

The Journal, 2022

The Journal: Writing Fiction

January 1, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * I Fibbed
- * Topic: Writing Fiction
- * A Quick Look Back
- * Of Interest
- * The Numbers

Welp, I fibbed. I said I wouldn't be back until tomorrow, but here I am. I wanted to do a self-motivating recap of 2021, and I wanted to announce my first writing project for the new year. And it seemed silly to wait until tomorrow to do either of those.

Also, it seemed wrong not to post on the first day of a new year. So here I am, wishing you the best year of writing you've ever had.

Topic: Writing Fiction

I wrote an SF novel called [The 13-Month Turn](#) almost five years ago, in February and March of 2017. A few days ago, a reader emailed and asked whether there was a sequel.

Well, there isn't. But wow, was the guy ever right to ask. I read the book myself over the past couple of days, and the ending literally begs for a sequel. If you've read the story, you know what I mean. I suspect I set it up that way on purpose.

In fact, I could easily have continued the story in the same book. Maybe I chose not to do that because it was already 73,000 words. Or maybe because I was distracted and wanted to move on to other projects. (I wrote a lot of detective stuff right around that time.)

But just reading the story, I could tell that I definitely planned to return. Anyway, for whatever reason I didn't continue the story in the same book and I didn't write a sequel, so that's my first writing project for the year.

The easy thing to do, especially because I've just read the book, would be to simply continue the story in the same book. But it would also be wrong. How many readers who've already read the 73,000-word novel would buy it again to read the rest of the story? None. Nor should they have to.

I could also just continue the story in a separate book, a pure sequel. That, too, would be easy, and I might do that. If I do, I'll have to make it plain on the cover and in the beginning of the book that the story is a continuation, not a stand-alone novel.

But I prefer that my novels, even those in series, *do* stand alone, albeit in a way that makes the reader want to read the other books in the series. But that would require me to bring part of the story forward from the first novel to this one, while doing so without boring those readers who've read the first novel.

So the whole thing is a bit of a quandary. But then, conscious-mind decisions always are. (grin) I'll figure it out this morning and start writing. And of course I'll be back tomorrow to report numbers and let you know what I decided to do.

A Quick Look Back at 2021

Given my inadvertent 5-month hiatus, I decided to take a deep breath and look back at 2021 to assess the damage. Despite not having written what I might have written during those five months, as a writer I didn't come out all that bad. And as a human, I beat a major addiction, so there's that.

During 2021 my last day of serious fiction writing was August 6th. I wrote zero words of fiction in September and October, only 2602 words in November, and struggled through 10865 words in December (a heart-racing 350 words per day).

But despite the near-total 5-month hiatus, I somehow still managed to write 636,749 words of fiction. Let's do some math. If you divide that by 7 (=90,964) and then multiply the answer by 5 (=454,821), and then add that to 636,749 you'll see that I was on track to hit 1,091,570 words of fiction for 2021.

Sounds impressive, right? And yet that would have been a daily average of only 2991 words per day. (In case you're wondering, as a result of taking 5 months off, my daily average for fiction was only 1744 words per day.)

So all in all, as a writer, I'm okay with 2021. On the year, I wrote 636,749 words of fiction in 13 novels, 1 novella and 3 short stories. I also wrote 203,560 words of nonfiction (all of them in this Journal) for a grand total of what Dean calls "consumable words" of 840,309 words. Even with five lost months, I consider that failing to success.

I choose to believe 2022 is going to be wonderful for fiction writers. Here's to it, and to your success.

Talk with you again later.

Of Interest

See the comments on “I Think I Am Ready” at <https://www.deanwesleymith.com/i-think-i-am-ready/#comments>. Some on short story markets, some on tracking submissions.

See “Just a Little End of the Year Round-Up” at <https://countercraft.substack.com/p/just-a-little-end-of-the-year-round>. Contains a TOC to archived content.

See “Deductions” at <https://www.deanwesleymith.com/deductions/>. Just because something is legal doesn’t mean it’s also moral or ethical.

See “New Insight into the Friendship of Virginia Woolf and T. S. Eliot” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/new-insight-into-the-friendship-of-virginia-woolf-and-t-s-eliot/>.

See “The Great Rebus Craze of 1937 (Plus 4 Rebuses to Solve Yourself)” at <https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/653239/great-rebus-craze-1937>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 830 words

Writing of The Stirchians (tentative title, novel)

Day 1..... XXXX words. Total words to date..... XXXXX

Total fiction words for January..... XXXX

Total fiction words for the year..... XXXX

Total nonfiction words for January... 830

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 830

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 830

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 66

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: In this blog, I provide advice on writing fiction. I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. To be crystal clear, WITD is not “the only way” to write, nor will I ever say it is. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among myriad other topics.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Countercraft](#), [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [Failing to Success](#), [Mental Floss](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [the writing life](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: And So It Begins

January 2, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Einstein's quote
- * And So It Begins
- * Of Interest
- * The Numbers

Quotes of the Day

“The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant. We have created a society that honors the servant and has forgotten the gift.” Albert Einstein

“[A]t 2,500 words I knew it would be a novel, but managed to go back and wrap it up into a short story. But no doubt this will be a start of my next Mary Jo Assassin novel. I will just remove the last 300 words and go in a different direction.” Dean Wesley Smith on his first new short story of the year

I love Einstein's quote above. It's one of the truest things I've ever read, and it goes straight to the heart of writing. Be brave. You don't have to mistrust your own creative subconscious just because everyone says you should.

Let the characters tell the story that they, not you, are living and you will be amazed. A whole new world will open up to you.

And So It Begins

That title sounds terribly important, doesn't it? Dramatic, even?

But it isn't. Yes, I'm writing again, and a new story has begun, but it isn't important at all. How much will the world suffer if I never finish this story?

None.

Okay, but what will happen to me personally if I never finish this story?

Again, nothing. No consequences. It's only a story, a fiction.

Now, if I finish it, which I fully expect to do in a few weeks to a month or so, this story might have consequences. It might make a difference of some kind in the life of some reader somewhere for a few minutes or even a few hours. But that's it.

No fiction is important enough that the lack of it bears any consequences at all. This might become my new mantra.

Yesterday, after not writing any fiction for five months, I pried open the creaking driver’s side door and slipped in behind the wheel of a story that’s been sitting cold for five years. As you might imagine, both I and the story were a little rusty. (grin)

As expected, I barely made my word-count goal. That’s because yesterday wasn’t about just driving the story. In addition to this novel being a sequel, I decided I wanted it to stand alone. So yesterday was about the work of figuring out (conscious mind) what to put in and what to leave out from the first novel. So those 2800 or so words took several hours to get on the page.

I had to bring forward enough so the novel would stand alone but omit enough so it wouldn’t bore those who had read the first novel. That’s one of the problems of writing a sequel years after publication of the original novel.

I also had to make the opening interesting—one that would make the reader lean-in to see what was going to happen next—vs. a boring line-item recap. I think I was successful so far. And today there will be a little more of the same.

The overall story is massive in scope, so today I’ll bring a little more of the old into the new. If I’m lucky, I might also get started today on writing the new story. If not, tomorrow or the next day. Once that happens, I expect to pretty much blow past my daily goal almost every day.

I can sense the characters waiting just off-stage, itching to get in front of the lights to start telling the rest of their story. It’s all I can do to hold them at bay for the moment, and I have to admit, that’s pretty exciting too.

Talk with you again later.

Of Interest

See “Do You Trust Your Gut Feelings?” at <http://dyingwords.net/do-you-trust-your-gut-feelings/>. Of course. If you WITD, you’re very in touch with that tiny voice.

See “Smashwords Blog: 2022 Publishing Predictions – Indies Take Center Stage” at <https://blog.smashwords.com/2021/12/publishingpredictions2022.html>.

