to a great little bonus. “As a result of my cricket articles, I have been elected into The Cricket Writers Club – an organisation that counts experienced journalists among its members. One of the perks of this membership is a press card that gives me entry into all of England’s cricket stadium press boxes.” And there are not many that get in there.

Then there’s Jacqueline Jaynes, who just loves to travel: “The Writers Bureau course has done everything I hoped it would and more. There was a clear progression through chapters so that my writing skills and confidence grew steadily with feedback from my tutor. The market research activities were invaluable for



Louise Kennedy



Jacqueline Jaynes



Martin Read

opening up potential new avenues for publication.”

Those new avenues led to a travel website where Jacqueline started writing short articles. Soon she was asked to join the team, and now she and her husband get expenses paid trips all over the world in exchange for reviews!

These are just some of the many inspirational true stories from Writers Bureau students. And there’s no reason why you shouldn’t join them. Who knows, this time next year I could be writing about your success. With a 15-day trial and money back guarantee, there’s nothing to lose and potentially a whole new life to gain. So why not visit the website at www.writersbureau.com or call Freephone 0800 856 2008 for more information?

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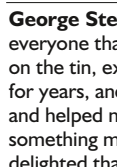
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Sarah Plater “I’m currently working on my fourth book, have been paid for my writing by at least 15 different magazines, and now earn half my income from writing – all thanks to The Writers Bureau’s course.”



George Stewart “I am delighted to tell everyone that the course is everything it says on the tin, excellent! I have wanted to write for years, and this course took me by the hand and helped me turn my scribbles into something much more professional. I am delighted that my writing is being published and I am actually being paid. All thanks to the Comprehensive Creative Writing course.”



Rachael Dove “I won the 2015 Flirty Fiction Prima Magazine and Mills and Boon competition. The prize was £500, a three page feature in the magazine and the chance to work with Mills and Boon on my book. “Also I have three stories in three anthologies with other authors – we’ve raised almost £2,000 for cancer charities”

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A line to new life

Poet **Alison Chisholm** looks at a poem inspired by a line from another poet's work

Writers are always urged to read widely in their genre. This keeps everyone up to date with the work of their peers, and with the latest trends and movements. It's a pleasurable activity. It can also provide the readers with inspiration for their own next piece of work. Poets can find their imagination set spinning by a single word or phrase whizzing into unexpected directions, and returning with a whole new angle to furnish a fresh poem.

This is not an exercise in plagiarism; it's simply a case of absorbing a piece by a fellow poet, allowing a phrase from it to work its magic, and advancing and enriching our own creative processes by doing so.

Sometimes the magic is anonymous. We are unaware of exactly what, in a poem we've read, triggers the idea for the next poem we write. Sometimes we can be certain about it. Gill Hawkins of Wimborne, Dorset knows the poem and even the line that led to her piece, which is *Do not be deceived by the innocence of snowmen**. This led to a new train of thought, involving getting into the head of a snowman and speaking through his voice.

Gill points out that this was a fun piece to do, and says: 'I found the images came easily as it's a familiar subject.' The familiarity means that imagery is transferred smoothly and naturally from writer to reader. There can be few people in Britain

The Loneliness of Snowmen

*You made me what I am,
I stand with heavy middled pose,
a perch for blackbirds, robins;
a borrower of hat and scarf,
an old clay pipe and nose.*

*A dull shaped garden sentry,
I watch, as silent as the night,
frosted like the winter sky,
lit up by gems of frozen stars
and moon of silver light.*

*But at dawn, when sunlight
sends ice shards dripping, dripping;
it tilts my hat, my carrot nose,
my pipe and scarf all follow me
earthwards, slipping, slipping.*

*Unconcerned that I have gone,
you look skywards in suspense,
as giant settling flakes arrive
you start to build another me,
all white and innocence.*

who have never had the experience of making a snowman, few who have never watched the short film made from Raymond Briggs' book *The Snowman*. For most of us, then, snowmen are entrenched in our lives and particularly our childhood, and reading the poem stirs memories as well as revealing the poet's message.

The subject of snowmen is not an original theme for a poem. It has been

covered many times before, mostly for child readers. *The Loneliness of Snowmen* has attributes that make it stand out from the crowd, with its snowman narrator, its appeal to adult readers as well as children, and the final twist, with its unspoken, broad hint that snowmen have feelings too, and are not impressed by the careless suggestion that another can be built to replace the departed member of their family.

There is fine balance in the poem, with a clarity of movement from one thought to the next. We begin with the snowman's construction, and through the first person narrative we see him as a perch for *blackbirds, robins; / a borrower of hat and scarf*. Next he shows himself standing proud in the night. We witness his decline in the day, and see his maker's unconcerned response to his fate, with the resolve to *build another me*.

Throughout the poem, the wording is concrete and precise, drawing vivid pictures for the reader. Phrases such as *an old clay pipe and nose, gems of frozen stars* and *ice shards dripping, dripping* are memorable because they are so specific. They also deliver additional information, either obviously or subliminally. *I stand with heavy middled pose* shows (without describing) the style of snowman that's been built. The *old clay pipe* begs the questions of who owned it, whether it had ever been smoked, and why it was still lying around.

The poet comments that keeping

the rhythm was quite tricky, and yet there seems to be an easy flow through the piece. Perhaps this touch of anxiety about the rhythm is occasioned more by the rhyme scheme. Where it is more usual to see quatrain stanzas with the second and fourth lines rhyming, Gill Hawkins has opted for quintains, stanzas of five lines, and rhymed the second line with the fifth. This makes the effect of the rhyme less strident, though it is still insistent. It distances the rhyming sounds, moving them a little further apart than in the more familiar form, in a way that is relaxed and pleasing.

No matter how well its content is put across, a poem needs to find its register and physical presentation on the page. Much of this is rooted in the sentence structuring of the piece. As the poet points out: 'That all too familiar subject of grammar arose, should I use a semi colon instead of a comma?', and doubtless this is one of many similar questions. This is by no means a small matter. Such details add the final polish to a poem, and

If you would like your poem to be considered for Poetry Workshop, send it by email to: jtelfer@writersnews.co.uk

neglecting them can only result in roughly finished text. This is one of the aspects of revision that needs to be left to 'settle' before it is checked. If you're not sure which version of your punctuation works better, simply putting the poem aside for a day or two allows you to look at it with a fresh eye.

In a poem that is working so well, there seems little that requires further attention; but it might be worth thinking again about the title. Is *loneliness* the best word? Would something like *evolution*, *resignation*, or even the pun of *sang froid* be better? This is not a strong opinion, just a suggestion to review the important business of naming the piece.

Gill Hawkins makes an interesting point about her poem. She says: 'When you take inspiration from someone else's work, you want to do it justice.' She goes on to add: 'I'm still wondering as I write this, is it as good as it could be?' The question demonstrates sensitivity to

the principle of using an idea from another writer, but the poet need not have worried. This poem is, in fact, a textbook example of the way to handle the inspiration found via another poet's work.

The line that sparked the idea has provided the impetus to write, but the finished poem bears no resemblance to the one that included it. Nothing in *The Loneliness of Snowmen* requires any explanation or depends on a knowledge of the inspiring poem for it to be comprehensible. The poet has accepted the challenge of the line, explored it, and produced a powerful, pleasing poem that stands alone.

There's an implicit challenge here for all the *Writing Magazine* poets. Can you find inspiration in a line from somebody else's work, as Gill did? Can you create a poem triggered by those few words that will be original and read naturally? Will it delight you and fascinate its audience? Why not give it a try? [W](#)
* From Alison Chisholm's *White Out*, from *Star and Snowflake*

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Registration is £65 per person; this includes a delegate's pack, morning coffee, buffet lunch, afternoon tea, a drinks reception and a choice from more than fourteen sessions on different aspects of self-publishing.

www.selfpublishingconference.org.uk

"I cannot think of very much wrong with the event and can recommend it to aspiring writers and indie/self publishers. **Richard Denning** I just wanted to thank you for the excellent Conference I attended on Sunday. It was well organised, well presented, full of helpful, friendly people and a joy to attend. **Sandra Smith**

That was an absolutely first rate conference - from the speakers to the catering and the venue. A great overall atmosphere and so many nuggets of info and ideas they wouldn't all fit onto the notepads you kindly provided! **Tony Boulemier**"

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Poetry from A to Z

Poet **Alison Chisholm** guides you through the language of poetry

The **RHUPUNT** is a Welsh form consisting of three, four or five sections of four syllables, the first lines of which rhyme together, while the last rhymes with the final line of the next section. This produces a pattern of a a a b c c c b continuing d d d e f f f e and so on. This example demonstrates the four section version:

*Thoughts of times past
hover, and cast
shadows. Too fast
days turn to years.*

*Memories made
can blur and fade;
but love, unswayed,
brightens and cheers.*

In the long rhapsody, the poem is written in the form of rhyming couplets, with each section becoming a single line:

*Thoughts of times past hover, and cast
shadows. Too fast days turn to years.*

*Memories made can blur and fade; but
love, unswayed, brightens and cheers.*

EXERCISE: Try out a few rhapsody stanzas on any time-related theme, experimenting with the three, four and five line sections, and the regular and long form layout. Create different lengths of poem, remembering that each pair of sections (or long form couplet) shares an end rhyme.

RHYME is one of the standard building blocks of poetry, producing a harmony of sound that is both resonant and memorable.

Full rhyme occurs when monosyllabic words and/or the final, stressed syllable of a two or more syllable word end with the same vowel sound or vowel and consonant combination. So *day* rhymes with

play, betray, underway and *cabriolet* while *kite* rhymes with *night, delight, candlelight* and *meteorite*.

These are masculine rhymes, where feminine rhymes have stressed rhyming syllables followed by one or more unstressed rhyming sounds. *Singing* and *ringing* are feminine rhymes, and *beautiful* and *dutiful*.

Full rhymes usually appear at line ends, and the closer together they are, the more strident they sound. They can also be used within the line, creating a pattern of internal rhymes. When an internal rhyme falls immediately before the caesura, the line's pivot, it's known as leonine rhyming. These examples show how the effect changes with different positioning.

In the deep woods, she fell asleep.

Internal

Where woods were deep, she fell asleep.

Leonine

*The woods were shady, dark and deep,
And there she rested, fell asleep.*

Rhyming couplet

*She walked along the treelined paths
Where woods were shady, dark and deep,
And, tired from hours of wandering,
She sat and rested, fell asleep.*

Alternate lines rhyming

In slant rhyme, there is similarity of sound rather than exact repetition, and the rhyming does not necessarily fall on monosyllabic or final stressed syllables of longer words. This is the form of rhyme that fuels free verse, and while it can occur in the same set positions as full rhyme, it can also be scattered throughout the text. The more frequent use of subtle rhyme reinforces the poetic effect.

There are various categories of slant rhyme/sound similarity, including:

- Alliteration: the same consonant

sound starting adjacent/close words
a case of candy canes

- Consonance (also known as pararhyme): the same consonant sound ending adjacent/close words
cold, hard and dreaded
- Full consonance: a combination of the above, with shared consonant sounds both before and after the vowel
black book

- Assonance: the same vowel sound with different consonants
sweet dream

- Unaccented rhyme: the same sound occurs in unstressed final syllables
finding keeping

- Eye (or sight) rhyme: words look as though they rhyme, but the sound is not the same
plough through

- Half rhyme: there is rhyme in the stressed syllables of the words, but this is followed by unstressed syllables with different sounds
mutely, fruitful, shooting

- Crossed syllable rhyme: stressed syllable rhyming occurs in syllables occupying different positions in the words
detain, chaining, arraignment
- Synthetic or wrenched rhyme: where the pronunciation of the language would have to be compromised to force a rhyme
bluebell, which has a natural stress on its first syllable, would have to be wrenched to rhyme with *repel, excel*.

In practice, it's more important to understand the sound of slant rhyme and the way it works than to agonise over the terminology.

EXERCISE: Select three or four random words. Make lists of the full, feminine and slant rhymes that match their sounds. Use the first two categories to create traditionally rhymed stanzas, and the slant rhymes to fuel a free verse poem. Your theme should be relevant to the words you've generated. Which did you find easier? Which worked best? [WM](#)

Poetry in practice

Read widely to improve your own poetry, says **Doris Corti**

If you want to write poetry it can help to read it.

To start, choose poems at random from any anthology you have to hand. The poems read may not be modern but the deeper your understanding of these, the more likely you will be to create a poem in today's voice.

Think about whether the poem(s) you have chosen have a particular theme. For instance, you may like poems that have some aspect of nature as their theme. The poet John Clare has a wonderful poem, *I love to hear the evening crows go by*.

This is the opening line of his poem and he continues *The bleaching stack the bustling sparrow leaves*. Having such a theme about nature in your mind, try in your own voice to write a few lines about some aspect of nature that you can see perhaps whilst out

on a walk, in your garden or the local park. If you have a domestic animal or fish in a tank any of these can be included in your poem.

Throughout the writing process take care to use words and phrases that relate to the subject matter. Take note of the emotions you feel as you write. You may feel joyful as you note a new flower on a bush or plant that hasn't bloomed in years. Or, if you find a dead bird under a tree you may feel sad. These emotions can be worked into the lines of your poem. These emotions can be made plain through imagery, intense rhyme pattern/repetition and other devices.

Another poet, Edward Thomas, uses rhyme to reinforce the eloquence in his poem *The Mill-Pond* as in the opening stanza:


The sun blazed while the thunder yet/Added a boom/A wagtail flickered bright over/The mill-pond's gloom:

Read Dylan Thomas's poem *The force that through the green fuse drives the flower* and note the repetition of certain words one of which is the word *drives*. This is done to enforce the image. He opens the poem using the same line as the title and follows it with '*drives my green age...*' He repeats the word *drives* in the next stanza. Choose a theme to write about and look inward to examine your emotions – be careful to ensure that these do not impede your technical ability! **WM**


Exercises

Exercise 1: Choose a poem on a theme you like.

Exercise 2: Write a poem on this theme in your own style using any of the techniques discussed.




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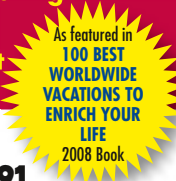
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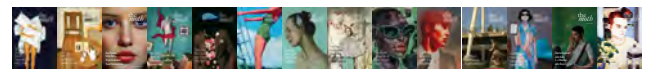
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Uncovering media bias

How can you get to the facts about current events when different media outlets report from differing perspectives? **Tarja Moles** explains how to see through media bias



Bias can be understood as a partiality or preference toward a particular point of view over another. We all have biases – that’s merely part of being a human. However, we need to be aware of our own and other people’s biases when we’re doing research, and indeed as we live our daily lives in general.

The media are constantly bombarding us with news and other information, and these – whether explicitly or implicitly – affect our opinions, decisions and actions. When you’re engaging with news stories, it’s important to remain critical so that you can decide for yourself what you want to think. Here are some media biases to look out for:

Editorial biases

These are biases that occur during the editorial process while editors select which stories are published, when they are published and where they are positioned within print publications and on webpages. Editorial partiality can be deliberately used to manipulate the readers and push them towards supporting a particular worldview, political opinion or social agenda.

For example, stories that are not conducive to spreading a specific agenda can be ‘buried’ by placing them in a part of a newspaper that’s not so often read or scheduled to air on TV or a website at an atypical time. Some stories may be omitted altogether. It’s also common for editors to promote stories that are novel, exciting or shocking in some way. Not only does sensationalism draw in more readers, but larger audiences are needed to attract paying advertisers.

To detect editorial biases, you need to look beyond the first impressions. Identify who’s funding the publication and whether there is a known history of partisanship that dictates the slant of the publication. Also consider what alternatives could have been chosen but were not, and why certain stories are presented in more depth or more prominently than others.

Reporting biases

These biases arise when news stories are researched and constructed. Stories can be spun so that the readers perceive them in a certain way. For instance, omitting facts, framing them in a way that supports the media company’s agenda and providing skewed analyses are not uncommon. Even if journalists want to provide as objective stories as possible, tight deadlines put them under pressure to create stories fast and they may not have time to explore alternative perspectives or find witnesses with a variety of viewpoints.

Additionally, there is an expectation in the journalistic storytelling structure that the news stories should answer the standard six questions of ‘who, what, when, where, why and how’ and that the stories should include both protagonists and antagonists. These expectations may pressure the journalists to come up with conclusions that are not fair and/or to express contention where there is none. All of these factors can result, to varying degrees, in skewed stories.

To detect reporting biases, you need to assess the news stories’ accuracy, relevance, depth, breadth, clarity and significance. Identify any contradictions, inconsistencies, dubious facts and implicit assumptions. Notice which interests and agendas the story is promoting and which points are systematically presented in a favourable light at the expense of other facts or arguments. Study alternative perspectives and compare the stories on the same topic area across the different news media.

Situational biases

These biases relate to the conceptual and contextual interpretations of news stories. For example, the use of stereotypical and loaded language can be deliberately used by the media to achieve a particular effect. Think of the word ‘migrant’. It can be used as a neutral expression when describing a person who has moved from one place to another, but it can also be portrayed as having negative connotations, as indeed the

more right-leaning media do.

Even when the media isn’t intentionally spinning stories, biases can creep in. Since news stories are usually brief and only include a limited amount of information, the complexities of real life rarely fit into this neat framework and readers may fail to understand the potentially important nuances.

Furthermore, we each understand the world in a way that’s specific to our surrounding culture and our personal life experiences. Therefore, the concepts and terms used in news stories (and in life in general) mean different things to different people. And if the news items contain, say, social and cultural issues that occur in an unfamiliar geographical location, we may misunderstand their significance and real meaning because we’re not knowledgeable enough about that particular culture.

To detect situational biases, you need self-awareness. Question your own deeply held views and attitudes and don’t jump to quick conclusions. When you’re reading the news, adopt a curious but detached attitude and consider different perspectives before making any value judgments.

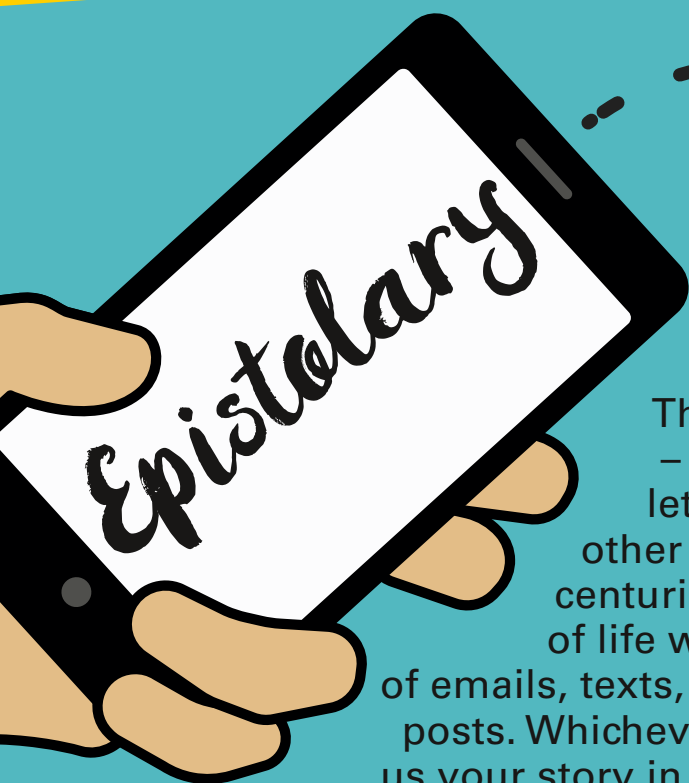
News organisations, editors, journalists and readers all have their own viewpoints, prejudices and agendas, and when put together, they form a complicated concoction of different kinds of biases layered on top of each other. This doesn’t mean that the news media is worthless for research purposes. Rather, by thinking critically and using the material in the knowledge that there are biases there, you can work round the issues and make the best of the information available. [WM](#)

TRY THIS

To improve your critical thinking skills, try this exercise: Buy a selection of newspapers on the same day and study them in depth. How do they differ with regard to their agenda, content selection, how the stories are framed and where they’re placed?

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There is no entry fee, and the closing date for both categories is **31 January 2018**.

See p91 for entry details

SEE P91
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STILL TIME TO ENTER

With its closing date of **15 January**, there's still time to enter last month's competition, for a story which starts with a cliffhanger

Prize and word limits are as above. See p91 for entry details.

Sand, Stone and a Shiver

by Debbie Parrott

Let's go down.
Where? I wonder.
Despite hands like
gnarled roots, his
touch is light on the
controls. Bertus eases the little plane
through a scarf of fog that stretches all
along the northern coast of Namibia –
the Skeleton Coast.

We fly low over the carcass of another
wrecked ship; the wind and waves, like
vultures with ragged black sails, still
picking over it. The wind has no regrets
about the death it has aided, it rages and
the sea reacts, not to be outdone.

Bertus tips the Cessna into a
swooping curve and turns inland. The
fog clears and I press my nose to the
window looking for signs of life. All I
see is the plane's shadow as it dances
below on an ocean of sand. The sand
rises into a sea of giant waves, ever
poised but never breaking, enormous
apricot undulations scrolling away to a
seemingly limitless beyond.

We go lower and lower. The plane
skims the sandy crests. I grip my knees.
There is nowhere to land.

Surely he isn't...?

He does.

We bounce along the ground
scrunching over baked, cracking earth.
I have no idea where I am other than I
am several hours north of Swakomund
and fifteen minutes inland. We prize
ourselves out of the plane to stand under
a cloudless, blistering sky. We inhale and
a desiccated dryness coats our tongues.
Like dust, a sense of isolation settles on
us. Then a Land Rover appears.