See “Challenge Day One” at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/challenge-day-one/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 680 words

Writing of The Stirchians (tentative title, novel)

Day 1..... 2807 words. Total words to date..... 2807

Total fiction words for January..... 2807

Total fiction words for the year..... 2807

Total nonfiction words for January... 1510

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 1510

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 4317

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 66

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [DyingWords.net](#), [Smashwords](#), [the writing life](#)

A Slightly Belated Happy New Year

January 3, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Happy New Year
- * If any of you enjoy history
- * I Hoped to Post Links
- * My Only Real Escape
- * Of Interest
- * The Numbers

Quote of the Day

“My subconscious mind always knows how to get from A to Z.” [Novelist Robert J. Sadler](#)

Happy New Year

More than one person has reminded me that even though I posted a Journal entry on New Year's Day, I failed to say happy new year. I'd like to say I thought maybe that was implied, but maybe that isn't true. Maybe I just forgot.

So anyway, happy new year to everyone. And especially as it pertains to your writing and publishing success.

If any of you enjoy first-hand history that hasn't been blatantly, intentionally rewritten or sanitized, I strongly recommend "WWII Ace Pappy Boyington Recalls War, Prison and Flying" at <https://www.historynet.com/pappy-boyington-interview-with-the-us-world-war-ii-ace.htm>. The article is long but excellent. And thanks to my friend and former Marine Tim Weller for sending it to me.

I Hoped to Post Links

I hoped to post links below from the Kill Zone blog (they're back today) and elsewhere, but I found very little worth passing along. The Kill Zone post itself was unremarkable, and the question the author asked (innocently) at the end raised my hackles a bit.

After talking about her back-and-forths with her traditional publishing editor, the author asked in part, "How about you, TKZers? ... How will you manage the long trek to publication?"

What? Um, long trek?

To answer that question, I have an alternate question: How can any serious novelist in today's world completely ignore that indie publishing even exists? I'm not talking here about the extremely rare occasion (*ahem, John Gilstrap*) when an author is offered a Life-Changing Advance (mid-to-upper-level six figures). I'm talking about novelists in general. But I guess ignoring indie publishing and pursuing the traditional route is the common, albeit foolish, mindset.

Just like the mindset that stems from our implanted collective inferiority complex. You know, the one that says you can't trust your own creative subconscious, that you have to outline, plot, plan, revise, rewrite and polish, all with your conscious, critical mind, if you're to have any chance at success. AND that you have to let the conscious, critical minds of others second-guess your work too!

So again, how can any serious novelist ignore that indie publishing exists, not to mention trumpeting the praises of their traditional publishing slave masters in New York? Do they have no pride left at all? Do they want so badly to be taken care of that they accept being taken advantage of as just part of the bargain? Do they crave the approval of some 20-something fresh out of college in New York? Or are they seriously just that naïve? Regardless, it's embarrassing.

I realize going with a traditional publisher is a personal choice, but that doesn't mean it's a good choice. Jumping off a cliff into shark-infested waters is a personal choice too. But then, I repeat myself. Because jumping into shark-infested waters is pretty much what you're doing when you sign over all rights to your copyright to a traditional publisher for practically nothing.

And trust me, the sharks *will* feed. They couldn't begin to care less about you, or your work for that matter. All they care about is their own bottom line, and it expands by leaps and bounds

every time they add some unwitting author's IP to it. Traditional big publishers routinely increase the value of their company by MILLIONS of dollars for as little as a five- or ten-thousand dollar advance against royalties. Good business on their side, but head shakingly stupid for the authors who sign on the dotted line.

Sigh. Whatever. My apologies for the rant. If you couldn't tell, inanity, which I define as a situation and/or argument (i.e., "reasoning") that makes absolutely no sense, annoys me. And trust me, that's a huge understatement.

So I can't recommend the Kill Zone post. Besides, with any respect due the author, I find it difficult to take seriously any advice on writing or publishing from any novelist who's written and published fewer than a dozen or so novels. But to each his/her own.

My Only Real Escape

When I'm annoyed with stupidity, my only real escape is fiction. I can escape into a really good story on TV, or by reading a good novel. Then again, those are few and far between unless I go to TCM on television or to a select very few authors in my Kindle or on my shelves.

I'll be candid: If I didn't have a story to dive into, I'd probably spend much of the rest of this day wondering what (the hell) is wrong with the world and the nation and some writers who—solely because of their platform, not their literary accomplishments—exercise influence over other writers.

And honestly, my frustration would only increase because I'm helpless to fix any of it. The longer I live, the shorter my patience with intentional ignorance and the more I realize why we're allowed only a short time on Earth.

Anyway, my best and deepest escape is into something I'm writing at the time. Being directly involved with my characters and their world is a soothing salve to my reality. So I'm very glad I finally was able to pull the trigger and start a new novel.

Speaking of that, the writing's going well enough. It hasn't taken off yet, but it will soon. A lot of the set-up work is done. Soon I should be able to just let the story run. I'm looking forward to that, but unless I happen on an epiphany or something that I think might help you, this will be my last story-specific update. Of course, I'll continue to update the numbers below.

Talk with you again later.

Of Interest

See "Last Two Days of Year End Workshop Sale" at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/last-two-days-of-year-end-workshop-sale/>. Just a reminder.

See "2022 Publishing Predictions" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/2022-publishing-predictions/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1000 words

Writing of **The Stirchians** (tentative title, novel)

Day 1..... 2807 words. Total words to date..... 2807

Day 2..... 2986 words. Total words to date..... 5793

Total fiction words for January..... 5793

Total fiction words for the year..... 5793

Total nonfiction words for January... 2510

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 2510

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 8303

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 66

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [Indie Publishing](#), [Jane Friedman](#), [publishing](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [the writing life](#), [Traditional Publishing](#)

The Journal: To Achieve Success

January 5, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * To Achieve Success
- * A Minor Change to the Journal
- * Of Interest
- * The Numbers

Quote of the Day

“If I were to tell you today that your project is a waste of time, would you abandon it? If so, perhaps it’s best that you did. . . . [T]o achieve results that spell success . . . requires enjoyment of the writing process in and of itself—to see that as the reward.” Jane Friedman

To Achieve Success

Jane’s take (see “Of Interest”) is spot on:

To Achieve Success Requires Enjoyment of the Writing Process Itself.

Tattoo that to the inside of your eyelids.

I write because visiting with characters is fun. Not to interfere or impose my will on them—they’re characters, after all, not slaves—but just to visit. Mostly to look-in and see what’s going on.

I have more than a nodding acquaintance with several of them, especially Wes Crowley, TJ Blackwell, and General Amanda Lowrey. Well, and then Colonel Mark Hanson and Major Rebecca Hones. Then there are Nick Spalding, Stern Talbot, Rider Jones, Ray Acuna, and Joseph “Joey Bones” Salerno. Those and several others seem happy enough when I stop by. Well, Joey Bones puts on a smirk that I choose to *believe* indicates happiness. To think otherwise leaves me more than a little unnerved.

Of course, they all know I’m there to see what they’re doing. And they know if it’s interesting enough, I’ll probably write it down and then tell the whole world. And “interesting *enough*” is the key thing. Sometimes I get much more than just interested. Sometimes I get so exuberant that one of my characters at a party once hefted a glass of whiskey and proclaimed, “Check it out, kids. Stanbrough’s about to go all Vesuvius again.”

Then again, the characters don’t mind. I’m not committing larceny here. They don’t have flexible, working fingers of their own (their only in-born physical flaw), so it isn’t like they can write their story down for themselves. And let’s face it, my characters are hams. They enjoy the limelight, such as it is, and they love pretty much *any* publicity.

And really, given an un-addled mind, those are the two main ingredients for being able to write fiction: characters whose story is interesting to you, and your willingness to trust them to tell their story the way they want to tell it.

After that, it’s all gravy.

A Minor Change to the Journal

Things tend to run in cycles. I’ve heard from several people this week that they find it difficult to match my numbers when I’m writing. Awhile back, one even wrote that trying to keep up with my numbers is depressing. Sigh. That sort of sentiment crops up every now and then.

But seriously, what does it matter to *your* production how much or how little I write? What I do or don't do in my own writing doesn't directly affect *your* numbers in the slightest.

I mean no disrespect to those who feel that way, but frankly they're kind of disrespecting themselves. And if you think about it, it's silly. As I told a few, they shouldn't be concerned with matching my numbers, or anyone else's, really.

Some writers put far fewer words on the page than I do and some put far more. It will be the same for you. But so what? What's important is that You establish Your goals and then strive to reach them. Someone famous once said,

The only valid comparison is what You did today with what You did yesterday.

If you want to be concerned with something, be concerned with consistently spending time in the chair and actually putting new words on the page while you're there. If you do that (as many of you know), the numbers will take care of themselves.

I never meant posting my numbers to be some kind of competition or challenge. I post them (selfishly) to give myself a place to report and to illustrate what's possible when you have all the time in the world.

But really, my spreadsheet gives me a place to report. And you all know what's possible for you, in your world. So for the time being I'm going to try something new: I'm going to take away the Numbers section.

It's the perfect time to try this. At the moment, my novel is stalled as the characters vie for who gets to open it. (grin) So I'm not really writing in earnest, but I'm having fun writing various openings.

I'll continue to keep track of both fiction and nonfiction on my spreadsheet. More than likely I'll report updates on numbers in the body of the Journal now and then, maybe each time I finish a novel or something. We'll see.

In the meantime, drop in on your own characters. Visit a little. See what's going on in their lives. And if it interests you, write it down.

Talk with you again later.

Of Interest

See "A Dog's Tale" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/01/a-dogs-tale.html>. Some good info here on dog searches. Types, methods, etc.

See "The 100 Most Popular Baby Names From 100 Years Ago" at <https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/653478/most-popular-baby-names-100-years-ago>. Maybe interesting as a source for character names.

See “To Everyone Who Wants Me to Read Their Writing and Tell Them What to Do” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/to-everyone-who-wants-me-to-read-their-writing-and-tell-them-what-to-do/>.

See “Just how big in media does Apple want to be?” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/just-how-big-in-media-does-apple-want-to-be/>. See PG’s take.

See “Burglary: It’s Not Robbery” at <https://leelofland.com/burglary-its-not-robbery/>. Just in case anyone on the planet who’s a writer really doesn’t know this.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Jane Friedman](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [Lee Lofland](#), [Mental Floss](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [the writing life](#), [Visitng Characters](#), [Writing Into the Dark](#)

The Journal: Characterization: Just Don’t

January 6, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Some Quick Math
- * Topic: Characterization: Just Don’t
- * Of Interest
- * The Numbers

Quote of the Day

“It’s not a race. This writing business is one event where everybody who crosses the finish line wins. And then we get to start all over again. You just can’t beat that.” Dan Baldwin

Wow. I did some quick math yesterday just out of curiosity. Remember I offered to send you the rough Journal archives in PDF documents from 2014 through 2021?

I went back and added those up. Granted, they’re the rough originals, so every issue includes things I don’t include in my nonfiction daily word count (the title, the disclaimer, the cumulative totals, etc.). But overall, from October 19, 2014 through December 29, 2021 the rough archives contain 1,841,064 words and over 7 years of advice on writing.

The good news is, you can still get the archive if you want it, free of charge. Just email me at harveystanbrough@gmail.com. I’ll respond with two emails, one with four years of archives attached and another with three.

Of course, all the archives are my intellectual property © 2022. You may share them with your significant other. Under no circumstances are you allowed to share them for a fee.

Topic: Characterization: Just Don't

At the end of Garry Rodgers' post on "Characterization" over on the Kill Zone blog, he asks, "What unique quirks have you embraced in your characters?" What he's really asking is what unique traits and quirks you've *assigned* to your characters as you've constructed or created them. Hence the title of this post.

Garry is a good storyteller. I like to think if we lived closer we'd probably have a beer now and then. But in his TKZ post, which I included in "Of Interest" just in case you might get something out of it, he's parroting some of the standard advice batted back and forth by new writers. I can practically guarantee you won't find anything in it that you haven't seen or heard before.

I used to teach a day-long seminar on character traits and quirks, what they are and how to use them to create characters. But I would never teach that seminar again or share the materials because I've learned a better way. The only way to experience authentic human beings is to relinquish control and allow them to be who they are.

I don't invent characters anymore than I invent other human beings. I take both as they come.

The difference is, if a character does something stupid I can legally kill him. (grin) Well, officially I allow another character to kill him. Keeps everything out of the courts. But still.

Some would argue that characters aren't real. But for me, "real" is defined by how much you know about someone. That's much more important than a physical essence. So my characters are far more real to me than most actual, physical human beings are.

Consider, even among the humans I have actually encountered—from people I've only seen at the post office or gas station or Walmart to my neighbors and even to my friends and relatives—I generally don't know much about them beyond their surface appearance. Your results, of course, might vary. But I'll bet not.

All humans—even those we don't know and have never met—are ostensibly living their lives, their stories, somewhere in the world. Billions of them.

At least that's the rumor. And most of us believe those billions of people are real. But whether they actually exist is a collective assumption, isn't it? Could you even testify in a court of law that they exist?

I couldn't. I haven't seen them. I haven't heard them. I don't know how they look, sound or smell. If they do exist, I don't know who their friends or relatives are, what they like or love or dislike or hate. I don't know what they believe or staunchly refuse to believe. So seriously, how "real" are they?

On the other hand, I could testify under oath on any of the above (and a great deal more) about my so-called fictional characters without the slightest fear of committing perjury.

As always, believe whatever you want to believe. But exactly like the human beings we *imagine* living all around the world, our characters are living their stories in a particular time and place. The difference is, we know our characters are real because we can actually look in on them as they live those stories.

As I write this, some of my characters are riding wild on good horses in what they see as a just cause in the 1890s in the Texas panhandle. Another group spent many years on what was supposed to be a generation ship voyaging through the Milky Way galaxy. Through a bit of good fortune, they are now on a new planet they named Terra 2 and are establishing colonies and living their lives.

Yet other characters are struggling through the Spanish civil war or being tunnel rats in Vietnam or working as for-hire killers. Others are solving crimes in southern Arizona or committing crimes in New York and Chicago.

Others are trying to figure out why there are odd, futuristic machines on that side of a bright, light-framed portal even though everything is “normal” on this side.

And still others are living their stories, living their lives, in various other times and places. And I get to witness any of that by simply choosing to look in on them.

I think I’ll go do that now.

Of Interest

See “10 Old English Words You Need to Be Using” at <https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/53027/10-old-english-words-you-need-be-using>.

See “Characterization” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/01/characterization.html>.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [characters](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [Mental Floss](#), [the writing life](#), [Topic](#), [Writing Into the Dark](#)

The Journal: Truly Stupid Advice and “Deep POV”

January 8, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Altered Brain Chemistry
- * Truly Stupid Advice
- * Topic: Deep POV
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“[J]ournalists need to be overt and candid advocates for social justice, and it’s hard to do that under the constraints of objectivity.” Stanford journalism professor Ted Glasser (As a writer, I personally see censorship as a bad thing. Your opinion might vary.)