'Wow,' says my husband, Steve, 'that's

Debbie Parrott lives in Guernsey and has travelled widely from early childhood; starting with family camping trips through France to her latest adventure in Papua New Guinea. Only recently has she found time to write articles based on her many travel diaries. Three have been published: two in Bradt travel anthologies and one in the *Independent on Sunday*. Debbie struggles to find time to write as she enjoys gathering material far too much.



at least a 1960's model.'

'1963,' corrects Bertus, 'fantastic
workhorse, never let us down. Would you
like to ride on top?'

We watch as Bertus scrambles up
the bonnet and onto the roof where he
unfolds the back of a double seat.

Soon, Steve and I sit side by side, like a
maharaja and maharini about to make a
victorious entry into a city on elephants.
As the vehicle is loaded we run through
some holding-on techniques.

'Ready?' calls Bertus, 'I'll take it slowly
to start with.'

'All we need now is a beer,' laughs
Steve.

Like Excalibur, a bottle of Hansa is
thrust up from the driver's window,
followed by a second. As King Arthur
did, we grab our trophies before raising
them skyward in astonishment.

'Cheers!'

Unlike Arthur, we then break into song
until the wind whips the words away and
we settle down to silly grins and the basics
of balance and grip.

The Land Rover follows a familiar and
well flattened track. We drive into the
yawning desert: somewhere there is a tent
for us.

Using far more gears than I knew
existed we head towards and then up a

field of sand dunes. When Bertus stops
to perch on top of the highest one, our
smiles have been fossilised and our cheeks
polished a burning red. He jumps out
and points to a row of tiny tents far below
nestling on the raised bank of a river. The
river is like quicksilver drizzled down a
narrow valley.

'There's the camp.'

'I didn't expect to see a river,' says Steve.
'River Huab. A rare and precious thing
out here.'

'Quite a way to backtrack and get
down there,' I say.

'Who said we were backtracking?'

With that Bertus approaches a tyre
and lets half the air out. We peer down,
bewildered, as he repeats the process three
times.

'Increases the traction, I'll take the
empties and you two hold tight.'

A sand devil swirls in my stomach -
then sucks and squeezes.

'You can come down below if you'd
rather?'

Go on, I think, tell me I can't. I dare
you.

He turns on the ignition and the
engine chokes into action. After
manhandling the gear box, we edge
forward.

Oh my goodness!

Where's he going?
 He can't go that way.
 No-o-o-o-o-o! We tip over the edge and slide down.
 We slither at an impossible angle. Surely we'll somersault. My hands cramp, my legs brace, my head is thrown back. We carve parallel trenches of soft tyre patterns as if making impressions on shortbread. We ease into a stop.
 'You okay up there?' he yells.
 We realise we are: and breathe again.
 Bertus steps out onto the slope and picks up a handful of sand. 'Do you see the colour?'
 He takes out his Swiss Army knife and pulls out a small magnifying glass. He joins us on the roof and we look at the handful of sand through the lens. We see perfect jewels – garnets.
 'The garnets have been washed down in a far distant river and out into the Atlantic; the sea currents have rolled them north then the tides washed them back to land. The long journey wore the garnets down to tiny specks and then the wind blew them here. Quite something don't you think?'

We do.
 We stare at the purple and red hues that veil the slopes around us. Geography and geology lessons in this country must be a whole different kettle of primordial fish. The two week trip so far had been all about the upheaval of nature: the sea, dunes, giant granite formations, pillars and layers upon layers of every rock imaginable – all stuffed with gemstones.
 A gecko pops up from nowhere and stands hopping from foot to foot – too long and he would be branded with tiny searing grains of sand and garnet. This creature is a miracle of life. The desert offers little, rather it dares you to outwit it.
 'This next section's a bit steeper,' grins Bertus as he climbs back in behind the wheel, 'I love challenging the Angle of Repose.'
 'Angle of what?'
 'The Angle of Repose is 38 degrees on soft sand: the point at which sand on dunes will avalanche.'
 His chuckles blend with the revving engine.

We plough on, gouging a route. I try to ignore the sliding surfaces that travel with us. As we descend, Bertus makes increasingly exaggerated snaking turns. We create banks on the bends like snow drifts. I forget to be terrified and when we reach the bottom I am disappointed.
 'First did that when I was fourteen,' says Bertus.
 'Well that was a great finale to two weeks in Namibia. I don't think I have retina-room or brain-space for anything else.'

Bertus says very softly, 'Well you'd better shove something aside because there's more.'
 'I can't imagine what...'
 'Best wait and see.'
 As we make our way to the camp, I look back at the dunes. There is a sliver of molten string running along the peaks and troughs. Sunset is arriving.

The campfire that night sinks the rest of the world into perfect darkness and it is easy to imagine that it has ceased to exist. The sky overhead becomes mad with stars and we leave the tent flap open so that we can wonder at it for as long as possible.

A huge round fat sun wakes us and I stare until the smell of bacon rescues my vision.
 The sky is a bright blue canvas, only marked by the faint shadow of a week-old moon that leans back. I wrap my fingers around the coffee mug; the early morning chill is lingering.

Bertus strides over, holding a chunky corner of toast, butter dripping.
 'I'll just finish this and we'll go.'
 'Anywhere in particular?' asks Steve.
 'Oh yes. Very particular. Come as you are. It's not a hard climb.'

Like ducklings, we fall in behind Bertus as he strides towards a sheltering hill that is littered with boulders; all worn down and exhausted by a callous climate. We follow him along an ill-defined track strewn with rocks sparkling with mica and all manner of agates. I practise my recently learned geology as I pick up and name a piece of hematite; the ochre in it stains my hand as it does the goat's fat that Himba women will then plaster over their faces.

Bertus pauses, 'My father brought me

here a lot when I was a kid. My brother and I did a lot of exploring; I'd like to share something we found. Few people have seen what you are about to.'

We quicken our pace and clamber on until he stops and points.
 'This was a Bushman's cave.'
 We stare at the pile of stones. Two stacks of sliced rock form a porch effect in front of a natural alcove. It is not much bigger than a pizza oven and had probably been as hot.

'That would fit the whole family,' adds Bertus.


How?
 This is impressive but I realise it is not the "particular" destination. We scramble on until he drops out of sight and we only hear his voice floating up. Muffled, distant words.

'You'll have to come one at a time.'
 On all fours I crawl under a huge wedge of fallen rock.
 'Lie on your back just over there.'
 I only just have room to do it.
 I don't see it at first, then, like warm oil, it trickles over me.

Living history.
 I peer, until my eyes adjust to absorb the scene above. Engraved into the "roof" is a zebra and foal, each with iridescent, white quartz stripes. There are bowls and baskets etched in the warm, softer feldspar. A solitary goat stands alongside. There are squat, square figures entwined with tall, stick-like Lowry men: Bushmen and Europeans. A small, parched gasp escapes. I stretch up a fingertip and stroke the contours of the zebra. There is a seeping between living things and the God inside them, I can sense the beating heart. I am tracing it as its creator had once done – the tips of my fingers tingle.

It's like touching a star.
 Bertus taps me on the shoulder and, as if watching the final hint of a rainbow, I drag myself away.

'Was that a better finale?' he asks.
 I can't speak. I nod.

Later, at camp, I sip a sundowner. I know, without doubt, that I have reached out across two and a half thousand years and, for an instant, I felt a connecting shiver. 



Runner-up in the Travel Narrative Competition, whose entry is published on www.writers-online.co.uk, was: **CL Raven**, Cardiff. Also shortlisted were: **Dominic Bell**, Hull; **Jane Bheemah**, Exeter, Devon; **Pauline Massey**, Osney, Oxfordshire; **Sim Smailes**, Panfield, Essex.

MYTH



V e r s u s



REALITY

(part two)

Amy Sparkes busts some common preconceptions about the life of a children's writer

It's easier to prepare for a career when you have inside information about it. So, what's the truth of being a children's author? And what are merely myths? The second part of this mini-series helps to manage your expectations and work out how to invest your time and energy to achieve the result you want in the world of children's fiction.



Myth 6: My self-published children's book will help me get a publisher/agent

Sometimes a self-published book takes Amazon by storm and earns the author thousands of pounds. Yes, this does happen, but please be aware it is rare. Agents and publishers do sometimes keep an eye on self-published material, in case something awesome is out there. It's possible – but unlikely to be picked up. Once the book has been in the public sphere, many publishers would prefer to work on new material instead.

However, a self-published book can offer other opportunities. You could send copies to an agent or publisher as a sample of the work you can produce (NB they won't get posted back). It will

demonstrate that you have creativity, discipline and enthusiasm to complete a story and see a project through. It can also open doors to schools and local festivals.



What you can do:

Employ the services of a professional editor when you are producing your book and think carefully about illustrations. If you're illustrating yourself, can you do the book justice? Or could you employ a professional illustrator? Thinking about these things will help make the book the best it can be – crucial if you intend to showcase your book to publishers and agents as well as for placing it in shops. Most importantly, enjoy the satisfaction of your completed book for its own sake.



Myth 7: Once I'm published, I'll get an agent.

Being published, even with a small publisher, can help you find an agent, but it doesn't guarantee it. If you can offer an agent a book deal before it progresses to contract-signing stage, you may have a hook. However, agents won't necessarily take people on just because they are published or been offered a deal. It's important to the agent to be passionate about the book, the genre or the author's style. With so many authors on the submission pile (whatever their publishing history), agents will pick and choose what

they feel they could passionately champion. So, don't take it personally if you're rejected – it may just not be quite what an agent is looking for.



What you can do:

Do mention your published book in your cover letter but also research agents fully before submitting. Look at their websites, their clients and the types of books they champion. Follow agents on Twitter. Where possible, try to attend conferences, such as Winchester Writers' Festival (www.writersfestival.co.uk) or the British SCBWI Conference (<https://britishisles.scbwi.org/>).





Myth 8: You have to do lots of school events and festivals if you write for children

Speaking of which... Some writers enjoy doing events and some don't. Events and festivals are not everyone's cup of tea. Never feel forced to do something if you really don't feel happy with it. Yes, you and your books will gain a higher profile if you do literary festivals, visit schools, or participate in community events. But you're under no obligation (unless there is something specific lurking in your contract).

It is worth remembering that it's good to try new things, though, and step outside of our comfort zone. You may even surprise yourself. When my first book came out, I was terrified at the idea of reading in front of a group of children until a friend persuaded me to visit

her pre-school. I discovered I loved it! These days, I talk to hundreds of children at a time and really enjoy the satisfaction of watching the children giggle, talking books with them, or hearing them say how exciting it is to meet a real, live author.



What you can do: Think about what you want to do to share your books. Make a publicity plan. If you're not happy doing publicity events in person, try other ways of promotion, such as press releases for local newspapers. Or try using your website, blog or social media to run special offers or competitions.

It might be worth trying an event, perhaps a launch for your book, or a visit to a small school – you may find you enjoy it.



Myth 9: You have to do everything for free

When you start out, it's difficult to know what's expected of you. You'll probably want to promote your book to maximise sales. If you're happy to give your time and energy for free, that's up to you. What publishers often suggest is that you give maybe a few weeks to a promotional 'tour', where visits are free of charge. After that, you could ask for a fee for your time. How much you ask for is up to you. Be aware that schools do have a budget – on one hand, they may be able to pay for a visiting author; on the other hand, they may have other priorities they wish to focus on.

If people are excited about your book (whether you're published or self-published), especially if you're local, you may be asked to do various things for free. Some you may feel quite happy about, for example, judging a writing competition at a local school or a storytime session at a bookshop or library. However, do be aware of a slippery slope.

Once you visit somewhere, such as a school or nursery for free, it may be expected that you will always visit for free. If this isn't your plan, do make it clear at the beginning that this is a promotional tour for your new book. Many people believe Myth 1 we looked at last week: *Children's authors earn loads of money*. And people may think that since you're promoting your book and children are buying copies, that should be enough. However, bear in mind that although you may be able to buy your books at a discount and sell on yourself, you'll probably want to knock something off the RRP to increase sales. This cuts down on the money you recoup. Also, not every child will buy your book. The average is probably 1 in 4 or 1 in 3 if

you're lucky. Do the maths, and work out what you're happy with and when you want to draw the line. Also bear in mind travel expenses, or ask whether a school may be able to contribute if you visit for free.

You're giving your time as a writer. Don't feel bad about saying 'no' if you find you're spending more time doing activities for free than you feel happy with. You don't want to end up resenting people or establishments because you constantly feel like you're being taken advantage of. There's a fine balance between giving your time and gifts generously to the community or promoting your book and making a loss in your career because you never charge for anything. It doesn't matter if it's your first book: remember you're an author – a professional writer, trying to make a living. You wouldn't invite a plumber into your house and expect them to fix your taps for free.



What you can do:

Make a financial plan. How much can you buy your books in for? How much do you want to sell them on for? How much (if at all) would you charge for a visit? The Society of Authors have guidelines on their website (www.societyofauthors.org) but you may not feel this is right for you. Think about what you're happy with and be consistent. You could create a 'Schools/Events/Visits' page on your website with details of your charges and direct people there. This will make it clear from the outset. If you don't want to charge full rate initially, perhaps consider offering a promotional 50% off your usual author fees. Do what you feel is right for you, and don't go beyond what you feel comfortable with. You want to enjoy your visits – not resent them.



Myth 10: You need to be a celebrity to get a publisher's interest these days

It's true that there are an increasing number of children's books which are written by celebrities – and any books you write will be up against them. However, publishers will always be interested in a brilliant story concept, with fascinating characters and a gripping plot, told with a strong author voice. This will sell books and this is what publishers will buy. Don't be discouraged that you're not a member of a boy band, or a former model, or an Olympic rower. Focus on writing the best story you can and get it out there!

Maximise your chances of success

• **Join a writing group**

Share your journey and have someone to celebrate the successes with. You can also be accountable to each other, helping to develop the discipline to stick to deadlines and keep going even when you want to throw the laptop in the dustbin.

• **Take a writing course**

Improve your writing craft so yours can be the book that publishers and agents are looking for (keep your eyes peeled – we will be discussing this in a future article).

• **Create a folder of success**

Celebrate everything positive. Keep publicity newspaper clippings, feedback from agents or publishers, tickets from conferences you attend... Anything which encourages you. Even rejection letters can be encouraging. They prove that you are officially on the writing journey!

• **Attend writing conferences**

Talking to publishers, agents and other writers helps you understand the industry.

• **Keep track of all your expenses**

Being aware of your incomings and outgoings will help you plan accordingly. They are also essential if you need to do a self assessment tax return.

CRIME FILE

Crime writer Matthew Sullivan talks bright ideas with **Chris High**

The cover of Matthew Sullivan's debut novel, *Midnight at the Bright Ideas Bookstore*, is every bit as sumptuous as the book's plot, writing, characters and narrative.

Lydia Smith lives her life hiding in plain sight. A clerk at the Bright Ideas Bookstore, she leads a carefully crafted existence among her beloved books, eccentric colleagues, and the BookFrogs – the lost and lonely regulars who spend every day marauding the store's shelves.

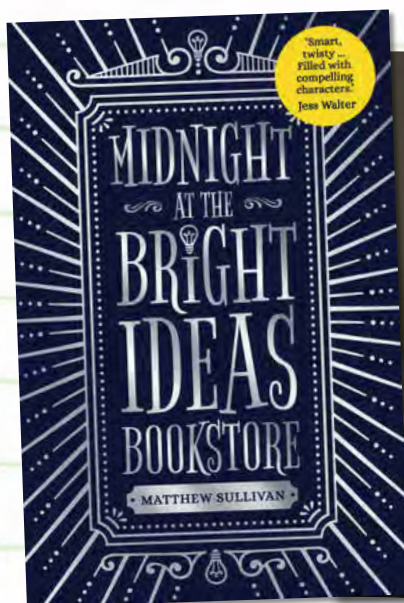
When Joey Molina, a young, beguiling BookFrog, kills himself in the bookstore, Lydia's life comes unglued. Always Joey's favourite bookseller, Lydia has inherited his meagre worldly possessions. Trinkets and books; the detritus of a lonely man. But when Lydia flips through his books she finds them defaced in ways both disturbing and inexplicable.

The cover design is a beautiful oceanic blue, slashed in diagonal pleats with flashes of silver and with the title and author stencilled in bold. If first impressions are anything to go by, it's a jacket certain to attract a great deal of attention.

'I think this story has been somewhat of a challenge for cover designers because it's both a dark thriller and a literary bookstore novel, Matthew explains. 'This hybrid quality complicates the aesthetics, but so far I've been very pleased with how the covers have turned out. I think the team at William Heinemann/Penguin UK did a brilliant job of bringing out the very bookishness of the story and treating the book as an artefact in its own right. It looks and feels like a real book should, if that makes sense.'

It does – and Matthew's love for the aesthetics and feel of a good book became an important part of Lydia's development within the story. 'It was enormously important. After the Hammerman murders in the novel, Lydia spent much of her life swaddling herself in books, psychologically and physically, as if to ward off the losses that had accumulated in her life.

'Books became her salvation and



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her sanctuary, as they have for many of us, and a key part of this is their tangible, sensory presence. The fictional bookstore of the story has been called Bright Ideas from the start – based on the store's fictional history as a light bulb factory – but the title itself has changed many times. For a long time it was *I Know What You Have Done*, which sounds more menacing, I think, but isn't as colourful.

'I cribbed much of the Bright Ideas setting from my years working at the Tattered Cover Book Store in Denver, but the characters and the situations came entirely from my imagination, not from any direct experience. Even more important to me was capturing the creative, supportive vibe of indie bookstores everywhere.'

Matthew comes from a family of eight children and is married to a librarian. Books, stories and writing have been an intrinsic part of his life from an early age. 'My mom wrote middle-grade fiction and published articles on nursing and Catholic family life, so there were always books on saints or writing on the back of the toilet, but reading was just one part of our daily lives. My siblings and I read quite a lot, but we weren't fiendish about it, the way that my kids and wife and I are now. I didn't really catch the serious reading bug – making time to read for pleasure every day – until I was

in my late teens.

'I was a die-hard fan of the Encyclopedia Brown series, as well as Judy Blume's *Tales of a Fourth-Grade Nothing* and *SuperFudge*, so I reread those books all the time. But my single most memorable childhood book is *A Taste of Blackberries* by Doris Buchanan Smith, which is about a boy whose best friend dies after being stung by a bee. My mom picked it up for me when I was in fourth grade, after my friend died of an asthma attack, and I still remember feeling really weepy as I read it, but it was just what I needed.

'The first story I remember writing was, quite literally, about a haunted house on a dark and stormy night. I spent quite a lot of time working on it, not because of the story, but because it gave me a chance to tinker with this very old manual typewriter, and to use up half-a-bottle of White-Out, and to roll those crinkly sheets of typing paper into the machine. The story itself was far less magical to me than the process.

Which book does he wish had the name 'Matthew Sullivan' on the front and why? 'I admire so many writers, but one of the more influential books I've ever read was *Jesus' Son* by the late, great Denis Johnson. It's a dark and beautiful collection of stories and it impacted me immensely in my twenties. Every sentence shines.' **WM**
Website: www.matthewsullivan.com

BEHIND THE TAPE

DO NOT CROSS POLICE LINE DO NOT CROSS POLICE LINE DO NOT CROSS POLICE LINE DO NOT CROSS POLICE LINE DO NOT CROSS



Expert advice to get the details right in your crime novel, from serving police officer **Lisa Cutts**

Q One of my characters is a 35-year-old man who has mild learning difficulties. He has been jailed overnight on two occasions for fighting. Now he has been caught trespassing in my protagonist's empty shop, the police have been involved. He has not done any damage but what happens next – will he go before a magistrate? What sort of punishment can he expect?

A Very little punishment if I'm honest. He would be unlikely to receive a custodial sentence for trespassing in an empty shop, learning difficulties aside. He may end up at magistrates' court if the officers who discover him arrest and charge him with burglary. It doesn't sound as though that's likely from your scenario. Pursuing the matter in the civil courts may be the best option, possibly not something you would want to include in crime fiction.

Q I would like to seek your advice related to forensic pathologists (or medical examiners?) for a crime fiction I am preparing. I need to have an insight into their work and the autopsies they carry out, in terms of vocabulary and procedure.

Would you have some suggestions, a website for example, or a description I could obtain somewhere?

A A Home Office Registered Forensic Pathologist is appointed by the coroner to perform the post mortem. This is to establish the cause of death, injuries and any natural diseases in cases of violent, unnatural or sudden death with unknown causes. Such a PM takes many hours and pathologists have a fascinating role. Your local Coroner's Court website, or visiting the court in person, may give you some of the vocabulary you're after. In terms of procedure, it is a painstaking process which begins with a CSI taking dozens of photographs of the body, both within the body bag, and then as the bag is removed. Every single part of the human body is examined, logged and tested. The pathologist will record everything she or he is doing, often on their iPhones as they carry out the examination. I'd rather not get too graphic here, but it really is every single part of the human body.

The Royal College of Pathologists gives a glossary of terms on its website (www.rcpath.org). 

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HORROR COMES HOME

How do you ramp up the fear factor in a domestic setting?
Alex Davis offers a guide to writing home invasion stories

Many, many horror stories feature some element of travel. Whether it's an old-fashioned tale taking place in the 'cabin in the woods', a jaunt to distinctly

unfamiliar climes, or even a journey into some otherworldly realm, there is a great number of genre stories that involve plunging your characters into something out of their comfort zone. And that's often a key element – how will your protagonists adapt when they are in trouble and unable to call upon the comforts of home, and the support of family and friends that so often goes along with it?

However, there is another branch of horror that takes the opposite approach, with the fears that are so often found outside reaching into our home, that place where we feel most at ease and most comfortable. These tales of 'home invasion' require a different approach for writers, and play with the readers' fears in a different way – so how do you craft a great tale of housebound horror?