Altered Brain Chemistry

From a dear friend whom I believe would not mind me sharing:

“By now, you’re probably aware that the one change in your life—giving up nicotine in all forms—dramatically changed your brain chemistry. It takes time and great effort to re-establish the same patterns. No one ever warns patients about that. There have been studies done (Lancet, other British medical journals) about these abrupt changes in creativity in artists, writers, and musicians. As you might imagine, our country does not consider such research important.”

Palm to forehead: Of course that’s what happened! As I told my friend, I think I knew, but if so I had forgotten. I might have stopped my cigars anyway. The point is, it’s better to have all the information up front so you can make a more informed decision.

Now don’t worry. I won’t venture into the politics of any of this—pretty much all of our so-called “public servants” are far too pretentious and hypocritical for my taste anyway—but no, our country generally does not consider such research important. And it deems the dissemination of that research almost heretical if not harmful.

Our country increasingly cares only about the “narrative,” meaning how information is framed (in turn, meaning how they can use it to manipulate you), not the actual information itself. Today the narrative is “Nicotine Bad,” even as another narrative is “Cannabis Good.”

And let’s not get into a back and forth about the medicinal benefits of cannabis. I’m sure it probably has those benefits, just as I can attest personally that nicotine does. But both have their downsides too.

Anyway, with any luck, if I keep at it, I’ll be able to re-establish the brain chemistry patterns that enabled me to write so prolifically and with such unbridled joy. And if not, well, then we’ll see what happens next.

Truly Stupid Advice

In other news, I recently saw a truly stupid bit of advice repeated yet again by a professional fiction writer. He wrote, “Write for free.” By which he meant “write without expecting monetary compensation.”

Here’s the response I left, although I’ve expanded it a bit:

Let me ask you a question: Would you expect your plumber or lawyer or doctor or carpenter or cleaning person to provide their services free of charge? And those of you who have a day job, do you get paid for that? We even tip the waiter or waitress or roller-blade-poised carhop who brings our food, don’t we?

On the one hand, writers being willing in the first place to provide a service without being compensated (or compensated only with “copies”) is exactly why so many readers believe writing has no value, and therefore they shouldn’t have to pay for it.

Tell you what: If you’re a writer who honestly believes *any* writers should not be paid for their work, please send me a list of URLs where I can download or order (if paper) your work free. I’d really rather not pay shipping either.

Then again, if you believe that little in yourself, I probably don’t want to read your stories anyway. That’s the other, even uglier side of writing without compensation. It reinforces the common and collective inferiority complex that drives beginning writers to not believe in themselves.

Writing is no different than any other art or trade—it has value—and writers deserve to be paid.

To paraphrase what the late Harlan Ellison famously told someone who’d called him from a studio asking that he contribute (free) some writing to a production, “No. Cross my palm with silver. Would you expect the director or the other writers or your cameraman or your stage hands to work for free?”

But listen for yourself. If anyone out there hasn’t seen the video, you can find it at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PuLr9HG2ASs>. There’s some profanity. Enjoy.

Topic: Deep POV (sigh)

In another post I saw online, Lori Brown, a professional editor and book doctor (who has never written any fiction that I could find) talked about so-called “deep POV.” And she actually started by saying when she was asked in her capacity as a writing instructor, “What’s Deep POV?” she would respond “I can’t tell you, but I know it when I see it.”

Grrrrrrr.

Okay, first, ANY writing instructor who says about ANY writing technique, “I can’t explain it but I know it when I see it” should be fired immediately. Meaning you should demand your money back and walk out of the class, lecture, or seminar.

Second, “deep POV” really isn’t that difficult. If you want to write “deep POV” and directly engage your readers, then be sure you filter every word of your story through the POV character’s physical and emotional senses (and oh-my-god NOT the author’s!).

“Deep POV” is a fairly new term, but the technique itself is as old as storytelling. This is one more instance of someone creating a “new” name for a technique in order to teach it and make money.

The best way to practice “deep POV” by any name is to include all five of the POV character’s physical senses (sight, touch, taste, smell, hearing) and at least one of his/her emotional senses (joy, fear, etc.) in every major scene. That really is all there is to it.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Meth, Murder, and a Good Day To Pick Cotton” at <https://leelofland.com/meth-murder-and-a-good-day-to-pick-cotton/>.

See “Contracts: Traditional Publishing” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/contracts-traditional-publishing/>. Especially if you’re still pursuing a traditional publishing contract. And see PG’s take.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Altered Brain Chemistry](#), [Deep POV](#), [Lee Lofland](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [the writing life](#), [Topic](#), [Writing for Free](#)

The Journal: General Tidbits

January 10, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * The quote of the day...
- * This is the year you’ll finish your book
- * I was glancing over
- * If I May
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

“Publishers can’t publish without writers.” Dan Baldwin in “Son of Why Is This A Good Idea?” (see “Of Interest”)

The quote of the day is a massive UmYup, a solid statement of fact, and one that is empowering for writers. From early school, we are taught that our creative subconscious (and ourselves and whatever we’ve learned) are inadequate to tell a good story. They never actually say we aren’t good enough, but that is the implication.

We are taught that we must outline, plot and plan instead of simply trusting the characters to tell the story that they, not we, are living. And we’re taught that after we’ve written, we must revise, rewrite, and polish, not only with our own critical mind but with input from the critical minds of others.

And it’s all BS. All of it. As Dan wrote above, “Publishers can’t publish without writers.” Which means you, the writer, have the power.

I’ve told this story before, but as I used to ask writers at conferences, usually in the presence of at least one acquisitions editor from a “big” publishing house, “Don’t you know how important you are?”

The acquisitions editor frowns slightly, a half-grin on his face.

The writer shakes her head.

Me to the writer. “Okay, so tell me, what would writers do if there were no editors or publishers?”

The writer, nervous, grins, shrugs, glances at the acquisitions editor. “Write?”

Me. “Exactly. Even with no editors or publishers, writers would write. But do you know what editors and publishers would do if there were no writers?”

The writer cants her head and smiles slightly. Maybe something good is coming. “I don’t know.”

The acquisitions editor grimaces. And he should.

I grin. “Want fries with that?”

And today we have indie publishing.

Today, with just a little time investment and almost no monetary investment, a writer can learn to design professional covers, write professional sales copy, and publish.

For your efforts, you’ll keep 70 or 80 percent of the royalties instead of the 12 to 15 percent usually paid by traditional publishers. And much more importantly, you retain all rights to your intellectual property. Seriously, it’s all good.

I was glancing over a blog digest and a list of upcoming online classes when I noticed this class title: “This Is the Year You’ll Finish Your Book.”

Let me clarify: Umm, no, it isn’t. If you’re interested in taking this class, this will probably be yet one more year of *talking* about writing, *thinking* about writing, *taking classes* on writing, and even occasionally *considering* writing, none of which are actually writing.

So no, it won’t be the year you’ll finish your book. You’ll be far too busy doing all those other things to actually write. And to finish a book, you must write.

If I May

Yesterday I read a comment on another post that opened with, “I’m a practicing writer who hasn’t published anything, but—”

I don’t know what she wrote after that because I stopped reading.

If I may offer some advice on offering advice, if you want others to take you seriously, never start with, “I have zero experience at what you folks are talking about, but I think....”

If you have zero experience at the topic of discussion but the topic is something you are interested in or want to learn, I suggest reading and listening rather than writing or talking. Just sayin’.

But the opening of her comment did raise a valid question:

What exactly is a “practicing writer who hasn’t published anything”?

Does she really mean she practices writing (i.e., constantly puts new words on the page)?

Or does she mean she writes a bit, then practices hovering as she goes over and over and over what she’s written with revisions, “editing passes,” rewrites, and eventual polishing?

I didn’t ask her.

But if it’s the former, I hope she will develop a little belief in herself and publish what she’s written so readers can see whether or not they like it. If she does, she will almost certainly be be pleasantly surprised.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Midwest Mugshots: Police Records in Nebraska Yield Arresting Images of 19th Century Criminals” at <https://jonathanturley.org/2022/01/08/midwest-mugshots-police-records-in-nebraska-yield-arresting-images-of-19th-century-criminals/>. Possible criminal types for fiction.

See “Thoughts on Publishing in 2022” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/01/thoughts-on-publishing-in-2022.html>. Just in case you find something of interest in the post. I did not.

See “The Challenges of Policing in the Rain” at <https://leelofland.com/the-challenges-of-policing-in-the-rain-2/>.

See “A Hapless Car Thief...” at <https://jonathanturley.org/2022/01/09/a-hapless-car-thief-nevada-man-caught-with-dismembered-body-claims-to-have-stolen-the-wrong-truck/>.

See “Son of Why Is This A Good Idea?” at <https://fourknightspress.com/f/son-of-why-is-this-a-good-idea>.

Disclaimer: In this blog, I provide advice on writing fiction. I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. To be crystal clear, WITD is not “the only way” to write, nor will I ever say it is. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among myriad other topics.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Dan Baldwin](#), [Jonathan Turley](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [Lee Lofland](#), [Professional Writer Series](#), [the writing life](#)

The Journal: Dave Farland (David Wolverton)

January 14, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * David Wolverton
- * Of Interest

David Wolverton

I’m still here, and there are some good things in “Of Interest.” But my main reason for posting today is to pass along some sad news.

John David Wolverton, better known as Dave Farland or David Wolverton, suffered a massive heart attack yesterday and passed away last night. His departure is a huge loss to the fiction world and to the world in general.

He, Dean Wesley Smith and Kris Rusch were longtime friends. Dean posted a great pic at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/dave-farland-wolverton-has-left-us/>.

Dave was only 64 years old. That’s six extremely short decades. Enjoy every moment of your life, my friends.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Worldbuilding and the Whims of History” at <https://countercraft.substack.com/p/worldbuilding-and-the-whims-of-history>. Great food for thought if you want your stories to feel real.

See “Writing Challenge Update” at <https://www.deanwesleymith.com/writing-challenge-update/>. Includes a link to another Kickstarter.

See “Naming Your Baby” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/01/naming-your-baby.html>. Some thoughts that might help with titles.

See “Whose Story Are You Telling?” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/01/whose-story-are-you-telling.html>.

See “Curvature of space-time measured using ‘atomic fountain’” at <https://www.space.com/space-time-curvature-measured-atomic-fountain>.

See “9 things we learned about aliens in 2021” at <https://www.space.com/alien-discoveries-2021>. SF story ideas.

See “The 2022 Writers’ Police Academy Website is LIVE!” at <https://leelofland.com/the-2022-writers-police-academy-website-is-live/>.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Countercraft](#), [Dave Farland](#), [David Wolverton](#), [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [Lee Lofland](#), [Space.com](#)

The Journal: Believe in Yourself

January 16, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Topic: Believe in Yourself
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

[I]f you are really writing from your creative voice, it just ain’t possible to control it or steer it.”
Dean Wesley Smith

“[S]ince I never go into the writing with any idea what I am doing, I have been surprised every day what has appeared. And not questioning anything, just going for the ride and having fun.”
Dean Wesley Smith

“A year from now you will wish you had started today.” Karen Lamb

Topic: Believe in Yourself

In “Of Interest” today, see James Scott Bell’s “How to Write Short Stories Worth Reading.” There are some interesting links in the post. There are also a lot of what I’ve come to call Bell’s Negatives. I’m not a fan. Hence this topic on believing in yourself, and on watching out for, and not taking on-board, subliminal negatives.

Of course, Mr. Bell maintains plausible deniability by dropping little subliminal hints rather than coming right out and saying how he feels. Today, he begins with the subliminal notion that short stories (or at least *His* short stories, and by extension **Yours**) aren’t worthy of the writer’s faith. The first negative is in the title of the post: “How to Write Short Stories *Worth Reading*” (emphasis mine).

Short stories “worth reading”? Seriously, whatever happened to “A writer is the worst judge of his or her own work”?

No writer is in a position to judge whether any story is “worth reading.” If you wrote it, it will be far more than “worth reading” to some readers and far less to others, with most readers falling somewhere in the middle: the story’s good and entertaining, but nothing to write home about.

There’s also this negative:

“A good short story can be a gateway for readers to discover you and your full-length books. So where can you publish? There are established venues, like *Alfred Hitchcock* and *Analog*. These can be hard to crack and take a long time to hear from.”

Me, shaking my head. Two negatives in this one.

1. A good novel can be a gateway for readers to discover you and your short stories too. Duh. Anything with your name on it can be a gateway to you and your other writing. And don’t even try handing me that stuff about short stories being easier to write. They take less time to write than a novella or novel. But they aren’t easier.

2. As for where can you publish, he recommends against venues like *Hitchcock’s* and *Analog* because... well sir, because they might have a long response time. Again, I’m shaking my head in utter disbelief that any successful writer actually said this. *So what* if response times are long? It isn’t like you have to sit by the mailbox (or email inbox), unable to do anything else (or any more writing) until the response comes. C’mon, man.

And in response to his own “So where can you publish?” Bell writes,

“Some authors, like yours truly, use Patreon. . . . Many more use sites like Wattpad, Medium, and Comaful. Heck, you can start your own blog just for short stories.”

Okay, that’s what we in the biz call an umyup. Um, yup, some authors use *all* of those. And others submit to *Hitchcock’s* or *Ellery Queen’s* or *Analog* et al and THEN go to Patreon or wherever else.

Bell continues: “Or why not go right to Kindle? Publish it in Kindle Select, price it at 99¢, and run a free promo every 90 days. Make sure you have links to your website and books in the back matter.” (I can almost hear him saying “It’s only a short story. It isn’t worth more than a buck.”) And he’s wrong.

Here, let me try to write some advice myself: “And after you’ve exhausted the traditional magazines that pay professional rates and your story’s been published there for several hundred dollars and the rights have been returned (usually 3 to 6 months after publication), THEN you can go to Patreon AND Wattpad, AND Medium, AND Comaful, AND your own blog, AND Amazon Kindle (but not Select, *never* Select), AND Kobo, AND B&N, AND all the other venues around the world.”

As an aside, I recommend using Draft2Digital as your aggregator. I personally upload to Amazon and D2D, then let D2D do all the rest.

And um, yup, you can do exactly the same thing with your story after you’ve exhausted the traditional magazines that pay professional rates and your story’s been *turned down* for publication by all of them. But why not try the major paying markets first? Believe in yourself a little.

Also, Mr. Bell doesn’t mention collections at all, or not that I noticed. After awhile I only skimmed.

But collections—when I’ve written 10 short stories, even if none are published in major magazines, I’ve created 13 publications with my name on them: 10 individual stories, two 5-story collections, and one 10-story collection. If any of the stories were published by major magazines as well, so much the better. Those are additional publications.

In yet another negative, Bell also suggests pricing your stories at 99 cents. Seriously? If that’s really what you think of yourself and the value of your work, maybe you should find something else to do. I price all my short stories (defined as 2000 to 7000 words) at \$2.99 to take advantage of Amazon’s 70% royalty rate. Mr. Bell’s stories, priced at less than \$2.99, are pulling-in only a 35% royalty. And he’s literally telling his readers (albeit again, subliminally) he himself believes his work is worth only 99 cents. What you believe your stories (your work) are worth is literally your choice.

Sorry to get so long winded, but Mr. Bell gave me a lot to play with. As you read his post, you might find even more negatives. For his sake, I hope he actually thinks more of himself and his work. And as for what he thinks of you and *your* work, that shouldn’t matter at all.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Update On Challenge” at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/update-on-challenge/>.