It could happen to you

Much horror can feel somewhat 'safe' because there is a sense of the fantastical, and a sense that the events of the story couldn't happen to you. While we often share the fear in a vicarious and indirect way, when we put the book down we are relatively easily able to switch off and get back into reality and our feeling of security. That's in part because many fantastical elements in horror stories are things that people have never individually encountered – whether you believe in them or not – and also because there is something distinctive that makes the characters as written the ones to endure the horror. Whether that's some familial connection, their decision to travel to a mysterious or dangerous location, their line of work or a particular hobby seeing them encounter something supernatural or unusual, our protagonists tend to find themselves wrapped up in a horror story for a reason.

However the home invasion story flies in the face of both of these things, and it's important for writers to remember this is what makes them so scary. A

home invasion could happen to anyone, because more often than not the attack is effectively random, or at least out of the control of those who suffer it. It also has an edge of reality that doesn't always exist in horror, because these are not monsters as we may usually define them – our 'monsters' in these tales are distinctly human. These are things that you can use to your advantage to truly chill your readers. By taking away that element of detachment, the tales become even more uncomfortable.

Sudden or slow?

When it comes to introducing the 'invaders' to your story, it's worth bearing in mind that typically the story will begin with something relatively everyday, some small glimpse into the home lives of our main characters. As a set-up phase of your story it's not something you would expect to last long, and when you do decide to introduce that home invasion aspect there are two approaches you could take.

The first one is a more steady approach, be it the attacker(s) stalking around the outside of the house before finding



their way in – with the reader very likely realising the danger before the characters do – or our antagonists getting into the home under some legitimate pretext until they reveal their true intentions. This can be effective in building dread and atmosphere, and can also give a better insight into who our characters truly are.

The alternative approach is to go for a short, sharp shock and introduce your aggressors all of a sudden, the threat just crashing through the door or bursting onto the scene having already made its way into the house. This can bring the tension to a peak earlier but means you will have to try to develop character more as the story continues on, revealing more about your characters deeper into the tale.

To use a filmic point of reference, Mike Flanagan's recent movie *Hush* takes a much more measured approach, with our deaf protagonist not picking up on the presence of her attacker for some time. A movie like James Cullen Bressack's *Hate Crime* is very sudden and shocking, bringing the hooded extremists into the mix in abrupt and brutal fashion.

A matter of escape

Once your attackers are into the house, there is very often a focus on your protagonists to simply make an escape. Because this is typically a more realistic type of story, you will probably have to consider more realistic matters. What is the size of the house, the dimensions, what rooms are there? Where are the entry and exit points through which your lead might make a getaway? Where could a character hide, if they needed to? Where is the home phone – if they have one – and where would people tend to keep their mobiles? Some of that might sound like dry detail, but it's going to be crucial to ensuring your story feels believable.

The focus on an attacker/attackers – whatever their larger motive might be – will be to capture or incapacitate the people who live in the house at the very least, with the potential for them to be far more violent, inflicting pain or even death. As such the main aims for a protagonist will be either somehow to get help to come to them – which you don't often see done successfully in home invasion stories – to overcome the intruder, or to simply make an escape from the house and get help themselves. The very

best home invasion stories have a strong air of claustrophobia about them, a sort of 'cat and mouse' game played out in a small space that the lead thought was safe but has turned out to be anything but. It's a place they know better than their aggressor(s), but they may not be as hardened, as desperate, as strong or simply as armed as those trapping them.

Haute tension

Excuse me referencing one of my favourite French home invasion movies, but it is important to consider where the tension of your story comes from. With home invasion stories, there are effectively two angles you could take – the first is something like what we described above, with our protagonist trying to hide, find some safety or make their way around the house. The key thing in this instance for a writer is to play with senses, not just sight – which will of course be important – but also sound. In a quiet house, the slightest of breaths or tiniest shifts of the body can sound cacophonous. You can also build in plenty of close escapes and moments of physical confrontation to go alongside that, offering a mixture of real physical conflict plus plenty of dramatic suspense.

The other approach you could take is for your protagonist to be caught or subdued very early on by your antagonist, which will mean you are delivering a very different story and developing a different kind of tension. The focus then goes from the physical to the psychological, in two respects: firstly, how will your main character react? Will they be defiant, determined to try and escape their captivity, or will they simply shrink under the awfulness of the situation? Will they attempt to trick their foe somehow, using their mental or emotional intelligence, or bargain and reason with them? And the other question is – what is it that your home invader actually wants?

A matter of motivation

We've already established that some of the key things for great home invasion stories are a strong and believable feel, the development of tension and the use of space and attempts to escape or summon help. The one thing we haven't touched on yet is the motivation for your invader. There are a number of different

approaches you can take in this respect.

1) Their aim might simply be to hurt or kill people – antagonists in home invasion tales will sometimes just select a house at random and decide to torment the people within it. Again, a good filmic reference here is 2008's *The Strangers*.

2) You often see characters in home invasion who are in some way on the run or simply looking for a refuge, and when they are obviously not welcomed by the homeowners we launch into a more confrontational scenario. 2010's *Mother's Day* is an example of this, although a pretty overlong one.

3) The people in the house might be chosen for some particular reason, so the invasion is very much premeditated and considered. It might be because of arguments or tension between people, or based more on facets such as race, religion, sexuality etc. You can see this aspect strongly in 1977's *Fight For Your Life*.

4) There might be cases of home invasion where your protagonists are simply in the wrong place at the wrong time, and find themselves in the midst of some situation that is far larger than them. This again advocates that point that home invasions are scary because they could happen to anybody. The first movie in The Purge series is a prime instance of this.

Conclusion

It's sometimes thought that the home invasion subgenre is a simple one, but I would suggest it requires as much forethought as any other branch of horror. By removing the supernatural and otherworldly, you have to develop a story that is deeply believable and grounded – and in that lies one of its key strengths. Good home invasion stories can have readers double-checking they've locked the door at night. But to deliver them well requires a deep consideration of character – both your 'victims' and your 'invaders' – as well as plenty of forethought on the physicality of the location and the conflicts your characters endure. It's often appealing to authors who shy away from the supernatural, but still want to deliver dark and terrifying tales – and proof that humans can be just as scary as any other creature out there in the world of fiction. **W**





Invoicing

INSTRUCTIONS

If you write for money, you need to make arrangements for payment. **Simon Whaley** dots the Is and crosses the Ts when it comes to issuing an invoice.

In last September's issue I chatted to Carolyn Henderson about the experience she had when taking a publisher to court for money she was owed. Such drastic action for most writers is rare, but it's useful to know there's a system in place for when things don't go to plan.

However, many writers experience problems with payments purely because they're unsure how to issue an invoice for their work in the first place. When it comes to the business of writing, being paid should be a simple transaction. A few basic invoicing steps can go a long way to ensure everything runs smoothly.

Confusion often arises because magazines and publishers all operate slightly different systems. For example, I've never invoiced DC Thomson for any of my features or fiction pieces that have appeared in *The People's Friend* or *The Weekly News*, and I've always been paid promptly. Yet I know other writers who also write for these publications and have always invoiced, because that's what they've been told to do.

Things tend to go wrong in these situations when you do something differently to the way you have in the past. If you've always been paid promptly by a publication without the need

to invoice, then don't suddenly start invoicing without querying this with the accounts department first.

Ask the editor

The best time to ask how the publication prefers paying its suppliers is when the editor gets in touch commissioning your idea, or accepting your submission. Many novice writers shy away from talking money, but there's no need. Magazines and publishers are legitimate businesses trying to make a profit, so they expect the conversation. You, as a writer, are a business supplier. Suppliers need paying for their services.

When the editor gets in touch, offering you the great news that they want your words, all you need to ask is: Do you need me to issue an invoice? This can be a useful way of opening the payment conversation in the first place.

Not every publication requires writers to issue invoices, especially smaller circulation magazines. One editor I write for simply goes through the published issue, page by page, and issues a cheque for the writer of each piece.

The majority, though, ask for an invoice. So what information should you put on this document?

Itemise your invoice

An invoice is a written request for payment, setting out details about the goods supplied (your words, and possibly accompanying pictures) and the amount you are charging for those goods. It does not need to be a complicated-looking document, nor does it need to be up for any design awards. All you need is the following information on a single sheet of paper:

- The word Invoice, to clarify that this is a demand for payment.
- Your name and address. While it's becoming rarer to receive a cheque in the post these days, an address will differentiate you from another writer of the same name, who also writes for the same publication, or group of publications. (Even if you write under a pseudonym, your invoice needs to be in your real name.)
- The buyer's name and address.

The invoice should be addressed to the magazine/publisher buying your work. It clarifies that they owe you the money.

- An invoice number. Each invoice should have its own unique reference number. Should you ever have a query with a publisher, and you've issued several invoices for several different pieces of work, this reference will help identify

the specific invoice you are querying. It needn't be complicated. A simple system using the year and an incremental reference number will suffice: 2018-1, 2018-2, 2018-3, etc.

- A description of the goods supplied. Be as specific as you can. Use the title of the piece you've used, and state for which issue and publication the piece is intended, if you have this information. Eg: Invoicing Instructions – *Writing Magazine*, Business of Writing – January 2018 issue. If you've been told to send the invoice to an accounts department, it can be useful to include the name of the commissioning editor and the date they accepted/commissioned the piece. This gives the accounts department an internal contact, should they have any queries.

- The amount. The editor will stipulate how much to invoice for. If they don't, then clarify this after you've asked the 'do you need me to issue you with an invoice?' question. It may be necessary to itemise the total figure. For example, a magazine may pay a rate for words and a different rate for photographs. Occasionally, I've been offered expenses too, so I've had to itemise these.

- The total invoice figure. If you have several itemised figures it's important there's a clear total, so the buyer knows exactly how much you're charging. You only need to charge VAT on an invoice if you are registered for VAT. Most writers aren't. (If you are, you'll already know about it!)

- The right currency. If you write for foreign publications, payments are usually in the home nation's currency. I've issued invoices in US dollars, Australian dollars, euros, Canadian dollars and even Indian rupees and Japanese yen. Don't try to convert the foreign payment into sterling. Simply invoice in your buyer's currency. The bank will do the conversion at your end when they receive the payment.

- Your bank details. You want paying, right? Make it as easy as possible. Most businesses pay directly into your bank account, so give them the sorting code (a six-digit number) and account number (eight digits) that you want the money paid into. If you're invoicing in a foreign currency you may find it useful to include a Swiftbic code and an Iban code. You'll find these on your bank statements. If not, contact your local branch.

- Other payment options. Do you have a PayPal account? If so, include it on your invoice. Many foreign publications prefer this payment method.

- Your payment terms. Unless otherwise agreed with your buyer, the standard payment term for invoices is thirty days after the date of the invoice, or delivery of the goods, whichever is the later. Publishing differs because many publishers pay after publication, which may be several months after you've delivered the work. Therefore, some publishers ask you to state thirty days after publication on your invoice. This can be a matter for negotiation, so it's always worth asking. The sooner you get your money the better. This is important because it determines when you can start chasing for an outstanding payment, and from when you can calculate late payment interest charges. If you become a regular contributor, terms may be stipulated in a contract.

- A due date can be useful. Although the due date can be worked out from the payment terms stipulated above, having a specific date makes it obvious when payment is expected. Some companies automatically schedule invoices for payment on their due date.

Send your invoice by email, in pdf format, to either the editor or the publisher's accounts department. The editor will usually inform you where to send it. Sometimes an editor wants to see the invoice first so they can authorise it for payment before forwarding it on to accounts.

Note the numbers

- **Purchase order** Many of my commissions, such as those from *Outdoor Photographer* or *BBC Countryfile* magazines, come with purchase order reference numbers. This is increasingly common for publications owned by large companies producing several different publications. It's a unique reference for your work that immediately tells the accounts department (sometimes based elsewhere in the country from the editorial department) which magazine your piece has been commissioned for. It also proves your invoice request is genuine. If you've been issued with a purchase order reference then you must include it on your invoice. You won't get paid otherwise.


• Pro-forma invoices

Some commissioning forms include pro-forma invoices pre-populated with all the relevant details, like purchase order references, amounts, and a description of the work, along with your name and address. All you need to complete are your banking details, and then sign it.

You don't have to use these if you don't want to. You can still issue your own invoice. However, why not take advantage of this work that's been done for you? I take the attitude that the accounts department recognise these forms, and I know they already contain all the key information. All I need to add are my banking details and my own invoice reference number.

• Self-billing invoices

If a publication says it doesn't need invoicing, you may still receive a self-billing invoice from the publisher. Essentially, their payments system won't make a payment unless it's paying out against an invoice. So to make the payment, they create an invoice on your behalf, and any self-billing invoice you may receive is just a copy of that auto-generated document. This is often produced a couple of days before they issue their remittance slip. It's a good sign. It means your money is on its way.

Invoices are not complicated documents. But they are an important part of the payment process. We should celebrate invoices, not fear them. It's proof that someone wants to buy our words, and that means we're in business as a writer. 

Business Directory: Credit control

A spreadsheet can help keep control of your invoices. Record:

The customer's name (magazine), the amount, date issued, due date, and invoice number.

Update this with the date the payment is received. (Over time, this data will reveal trends about how quickly a particular publication pays.)

If no payment has been received by the due date issue a Statement of Account. This means re-issuing your invoice, but changing the word 'Invoice' to 'Statement of Account'. Send it to the accounts department, politely requesting payment within the next seven days.

Late payments are usually administrative errors. Prompt chasing often soon rectifies this.

IN THE MOOD

Helen M Walters looks at the way Ambrose Bierce uses weather to create mood and atmosphere in *Beyond the Wall*

In this month's masterclass I want to highlight how aspects of the environment can be used to create atmosphere and mood in a story. *Beyond The Wall* by Ambrose Bierce demonstrates how reference to the weather and other natural conditions can accentuate the plot of a story and help to create a response in the reader. By using these references, the author prepares the reader for what sort of story they are going to get. In this case – downbeat, slightly spooky and ending badly. As always, you will benefit most from this masterclass by reading the story for yourself, at <http://writ.rs/wmjan18>

Beyond The Wall is a tale of an unnamed narrator visiting an old friend, Mohun Dampier, and finding him much changed in the years since they last met. The narrator first tells us that he is travelling back home from Hong Kong to New York and has stopped off in San Francisco. This provides the broad sense of place and context in which the story unfolds, that of a Californian winter.

We then read of the narrator arriving at the home of Dampier during a storm. Notice how both here and elsewhere in the story the choice of words to describe the weather is very vivid, helping to create a detailed sense of the experience. We have incessant rain splashing, the tempest creating torment, the murk of the rain and its monotonous sussuration. When we are told of the *rill of rainwater* running down the narrator's back, we as readers can almost feel the chill going down our own spines. The use of words has created a feeling that very directly transmits a sense of foreboding to the reader.

Note what else we are told. Dampier's house is described as being *ugly*. It has an unusual tower, and there are no flowers or grass surrounding it. As the narrator ascends into the tower, where Dampier has his room, we are told the staircase is dimly lit. This all works towards the prescience of death he feels which will turn out to be central to the story.

It is also significant that the narrator only hears the inexplicable tapping on the wall, which gives rise to Dampier's explanation of what has been happening to him over the preceding years, because there is a lull in the storm. The weather takes a hand in furthering the plot. Note also the careful use of the phrase *dead silence*. Again we are building up layers of meaning that transmit emotion and mood to the reader.

We then move to a story within a story as Dampier relates an incident from his past that has strongly affected him. The story starts out very differently from the main narrative and one thing that signifies the change of mood is that we are told the story began on a warm June day when Dampier first set eyes on a beautiful young woman. We further learn that the encounter took place in a garden and that the young woman's hat was decorated with flowers. It is hard to imagine a greater contrast with the dark tower at night with a storm raging outside.

CLICK HERE
TO READ
Beyond the Wall

As the reader has been led to suspect by all that has gone before, the romance and sunshine is short lived. As Dampier relates his tale, the full tragedy of his doomed affection for the young woman is revealed and we are brought back to the gloom and despair of the room in the tower and the stormy night which ultimately forms the backdrop to Dampier's own death.

This story is a great example of how the natural elements can be used to frame a story and intensify the action, the meaning and the emotion. In *Beyond The Wall* it really feels as though the reader is experiencing the power of the storm and the sense of foreboding it instils along with the narrator.

Weather or not...

We are notorious as a nation for our constant obsession with the weather, but nobody really wants to read long descriptions of it in a short story if they've just been placed there as padding and don't serve any purpose.

As we've seen from the Ambrose Bierce story, descriptions of weather and the natural environment can be useful in creating a particular feeling or mood in a story, but now I'd like to think about some other more active ways of using the weather in your stories.

What if the weather actually takes a hand in your plot?

Wind

There's a great scene in the film *Love Actually* where the character played by Colin Firth is working on the manuscript of his novel sitting outside by a lake. His love interest picks up a mug that had been weighting down the pages of manuscript and they all fly off into the lake. The couple both plunge in after them and this moves their relationship on as well as providing a great comic moment in the film. This is a perfect example of the weather in a story actually influencing the action.

What part could the wind play in your story? Maybe a sudden gust whips an important letter out of your main character's hands before they have a chance to read it. Or perhaps their last ten pound note blows

away on the breeze and leaves them penniless. Even more dramatically, what if the wind brings down a tree and blocks the road they need to travel down to accomplish their dearest desire in the story?

Of course, wind can also bring good things, from the joy of flying a kite to the powering of a windmill. Be creative about how you use it in your narrative.

Rain

Rain can put a real dampener on things. We can all relate to the misery of being soaked to the skin and feeling like our feet will never dry out. If you recreate that in your writing you'll certainly help drum up some sympathy for your character.

But what else can you do with rain? It can disrupt the best laid plans, of course. Ask yourself what might happen if a picnic at which someone was planning a romantic marriage proposal was rained off. What if the village fete has to be relocated to the nearby sports centre whose manager is the sworn enemy of one of the organisers? What about the school sports day being cancelled at the last minute because of a downpour. How would that feel to the parent of a child who struggles academically but is a brilliant athlete and has just lost their one opportunity to shine?

Of course, at its absolute extreme rain can cause flooding, landslides and destruction and that opens up endless possibilities for putting your characters in peril and giving them obstacles to overcome.

Snow

Snow can cause just as much havoc as rain. Think blocked roads, snowed in hilltop villages, cancelled flights.

But it can also be enormous fun. It opens up possibilities that don't exist at any other time, like snowball fights, building snowmen and sledging. Think about the effects of an unexpected falling of snow on someone who's never seen it before; maybe a small child, a puppy or someone who has just arrived from warmer climes.

Snow could influence your story in other ways. If you're writing a mystery

story don't forget that while snow can muffle the sound of footsteps it can also give away the presence of an interloper by revealing their footprints. Could that be the clue to whodunit?

And all the slipping and sliding that comes from icy compacted snow could throw all sorts of mayhem in the path of your characters.

Sunshine

The sun is often seen as benign and friendly and therefore may be used as an ingredient of stories that are going to be upbeat and happy. But if you want sunny weather to work for you in your plot it's worth also thinking about what it can do that's problematic.

Maybe you could give one of your characters sunburn or sunstroke? What events or opportunities might they miss out on as a result of that? And, of course, at the absolute extreme too much sun and too little rain can cause drought and serious hardship.

But what about some other unfortunate effects of sun? Maybe your character is given a beautiful bouquet of flowers and leaves them on the back seat of the car where they shrivel in the heat of an unexpectedly sunny day, thus sparking a huge row with the giver of the bouquet. Or perhaps they have made an exquisite chocolate cake with complicated decorations that accidentally gets left where the sun can melt it, destroying hours of work.

As we all know, being temporarily blinded by the rays of the sun can be dangerous. In your story, an event like that could lead to a collision or accident with far reaching consequences.

Ambrose Bierce successfully used adverse weather conditions to create a sombre mood and atmosphere in *Beyond The Wall*. Don't forget you can also subvert this idea in your own story. A beautiful sunny day can form the backdrop to heartbreaking news, and similarly a character can find perfect peace in the middle of a raging storm.

So don't just think about what the weather is doing in your story, think about what you can make it do to your story. Don't just describe it, make it really work for you by taking a hand in the action. **W**



PDFS PLEASE

Greta Powell looks at working with the increasingly popular pdf format

This month a couple of interesting queries arose, mainly involving different software when working with pdfs. The pdf format increasingly seems to be the main choice of writers when creating and publishing their online documents. In the following queries we will look at how to export a pdf document from InDesign to include any interactive elements. We then go on to discuss the possibilities of using the Publish Online option which has been available in InDesign since CC 2015 and is a useful but under-used option. We also address concerns importing Word styles to InDesign that can be mapped, edited and then updated to InDesign ones.

Q After writing and laying out my book in InDesign 2017 (Windows computer) I went to the Interactive panel to create hyperlinks and navigation buttons. After much tweaking I finally converted it to pdf with the intention of creating a living book for onscreen reading. Having spent ages working on this project, for some reason none of the hyperlinks or buttons work when previewed in pdf. I have no idea why and hoped you might be able to identify what I am doing wrong.

A This is probably due to the way you are converting the document to pdf. InDesign contains a number of different options that enable you to convert to pdf. These include using the built-in Adobe pdf presets or the Export command, both of which are found under the File menu. The latter option, Export, is probably the easiest one to work with for this. When you are ready to save the document go to Export and when the Export box opens click on the Save as Type drop down box selecting the Adobe PDF (Interactive) option from the list. By choosing the Interactive option the document should then retain all the links, buttons and rich media contained in the document.

• Publish Online

As you have InDesign 2017 installed you also have the option to use the 'Publish online' feature which can be used to publish your InDesign documents directly on to the Adobe website. This option will also let you retain all the interactive elements that have been included in the file. It can be accessed directly from the toolbar at the top of the screen and once clicked on, a screen containing two tabs will appear. The General tab lets you set various options including the choice to let your viewers download the document in pdf format.

Once in this dialogue box you then set any further options in the 'Advanced' tab where a pre-designed cover page can be uploaded or a specific predefined InDesign pdf preset can be applied. You can of course set up and create a pdf preset* of your own inside InDesign and use that. It is also

worth noting that the Advanced tab also offers you the option to include an image for the cover page which can be uploaded as a jpg or png. If you go to YouTube there is a full tutorial from Terry White who demonstrates the whole process for you: <http://writ.rs/pdfpresets>

* This online tutorial explains exactly how you can set up your own Adobe PDF presets: <http://writ.rs/adobepresetspdf> Publish Online is a very flexible process because it also lets you work with any previous uploaded documents that need editing or updating. Finally, once the document has been uploaded to the Adobe website it will be given a unique url which you can then distribute either from your website, via email or use on social media. An example of how these books look in the browser can be viewed here: <http://writ.rs/fivedaysfromnowhere>

Q I have a number of documents in Microsoft Word which I would like to rework in InDesign in order to create some interactive pdf files. Because of the size of the documents I want to bring across I wish to retain the original styles from Word and update them automatically in Word.

A Bring the Word document across to InDesign by using the Place command (File menu >Place) but make sure you click on the Show Import Options box. In this box you will see an option to Preserve Styles and Formatting from Text and Tables. Again, make sure this radio button is clicked. Then press OK to open the document in InDesign. The next thing to do is to look at your Paragraph/Character styles panels where all the previous Microsoft Word styles should appear in a list with a small square icon next to them. This identifies them as Word styles, not native InDesign ones. All you need to do now is click on the individual listed style and edit it in exactly the same way you would an InDesign one. Once these have been saved you will notice that the icon is gone and to all intents and purposes these are now standard InDesign files contained in the document, which means they can be edited or removed in the future

Adobe Creative Cloud 2018

A few months ago Adobe updated the Creative Cloud to its latest version, 2018. If you have a subscription to it and haven't already done so, it's available to upgrade at www.adobe.com

GET CONNECTED!

If you have a technical query for Greta, email info@gretapowell.com or use the contact page at www.gretapowell.com

Away from your desk

Get out of your garret for some upcoming activities and places to visit

Back soon!

The Riff Raff

The Riff Raff offers a lively writers' get together in a relaxed, fun atmosphere on 25 January with debut authors Emma Glass, Tara Westover, Will Dean, Fiona Tudor and Fiona Mitchell.

Details: 7-9pm, Effra Social, Brixton, London SW2 1DF; **website:** www.the-riffraff.com



© Alice Lubbock

Get Writing!

Meet *WM's* very own agony aunt Jane Wenham Jones in the splendid surroundings of Chez Castillon in this taster course to set your writing on track from 18 to 21 January.

Website: www.chez-castillon.com



Magic and Enchantment in Literature

This study day at the British Library on 27 January includes an evening private view of the exhibition Harry Potter: A History of Magic.

Website: <http://writ.rs/magiclit>

Edit your book

Start the New Year by getting your manuscript into shape after you've been on the Writers & Artists How to Edit Your Book workshop on 27 January.

Website: <http://writ.rs/howtoedityourbook>



Love your verse

Poet and author Ian Parks has two practical poetry masterclasses at Gladstone's Library in January: Approaches to Writing Poetry on 20 Jan and Love Poetry on 21 Jan.

Website: <http://writ.rs/ianparkspetryworkshop>



Jaipur Literature Festival

Some of the world's greatest minds gather to celebrate writers across the globe for the largest free event of its kind in Rajasthan between 25 and 29 January. We can dream, can't we?

Website: <https://jaipurliteraturefestival.org/>

NEIL SPRING

The author of ghost fiction shares his spooky stories with **Margaret James**



After writing two bestselling novels, *The Ghost Hunters* and *The Watchers*, there must have been a lot of pressure on young British writer Neil Spring to come up with something truly amazing for his third book – and he's done it. In *The Lost Village*, Neil has indeed written a truly special story set in the real village of Imber on Salisbury Plain.

Who or what inspired Neil to write fiction?

'As far as we know, I'm the first writer in the family, but many of us are creative, including my mother and my

subject I knew I wanted to write about eventually – the possibility of supernatural experiences. The paranormal. Much of my fiction is inspired by that research and I can't think of a course which could have equipped me better.'

The protagonist in both *The Ghost Hunter* and *The Lost Village* is the real life psychic investigator Harry Price. 'Harry is an elusive character,' says Neil. 'To some people, he was a scientist who was determined to discover the truth about life after death. But to others



Price's investigations, his letters and articles. Then I wove a story around those elements, exploring the many aspects of this fascinating character and discovering what set him on his path of investigation into the unknown. ITV then produced a one-off television film about Harry Price which was based on my novel *The Ghost Hunters*.

'I'm not sure anyone could claim to have known the real man behind the façade that he presented to the media, his followers and his critics. Harry was a businessman. But he was

also a skilled conjuror (and member of the Inner Magic Circle), a photographer, engineer and journalist. He was very defensive about his working-class origins, constantly seeking academic recognition and validation, and craving fame and publicity. I wanted to discover the truth about this man through fiction. I wanted to know why he was so determined to prove the existence of life after death, and why so many eminent psychologists and scientists were prepared to follow him on that quest.'

The Lost Village is narrated by Sarah Grey, Harry's (sometimes reluctant) assistant who has issues of her own to resolve. Sarah's a very likeable heroine. As a man, did Neil find it challenging to write in the first person from a female point of view?

'*The Lost Village* is the second novel I have written in Sarah's voice and it was lovely to find her again, this time with the benefit of knowing about the trials and tribulations she faced in *The Ghost Hunters*. The events in *The Lost Village* occur during an interlude halfway through that first book, while Sarah is disillusioned and drifting away from Harry Price. She's lost in so many ways and she misses the thrill of the chase.

"I think there's more evidence for the possibility of the supernatural than against it. I'm often asked if I am scared by the possibility of ghosts or life after death. The answer is not really."

brother,' he says. 'There was a prolific Welsh author called Howard Spring who produced a series of bestselling novels from 1934 onwards, and the jury is still out on whether there's any family connection here.

'While I was at Oxford I studied Philosophy, Politics and Economics, and I believe this paved the way for a career in writing fiction. Philosophy is a course that encourages you to question your perspectives and your reactions to those perspectives. How do we know that what we see is real? Can the laws of nature be broken? Is there a life beyond this one? Questions like this keep us curious about life and hold us in suspense, which is surely what writing fiction is all about'

'I focused my university thesis on the

he was a fierce sceptic, the scourge of every spiritualist medium with something to hide. He bequeathed his library of magical literature to the University of London. It's the strangest collection of its kind anywhere in the world, complete with rare and ancient volumes on the arts of magic and summoning ghosts.

'The library used to be based on the eighth floor of Senate House in London. The only way up was via a small lift, the same size and shape as a telephone box. The librarians used to call this the coffin.

'I came across a few pages written by Price's first secretary all about her surreal time working alongside him. This was the way in for me. I plundered the archives, rediscovering



LISTEN

TAP HERE
To hear an extract from *The Ghost Hunters*

‘It’s curious, but I find the gender of a character is never much of a challenge. I think the key is to write your characters with depth and understanding. What are their needs, their wants and desires? I’m not saying I always get this right, but for me those are the magic ingredients which help everything else fall into place.

‘I wanted to keep readers guessing all the way through *The Lost Village*. There are so many twists and turns that it needed to be plotted carefully to make the finale impactful and believable. But, towards the end, many of the characters did surprise me, and that’s always a lovely thing to experience, because it means the work is flowing and assuming a life of its own.’

Does Neil believe in ghosts and/or reincarnation himself?

‘Well, put it this way: I think there’s more evidence for the possibility of the supernatural than against it,’ he says. ‘I’m often asked if I am scared by the possibility of ghosts or life after death. The answer is not really. What bothers me is the

black and empty possibility that there is nothing after death. Somehow that’s more terrifying.

‘My research for my books has convinced me that there are some occurrences within nature that science cannot yet explain. Of course, that doesn’t mean science will never explain them. But, in fiction, the most important thing for me isn’t whether these things happen. It’s my characters’ reactions to those events.

‘Charles Dickens was the master of ghost stories and wrote my favourite, *The Signalman*. Susan Hill is of course a master of the craft, as is MR James. I’m thankful to these authors because I think ghost stories are important. They remind us to look back. After the chills and thrills and scares, in these tales there is always another, deeper story – about a character’s life – about how that person acted, how they lived, and how they loved.



‘Ghost stories make us curious about regular people and daily life. Hauntings in literature are subtle and complex: the causes are not only spirits but memories, ideas and landscapes like Imber, where *The Lost Village* is set.

‘Fingers crossed there’s likely to be another book in this series about Harry and Sarah. A character who might be their child turns up in my second novel, *The Watchers*, which is about the UFO phenomenon and is currently in development for a television adaptation. We’ll see what happens!’ [WM](#)

NEIL’S TOP TIPS

- Experiment. Take time to find the right voice for the story you want to tell.
- Write whenever you can. Before you put pen to paper, writing a novel can seem like a daunting task. But, if you persevere, you’ll get there. Just 500 words a day, over a year, results in a novel.

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“I wouldn’t hesitate to recommend them for their professionalism, customer care and post-production assistance, all at a reasonable price.”

Adrian Churchward *Moscow Bound and Dancing With Shadows*

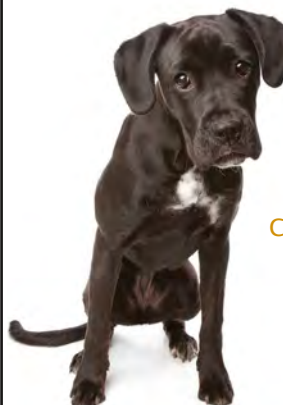
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WRITERS' NEWS

Your essential monthly round-up of competitions, paying markets, opportunities to get into print and publishing industry news.

New £5,000 award for Northern writer



Northern Book Prize

The Northern Book Prize is a new award created by independent publishers And Other Stories in partnership with New Writing North.

And Other Stories recently relocated to Sheffield. The new prize, launched at the Off the Shelf festival in October, aims to find a great new Northern writer, and demonstrates And Other Stories' commitment to new writing.

The prize is for a complete, unpublished work of fiction, which may be a novel, novella or short story collection in any style or genre, plus a one-page synopsis. The winner will receive a £5,000 prize/advance and a contract for worldwide publication, creative support to develop an unpublished manuscript, and developmental opportunities offered by New Writing North through the Northern Writers scheme. The winning writer will be announced at the Northern Book Prize award ceremony in June 2018.

The award is open for submissions until 1 February.

Details: www.andotherstories.org/2017/10/19/news/nbp/

A month in the sun

The Robert Louis Stevenson Fellowship 2018 is inviting applications.

The Fellowship offers four professional writers based in Scotland the opportunity of a month-long residency at the Hôtel Chevillon International Arts Centre at Grez-sur-Loing in France, with accommodation in a self-catering studio apartment, plus a stipend of £1,200.

To be eligible, writers should be practising writers based in Scotland, who meet the eligibility criteria for Scottish Book Trust's Live Literature database.

To apply, download and complete an application form, which requests information about the work the writer plans to carry out during the residency, and how the residency would further their development as a writer.

The closing date to apply is 31 January.

Details: email: applications@scottishbooktrust.com; website: <http://writ.rs/rlsfellowship2018>

Call for Kelpies



The Kelpies Prize 2018, for unpublished Scottish children's fiction, is inviting entries.

The winning author will receive £2,000 and their novel will be published in the Kelpies range of books published by Edinburgh publisher Floris Books.

Entries for the Kelpies Prize 2017 may be in the

Kelpies category for 8-11 year olds, or the KelpiesEdge category for 12-15 year olds. All entries must be set wholly or mainly in Scotland, and have Scottish themes and characters. Manuscripts in the Kelpies category should be between 30,000 and 60,000 words, and in the KelpiesEdge category, 30,000 to 70,000 words.

Submit complete, original, unpublished manuscripts. Type entries in 12pt font in double spacing on numbered pages. The writer's name must not appear on the manuscript. Include a completed application form, which can be downloaded from the website, with your entry.

Entry is free.

The closing date is 28 February.

Details: Kelpies Prize 2018, Floris Books, 2a Robertson Avenue, Edinburgh EH11 1PZ; website: www.florisbooks.co.uk/kelpiesprize/

Criminal magic



Otter Libris is an independent publisher of speculative fiction which needs stories for an upcoming anthology, *MCSI: Magical Crime Scene Investigation*. Writers should consider what tools detectives might use if the usual ones aren't good enough and they have to use a little magic. The story, 3,000-10,000

words, should be an urban fantasy involving a crime scene which forces the investigator to use magic, 'or engage the aid of a magical being to solve the crime'. Did the house sprite see what really happened in a domestic incident? Does the detective have a genie's lamp that will grant him one wish?

Comedy is welcomed, as are diverse protagonists and 'magic systems and magical creatures outside of the typical European-based fare'.

Reprints may be accepted if they are exceptional, multiple and simultaneous subs are not. Email stories with MCSI in the subject line as an attached doc or rtf file. The deadline is 31 January, 2018.

Response time is 'six to eight weeks after the closing date'. Payment is \$25 plus one contributor's copy (\$10 for reprints), for exclusive print, ebook, and audio rights for one year, and non-exclusive print, ebook, and audio rights for a period of five years

Details: MCSI: Magical Crime Scene Investigation, email: submissions@otterlibris.com; website: <http://otterlibris.com>

Fully booked



Fancy running your own bookshop? Want a unique holiday? The Open Book is a bookshop in Wigtown, Scotland's official National Book Town, which allows you to have both at once by running a used bookshop for a fortnight.

The shop is the inspiration of Jessica Fox, an American who in 2013 while working as a storyteller for NASA decided she would love to 'work in a Scottish bookshop by the sea'. Now, via the website AirBnB, Jessica rents out the Open Book for £36 per night, on the agreement that during that time you serve as a manager for the shop.

She told *The Scotsman*, 'It sounds like a romantic comedy, but I kept dreaming of working in a bookshop by the sea. I could see it as clear as day – right down to the rain outside. Wigtown is an amazing, unique place. It has a population of only 900 but it has sixteen bookshops and they welcome people from around the world with open arms. I thought, "I'm sure I'm not the only crazy American out there who'd love to run a bookshop," and that's how The Open Book was born.'

Fox is now in discussions with Chinese and South Korean companies to develop similar 'book towns' in those countries. Meanwhile if you'd like to be manager of the Open Book you can 'book' at www.airbnb.co.uk/rooms/7908227. Be warned though, the shop is so popular it is fully 'booked' until 2020.

Medical verse

The 2018 Hippocrates Prize for Poetry and Medicine is inviting international entries in two categories: Open and Health Professional Awards. In each category there are prizes of £1,000, £500 and £250. Winning poems will be published online, and in an anthology.

The competition is for an original, unpublished poem on a medical subject, up to fifty lines. The writer's name must not appear on the manuscript. Proof of health profession-related employment is required from entrants in the Health Professional category. Poems may be entered online or by post. If entering by post, put 'Open' or 'Health Professional' in the top right hand corner to indicate the category and include a separate sheet with full contact details and the title and first line of the poem.

The fee for online entries is £7 per poem, and for postal entries, £10.

The closing date is 1 March.

Details: The Hippocrates Prize, 37 Newbold Terrace East, Leamington Spa, Warwickshire CV32 4EY; website: www.hippocrates-poetry.org

UK MAGAZINE MARKET

Fine and dandy

BY TINA JACKSON



The multi-award-winning British edition of *GQ*, edited since 1999 by Dylan Jones, is the UK's leading men's style magazine.

GQ's hallmarks are high quality, wide-ranging and intelligent coverage of topics, meticulous attention to detail and excellent writing by leading names. Because of this *GQ* is at the forefront of the men's lifestyle sector, and continues to increase its audience where other magazines have fallen by the wayside.

'If you go back to the mid-90s, the world was a different place,' said Dylan. 'Most of the competitors to *GQ* were quite ribald. If you analyse our magazine, there's almost no sexual content. The market has determined it doesn't want the sexual objectification of women. We've always made a concession to what's popular – but what happened in the 90s

was you had magazines like *Maxim* and *FHM* that sold in huge numbers. Their USP was sex and if you keep pushing that button you veer towards pornography. That coincided with the pervasive nature of digital, where pornography is easily available, and that heralded the demise of the lads' magazines. We've always occupied the elegant end of the marketplace.'

Prioritising quality has only increased *GQ*'s appeal. 'The readership has become broader,' said Dylan. 'You're still trying to attract the generation who grew up with the magazine, and every level underneath that. We manage the balance with incredible difficulty, by trying to make what we produce as good as possible. We strive for quality. We live in an age of space junk where everything is competing for attention, so we try very hard to maintain quality, and improve quality – I'm loath to sink to the level of clickbait.'

GQ operates across digital platforms as well as print. 'The digital side of things is very important. I think we've actually managed to increase our print sales, but we know we have to engage with a digital world, and so we do. Is one successful at the expense of the other? I don't know.'

The magazine is aimed at mostly at men, with the sweet spot being 28-35. In terms of content, said Dylan: 'You have to have a certain amount of repetition. I think what you have to do is anticipate what your reader wants, and change it.'

As the editor, keeping *GQ* commercially and critically successful are his priorities. 'The most important thing to me as an editor is staying in business. And the other thing is to make sure what we do is better than anyone else. A good feature for us is something people can't get anywhere else.'

GQ is a style magazine, but its coverage goes way beyond clothing and grooming. 'At a very basic level, our job is to tell men which trousers they should buy,' said Dylan. 'But there's a million other things we cover – culture, lifestyle, travel, politics, fitness, sport, food and drink – to make the publication as scintillating as possible.'

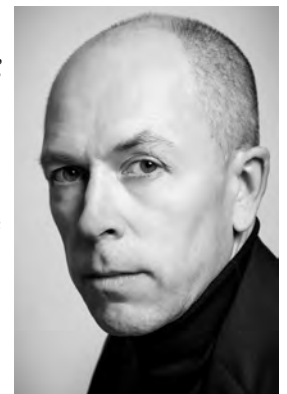
Dylan is always pleased to hear from excellent new writers. 'There aren't as many good writers as there used to be, which is a problem. We're always on the lookout for younger writers. I don't know if people these days would rather become bloggers, but we're always going to be happy to hear from writers.'

His advice for prospective writers is: 'Always find the most senior editorial person – that's me – and write to them directly. Don't make it too long. And show me what you can do.'

Although he's one of the most successful editors in the industry, there's nothing unapproachable about Dylan. 'It's important to be accessible, and talk to people. How can I know anything if I don't talk to people?'

Payment varies.

Details: email: onlineworkexperience@condenast.co.uk; website: www.gq-magazine.co.uk



FLASHES

Jonathan Webb edits *Today's Railways UK*, a monthly about contemporary British rail. We welcomes illustrated articles about individual railways and tramways. Contact before submission. Payment is £50 per page.

Details: email: editorial@platform5.com; website: www.platform5.com

Amazon Studios is producing a TV series based on JRR Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* with co-operation from the Tolkien Estate.

The *Northern Echo* announced that its former evening sister title the *Northern Despatch*, is returning as a 'part-paid, part-free' weekly newspaper serving Darlington, and other towns in the south of County Durham.

Amazon named David Grann's nonfiction book *Killers of the Flower Moon* as its Best Book of the Year 2017.

Two London councils received a final warning to stop publishing fortnightly newsletters or risk court action by the government. Hackney and Waltham Forest councils have published twice-monthly newspapers in defiance of government guidelines that they should be no more than quarterly. Holdthefrontpage website reported.

'If I'm not at my desk by 4am, I feel like I'm missing my most productive hours.'
Dan Brown

GLOBAL ONLINE MARKET

Talk tech

BY GARY DALKIN



The Verge is a hugely popular US website covering the way technology and science are changing the way we live. The editors are primarily interested in feature articles of 1,500-3,000 words which show readers something new: an unexpected side effect of an app, a surveillance programme people aren't aware of, the inside story of a product's development, a cutting-edge research programme, or an online community or trend that's escaped notice. They are particularly interested in stories where technology intersects with other areas, for instance, influencing health, politics, culture, business, or other fields.

Topics of especial interest include scientific research, climate change, new developments in transport and the interface of science, technology and culture.

Do not send a finished article, but contact *The Verge* with a clear and concise pitch conveying the essence of the story you plan to write and why it matters. The best pitches show a deep knowledge of the subject as well as give a sense of the angle or insight you plan to pursue. If your story depends on access to a person or company, you should say whether you have obtained it already (and if not, what your prospects are). You should also include a brief description of your qualifications to write the story and links to previously published work. Don't pitch a first-person opinion piece unless you are an expert who can provide an important context on a significant area of technology.

Email science/research based pitches to elizabeth.lopato@theverge.com. Pitches orientated more towards the cultural aspects of technology should be emailed to culturepitches@theverge.com

The Verge is published by Vox Media and pays around 30¢ per word. Full pitching guidelines, including many more examples of the sorts of stories required, are on the website: www.theverge.com/write-for-the-verge

Tell a gothic tale

Theatre Cloud's Tell a Tale competition invites gothic stories to celebrate a new production of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*.

The new production will be touring theatres in the UK between February and May 2018.

Short gothic fiction that reflects contemporary fears is invited up to 500 words, using this quote from the play's script as inspiration: '*It might be possible, of course, that far from being one, we may possess two selves.*'

At each city or town on the tour, a filmed reading will

be made of a selected story, which will be shortlisted. The overall winner will receive £300.