See “The Hat and Telling Details” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/01/the-hat-and-telling-details.html>. Some interesting and maybe helpful info.

See “How to Write Short Stories Worth Reading” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/01/how-to-write-short-stories-worth-reading.html>. Short stories worth reading. Wow. Just wow.

See “Here’s What Can Happen When You Resolve to Write a Little Every Day” at <https://www.janefriedman.com/heres-what-can-happen-when-you-resolve-to-write-a-little-every-day/>. I didn’t read this. I added it just in case it might appeal to you.

See “Rytr – AI Writing Assistant” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/rytr-ai-writing-assistant/>. Interesting. And nope.

See “Who Really Murdered and Mutilated the Black Dahlia?” at <http://dyingwords.net/who-really-murdered-and-mutilated-the-black-dahlia/>.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [DyingWords.net](#), [Jane Friedman](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [the writing life](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: Believe in Yourself, Part 2

January 17, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * I almost went back
- * Topic: Believe in Yourself, Part 2
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

“The devaluation of music and what it’s now deemed to be worth is laughable to me. My single costs 99 cents. That’s what a [single] cost in 1960. On my phone, I can get an app for 99 cents that makes fart noises — the same price as the thing I create and speak to the world with. Some

would say the fart app is more important. It's an awkward time. Creative brains are being sorely mistreated." Vince Gill

I almost went back into the post at <https://hestanbrough.com/the-journal-believe-in-yourself/> to add the Quote of the Day above to the others. It seems more than appropriate given the topic in that post, "Believe in Yourself."

And fiction writers go a step further than Vince Gill's complaint. We actually devalue our OWN work. With some regularity, beginning fiction writers are advised (mostly by other beginning writers) to work free "for experience" or "for clips" or whatever. Unbelievably, long-time experienced writers occasionally also advise beginners to give their work away. It's insanity.

Of course, giving away your writing for nothing reinforces the feeling deep inside you that your work is worthless. Or as Linda Maye Adams put it in [a comment on an earlier post](#), when you give away your work, "...you're subconsciously telling yourself you're not good enough to be paid for your writing and that you'll never be good enough."

Worse yet, giving away your writing teaches editors, publishers, and the rest of the reading public that they can and should expect free labor, not only from you, but from other writers. See Harlan Ellison's justifiably angry take on the practice in this video, an excerpt from Erik Nelson's definitive Ellison documentary, *Dreams With Sharp Teeth*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PuLr9HG2ASs>. Strong language, but it's an important topic.

Likewise, pricing our short stories at 99 cents devalues them. Doing so not only belies how we feel about our work, it is a direct reflection of how we feel about *ourselves*—how we *value* ourselves—as writers.

Never sell yourself short.

Topic: Believe in Yourself, Part 2

Over in the Kill Zone blog in "[Christopher Columbus and the Discovery Method](#)," Kay DiBianca asks, "Are you a plotter? A pantsner? Or a hybrid plantser? Have you happened onto any unexpected discoveries in your writing? Maybe you've experimented with a new idea to extend yourself beyond the safe haven of what has always worked for you. ¶ Is the possibility of discovering something new worth the risk of failure by launching out into the unknown?"

Okay, that last part first. Ugh. "The risk of failure?" What risk is that, exactly? If your story or novel flops, will someone come to your house and murder your family? Will someone take the time to break your fingers individually? Will someone even ring your doorbell and then smack you in the mouth when you open the door? No? So what risk?

Anyway, I knew that most of what I could write in response would be a waste of my time in that venue, so here's the comment I left:

“It all boils down to trust. If you believe your characters (like your neighbors, the folks down the street, and even complete strangers) can live their story without you telling them what to do and say and how to feel, then simply let them live it. You can be their access to a keyboard, and both you and your readers will be amazed at what goes on over in that other world.”

And here’s *some* of what I could have written in response, but saved for you instead, you lucky writers you (grin):

Those of us who don’t plot and outline and revise and rewrite and polish and participate in critique groups but somehow manage to write hundreds of thousands of published words of fiction per year don’t have a secret handshake, and there are no special incantations or magic fairie dust. We simply trust ourselves enough to drag our ego aside and allow our creative subconscious to create. That’s all. Nothing more.

Obviously, all writers are different. Some have that level of confidence and some don’t. Some are secure in their wealth of knowledge and others are not. Most don’t even recognize how much they already know.

For example, you’ll rarely see anyone even among the most meticulous plotters and outliners consciously fretting over whether to insert an apostrophe in *don’t* or *wouldn’t* or *can’t*, or over whether to insert a period at the end of a sentence. They just do it.

Likewise, we who trust ourselves “just do it” but on a much larger scale. We allow our creative subconscious to create, and we don’t allow our conscious, critical mind to second-guess that.

As a human being, I am responsible for controlling only my own story, the one in which I’m currently sitting at a keyboard writing a blog post about believing in yourself. By extension, as a rational human being I trust the characters to tell the story that they, not I, are living. Just as I trust my neighbors and others to tell the story that they, not I, are living. An authentic story directly from the source is always better than one that somebody makes up about another person or people.

And as writers, we who do not plot and plan and fret simply trust what we’ve absorbed about storytelling over the years from various media, whether from our mother reading aloud to us or from watching movies or sitcoms on television or from the various “how-to” books we’ve read about the craft of writing.

Of course, as I wrote earlier, every writer is different. Some require the safety net of an outline, or “signposts along the way” or whatever. Some might have a 3-act or 5-act or 7-act structure printed out and laying close by or pinned up on the wall. Some manufacture (conscious mind) extensive character sketches. All of that is fine, but we who do not plot and plan and fret—we who trust—don’t do any of that.

You cannot create an authentic, surprising work of fiction, something remarkable that nobody has seen before, with the conscious, critical mind. Because if you can think it up or figure it out,

so can the reader. Your characters, on the other hand, will surprise both you and the readers if you let them.

Not only do we not outline, but we also don't allow our conscious, critical mind into the process in any other way: we don't revise, rewrite, or polish, for example. (Yes, we have a better, cleaner, more honest alternative.)

And since we don't allow critical input from our *own* conscious mind, we certainly don't invite critical input from others. Not because their opinion doesn't matter, but because it's only One opinion, and as such it's no more valuable than the opinion of any other reader. Think about that: If you would change your story to suit the input of a critic you might as well change it again to suit every reader's whim.

It is completely possible to write something you personally believe is a complete waste of time, the worst old thing you could have turned out. But if you turned it out with your creative subconscious, some readers will love it. Most readers will at least like it, and a few will hate it. Again, this is a fact, not an opinion. I've done it myself numerous times.

Remember, Writers are the worst judges of their own work. That's true, but it cuts both ways. It's true when you *don't* like your own work just as it is when you *do* like your own work. Don't stick your work into a drawer somewhere. Publish it and let the readers decide whether they like it. Your opinion doesn't matter.

We who do not plot and plan and fret trust instead. We trust what we know about structure, pacing, suspense, and all the rest. Like dotting an i or crossing a t, the knowledge we've gleaned over the years comes forth just as naturally, if only you trust that it will.

And that trust is possible because we've learned by applying previous knowledge to new stories, not by revising, rewriting, and otherwise hovering over one work. We move forward, not back, and we never stand in place, not moving at all.

Earlier I mentioned that we who do not plot and plan and fret also have an alternative to revising, rewriting, and polishing. This post is too long, so I'll talk about that tomorrow.

Talk with you again then.