All the submissions will be uploaded to Theatre Cloud's website and every entrant will receive a £10 ticket offer on up to two tickets for a performance of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* at their nearest theatre.

Entry is free. Entrants need to register with Theatre Cloud before uploading their entry.

The closing date is 21 April, 2018.

Website: <http://writ.rs/tellatalegothicfiction>

Chip away!

Running for the third year, the ChipLitFest Short Story Competition is inviting entries. There is a first prize of £500, a second prize of £100 and a third prize of £50. This year's competition is sponsored by storyselling site Penny Shorts, and the top ten stories will have the chance of being featured there. The judge is novelist Rachel Seiffert.

The competition is for short stories up to 5,000 words. All entries must be original and unpublished. Send stories typed in any font at 12pt, 1.5 or double spaced, on numbered pages. Include the title and word count on the first page. No cover sheet is necessary for online entrants. Postal entrants should include a cover sheet with details of name, address, email address, telephone and story title. The author's name must not appear on the manuscript.

Send entries by email as doc or pdf files. The name of the attachment should be the exact story title.

The entry fee is £5 for stories up to 2,500 words, and £8 for stories between 2,500 and £5,000 words. Pay this by cheques made out to ChipLitFest or by PayPal.

The closing date is 7 February.

Details: CLF (PSSSC), Cleevestones, Main Street, Chipping Norton OX7 5PH; website: www.chiplitfest.com/short-story-competition

Sun seeking

Entries are invited for the University of Sunderland in Association with Waterstones Short Story Award 2017. The competition is in two categories. Adult writers may submit stories up to 2,500 words, and the prize is £500. Writers aged 11 to 17 may submit stories up to 1,500 words, and the prize is £200.

All entries must be original and unpublished. Entries are welcomed from international writers, published and unpublished. Send entries as doc files by email, including the receipt for the entry fee, which is payable through the online system.

Entry is free for 11-17 year olds, and £5 per story in the adult category.

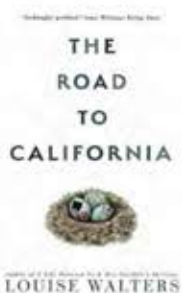
The closing date is 1 March.

Website: <https://sunstoryaward.wordpress.com/>

UK FICTION MARKET

Boutique books

BY TINA JACKSON



LOUISE WALTERS BOOKS

Louise Walters Books is a newly launched indie boutique publishing company of literary fiction from the author of acclaimed novels including 2014's *Mrs Sinclair's Suitcase*.

'I'm hoping to publish literary and literary/commercial novels and novellas for adult readers,' said Louise. 'The genre is less important than the quality of the writing. I'm looking, like everybody else, for a cracking read that I can't put down. I'm looking for fantastic writing, great characterisation and a plot that flows out from that. I'm not looking for anything too commercial. I'm not looking for clichéd and tired plots. The quality of the writing is the first thing I'll be considering with every submission. Make me sit up and take notice!'

Louise set up LWP in September. 'I'd been considering publishing for a couple of years. Self-publishing my own (second) novel was a great experience. I love project managing and seeing a book through from first ideas to the finished article on the shelves.'

LWP is starting small but hoping to build up momentum. 'At least for the first few years,' said Louise, 'I hope to publish one book per season, and take it from there. I am going to keep my feet on the ground and start slowly, building up to four titles a year, as I mentioned. If the business goes well I would love to increase the number of titles, and perhaps one day publish children's books too.'

Louise is looking for character-based literary and reading group fiction (novels and novellas), and is happy to receive professionally presented submissions from writers who take

their work seriously. 'Edit your words thoroughly and be honest with yourself about the quality of your work. Too many submissions are simply not ready, in terms of the writing, presentation or concept. Sometimes all of these!' Send the first two chapters, or around twenty pages, with a synopsis and brief covering letter, either by post or by email in a single Word file with the title of the novel in the subject line.

'LWB will publish in print, digital and sometimes audio. Each book will have its own plan; so some I will publish in ebook first, followed by paperback a few weeks later. Some I will aim to publish across all three formats simultaneously. Some may be ebook and print on demand. It will depend on the genre.'

LWB will pay royalties.

Details: Louise Walters Books, PO Box 755, Banbury, OX16 6PJ; email: submissions@louisewaltersbooks.co.uk

Becoming Gatsby



© Daniel Gale Sotheby's International Realty

The real-life Gatsby estate and mansion is for sale. Which is to say that the former Long Island home of railroad heiress Mary Harriman Rumsey is on the market. Rumsey was a friend of the author of *The Great Gatsby*, F Scott Fitzgerald, and it is generally accepted that the writer based the palatial home of Jay Gatsby on Rumsey's Normandy-style house at 235 Middle Neck Road, Sands Point, New York. So if you fancy an 11,955 square-foot American home complete with 13 bedrooms and 8.5 bathrooms, and

have \$16,880,000 to spare you might even snap yourself a bargain; the price has dropped 15% since September. The estate includes five acres of land, a private beach, caretaker's cottage, guest house, boathouse, tennis court and swimming pool.



It's a Funny Old World

BY DEREK HUDSON



'Writer's block afflicts many writers at one stage or another, and many writers have had somewhat – er, eccentric – ways of dealing with it,' revealed the Interesting Literature website.

'GK Chesterton would pick up his bow and shoot arrows out of his window at a tree in his garden; perhaps this distracted him from the immediate and onerous task of writing, or perhaps it concentrated his mind more sharply, fixing his thoughts to a very literal "target". Victor Hugo liked to write naked to help cope with writer's block. He would have servants take his clothes from him, with strict instructions not to return them to him until he had met his deadline.'



• The Society of Authors invited digital minister Matt Hancock to become a member.

They were recognising that he had penned a book called *Masters of Nothing* about the financial crash in 2011.

Then came the crunch. They informed him that it would cost him £100 a year, or handing over his royalties.

He responded: 'You can have the royalties. There's no way that book will ever make £100 a year.'



• Take care with your emojis, says Keith Broni, 27, who describes himself as the first ever professional emoji translator.

You might consider the symbol you add to a Facebook message to be friendly, but beware. In the Middle East the thumbs up is considered to be insulting, and Latin Americans feel the same about the A-okay character.

So, to avoid any such misunderstanding he is compiling an emoji etiquette guide.

Originally meaning pictograph, the word emoji comes from Japanese.



• *Wisdom & Wordplay* by Robert Eddison, journalist, public speaker and playwright, provides 300 original aphorisms (concise statements of a principle).

His much admired one-liners include: 'To gluttons dessert is always worth the weight.'

'Narcissists have only themselves to praise.'

'A life well-lived is to die for.'

'A politician's thick skin is mainly scar tissue.'

'Given enough notice, anyone can appear spontaneous.'



• TV's Kirstie Allsopp, on the contents of a cookbook written by her great great-grandmother: 'There's a section on how to deal with a dead body if your cooking kills anyone.'

• One of the words of the recent day in ForReadingAddicts website: Scrumdiddlyumptious: 'extremely tasty; delicious', or of a person 'very attractive'.

• From the Unknown Punster site: 'I asked the librarian if the library has any books about paranoia.' She whispered: 'They're right behind you.'

FLASHES

Interzone is the UK's longest-running science fiction and fantasy magazine, and comes out every two months. Short story submissions (one per magazine issue) are welcomed up to 10,000 words. Submit through the online submission system.

Website: <http://ttopress.com/interzone/>

A free weekly newspaper, the *Bristol Observer* has ceased publication with its Trinity Mirror owners blaming 'changing reader habits and customer needs'.

Bloomsbury Children's Books is to publish 'critically acclaimed' US author Renée Watson for the first time in the UK after buying world rights of five new titles from Bloomsbury Children's Books US. The first title, *Piecing Me Together* appears in February, *The Bookseller* reported.

The *Financial Times* and McKinsey 2017 Business Book of the Year Award went to Amy Goldstein for *Janesville: An American Story* (Simon & Schuster).

'What I really feel I'm teaching is patience – patience and stubbornness and discipline and resilience.'

Bret Anthony Johnson, director of creative writing, Harvard University

GLOBAL LITERARY MARKET

Set off down the Boulevard

BY JENNY ROCHE



Although submissions of fiction, non-fiction and poetry are welcome from experienced writers, *Boulevard Magazine* is particularly interested in publishing the work of less experienced or unpublished writers who show 'exceptional promise'.

Submissions of prose should be a maximum 8,000 words and should not be science fiction, erotica, westerns, horror, romance or children's stories as these will not be considered. For poetry, submit no more than five poems of a maximum 200 lines. Light verse will not be considered. Payment rates are \$100-\$300 for prose and \$25-\$250 for poetry.

All submissions should be previously unpublished in print or online and although multiple and simultaneous submissions will be considered you should withdraw your work if it becomes accepted elsewhere.

As email submissions will not be considered submit your work with your name and contact details by post, include a SAE for a response, or use the Submittable link on the website. There is a \$3 fee to submit online.

Details: Boulevard Magazine, 6614 Clayton Road, Box 325, Richmond Heights, MO 63117, USA; website: www.boulevardmagazine.org/guidelines

Express your values creatively



The John Byrne Award invites 16-25 year olds living in Scotland to express their values in a creative way no matter whether that be through writing, essays, poetry, art, music, video, photography or other means. It is the values behind the creative form, rather than

the techniques used, that are of importance. Have a look at the website for how others have achieved this.

There is a circumplex on the website to inspire a value or set of values and entries should consist of 200 words or a two-minute sound or video file describing the value your entry expresses and why.

Judges will be looking to award marks in the three areas of personal exploration, society and change and the technical execution of the piece. See website for further information of the judging criteria.

The best entry each month will win £100 and all entries will be submitted to the Award with the winner receiving £1,000. There will also be £500 prizes for values expressed in each of the writing, visual, music and video forms.

To submit, a message can be sent via Facebook or email or by completing the 'Share Your Work' form on the website. If the files you want to send are over 25mb it is suggested you use Wetransfer.com.

Email: Share@JohnByrneAward.org.uk

Website: www.johnbyrneaward.org.uk/how-to-enter

A Nobel return



Following last year's controversial decision to honour American singer Bob Dylan, the Nobel Prize for Literature returned to safer ground for the 2017 award, selecting an artist who is both popular, but critically, a hugely acclaimed literary figure,

the British author Kazuo Ishiguro. The writer, best known for *The Remains of the Day* and *Never Let Me Go* received a cheque for 9 million SEK, approximately £836,000.

The author told the Guardian, 'It was completely not something I expected, otherwise I would have washed my hair this morning. It was absolute chaos. My agent phoned to say it sounded like they had just announced me as the Nobel winner, but there's so much fake news about these days it's hard to know who or what to believe so I didn't really believe it until journalists started calling and lining up outside my door.'

Ishiguro received the Prize, which is for a body of work, not a single title, from Professor Sara Danius, Permanent Secretary of the Swedish Academy, who described his writing style as a mix of Jane Austen and Franz Kafka, noting, 'But you have to add a little bit of Marcel Proust into the mix, and then you stir.'

Book boom

Over 750,000 books were self-published in the US in 2016, according to Bowker, the exclusive US agent for International Standard Book Numbers. This was an 8% increase over 2015. Given that many self-published books are digital only, and that ebooks are not required to have an ISBN, the actual total of self-published books in the US could be considerably higher, perhaps even topping the million mark per year.

Asterix and the massive windfall



The original cover art for the classic Asterix graphic novel, *Asterix and the Banquet* (French title, *Le Tour de Gaule*) was auctioned in Paris recently, fetching a remarkable €1.4m. The illustration for the 1965 book was signed by Asterix creators Albert Uderzo and René Goscinny and had been expected to fetch around €200,000. The art for the cover of *Asterix and the Chieftain's Shield* raised €1.2 million in the same sale at the Drouot auction house. The auction came ahead of the October launch of the 37th book in the series, *Asterix and the Chariot Race*.

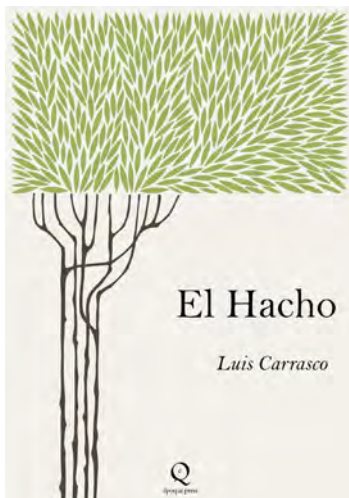
UK FICTION MARKET

Contemporary litfic

BY TINA JACKSON

Q

époque press



new authors. As we develop we would like to be in a position to put out more titles each year.'

Epoque Press is looking to seek out and publish new literary talent. 'At the moment we are specifically looking for novels and collections of short stories. As our name alludes to, we are looking for work which is of this time, period, era, and at the same time has a timeless quality to it. We are looking for new and strong voices, works which are imbued with a strong sense of character or place and works which make us think about what it means to be alive today. The writing will be bold and not shy away from its subject matter.'

In terms of submissions Epoque Press is looking for literary fiction – novels or collections of short stories. 'We have deliberately not been specific on genre as we feel that there is quite a blurring of lines between genres and we wouldn't want to miss out on any gems because we have been too restrictive up front. We are specifically seeking out strong and unique voices which challenge us to think about what it means to be alive today, to live within this current Epoque.'

Epoque Press is looking for fearless literary writers. 'Our advice for prospective authors, without wanting to sound clichéd, is to write from the soul – they have to lay themselves bare upon the page and not shy away from their subject matter. They need to find their own voice, a strong voice which packs a punch and submerges the reader in their work.'

Prospective authors should submit a complete manuscript (doc or pdf) and a short synopsis by email with the subject line 'General Submissions', the title of their work and their name.

Epoque Press publishes in print format in paperback with the option to also have the work available in eformat, and pays royalties.

• Epoque Press is also looking for submissions to its quarterly ezine. 'Each quarter we will be inviting short story, poetry, photography and visual art submissions based on a specific theme. This quarter the theme is "Beneath our Feet". At present we can not pay for submissions to our ezine but we are hoping that it will both serve as a means of promoting individuals' work whilst also helping the cross fertilisation of ideas across different art forms. You never know, a writer may see a photograph and it will be the catalyst for their next novel, and vice versa, a photographer may read a short story and it will inspire a new series of photographs.'

Details: email: submissions@epoquepress.com; website: www.epoquepress.com

Epoque Press is a new independent literary publishing company helmed by Sean Campbell and Chris Rowland. We only went live on 11 October 2017,' said Sean. 'We decided to set up Epoque Press because we are both passionate about great literature. We've watched as a number of smaller independent publishers have championed great new work which may otherwise not have been brought to attention (publishers such as Galley Beggar Press, Tramp Press and Salt Publishing). We do not see ourselves in competition but as broadening the options for authors who are seeking publication. We hope that our presence will contribute to more great writers getting their work out there.'

In Epoque Press's first year, Sean and Chris are looking to publish four to five titles. 'We want to make sure we can build a relationship with our authors and work together through every stage of the publishing lifecycle to bring their work to the public in a high quality manner. We are also very passionate about upholding the very best in design standards and we want to make sure the author is actively involved in this process. By being very focused on a small number of titles in our first year we hope to demonstrate our commitment and dedication to our authors. At the minute we are very much focused on our first two years and seeking out and supporting prospective



The price is right

Patrick Forsyth on price setting and value for money

Almost as satisfying as writing for *Writing Magazine*, my second novel, *Loose Ends*, was published in November. I know: but if I was not sufficiently marketing-orientated to put a plug in the column, then I should not be writing it. That said let me raise one issue about which I had to make a decision: price.

We all want value for money. We all think we make rational decisions. Yet the pricing tactic of setting prices just below round figures, from £9.99 for a book to £19,995 for a car, is well proven to work. People know £9.99 is virtually a tenner, yet we still buy more at such a price. Human psychology will doubtless remain a mystery for a while yet. Companies take advantage of this (sometimes in a way that might be regarded as unfair, for example the use of so-called confusion pricing, which hinders consumers making objective comparisons – as with mobile phone contracts).

One method that is not in that category and which can be profitably used for books is discounts. Many book prices are discounted. Again the effectiveness of this is well proven: a customer will weigh up the advantages, and disadvantages, of buying and they only buy when the pluses outweigh the minuses. A discount adds one extra thing to the plus balance; it makes obtaining each sale just a little easier to do. So, my book, a paperback, is priced at £8.99, but I know I will sell many at £7.99 (if you contact me as a reader, mention this!). I will also sell copies that I must post and offering to do so post free has the same positive effect. These details must be costed out and, in my case, I had to persuade a publisher of the logic of it. It's a decision to consider, while remembering that once price is set it must remain so for some time.

FLASHES

Clare Dowdy edits *Furnace*, a quarterly online magazine on industry and manufacturing, which launched in October. Contact through the website with editorial enquiries.

Website: <http://furnacemag.com/>

Hannah Baker is now editor of the *Bristol Post*, succeeding David Clensy who left in August to join *South West Business Insider*.

The next anthology of work by members of the Crime Writers' Association will be called *Mystery Tour*, and will be edited by Martin Edwards, and published by Orenda Books.

The Press Association has overhauled its editorial systems to allow the agency's newsroom to take a digital-first approach.

Dame Jacqueline Wilson has been awarded a prize as part of the British Academy Children's Awards to recognise her contribution to children's TV and media through the adaptation of her stories.

Ipswich Star editor Brad Jones is now also responsible for the *East Anglian Daily Times*.

US writer Edwidge Danticat is the 25th laureate of America's Neustadt Prize for Children's Literature, which recognises 'outstanding literary merit in literature worldwide'.

'The greatest part of a writer's life is spent in reading, in order to write a man will turn over half a library to make one book.'

Samuel Johnson

GLOBAL MOUNTAIN MARKET

Aim for the top

BY PDR LINDSAY-SALMON

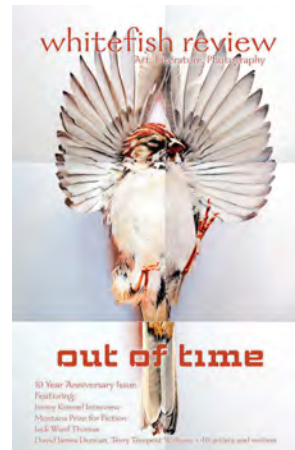
Whitefish Review is a US print journal which publishes 'the distinctive literature, art, and photography of mountain culture from national and international writers'.

It currently needs submissions for issue 22. Guidelines are sparse as there is no theme for this issue. Every issue features a previously unpublished writer or artist chosen by the editors, 'as part of their mission to discover and nurture budding talent'.

For fiction, non-fiction, essays or narratives, submit one piece of no more than 5,000 words in doc or docx format. For poetry submit no more than three poems in one document.

Response time is 'reasonable'. Payment and rights are discussed on acceptance.

Website: www.whitefishreview.org



Look north

The Northern Writers' Awards from New Writing North are open for entries for the 2018 awards.

The awards, worth a total of £40,000, support works in progress by new, emerging and established writers from the North of England (defined as the areas covered by Arts Council England in Yorkshire, North East and North West. The awards are in the following categories:

- **Northern Writers' Awards for Fiction and Narrative Non-Fiction:** £500 to £5,000 to support emerging and established writers to complete works in progress and develop manuscripts. Submissions may be fiction in any genre, including novels, novellas and collections of short stories, or narrative non-fiction with stylistic and structural similarities to fiction. Prose writers are not eligible to submit if the work is currently part of a book deal. Submit 3,000-6,000 words of an original, unpublished prose extract or up to three short stories of up to 2,000 words each. Include a synopsis.

- **Northern Writers' Awards for Poetry:** £500 to £5,000 to support emerging and established poets to complete full-length works in progress and develop manuscripts. Submit up to thirty poems and a commentary describing the proposed project. All work must be original and unpublished.

- **Northern Writers' Awards for Children's and Young Adult Fiction:** £500 to £5,000 to support emerging and established writers to complete works in progress and develop manuscripts of original, unpublished children's fiction. Submit 3,000-6,000 words of a prose extract or up to three short stories up to 2,000 words and a synopsis.

- **The Northern Book Prize** (see p72)

- **TLC Free Reads Scheme:** Up to five emerging or established poets, prose writers and children's/YA writers working on a work in progress will receive an in-depth editorial critique worth £300. Submit 3,000-6,000 words in total, or up to thirty poems.

- **Andrea Badenoch Fiction Award:** £2,000 for first-time female fiction writers aged 42+. Send 3,000-6,000 words of a work in progress (prose fiction or short stories).

- **The Arvon Award:** One prose writer will have the opportunity to undertake an Arvon course. Submit 3,000-6,000 words of prose or three short stories (all genres of fiction, children's fiction and creative non-fiction are eligible).

- **Northumbria Student and Alumni Award:** £2,000 to a writer of fiction or poetry who is a final year or recent graduate of Northumbria University. Submit 3,000-6,000 words of prose or up to thirty poems.

- **Northumbria University/Channel 4 Writing for Television Awards – Serial Drama:** A bursary of £3,000 and a writing placement on *Hollyoaks* for a new TV writer. Send up to ten pages of script, a short synopsis and an original storyline for *Hollyoaks* (600 words).

- **Northumbria University/Channel 4 Writing for Television Awards – TV Drama:** A mentoring placement with Bonafide Films worth £3,000. Send up to ten pages of script, a short synopsis and an original storyline for the first episode of a new TV drama (600 words).

- **Word Factory Apprentice Award:** Mentoring from Jenn Ashworth and a £1,000 bursary for writers who have not yet published a full-length work of fiction. Send a short story up to 2,000 words.

- **Cuckoo Young Writer Award:** £200 for a young writer (14-18) of poetry, prose or creative non-fiction. Send 2,000 words of prose or up to ten poems.

- **Matthew Hale Award:** A support package worth £500 for a young writer. Nominations for this award should be made by parents, teachers or other adults.

All applications must be made through the online submission system.

The closing date is 1 February.

Website: <http://northernwritersawards.com/>

UK SPECIFIC MARKET

Angry Robot hunts

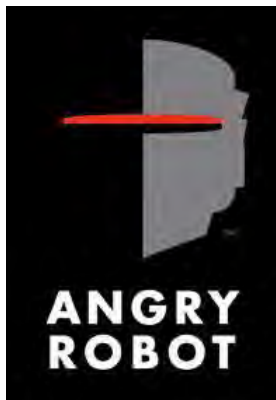
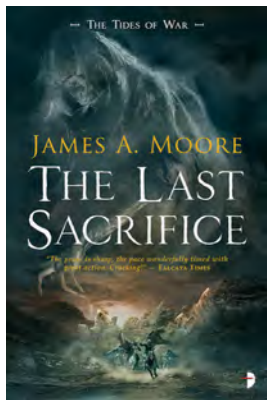
BY GARY DALKIN

Angry Robot Books, one of the UK's leading imprints for speculative fiction, is having an open call for submissions until 31 December. Publisher and MD Marc Gascoigne and his editorial team will consider unpublished science fiction and fantasy, including various sub-genres such as alternative history, military SF, space opera, epic fantasy, steampunk, cyberpunk, dieselpunk, silkpunk, anypunk, grimdark, utopian fiction, modern fantasy, cli-fi, unclassifiable SF/fantasy mash-ups, and so on. Books must be written in English by authors who do not have a literary agent. Manuscripts must be complete and 70,000-130,000 words. No graphic novels, short stories or novellas. Submissions must be aimed at adult readers. This does not mean that they can not feature teenage protagonists, but the books themselves should not be Young Adult.

Use Times New Roman, 12 point, double-line spaced. Include page numbers. Include everything in one document: your name and contact details, the name of your book, and the word count; a one-sentence summary of your book; a synopsis of the book, maximum two pages, as formatted above. If the book is the first of a series, summarise further volumes in one paragraph. Introduce yourself in one paragraph. Include anything notable in the SF community, and any social media links. Finally include the full text of your novel. Do not include a cover letter. Only one submission per person.

Last time Angry Robot ran a similar programme they received almost 1,200 submissions, so send only your very best work and be sure to follow the guidelines to the letter. Authors who have gone on to successful publication via previous Angry Robot open submission periods include Wesley Chu, Peter McLean, Lee Collins, and Lee Battersby.

Full guidelines are on the website: www.angryrobotbooks.com/open-door-2017-guides-faq/



Verse for Ver

Ver Poets are inviting entries for the Ver Poets Open Poetry Competition 2018.

The competition, which will be judged by Adrian Buckner, is for original, unpublished poems on any theme up to thirty lines. Poems may be on any theme and in form.

There is a first prize of £600, a second prize of £300 and a third prize of £100.

Send two copies of each poem, typed clearly on single sides of A4. The poet's name must not appear on the manuscript. Include a completed entry form, which may be downloaded from the website, with each entry. All entries must be made by post.

The entry fee is £4 per poem, or £10 for three and £2 per poem thereafter. Cheques should be made payable to Ver Poets.

The closing date is 1 April.

Details: Competitions Secretary, 181 Sandridge Road, St Albans, Herts AL1 4AH; website: <https://verpoets.co.uk>

And another thing...



'Be ruthless about protecting writing days, ie, do not cave in to endless requests to have "essential" and "long overdue" meetings on those days. The funny thing is that, although writing has been my actual job for several years now, I still seem to have to fight for time in which to do it. Some people do not seem to grasp that I still have to sit down in peace and write the books, apparently believing that they pop up like mushrooms without my connivance. I must therefore guard the time allotted to writing as a Hungarian Horntail guards its firstborn egg.'

JK Rowling

'(John) Cooper Clarke began to write his first poems at thirteen. By fourteen he'd "got a real thing for it". Despite his obvious way with words he was "discouraged at every turn from relying on poetry as a way of making a living". There were, he points out, few role models.



"Up until me, really, most poets had to do another job, they kept it as a hobby. But I was quite pig-headed about it. I thought if you write poetry that the public like, they will reward you."

Duncan Seaman, interviewing the Bard of Salford



'You should never read just for "enjoyment." Read to make yourself smarter! Less judgmental. More apt to understand your friends' insane behavior, or better yet, your own. Pick "hard books". Ones you have to concentrate on while reading. And for god's sake, don't let me ever hear you say, "I can't read fiction. I only have time for the truth." Fiction is the truth, fool! Ever hear of "literature"? That means fiction, too, stupid.'

John Waters, US filmmaker, actor and writer

'Sometimes when I was starting a new story and I could not get it going, I would sit in front of the fire and squeeze the peel of the little oranges into the edge of the flame and watch the sputter of blue that they made. I would stand and look out over the roofs of Paris and think, "Do not worry. You have always written before and you will write now. All you have to do is write one true sentence. Write the truest sentence that you know." So finally I would write one true sentence, and then go on from there.'



Ernest Hemingway in *A Moveable Feast*

FLASHES

Amateur Gardening weekly magazine now awards a gardening book for readers' stories, tips and photos, if published.
Details: email: amateurgardening@timeinc.com

Rosie Savage edits *Let's Get Crafting Knitting and Crochet* magazine. She welcomes readers' letters and photos. October's star letter merited a selection of Christmas ribbons.
Details: LGG Knitting & Crochet, 1 Phoenix Court, Hawkins Road, Colchester, Essex CO2 8JY; email: letsgetcrafting@aceville.co.uk; website: www.letsgetcrafting.com

Works Management, the leading voice of UK manufacturing for seventy years, has relaunched as *Manufacturing Management*. The new editor is Chris Beck.
Details: email: chris.beck@markallengroup.com; website: www.manufacturingmanagement.co.uk

Tesco supermarket is requesting readers' Food Love Stories. Share recipes and say why they are memorable to you.
Website: tes.co/myfoodlovestory

'Always read something that will make you look good if you die in the middle of it.'
PJ O'Rourke

GLOBAL FICTION MARKET

Get your book under sail

BY JENNY ROCHE



Founded in 2014, Fiery Seas Publishing has a catalogue of print and ebooks which includes dystopian, fantasy, historical, mystery, paranormal, science fiction, suspense, thriller and young adult titles and is expanding to include romance titles under its new Everlasting and Love Bites imprints.

When considering submissions this publisher is looking for 'wonderfully written manuscripts that grab the reader and will not let go, with a strong hook and plot that merge together flawlessly and characters we never want to leave behind'.

Everlasting and Love Bites submissions should have proven tropes, eg marriage of convenience, forbidden love, opposites attract, secret baby etc,

a romance main plot, a 50/50 hero and heroine viewpoint and a HEA (Happily Ever After) ending. Erotic romances are not currently being considered.

General submissions should be novellas of 35,000-60,000 words, novels of 60,000 words or more; Everlasting submissions should be 45,000-65,000 words and Love Bites, 15,000-25,000 words.

Follow guidelines and submit complete manuscripts as rtf or doc files through the website:
www.fieryseaspublishing.com

You should receive a decision within eight weeks.

Website: www.fieryseaspublishing.com/submissions

**Get lucky with Lucy**

The Lucy Cavendish Fiction Prize welcomes entries for the 2018 competition.

The prize is for a novel by an unpublished women writer that combines literary merit with unputdownability. All the shortlisted entrants will receive a half-hour editorial consultation with the judge, literary agent Marilia Savvides.

To be eligible to enter, writers must not previously have had a full-length novel accepted for publication, and must not be represented by a literary agent. Novels may be in any style or genre, and may be for adult, young adult and middle grade readers. Literary fiction and genre fiction are

equally acceptable.

To enter, submit the first 40-50 pages of the novel and a synopsis of the rest of the novel (5-10 pages). Format the files as two separate pdf documents, with 12pt font, 1.5 spacing and numbered pages. The files should be titled surname,initial_title_opening and surname,initial_title_synopsis. Submit all entries through the online submission system.

There is an entry fee of £12, payable as part of the online submission process.

The closing date is 9 February.

Website: www.lucy-cav.cam.ac.uk/fictionprize/

Backyard beckons

The Patchwork Raven is an indie publisher based in Wellington, New Zealand. The two-man team who run the press, Jax Goss and Will Thompson, like to create 'beautiful, unusual books' by international writers and artists, regarding themselves as 'the garage band of Wellington publishing'. This means, they explain, that they make 'beautiful things on a shoestring from our living rooms, using all our combined knowledge and skill to come up with innovative, beautiful products and new ways to get them into the hands of our readers'.

Submissions for novels are temporarily closed as they work through the backlog and organise their latest scheme. There are calls for submissions for anthology, short story and poetry projects. Their current anthology the editors call 'The Patchwork Raven's next ridiculously over-ambitious project', a

'round the world' series of books, Backyard Earth. The editors' intention is to make 'five books – one for each continent (more or less). Each book will contain one story for every country on that continent.'

There are still many countries in need of a story and submissions will stay open until all the countries have a story. The editors will remove countries that are no longer available from the list as they are accepted.

The stories, no more than 5,000 words, should give 'a sense of the actual place' and should not be 'travel stories'. Jax is 'looking for stories by and of the place itself. Stories that feel local, even if you, the writer, are not necessarily local.'

Submit doc, docx, rtf or txt files by email:
thepatchworkraven@gmail.com

Response time is 'reasonable'. Payment is NZ\$25, plus a royalty cut.

Website: www.thepatchworkraven.com





INTRODUCTIONS

Writing Magazine presents a selection of publications currently accepting filler contributions. We strongly recommend that you familiarise yourself with their guidelines before submitting and check websites, where given, for submission details.

The Oldie accepts 400-word contributions on an aspect of life in bygone times for its monthly Memory Lane slot, and pays £50 for each one that gets published. Send contributions by post or by email.

Details: *The Oldie*, Moray House, 23/31 Great Titchfield Street, London W1W 7PA; email: editorial@theoldie.co.uk; website: www.theoldie.co.uk



Each week the *Guardian* runs a A Letter to... in its Family section, and invites contributions between 600 and 700 words.

Contributions are also welcomed for Snapshot (a family story connected to a photograph), Playlist (a family anecdote linked to particular song) and We love to eat, a family recipe accompanied by a reminiscence. There's a payment of £25 for each accepted contribution. Include a contact telephone number with your submission.

Details: *Family Life*, the *Guardian*, Kings Place, 90 York Way, London N1 9GU; email: family@theguardian.com; website: www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle



Take a Break invites readers to send in top tips (with photos) for its Brainwaves page, and pays £50 if it uses a tip plus photo and £25 for other tips. Brainwaves tips should be exclusive to *Take a Break*. It's worth keeping an eye on the *Take a Break* Facebook page for



specific requests for real-life anecdotes and pics.

Details: email: tab.brainwaves@bauermedia.co.uk; website: www.takeabreak.co.uk

That's Life magazine runs a regular Soft Lad of the Week story that invites personal accounts of the man in someone's life doing something daft, complete with photographic evidence. There's a payment of £50 per story used.

Details: daftmen@thatsthatlife.co.uk; website: <https://thatsthatlife.co.uk/is-your-man-daft>



Chat weekly magazine is always on the lookout for amazing health stories that inform and entertain for the Your Health column, and pays £100 for every story printed.

Details: email: chat_magazine@timeinc.com; website: www.lifedeathprizes.com



The Telegraph

The Telegraph's weekly Just Back column invites submissions of pieces about a reader's travel experiences up to 500 words. The winning entrant of each weekly competition receives £200 in the currency of their choice and their piece is published in *The Daily Telegraph's* travel section. The writers whose Just Back article is judged the best of the year gets £1,000 in their chosen currency.

Details: email: justback@telegraph.co.uk; website: www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/just-back-travel-writing-competition/

Real People weekly magazine pays £100 for every problem featured on its Mum to Mum page that addresses parenting dilemmas. Get in touch with Genevieve Mullen by email to discuss.

Details: email: genevieve.mullen@hearst.co.uk; website: www.realpeoplemag.co.uk



Reader's Digest is always happy to receive submissions of jokes for Laugh!, gardening tips (preferably with a photo), holiday experiences for My Great Escape, true stories for You Couldn't Make It Up, and funny pictures and anecdotes for end-of-article fillers. Writers whose contributions are selected for publication will receive £50.

Details: email: excerpts@readersdigest.co.uk; website: www.readersdigest.co.uk



Take a Break's *Fate & Fortune* magazine invites true-life accounts of spooky encounters, psychic goings on and paranormal happenings. Send a brief outline and accompanying images in the first instance. Readers whose stories are selected will be interviewed by a member of the magazine's team, and will need to provide photographs of the relevant people and places. Payment is up to £200.

Details: email: fateandfortunefeedback@bauer.co.uk; website: www.fateandfortunemagazine.co.uk



GLOBAL DIGITAL MARKET

A new root to readers

BY PDR LINDSAY-SALMON



Aiming to bring 'a revolution in storytelling to the West', an enterprising team of techies and editors have built Radish, an app for serialised fiction, designed for the mobile generation.

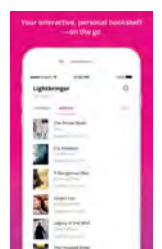
Following a model which has long been popular in Asia, Radish Fiction is a serialised fiction app 'where books can be updated by authors a chapter a week and readers have the ability to read a bite-sized chunk at a time'.

For readers the first three chapters are always free, some are entirely free. 'Others are set so the reader has the ability to pay to get to the next chapter rather than wait for it to be released for free the following week.' For writers, they can 'write, share and monetise bite-sized serial fiction

stories, perfectly suited for reading on smartphones'.

Writers who wish to write serials for Radish apply online and allow the editors to review their works. The team want writers who can provide 'Well-written, captivating stories with lots of cliffhangers to keep readers engaged.' Stories should be 'gripping', making the reader want to come back chapter after chapter. Writers with a significant online presence (social media, online writing platforms, etc.) start with an advantage. Writers whose serials are written solely for Radish also gain an advantage in the submission process. Response time is 2-4 weeks. Payment and rights are discussed on acceptance.

Website: www.radishfiction.com



FLASHES

The Garden magazine from the Royal Horticultural Society has a new look. Editor Chris Young welcomes reader feedback. Articles between 1,200 and 1,500 words are negotiable.

Details: email: thegarden@rhs.org.uk; **website:** www.rhs.org.uk

We Love Pop, one of the last magazines for teenage girls, was launched by Egmont in 2011 and has now ceased publication.

Debbie Gregory edits *Helipad*, the official magazine of the Devon Air Ambulance Trust, which is celebrating its 25th anniversary. **Details: d.gregory@daat.org; website:** www.daat.org

Matt Davis is now editor-in-chief of Time Inc UK's Real Life division, which includes *Chat* and *Pick Me Up* magazines.

The Marshwood Vale Magazine is a free community magazine for West Dorset, East Devon and South Somerset. **Details: email: info@marshwoodvale.com; website:** www.marshwoodvale.com

The Exmouth Journal has a separate edition for Budleigh Salterton. Readers' letters (max 250 words) and stories are welcomed. **Website:** www.exmouthjournal.co.uk

'The only important thing in a book is the meaning that it has for you.'
W Somerset Maugham

UK DIVERSITY MARKET

Diverse and proud

BY TINA JACKSON



Beaten Track publishes diverse fiction and non-fiction.

'Beyond that, there are very few things we wouldn't consider – we won't publish material that contravenes decency laws in the UK, or work that incites hatred and/or violence,' said publisher Debbie McGowan. 'The majority of our publications to date feature LGBT+ characters, but we don't exclusively publish LGBT+ fiction. Rather, we want our publications to reflect the rich diversity of contemporary society.'

Beaten Track is indie and niche. 'By its nature – ie the pursuit of profit – traditional, large-scale publishing excludes minority groups. Books written for/about minority groups – LGBT+, people of colour, disabled people, and so on – have much smaller readerships, and it is rare for a big publisher to take them on. These are the kinds of books we publish.'

Beaten Track Publishing came into being in August 2011, after Debbie's experience of moving from traditional to self-publishing. 'By accident. As an author myself, my first novel was published by a small publishing house, and whilst I had a much greater say in the publishing process than most authors, once that book passed from the publisher to the printers, it were as if the words had been set in stone. And, you know, first novels aren't that great. We're only beginning to learn our craft; we make a lot of mistakes. Between repeated rejections and the sense of no longer being in control of my own creative work, I decided I was done with traditional publishing. I tried self-publishing a couple of novels via Kindle, Smashwords and CreateSpace, and learnt the ins and outs of ebook formatting and typesetting along the way. Then I moved on to reading self-published ebooks by other authors, many of which contained typographical and/or formatting errors. Many authors can't afford the outlay for the services of an editor, proofreader, formatter, and so on, therefore they rely on their own skills and the automatic formatting offered by vendors. Thus, I offered these services to authors in return for a share of the net profit from sales. Within the space of a few months, I went from "offering services" to publishing on behalf of authors.'

Beaten Track works on ethical lines. 'Our publishing contract is equal profit share, and authors retain their rights. There are no options held in perpetuity, and we consider books on the basis of merit, not on how well they might sell. We don't make much money, and our ethos is socialist. We trade skills, help each other with beta-reading, proofreading, cover design and marketing – it's more like a family than a business.'

Ultimately, says Debbie, Beaten Track isn't for everyone. 'We don't have the resources to engage in extensive marketing. Authors have to be proactive. Beaten Track is for authors who value their independence and control over their creative work. What we do well is ensuring they go out there with a book that is the very best it can be.'

Writers interested in submitting to Beaten Track should initially make contact via the website. 'Tell us a little about your work (genre, length, blurb). No synopsis is required. We are particularly interested in LGBT+ fiction and non-fiction, but we will consider any work.'

Beaten Track books are published as ebooks and print books via print-on-demand. 'This keeps our costs to a minimum, giving us greater freedom to publish what we want. We're also a really small company, and we want to keep it that way.'

Website: www.beatentrackpublishing.com



Beaten Track
Publisher of Diverse Fiction & Non-Fiction

www.beatentrackpublishing.com

Audio files

• *The Icepick* podcast is a 'literary magazine for your ears', with 'the best new writing, the best voice performers, presenting themes and issues that speak to our world, now'.

The first and second podcasts have been themed. Check the website for the next themes. Submit short (under 10 minutes) and long (10-30 minute) features, which may be poetry sets, essays, radio plays, reviews, monologues, interviews, vignettes and all points in between. Watch the number of characters: three voices is the limit. Writers who prefer to read their own work may do so.

Submit a pdf, doc or docx file by email: icepickaudio@gmail.com

Response time is 'within eight weeks of your submission'. Payment is 'an honorarium of £8 for short features and £10 for long features.'

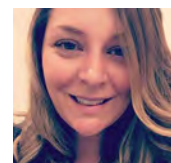
Details: ICEPICK, website: <https://icepickmag.com>

• Editor Tina Connolly calls *Toasted Cake* 'an idiosyncratic flash fiction podcast'. She releases one new story every week, on Mondays. Stories, 650-1,000 words, should be 'weird, quirky, dark, twisted, funny, fun, literary, puzzling, bizarre, tongue-twistable, singable, patter-friendly, elocutionary, experimental, witty, or wistful.' Tina is a rule breaker, accepts reprints happily, loves unpublished work and even accepts previously podcasted stories if the podcast was two years ago or longer.

Check the website for submission dates, which are sporadic. Response time is one to two months. Payment is \$10 via PayPal.

Details: Toasted Cake, email subs to: tinaconnolly@gmail.com; **website:** <http://toastedcake.com>

From screen to screen



Proving new publishing avenues are becoming ever more viable means to a successful writing career, Kelly Anne Blount has now optioned the screen rights for two recent novels to Komixx Entertainment Ltd, an independent production company based both in the US and UK. Nothing unusual in an author optioning screen rights, perhaps. Except that neither *Under*, optioned in 2016, and now *Captured*, have ever been traditionally published, instead finding a vast readership thorough the online service Wattpad.com. The site notes that *Captured*, described as an 'electrifying' YA thriller, has been read by over 15.6 million people around the world.

Head of film and TV at Komixx Entertainment Andrew Cole-Bulgin said, 'Kelly Anne Blount is one of the biggest names in the exciting pool of talent emerging from platforms such as Wattpad. Her loyal and global fan base is a testament to the quality of stories and writing represented by both *Captured* and *Under*, and we're delighted she has entrusted us to bring these narratives to the screen.'

GLOBAL CHILDREN'S MARKET

School rules

BY GARY DALKIN

The School Magazine, founded in 1916, is a group of Australian literary magazines for children. The magazine, actually four titles – *Countdown*, *Blast Off*, *Orbit* and *Touchdown* – is most often read in a classroom context and the editors will accept fiction, non-fiction, plays and activities that are suitable for Australian children.

Material should be suitable for children aged 7-14. Fiction can be up to 2,000 words, poetry up to 100 lines. Enquire first for non-fiction. Submission is by mail only, and you may send up to three manuscripts at a time. Payment is Aus\$270 per 1,000 words for prose and between \$47-\$198 per 1,000 words for poetry.

Submissions should have a fresh voice which seek to reflect the diversity and inclusively of Australian society. Avoid overtly message-driven pieces and carefully consider the portrayal of teachers, schools and any controversial topics.

The standard of submissions received is very high, so take the time to carefully polish and edit your work. It is best to familiarise yourself with the title before submission.