Of Interest

See "Christopher Columbus and the Discovery Method" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/01/christopher-columbus-and-the-discovery-method.html>.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Believe in Yourself](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [the writing life](#), [Topic](#), [Writing Into the Dark](#)

The Journal: Believe in Yourself, Part 3

January 18, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Read the Contract
- * Topic: Cycling (What It Is, How to Do It)
- * Maybe I Should Write a Book
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“READ THE DAMN CONTRACT BEFORE YOU SIGN IT! READ THE DAMN CONTRACT BEFORE YOU SIGN IT!” The Passive Guy (an attorney well-versed in copyright law)

“An author who has spent hours and days and weeks and months writing a book should be willing to spend the extra time necessary to make sure that her/his baby is going to have a good home surrounded by honest people. Plus, remember how much it will cost you in legal fees to get out of a bad contract.” The Passive Guy

Read the Contract

This is so important that I had to put it up here in the body of the post. It's also repeated it in “Of Interest.”

See “What Can Happen When Your Agent Decides To Become Your Publisher” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/what-can-happen-when-your-agent-decides-to-become-your-publisher/>. Read the excerpted article in the main post if you want, but PLEASE read PG's concise comment and take it to heart. It's absolutely spot on.

I also strongly recommend reading the comment by C.E. Petit, which you can find just below the post or directly at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/what-can-happen-when-your-agent-decides-to-become-your-publisher/#comment-461084>.

Now back to our regularly scheduled programming. I hope you're enjoying reading this brief series as much as I'm enjoying writing it. If you missed them, you can find the first post at [Believe in Yourself](#) and the second post at [Believe in Yourself, Part 2](#).

Topic: Cycling (What It Is, How to Do It)

Yesterday I mentioned that we who do not plot and plan and fret also have an alternative to revising, rewriting, and polishing. It's called cycling.

Some critics have said to me that cycling is just another word for revising or rewriting, but it isn't. There's one major difference.

Revising, rewriting, and polishing, like outlining, plotting, editing, and participating in critique groups, all are accomplished with the conscious, critical mind. Nothing good in literature ever came out of the conscious, critical mind. And that's the difference:

Cycling, like writing into the dark, is accomplished with the creative subconscious.

Readers have a conscious, critical mind too. If you can "figure out" (consciously plan) where a story's going and what's going to happen next, so can the reader. You can never excite a reader who knows what's going to happen next. And if you write from the conscious, critical mind, that's most readers. As Bradbury famously said, "No surprise for the writer, no surprise for the reader."

But cycling—There are several methods or rhythms for using it. The only key is that it *must* remain the domain of the creative subconscious.

In my practice, each writing session is about an hour long, and in that time I generally write between 800 and 1200 words. Most often, that comprises a complete major scene and also a chapter.

At the end of a session, I take a break that usually lasts a few minutes to a half-hour or so. Regardless, when I return to begin writing again, I cycle back and read what I wrote during the previous session.

But—and again, here's the difference between cycling and revision/rewriting—I read only as a reader, not critically. I suspend all sense of disbelief (that is, I suspend all criticism) and Just Read to enjoy the story.

As I read, I allow my fingers to rest on the keyboard. I don't "look for" anything (that's a function of the conscious, critical mind) but I allow my fingers to move if my characters decide to correct an obvious misspelling or add some description to the text, etc. As I wrote yesterday, it's their story; I let them tell it.

Reading the previous session also gets me back into the flow of the story, and when I get back to the white space, I keep going. Say it with me, class: "I just write the next sentence, then the next, then the next."

That's really all there is to cycling as an alternative to revising, rewriting, and polishing from the critical mind, but there's another aspect too: Writers who are not bound to an outline are also unstuck in time.

If I'm racing through the story, trying to keep up with the characters and writing down what happens and what the characters say and do, sometimes something unexpected happens. And sometimes that something-unexpected needs a little foreshadowing.

In that case, I can "cycle back" to the appropriate place in the story, allow the characters to revisit the scene and make any adjustments that they (not I) deem necessary. Then I return to the white space and continue writing.

Here's my favorite example:

Say in Chapter 18, Aunt Marge hears an unusual sound from her living room at zero-dark-thirty. She puts on her heavy robe, the black one with the green vines and pink flowers twining around it, and pads barefoot into the living room. There she can barely make out a figure in the dark. Of course, he sees her too.

And the chapter ends.

Later, after several other events have occurred elsewhere in the story, we return in Chapter 26 to the scene unfolding in Aunt Marge's darkened living room.

Aunt Marge says, "What are you looking for? What do you want?"

The man says nothing, but he emits a growl. As in slow motion, he takes a step toward her.

Aunt Marge's eyes grow wide. She yells, "No! Stop!"

Whereupon the man lunges. ('Cause yeah, he's just that much of a moron.)

But Aunt Marge whips a .38 caliber revolver from the right pocket of her housecoat and puts two bullets into her would-be assailant, one in each lung. Because Aunt Marge is crazy about things being in balance.

And the reader (and the writer) go, *What? Where'd the gun come from?* Because seriously, you can't save Aunt Marge with a revolver that appears out of thin air. It's bad juju.

So we cycle back to Chapter 18, and this time Marge puts on her black, flowery robe, then opens the drawer on the nightstand and slips her deceased husband's .38 caliber revolver into her right pocket.

Cool. Back to Chapter 26. I can't wait to see what happens next.

Very important: Note that just before I laid out the example, I wrote that I “allow the characters to revisit the scene and make any adjustments that THEY (not I) deem necessary.” That is absolutely key.

Your job as a writer is to cycle back to where the adjustment might be needed and then to read and wait. Your characters are living the story, so they know far in advance what’s going to happen. Most of the time, they’ll make an adjustment (e.g., as above, letting the reader see Aunt Marge putting the revolver into the pocket of her robe thereby eradicating the miracle of its appearance in Chapter 26).

But sometimes, like maybe once in 200 or 300 times, they won’t.

Don’t question what your characters want to do. Go with your feelings. Go with that little internal voice, especially if it’s particularly strong. If you get to the place where you thought an adjustment might be necessary and the characters choose to leave it as-is, Go With That.

Remember, trust your characters at all times. If you’ve given them the chance to make an adjustment and they choose not to do so, just go back to the current scene and continue writing whatever they give you. (Just write the next sentence.)

I can almost guarantee, sometime later in the story something will happen that will make Aunt Marge having that revolver seem perfectly logical even though the reader didn’t see her putting it into the pocket of her robe. Again, just go with it. Always trust the characters to tell the story they’re living.

A final note on writing like we (who do not plot and plan and fret) write: If you want to try this, you have to REALLY try it. Don’t go in with some little just-in-case safety mechanism in place. Because unless you can let go of the fear—unless you can dive in and trust the process and your characters completely—it won’t work. So if you can’t do that, don’t bother.

But if you DO let go of that unreasoning fear, if you DO sweat it out and force yourself to believe until it’s no longer necessary to force yourself, your characters will reward you beyond anything you can imagine. Literally. I promise.

Maybe I Should Write a Book

Wow. It’s been a pretty cool few-days ride on the topic of believing in yourself, and it was fun. It occurs to me that maybe I should write a book on this stuff. (grin)

But nah. There are enough books out there, and most of them are fluff-filled regurgitations of the same old stuff. Who needs the bad company? Besides, you can still get all my Journals free of charge in PDF from 2014 forward. That’s just over 3.4 million words of nonfiction about writing fiction. You only have to email me at harveystanbrough@gmail.com to let me know you want them. Of course, they’re searchable.