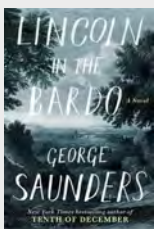
Postal submissions only. In your manuscript's header or footer include your name, email address and story title. Include a cover age with your name, full contact details and word count. Send your submission to Alan Edwards, Editor, *The School Magazine*, Department of Education and Communities, Locked Bag 53, Darlinghurst NSW 1300, Australia.

Enquiries can be sent to school.magazine@det.nsw.edu.au

There are useful tips on submission and a downloadable pdf of full guidelines on the website: <http://theschoolmagazine.com.au>



The Booker winner and Not



The 2017 Man Booker Prize for Fiction has been won by George Saunders for his debut novel, *Lincoln in the Bardo*. The judging panel of critic, Lila Azam Zanganeh; novelist, Sarah Hall, artist, Tom Phillips and travel writer Colin Thubron had to consider a total of 144 submissions to make their final choice. American author Saunders was honoured at a ceremony at the Guildhall, London, receiving a cheque for £50,000 from Man Group Chief Executive Luke Ellis, a further £2,500 for being shortlisted, a trophy presented by HRH The Duchess of Cornwall and a unique designer edition of his novel.

Chair of Judges, Lola, Baroness Young, said, 'The form and style of this utterly original novel reveals a witty, intelligent, and deeply moving narrative. This tale of the haunting and haunted souls in the afterlife of Abraham Lincoln's young son paradoxically creates a vivid and lively evocation of the characters that populate this other world. *Lincoln in the Bardo* is both rooted in, and plays with history, and explores the meaning and experience of empathy.'

Concurrent with the Booker Prize, the Guardian's 'Not the Booker prize' contest has been won by Winnie M Li for *Dark Chapter*, the novel being the ultimate favourite of both the judges and the voting public. Harriet Paige's *Man With a Seagull on His Head* was a close runner-up, being the first choice of two of the judges.



Novel Ideas

Leave your ideas behind

Lynne Hackles says you can always find new ones

This time last year The Long Suffering One and I were about to set off on The Big Adventure, touring the UK in our motorhome for as long as we enjoyed doing so.

What we needed to take was pretty obvious until it came to writing. My laptop was no problem. Notebooks, pens and paper could be bought anywhere. But what about my ideas notebooks and folders of newspaper and magazine cuttings that had sparked ideas? Could I manage without them? Some were only one sentence, or even a title. Others were half-completed articles and stories. Should they accompany me on our travels?

But why had none of these sparkling ideas been typed onto the laptop? Why had none been turned into completed pieces? At the time of their conception I'd thought they were all good, if not brilliant, but none had reached full-term.

In the end they were all left behind, stored in a plastic box to be resurrected one day or to remain until the paper they were written on turned yellow and the corners crisped.

After a year on the road have I missed my store of ideas? No. Have any been thought about, dragged out of my memory and worked on? No. But I have listed a lot more on my laptop in an Ideas file and realised the best ones actually get written right away. The others languish and the enthusiasm for them fades.

Ideas are fine to keep if they make you feel as if you have something to turn to on the days when imagination refuses to work. They are a sort of comfort blanket but the main object is to get the writing done and the finished products sent out into the world.

I pass this bit of wisdom on to you.

FLASHES

Visordown is a wide-ranging website from Crash Media Group for motorcycling enthusiasts. Editor Steve Farrell will consider original ideas, with payment negotiable.
Details:
email: steve@visordown.com;
website: www.visordown.com

A letter written to his mother by Alexander Oskar Holverson, a passenger on doomed ocean liner the Titanic, has sold at auction in Wiltshire for £126,000. It includes the line 'if all goes well we'll arrive in New York on Wednesday.'

Chris Gamm has succeeded Amanda Afiya as editor of *Caterer*, the weekly magazine for the hotel and catering trade.
Details: **email:** info@thecaterer.com;
website: www.thecaterer.com

French president Emmanuel Macron sent a 21-line poem as a birthday present to a British schoolgirl called Sophie who sent him a poem called *Centre of Attention* that she'd written about the Eiffel Tower after a family holiday. The French Embassy published both poems on its Twitter account.

'Words can be like X-rays if you use them properly - they'll go through anything. You read and you're pierced.'
Aldous Huxley

Paws for this writing prize

Creative Writing For All is inviting entries with the theme of cats and/or dogs for a writing competition, with the benefits going to RSPCA at The Holdings, Kempsey.

Enter short stories up to 2,000 words and poems up to forty lines. There are prizes of £60, £30 and £15 in each category.

Short story entries should be double spaced, and poetry entries single spaced, on single sides of numbered pages of A4. The writer's name must not appear on the manuscript. Include a completed entry form, which is available on the website. Only postal entries will be accepted.

There is an entry fee of £5, and £3 for additional entries. Pay this by cheques made out to Creative Writing For All.

The closing date is 30 April.

Details: Creative Writing For All, 8 Field Walk, off Bath Road, Worcester WR5 3AN; **website:** www.writing-experiment.com/competition-for-2018

Wolf coming out of the darkness



The Wolf Poetry Competition is open for entries.

Organised by Write Out Loud in association with Wolverhampton Literature Festival, the international competition is inviting entries of poems on the theme of '...out of the darkness'.

There is a first prize of £400, a second prize of £150 and three third prizes of £25.

All entries must be original poems no longer than forty lines. Enter all poems through the online submission system.

There is an entry fee of £4 per poem, or three poems for £10.

The closing date is 31 December.

Website: www.writeoutloud.net/competitions/wolf18

Changing climatic conditions



There is a \$1,000 first prize in the Everything Changes Climate Fiction Contest presented by the Imagination and Climate Futures Initiative at Arizona State University.

Submit stories up to 5,000 words that illustrate,

explore or illuminate the impact of climate change on the planet and/or its inhabitants. In addition to the \$1,000 first prize, nine further finalists will each win \$50. Selected stories will be published in an anthology.

All submissions must be original and unpublished, and may come from writers anywhere in the world. Writers may submit one story only. Submit through the online system. Entry is free. The closing date is 28 February.

You can download a free pdf of the anthology compiling last year's winners, *Everything Change*, with a foreword by judge Kim Stanley Robinson, from the website: <http://climateimagination.asu.edu/everything-change>

Website: <https://everythingchange.submittable.com/submit>

GLOBAL SPECIFIC MARKET

Positive Compelling SF wanted

BY GARY DALKIN



Now up to issue nine, *Compelling Science Fiction* is a US based bimonthly magazine published free online and available for purchase for Kindle. Publisher and editor-in-chief Joe Stech and his team have two main goals: to find, publish, and promote the best science fiction stories, and to support and encourage the authors who write



them. *CSF* pays 6¢ per word for first world electronic print rights and audio for original fiction and 1¢ per word for reprints. Submissions should be between 1,000-10,000 words.

Joe is looking for engaging, idea-driven science fiction which clearly explains the science, technology or concept on which the story is based. He says that ultimately

he and the editorial team are looking for science fiction that is entertaining, scientifically plausible, self-consistent, and, if appropriate, technically detailed.

CSF has a preference for positive stories. While they won't dismiss a well-written dystopian future, Joe has a bias towards stories that depict technological advancement towards a better future. Humour is always appreciated. No fantasy or horror.

CSF doesn't have reading periods and is open to submissions year round. Stories must be submitted in docx format only through the website: <http://compellingsciencefiction.com>, where there are also detailed guidelines. You can send any enquiries direct to Joe by email: joe@compellingsciencefiction.com





INTERNATIONAL ZINE SCENE

BY PDR
LINDSAY-SALMON



Carte Blanche is a triannual, Quebec-based non-profit journal, aiming to promote writers from the province, the rest of Canada and around the world. The editorial team are 'open-ended and open-minded', giving writers a blank page for narrative in any form, to 'sound off, send up, amuse, follow their muse, versify, dramatise, sketch, snap, think big, get famous, polish, perish and, above all, publish'.

It is open to submissions until 31 December, and then from mid-March to 1 May. Submit narrative prose, up to 3,500 words, or up to three poems in any form, uploaded separately. Writers, appropriately enough, have carte blanche on length, style and genre.

Response time is 'reasonable'. Payment is 'a modest honorarium'.

Website: <http://carte-blanche.org>



Ghost Parachute is a zine in the old tradition of innovative, experimental and original. It needs 'unapologetically bold' writing, 'full of fresh and vibrant imagery'; stories which reveal 'the spider behind the rose and dance in the surreal'.

Submit flash fiction, up to 1,000 words, after closely following format guidelines on the website: <http://ghostparachute.com>

There is no payment but all writers are rigorously promoted.

THE CANTABRIGIAN



The Cantabrigian is a new literary magazine, based in Cambridge, MA. It needs literary fiction which is 'stylistically exciting, relevant, and above all original', up to 8,000 words. Playscripts, poetry and nonfiction will be considered, but send a proposal first.

Submissions are open until 31 December. Response time is 'within four months'. Payment is \$20-\$50.

Follow format guidelines and submit through the website: www.cantabmag.org



The Icarus Anthology is a brand new online 'literary and arts publication designed to inspire and challenge'. They want fearless writers: 'Send us your candle wick whispers, your sun-dipped hopes, your bruised tribulations'.

Issues are themed. The first issue's theme was 'Cathexis' – the mental energy and dedication channelled towards anything. Check the guidelines for the next theme and do note that all submissions are read blindly, so keep your name off the manuscript.

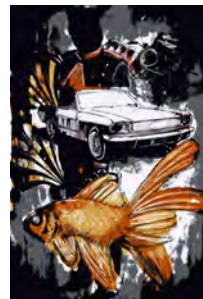
Submit doc or pdf files of prose, 200-3,000 words, in any genre, and poetry, no more than two pages. Don't submit more than two pieces of prose, three of poetry or four of artwork per submission cycle.

Follow the online guidelines then submit by email: theicarusanthology@gmail.com

Response time is 'within one week'.

Payment is forthcoming, details soon.

Website: <https://icarusanthology.org>



Freeze Frame Fiction is a quarterly zine, its title referring to a definition of good flash fiction: 'a snapshot of a real story about real characters'.

'Flash fiction is not the same as a vignette, or a scene; it hints at much more,' but remember that, as,

'The word count is low, so many of the details are left to the reader to fill in, but they're there.' Whatever the genre, make sure your story provides 'something real (though not necessarily realistic), unique, and interesting.'

The zine publishes any genre, as long as it is good flash fiction. Submissions are

open in four periods, with the next from 1 January to 15 March.

Response time is 1-2 months. Payment is \$10 for 'worldwide first publication rights in multiple electronic formats, exclusive for one year from first publication, non-exclusive for three years'.

Follow format guidelines and submit through the website: <https://freezeframefiction.com>



The Airgonaut is a flash fiction zine specialising in 'absurdist, fabulist, magical realism, and surreal work'.

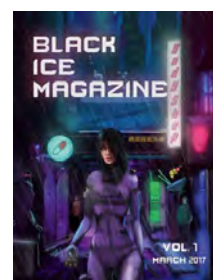
Write with a 'sense of fun and discovery' and

above all don't play safe, be courageous, innovative and 'more concerned with saying something bold'.

Follow the format guidelines on the website, then submit one story, under 1,000 words, or 3-5 poems, under five pages in total, as an attached rtf, doc, or docx file, by email: theairgonautship@gmail.com

Response time is 'reasonable'. There is no payment.

Website: <https://theairgonautblog.wordpress.com>



Black Ice Magazine used Kickstarter fundraising to establish itself. Editor John K Webb has now published the first issue and seeks speculative fiction for the second issue. He wants 'character

driven fiction, with a clear plot, that extrapolates today's technological and social landscape into tomorrow', favouring near future settings and including cyberpunk in his definition of the genre.

Submit short stories, 1,000-6,000 words, as doc attachments, by email: betterfuturespress@gmail.com

Response time is '2-8 weeks'. Payment is \$5 for 1,000-3,000 words and \$10 for 3,000-6,000 words, for non-exclusive first world rights

Website: <https://betterfuturespress.wordpress.com/blackicemagazine/>

FLASHES

Jake Tucker edits *One Magazine*, a free monthly local lifestyle magazine with editions covering Exeter, Exmouth, Devon and Newton Abbott. Contact him through the website. Website: www.one-mag.co.uk

Research from new membership service Bookchoice has revealed that a fifth of its 2,000+ respondents has lied about having read a book. The survey also reveals that 51% of the respondents were more likely to find someone attractive if they read books. Website: www.bookchoice.com/en/

Ellipsis Zine is inviting flash fiction and non-fiction submissions up to 300 words that respond to the prompt words 'two/too/to' for *Ellipsis Zine: Two*. Published authors are entitled to a share of royalties. Submit by 5 January. Website: www.ellipsiszine.com/two/

Alys Conran has been announced as the winner of the £4,000 Wales Book of the Year 2017 with her novel *Pigeon*. Published by Parthian Press, *Pigeon* also won the *Wales Art Review's* People's Choice award.

Art students in Devon, Cornwall and Dorset are invited to submit artwork inspired by the Devon coast to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Budleigh Salterton Literary Festival. The winner will get £500. The deadline is 8 January. Website: www.budlitfest.org.uk/birthday/

'You can make anything by writing.' CS Lewis

UK CRIME MARKET

Time for crime

BY PDR LINDSAY-SALMON



JANICE FROST

Joffe Books is a niche indie, specialising in crime, thrillers and mysteries. In addition to several bestsellers, Joffe also work the secondary rights market, selling film, audio and foreign rights.

Submissions are welcome from both published and new writers, and are also interested in finding authors who wish to relaunch their backlist. Joffe focuses on digital but also publishes in print for its most successful titles.

Mysteries, crime fiction, psychological thrillers, detective, thrillers and suspense are the favoured genres. Submit only full length fiction, the full manuscript as an attached doc file (preferred) or pdf, with short synopsis (three paragraphs maximum), and put the synopsis in the body of the email. Also include a word count, what genre the novel is, a 100 word bio and how and where you heard about Joffe Books. Please put Submission in the subject line of the email.

Response time 'might take ages'. Payment is a competitive royalty.

Details: Joffe Books, email subs to: submissions@joffebooks.com; website: www.joffebooks.com

Groovy prose poems



Tongues & Grooves Prose Poem Prize is open for entries.

The competition, which is running for the first time, is for original, unpublished prose poems up to fifty lines.

There is a first prize of £600, a second prize of £200 and a third prize of £100. Seven further commended poets will each win £25. Prizewinners will be invited to read at the Bookfest event in March.

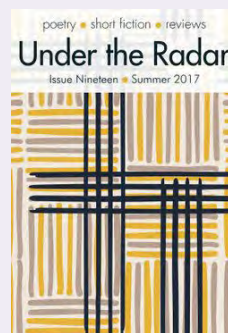
Type entries on single sides of A4 in a clear 12pt font such as Arial or Times New Roman. Each prose poem should have a title. The writer's name must not appear on the manuscript. An entry form, which may be downloaded from the website, must accompany each postal entry. Writers may enter online or by post.

The entry fee is £5 for the first poem, and £4 per poem thereafter. Postal entrants may pay this by cheques made out to Tongues & Grooves in the Community.

The closing date is 1 January.

Details: Tongues & Grooves in the Community, Cathedral Innovation Centre, St Thomas's Street, Portsmouth PO1 2HB; website: <https://tonguesandgrooves.com/>

Slide in here



The magazine arm of Nine Arches Press, *Under the Radar* magazine with its content of poetry, short fiction, reviews and articles aims to be 'a place for readers and writers alike to make new discoveries'.

Closing date for submissions of poetry and short fiction for the next issue is 31 December. Send a maximum of six poems or 2,500-3,000 words of

fiction. Include a cover letter with your full postal address and a maximum fifty-word bio written in the first person. Submissions should not be simultaneous or previously published works. As the magazine likes to ensure variety in its pages it is requested that writers who have been published in the magazine wait at least six months before submitting again.

The magazine is open to submissions from around the world and unfortunately there is no payment. Nine Arches Press does however advise being published in the magazine as 'a great place to be around if you want to be noticed' and this could be your way into publication of a poetry or short fiction collection in book form.

Submit through the website: <http://ninearchespress.com/magazine.html>

Keep it short for LISP

Entries of 300-word fiction are invited for the London Independent Story Prize. Prizes are £100, £30 and £10. All entrants will be considered for publication in an anthology. Entries may be on any theme but must be original and unpublished. Enter by email as doc, docx or pdf files typed in 14pt font. The filename should be the title of the entry and your name must not appear on the manuscript.

The entry fee is £7.99, £9.99 for two and £11.99 for three. The closing date is 10 January.

Details: email:

entry@londonindependentstoryprize.co.uk; website: www.londonindependentstoryprize.co.uk

A poetic snapshot

Entries are invited for the Snapshot Press Books Awards 2018, for unpublished book-length collections of haiku, tanka and other short poetry.

The award winners will have their collections published by Snapshot Press.

Entries should consist of collections of 60-100 short poems of any genre. All poems must be original, and may be published or unpublished, but must not previously have been published as a collection.

The title of the collection must appear on every page of the manuscript. The writer's name must not appear on the manuscript. Include a cover page with full contact details and the name of the collection. Postal entries should be typed on single sides of A4. If entering by email, the subject line should be 'Book Awards – Your Name.'

The entry fee is £18 per collection, payable by PayPal.

The closing date is 1 March.

Details: Snapshot Press, Orchard House, High Lane, Ormskirk L40 7SL; email: submissions@snapshotpress.co.uk; website: www.snapshotpress.co.uk

GLOBAL MYSTERY MARKET

Get lucky with *Black Cat*

BY GARY DALKIN



Black Cat Mystery Magazine is a new US title which made its debut in September. Edited by John Gregory Betancourt and Carla Coupe and published by Wildside Press LLC, it is a sister magazine to the successful *Sherlock Holmes Mystery Magazine*. For the first year there will be two issues, after which the title will become a quarterly.

The editors are seeking a balance between established and new writers and say they don't care if your submission is your first or your 500th – all they care about is quality. They want stories of

1,000-8,000 words including contemporary and traditional mysteries, thrillers and suspense stories. Stories can range from cosy crime to edgy, noir-tinged works, essentially any mystery story as long as it involves a crime. Your characters should feel real and the situations should be both possible and plausible. Works over 8,000 words, up to 15,000, may be considered, but will be a very tough sell and will have to blow the editors away.

The deadline for both issues 2 and 3 is 15 December. Response time, about two weeks. No flash fiction, no poetry, no routine revenge stories, no gratuitous sadism, no genre science fiction, fantasy or horror or westerns, and absolutely no supernatural elements unless they are completely debunked by the end of the story.

Payment is 5¢ per word to a maximum of \$250 per story, plus two print contributor's copies. Submit a doc, docx or rtf file by email: carla.coupe@wildsidepress.com

Download the full guidelines as a pdf on the website: www.bcmystery.com



Enter the Interpreter's House

With a record of having published over 1,000 writers *The Interpreter's House* independent print journal is published three times a year and the next call for submissions is the month of February for the summer issue.

Format your work using single spacing and a Times New Roman 11pt font and submit a maximum of five poems or two short stories of less than 2,000 words each. Simultaneous submissions are not appreciated.

Submit a doc file by email: theinterpretershouse@aol.com or manuscripts by post, enclosing an sae, to: The Editor, Martin Malone, The Interpreter's House, 63 Strait Path, Seatown, Gardinstown, Banffshire AB45 3ZQ.

Website: www.theinterpretershouse.com/submissions



Mine the details

A tiny detail can lead to so much more, says Patrick Forsyth

Few journeys are simple. If we get up in the morning and head off somewhere down the road it may require no planning at all, but mostly travel involves a good deal. You need to: decide on a destination, check passports, book flights, arrange insurance, think about packing and a great deal more. Then, come the day, you have to actually do it all – and that all includes a great many things from maybe getting up at three in the morning to suffering the whole tedious airport experience. Your readers do all this too.

One decision for the writer is which part of the process to focus on. The word count is a major factor here. In a book you might describe a whole journey or a place in detail. In an article you might focus on just a small part of the travel process. Such a part may be tiny.

Consider an example: the passport. There are serious points to be made: where is it, is it up to date, does it include any necessary visa and have you left it on the sideboard? But there are others too, some topical: will Brexit see the British passport return to having a dark blue cover? Will we return to the old, old days of collecting and counting stamps if/when new arrangements apply to travel in Europe? There are a legion of possibilities even in such a tightly focused area.

Still using passports as an example, you might go back and write about their history. Or you could focus on the Passport Office and the renewal process, the peculiarities of getting a visa, which range from spending a few minutes online (on the right website: this is an area of rip offs, something else to write about perhaps) to queuing in the rain outside an embassy with limited opening hours and an application process that makes the movement of glaciers look super-fast and charges that are greater than some flight fares.

Some aspects of a topic are perhaps digressions, and some things are worth more space than others, but there is much to be mined from even the tiniest seam of a topic. The plethora of details and processes involved in travel which you might choose to write about is huge. It is amazing how much can flow from the examination of one small thing – maybe currency is another example – once you start thinking about it. After all this whole column stems from one simple thought: select and mine the details.

FLASHES

Dawn Neesom is the editor of the *Daily Star*. If you have a story contact the news desk.

Details: email: news@dailystar.co.uk; **website:** www.dailystar.co.uk

The inaugural £1,000 Bluepencilagency First Novel Award has been won by Carolyn Kirby's historical thriller *Half of You*. The runner-up was *The Wrong Guy*, a comedy crime novel by Neil McLennan.

Yuko Tawada's *Memoirs of a Polar Bear*, published by Portobello Books and translated by Susan Bernofsky, has won the inaugural Warwick Prize for Women in Translation. The £1,000 prize is shared equally between author and translator.

Nicola Barker has won the £10,000 2017 Goldsmith's Prize, given for fiction that 'opens up new possibilities for the novel form', for her eleventh novel, *H(a)ppy*.

Jesmyn Ward has won the US's National Book Award for the second time with *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, which follows a family in a fictional town in Mississippi in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. She won for the first time in 2011 with *Salvage the Bones*.

'Fill your paper with the breathings of your heart.'
William Wordsworth

UK LITERARY MARKET

Think of your reader

BY JENNY ROCHE



Readers come first for *Prole* print magazine, which aims to appeal to a wide audience with poetry and prose that avoids literary elitism, obscure references and highly stylised structures.

Submissions of prose, short stories and creative non-fiction should be no more than 7,500 words long, but there are no restrictions on theme.

For poetry, all forms are welcome. Single poems will be considered, but collections of up to five pieces are preferred. If submitting more than three poems limit them to sixty lines each; for longer poems limit your submission to three poems.

Submissions should not have been previously published in print or ezines. Work published on blogs and free membership sites will be considered but should be removed from the sites before submission. Simultaneous submissions will not be considered.

All published work will receive a profit-share monetary payment. For full guidelines, see the website: <http://prolebooks.co.uk>

• *Prole* also runs the Prole Laureate Poetry Competition which has a £200 first prize and two runners-up prizes of £50. Winners will be published in *Prole* magazine and on the website.

There are no restrictions on style, content or length; only that submissions recognise the editorial values of *Prole*. All entries should be original and unpublished.

The entry fee is £3, £2 each subsequent. The closing date is 31 January 2018 and the winners will be announced in April 2018. See the website for full details.

Email magazine submissions to: submissionsprose@prolebooks.co.uk or submissionspoetry@prolebooks.co.uk

Details: Brett Evans, 15 Maes-y-Dre, Abergele, Conwy LL22 7HW;
website: <http://prolebooks.co.uk>



Prole, poetry and prose
Issue 22

Book Talk BY JOHN JENSEN

I like to relax with a book at bedtime but usually after half-an-hour I start dozing. My partner finds this very funny: 'Page one, chapter one, paragraph one, ZZZZZ' she says, smirking. I decided to give audio books a go but after fifteen minutes I'm dozing again. If I don't like the choice of actor doing the reading my irritation with him or her wakes me up and sends me back to printed books so that I can be sure of getting back to doze mode. I have an e-reader but there comes a time when you don't always want to be staring at a screen: bed is usually sacrosanct in that respect. Novels? I prefer histories or biographies, I've got dozens – Leonardo, Dr Johnson, Hogarth, Sartre, books on literature, science and politics which I'm determined to finish. They're all bookmarked so I can pick any one of them up to find where I left off even though some of them are fifteen years old. I might even have to start reading them all over again. Or buy new copies if they're still in print. Old paperbacks with yellowed paper and so called 'perfect' binding tend to fall to bits, strewn pages all over the bedroom floor. Maybe I'll Kindle some of them after all. One day.



Unacceptable practices

The Society of Authors and *The Bookseller* have joined forces to call for co-operation throughout the publishing to tackle sexual harassment.

An industry-wide survey conducted by *The Bookseller* found that more than half of the 381 respondents had experienced harassment: 54% of women and 34% of men. The reported harassment was spread throughout the industry: booksellers, publishers, agents, scouts, authors, events organisers and freelancers. The harassment frequently happened to younger workers and had been carried out by senior or higher status colleagues, contacts, authors and clients. A higher-than-average risk of harassment was reported by publicists (66%) and booksellers (61%).

David Donachie, chair of the Society of Authors Management Committee said: 'We offer our complete support for *The Bookseller's* work to expose the issue of harassment in publishing through their survey. We join them in calling for industry-wide cooperation to ensure that everyone in the industries of which our members are a part – publishing, broadcasting, media and beyond – is better protected. We are currently discussing how

best to contribute to this effort.'

CEO Nicola Solomon said in a statement: 'Clearly it is abhorrent for anyone in a position of power – whether they're an author, publisher, agent or whoever – to use their position to compromise those around them, on any level.'

'As Benedicte Page wrote in *The Bookseller* last Friday, 'we need a more open and public dialogue'. We have already been in touch with the Publishers Association and Association of Authors' Agents to discuss next steps on drawing up book industry guidelines. Obviously, our members work in a wide range of fields, so we'll also contact organisations in other industries – for instance with BBC and PACT in relation to our members working in media – and will consider what steps might be taken in the less corporate arenas where authors work, for instance festivals and performance poetry.'

Publishers Association CEO Stephen Loting said: 'Any single example of harassment is completely unacceptable, and we have to work towards a professional environment where no person is made to feel uncomfortable in the workplace.'



UK MAGAZINE MARKET

A moment of mindfulness

BY TINA JACKSON



In The Moment is a beautiful, practical, mindfulness and wellbeing magazine for women of all ages.

'*In The Moment* is different from other magazines on the newsstand!' said editor Kirstie Duhig. 'It's got a great, positive, international vibe, it feels modern and fresh and it's beautifully laid out with gorgeous illustrations and images. Our strapline is "Mindful ways to live your life well". And "make the most of every day" is a good way to do this.'

The magazine is upbeat and inspiring. 'Through our four editorial pillars: Wellbeing, Creating, Living and Escaping, the magazine touches on many aspects of life with a positive message (our news pages are called Good News), offering thoughtful feel-good features and expert advice on wellbeing and mindfulness; and reflecting current ideas, beliefs and trends on these topics. Each of our four sections features a practical, light-hearted column, alongside a regular relationships column, yoga and fitness features and discerning product pages.'

The core readership is women aged 25 and 55. 'Our readers care about their health and wellbeing – both mind and body. They nurture their relationships and enjoy spending time in nature, travelling and adventure – at home or further afield. Natural remedies, natural beauty and ethical products are all of interest. They are intelligent and deep thinking and they also love to have fun!'

Each issue includes one or more in-depth features in each of our four sections. 'They key for me is that our features are well-researched and trusted, our writing is astute, lively and engaging and our content enriches and inspires our readers in their day-to-day lives. Our features are trend- and season-led, offering a broad appeal to women of all ages.'

Topics and ideas range from trends in natural health and beauty to building positive life values such as confidence, optimism and resilience; lifestyle choices, food and interiors; lifestyle choices, food and interiors and the kind of travel and escapes that refresh and stimulate the mind and body. The Creating section includes step-by-step projects and creative inspiration plus an eight-page handbag-sized

mini magazine – *Take A Moment* – featuring a thought-provoking short story and a crossword puzzle.

'We look for features with a fresh perspective, content that reflects and examines new and positive trends within the wellness sector, whether that's mind and body, calming interiors, work-life balance, mindful creative pursuits or ways to escape, refresh and reconsider,' said Kirstie. 'Our content is well-researched with quotes and opinions from experts, social media influencers and real women. Where relevant, features have an international aspect to reflect the fact that *In The Moment* is sold internationally. Our tone is warm, positive and intelligent with humour where appropriate; we never preach and we don't tell our readers what to do – we offer ideas, and an alternative way of thinking and living so that our readers can make their own choices to suits their lives.'

In-depth features are 1,000-1,400 words. 'We also ask our writers to source relevant high-resolution photographs – the right images are crucial to us so this is an integral part of every commission.'

Short stories are 2,000-2,400 words. The stories are thought-provoking – they might challenge a reader's perspective, or give them an insight into themselves or their lives. 'We are particularly interested in themes such as forgiveness, kindness, resilience, positivity, confidence, empathy, happiness and inner strength.'

Kirstie is happy to hear from writers. 'We are looking for features that stand out from the crowd, that offer real insight, a genuine take-away for our readers that brings more happiness, more positivity, more optimism, basically more of the good stuff into their lives. To pitch a feature to us, we'd like a precis of the idea (approximately 150 words) and which section writers feel it would be relevant for, an outline of how the piece would be structured, a note on relevant research and experts who they intend to quote, and, where relevant (for a travel feature, for example), details of images available and whether these are free or have a fee attached.'

Payment varies. **Details:** calmmoment@immediate.co.uk; **website:** www.calmmoment.com

UK LITERARY MARKET

This way may be a wise way

BY JENNY ROCHE



A small independent literary publisher based in the UK with a subsidiary in America, The Waywiser Press has a special interest in poetry and fiction with an occasional interest in other literary genres such as memoir, criticism and history.

'We are keen to promote the work of new as well as established authors and would like to rescue still others from undeserved neglect,' say guidelines.

Submissions are open to prose authors year round and initially a maximum 500 word synopsis and two chapters should be submitted along with a CV which should include any previous publications.

Submissions from poets sending a first or second collection of their work can only be considered through entry to the annual Anthony Hecht poetry prize which closed earlier this month. Poets who have published two or more collections of their poetry can only submit their work between 1 March and 1 July in any year so diarise these dates if you wish to submit.

Submit prose submissions by post only and include a SAE for a decision or return of manuscript to: The Waywiser Press (Submissions), Christmas Cottage, Church Enstone, Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire OX7 4NN; website: <https://waywiser-press.com>

Pleasures of the Game



Austin Allen

A prize retreat



The Writers' & Artists' Yearbook Short Story Competition 2018 is open for entries.

The prize in the annual free-to-enter short story competition is a place on a four or six-day Arvon Clockhouse writing retreat. The prize must be taken by the end of 2018 and does not include travel costs to the retreat. The winning story will be published on the Writers' & Artists' website.

To enter, send an original, unpublished short story on any theme for adult readers, up to 2,000 words. Writers may submit one story only. All entrants must be registered on the Writers & Artists' website. The subject line of the submission email should read 'W&A Short Story Competition 2018'. The story may be pasted into the body of the email, or included as a doc or pdf attachment.

The closing date is 13 February.

Website: www.writersandartists.co.uk/competitions

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Competition rules and forms

Enter online at www.writers-online.co.uk or by post, with the ref code in the address, to: *Writing Magazine* Competitions (Ref Code xxxxx), Warners Group Publications, West Street, Bourne, Lincolnshire PE10 9PH. Remember to add a front sheet with full contact details and the name of the competition you are entering (see Rule 3)

To enter:

• Dialogue-only Competition (see p29)

For stories told in dialogue only, 1,500-1,700 words; entry fee £5, £3 for subscribers; closing date, 15 Feb 2018; **Ref Code: Jan18/Dialogue**

• Open short story Competition (see p29)

For stories on any theme, 1,500-1,700 words; entry fee £5, £3 for subscribers; closing date, 15 Jan 2018; **Ref Code: Dec17/OpenSS**

• Open Poetry Competition

Any theme and form; forty-line limit; entry fee £5, £3 for subscribers; closing date, 15 Jan 2018; **Ref Code: Dec17/OpenPoetry**

• Epistolary Competition (see p55)

Fiction, 1,500-1,700 words, in epistolary format; free entry, subscribers only; closing date, 15 Feb 2018; **Ref: Jan18/Epistolary**

• Cliffhanger Short Story Competition (see p55)

Short stories, 1,500-1,700 words, opening with a cliffhanger; free entry, subscribers only; closing date, 15 Jan 2018; **Ref Code: Dec17/Cliffhanger**

• New Subscribers Competitions (see p55)

For fiction, 1,500-1,700 words, or poems, up to 40 lines, or one of each, any genre or theme, by a new subscriber to *Writing Magazine*; free entry; subscribers only; closing date, 31 January 2018; **Ref Code: Jan17/SSNewSub** or **Jan17/PoetryNewSub**

How to enter

WM Competition Rules

1 Eligibility

All entries must be the original and unpublished work of the entrant, and not currently submitted for publication nor for any other competition or award. Each entry must be accompanied by an entry form, printed here (photocopies are acceptable), unless stated.

Open Competitions are open to any writer, who can submit as many entries as they choose. Entry fees are £5, £3 for subscribers.

Subscriber-only Competitions are open only to subscribers of *Writing Magazine*. Entry is free but you can only submit one entry per competition.

New Subscribers' Competitions are open only to those whose subscriptions start during 2017. No entry form or fee is required.

2 Entry Fees

Cheques or postal orders should be payable to Warners Group Publications or you can pay by credit card (see form). No entry fee is required for New Subscribers' competitions.

3 Manuscripts

Short stories: Entries must be typed in double spacing on single sides of A4 paper with a front page stating your name, address, phone number and email address, your story title and word count and the name of the competition. Entries will be returned if accompanied by sae. Electronic entries should be a single doc, docx, txt, rtf or pdf file with the contact details, etc, on p1, and your story commencing on the second page.

Poetry manuscripts: Entries must be typed in single spacing with double spacing between stanzas on single sides of A4. Entrant's name, address, telephone number and email address must be typed on a separate A4 sheet. Entries to poetry competitions cannot be returned. Electronic entries should be a single doc, docx, txt, rtf or pdf file with the contact details, etc, on p1, and your poem on the second page.

All manuscripts: Receipt of entries will be acknowledged if accompanied by a suitably worded stamped and addressed postcard. Entrants retain copyright in their manuscripts. You are advised not to send the only copy of your manuscript. Enclose an sae if you want your manuscript to be returned.

4 Competition Judging

Competition judges will be appointed by *Writing Magazine* and the judges' decision will be final with no correspondence being entered into.

5. Notification

Winners will be notified within two months of closing date after which date unplaced entries may be submitted elsewhere. Winning entries may not be submitted elsewhere for twelve months after that date without permission of *Writing Magazine* who retain the right to publish winning entries in any form during those twelve months

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My Writing day **OMAR EL AKKAD**

The journalist and author needs lots of thinking time before he starts to write, he tells **Lynne Hackles**

I do most of my writing before I start writing,' says Omar El Akkad, an award-winning journalist and author.

'The process of putting words on paper is secondary. What I really need is time to sit alone and think. I do this best when I'm lying in bed, taking a shower or going on a long drive. Every morning, when other obligations don't get in the way, I'll lie in bed for as long as I can, until I stumble onto an idea, a narrative direction or even a sentence I think is good. Later, I'll do the same thing in the shower. By the time I sit down to write, I already have something to start with.

'When I wrote my first published novel, *American War*, I was working full-time as a journalist and wrote fiction in my off-hours, usually between midnight and five in the morning. It was exhausting, and I don't recommend it, but it was the only way to get the work done. I'd finish working on the novel just before sundown, get a few hours of sleep, wake up in time to start the work day, and then try to sneak a nap in around noon. I worked remotely from home, so this was a lot easier to do than it sounds, although impossible on days with big breaking news. Now I write full-time, I tend to write in the late mornings and early afternoons, but still do a lot of my editing after midnight, out of habit.

'In terms of word-count, my daily output is minimal, usually 500 words. Some days the word count is negative; I re-read what I wrote the day before, find it awful, and delete it.

'Procrastination takes many forms. These days it usually

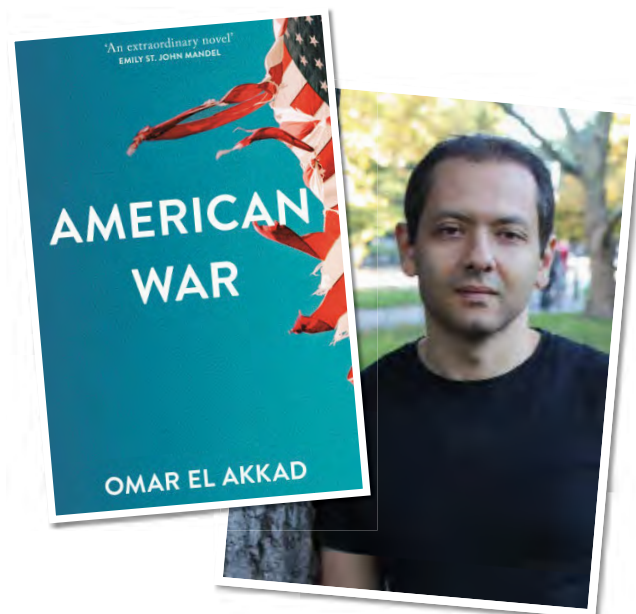
involves housework. I'm a slob by nature, but will happily tidy the whole house before tackling a difficult writing assignment. On other occasions I've read entire novels, gone for long walks, cooked elaborate meals – it's a real problem.

'I write best when alone, and often dream about hopping on a train through the Siberian wilderness, severed from the rest of the world, with nothing but time to think. But life doesn't allow for those kinds of opportunities very often, and especially since my wife and I had our first child this April. These days, I take brief glimmers of solitude and silence whenever I can get them.

'I've done a lot of touring this year, both in the US and abroad. *American War* is my first book and this has been an amazing opportunity to see the world, even if some of my bookstore events have attracted a grand total of four or five people.

'I've wanted to write fiction ever since I learned how to write. I belong to an immigrant generation, having been born in one country, spent my youth in another, completed college in a third and now living in a fourth. From a young age I'd seek refuge in fictional worlds of my own invention. I wasn't particularly gifted in any other academic field, but I could write.

'*American War* is my first published novel but the fourth I've written – the other three have never been shown to any publishers or agents. It's the story of a second American civil war, which takes place some sixty years from now. It follows the life of Sarat Chestnut, a young girl growing up in southernmost Louisiana who is sucked into the thick of the war-



torn South and has her life forever altered by the war.

'I wrote it over the course of a year and never intended it to be a novel about America, but rather a novel about the universal nature of revenge. Of course, it was published in the early days of the Trump administration, and now almost everyone tends to talk about it as some kind of prophetic text, a fictional account of something that seems more realistic by the day. But that was never my vision when I wrote it.

'Every novel I write begins with a single image. In the case of *American War*, it was the image of Sarat Chestnut, at the age of six, sitting on the front porch of her home, pouring honey into the knots in the wood. I spend a lot of time – sometimes years – researching the details that end up in my fiction, but the starting point is always visual, an image in my mind's eye that I can't shake loose.' [W.M.](#)

Website: www.omarelakkad.com

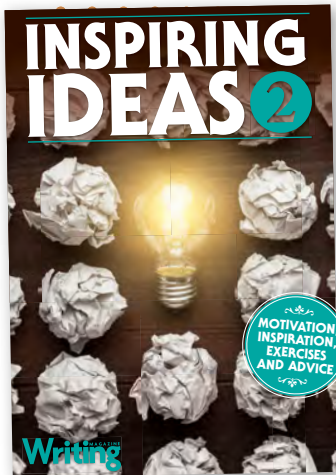
MY WRITING PLACE

'My wife and I have a small house in the woods just south of Portland, Oregon. A half-acre forest, vineyards and gated-off mansions are neighbours. At the foot of the woodland that makes up our backyard is a standalone studio that is now my writing bunker. My desk faces a wide window overlooking the forest. It's empty save for my keyboard, mouse, monitor and two framed pictures – one of my parents from their engagement party 36 years ago, the other of my wife. Reference books, printouts of drafts and bizarre hand-drawn maps are usually strewn around the floor.'

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TRUCK STOP

Lorraine Mace thought she'd loads of time to file her copy – until a road trip turned into the journey from hell

Until recently, I'd always believed having the time to write, combined with a comfortable place in which to work, was necessary to ensure whatever I scribbled would have a decent chance of coming out as something others might want to read. I certainly couldn't imagine turning out a good article under less than favourable conditions, but sometimes life chucks a curve ball and you just have to go with it.

I was having one of those rare months where I was not only up to date with my work, but actually ahead of the game. With only one article outstanding, and still a week and a half left in which to write it, I knew I'd have a few days over at the end of the month to work on my latest novel.

Of course, that went by the board when a close friend called and asked for a favour. He had a delivery to make from Spain to the UK and his regular partner had gone down with some form of dreaded lurgy. Would I please go with him, as he couldn't drive that length of time on his own? I asked how long I'd be away and, as it would only be five days in total, with at least two days free on the ferry in which I could write the remaining article, I said yes.

We were almost at the ferry port in Bilbao, after a twelve-hour drive

through the night, when my friend received a text to say the ferry was going to be six hours late due to bad weather. That scuppered my plan to rest for a few hours on the boat and then work in the afternoon, but I wasn't too upset as I knew I'd have time the following day after delivery of the van's contents. I reckoned without traffic and roadworks!

We sat in a one and a half hour jam going up country, then another hour crawling past roadworks on the M1 on the way back. A further frustrating 45 minutes was spent getting past a blockage on the North Circular, followed by a soul-destroying hour on the M25 southbound where the roadworks meant only one lane was open. Only at midnight were we finally in spitting distance of the hotel, so there wasn't any hope of writing before bed, which was just as well because the road into Newhaven was closed and all traffic diverted. I finally fell into bed at half past one in the morning – two and a half days into the trip and not a word written on the outstanding article!

The next day I helped my friend load his van ready for the return trip to Spain the next day. I was looking forward to getting settled in my cabin on the ferry, plugging in the laptop and writing. This was when he received another text from the ferry company. Our return trip wasn't delayed – it was cancelled due to Storm Brian. The replacement vessel would only

be operating once it was safe to cross the Bay of Biscay. Our rescheduled return meant we would be two nights at sea with a whole day to myself in between. I was delighted. I'd get the article written with a few days to spare before deadline.

I reckoned without dear old Storm Brian's tail causing high waves as we crossed the Bay of Biscay. During the thirty-hour trip back to Spain, the ferry went up and down, up and down, up and down. So too did my nausea level. I tried to concentrate on the laptop screen, but my insides screamed stop. I managed a paragraph before lurching to the bunk to compose myself to die.

By the time we arrived back in Bilbao, instead of having lots of time to polish the article, I was panicking because I hadn't even written it! There was no help for it, I'd have to write during the periods when my friend was driving. With the laptop perched on my knees, I tried touch typing, but ended up hitting so many wrong keys I spent more time deleting lines than I did writing them. Nevertheless, I got over a thousand words written. I had to as, being so late back from the UK, I only had a day in which to rewrite before submission.

I made the deadline, but dreaded the editor's feedback. Imagine my shock when he said it was the best piece I'd written! Time and comfort? Who needs them? **Ww**