And if I may engage in a little shameless self-promotion, I also strongly recommend two of my 15 or so nonfiction books:

[Quiet the Critical Voice \(and Write Fiction\)](#)

[Writing the Character-Driven Story](#)

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “What Can Happen When Your Agent Decides To Become Your Publisher” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/what-can-happen-when-your-agent-decides-to-become-your-publisher/>.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Bad Contracts](#), [Believe in Yourself](#), [Character-Driven Story](#), [Cycling](#), [Quiet the Critical Voice](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [Topic](#), [Writing Into the Dark](#)

The Journal: A Little Fun Today

January 20, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * A Little Fun Today
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“The advocacy of the three-million-member organization for censorship is a chilling position for any group representing educators.” Jonathan Turley

“I’ve put in so many enigmas and puzzles that it will keep the professors busy for centuries arguing over what I meant, and that’s the only way of insuring one’s immortality.” James Joyce

A Little Fun Today

Again, the Kill Zone rises up to hand me a topic, but this time it isn’t something to argue against. This time, Garry Rodgers’ post is on the use of clichés.

Naturally, my initial reaction was a little overboard. I hate clichés and I despise their use. In the comment I left there, though, I restrained myself:

“Like any tool, if a cliché is used intentionally to create a certain effect in the reader, it’s fine. I don’t like them myself, but if I have a character who often uses clichés as a pattern of speaking, who am I to stop him?”

Which is consistent with my “It’s the characters’ story. They’re living it, so let them tell it” mantra.

But honestly, what I wanted to write is this:

Like any tool, if a cliché is used intentionally to create a certain effect in the reader, it’s fine. I don’t like them myself, but then I’m an old grouch who doesn’t like much of anything. I especially don’t like trite, cutesie little aphorisms like, “There is no I in team.” (I can almost hear the whiny voice.)

Me: “No, but there are three U’s in Shut the F*** Up.”

See what I mean?

Likewise, when I encounter meaningless greetings to which I’m expected to utter a boring, trite, in-kind response, I just say no. I might even go out of my way to create a unique, previously unspoken or rarely spoken work of art for the person. For example, someone says, “Hi, how are you?” and looks away, betraying his indifference.

Me: “Oh, well, hey, you know, thanks for asking.” Pause. “Actually I think my left nut fell off just a moment ago. Want to help me look for it?”

Oh, did I mention I’m sitting astride my bicycle and the front wheel is a little wobbly?

Or a fake, mouth-only smile accompanied by a half-yawn and, “You have a nice day, now.”

Me, if I’m in a great mood: “Don’t tell me what to do.”

But I *really* hate that one. So maybe I’ll go into stage-play mode. Maybe I’m in the local post office, talking with the clerk across the counter. There are two or three customers in line behind me.

Maybe upon hearing “You have a nice day, now,” I’ll glance at the woman’s name tag to be sure I don’t accidentally use her real name (the name tag reads *Alice*), drop to one knee, spread my arms wide, and emote:

“Melinda! Melinda! How can I have a nice day when my every waking moment is focused on finding you and bringing you home? Why did you ever leave me and our 18 children?”

(I stop, re-splay my arms and look around wildly. The customer immediately behind me shuffles backward a few steps.) “And a *brothel*, Melinda? Would you really rather labor here than come home to your loving husband and our goats and chickens and that one chupacabra and your children who so desperately need you?”

(One forearm slapped across my forehead, I rise and stagger toward the chrome and glass door.) “But fare thee well, Melinda my love, if toiling in this den of iniquity is thy wish. Fare thee well!” As I place my hand on the cross-bar, a pause. “Annnnd scene.”

I glance over my shoulder and grin. “You have a nice day too, Melinda.” Then I shove open the door and step out of the lobby of the post office.

‘Cause I really, really, REALLY don’t like clichés.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “A Fun Ad” at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/a-fun-ad/>. Showing things you can do to publicize your book.

See “How is metal 3D printing transforming space travel?” at <https://www.space.com/metal-3d-printing>.

See “Teaching Censorship...” at <https://jonathanturley.org/2022/01/19/teaching-censorship-national-education-association-called-on-social-media-companies-to-silence-its-critics/>. Bone-chilling stuff.

See “Firefights and a Massacre: Real-World Horror” at <https://leelofland.com/firefights-and-a-massacre-real-world-horror/>. The opening two sentences: “Today, I’m featuring three podcasts.... Each session is a goldmine of information for crime fiction writers—dialog, slang, emotions, first-hand accountings of life or death situations, actual radio transmissions during ‘shots-fired’ incidents, and much, much more.”

See “Another Bryant Street Story Tonight” at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/another-bryant-street-story-tonight/>. To see what it takes.

See “When the Cows Come Home to Roost” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/01/when-the-cows-come-home-to-roost.html>.

Disclaimer: In this blog, I provide advice on writing fiction. I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. To be crystal clear, WITD is not “the only way” to write, nor will I ever say it is. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among myriad other topics.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Clichés](#), [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [humor](#), [Jonathan Turley](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [Lee Lofland](#), [Space.com](#)

The Journal: It's Much Easier

January 22, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * It's Much Easier
- * Of Interest

It's Much Easier

Over at the [Kill Zone Blog](#) a day ago, James Scott Bell posted an interesting question: "Should Writing Be Easy?"

Naturally, I commented. Of course writing is easy. You're sitting alone in a room, making stuff up. What could be easier than that?

But I wasn't quite that flippant in my actual comment. I wrote that, "Writing is easy (and fun!) for those who are able to trust their creative subconscious and not allow the conscious, critical mind to second-guess them and shut them down."

Which of course started a little firestorm, which is silly. You either trust your creative subconscious or you don't. No skin off my teeth either way. I'm just putting it out there to let folks know what's possible. I really should leave my matches at home when I go visiting. (grin)

Anyway, after I'd read or skimmed the other comments, I left another comment, basically agreeing that "Yes, learning the craft is a good idea." And really, to believe otherwise is inane. But should a guy who's written over 65 novels and over 200 short stories have to say "Yes, learning the craft is a good idea"? Sigh.

But I've noticed over the past few years that somehow, some of the folks who frequent TKZ got the idea that we who write into the dark do so willy-nilly with no thought at all to structure, pacing, and other matters of Craft.

And that's just silly. *Of course* we consider those things. We just don't consider them consciously while we're writing. We don't stop in the middle of a scene to look up a reference about what should be included in a scene.

Anyway, after I left the second comment, I promised to write a longer post on the topic here at the Journal today just in case anyone over there wants to stop by.

But a disclaimer—my thoughts here apply only to what I consider regular fiction, by which I mean stories that the writer makes up of whole cloth, so not "true crime" or "based on fact" or

even “historical fiction,” for which I assume the writing process is different. I don’t write them, so I can’t comment. As for writing regular fiction, here are my thoughts:

First, yes, by all means, anyone who aspires to grow and improve in the craft of writing should read and study and take classes and learn the craft. And they should use the conscious, critical mind to do that. That’s what it’s for.

Frankly, as an aside, if you’d like to learn how to interweave an overall plot with a couple of sub-plots and tie it all together at the end, I recommend bingeing *Seinfeld* until your eyes begin to bleed. You can take notes, but you’ll absorb a lot about (ahem) structure and pacing and dialogue (to quickly name three aspects of craft) without even taking notes.

But after writers learn and absorb, they either trust (or not) what they’ve spent all that time and money learning. And whether or not they trust or believe it, the newly acquired knowledge *still* has seeped into their creative subconscious. So really it’s a matter of trusting their characters to use the knowledge directly from the creative subconscious, or of the writer re-accessing the knowledge consciously, thereby sending a message of mistrust to the creative subconscious.

Those of us who write into the dark practice that new knowledge (and the knowledge that preceded it) by putting new words on the page. We write story after story after novel after novel, unimpeded by our own or others’ conscious critical mind.

Others, for whatever reason—and there literally are dozens of reasons given—hover over one work, revising, editing, inviting critiques, rewriting, etc. All of which, I hasten to add, is perfectly fine. The choice of whether to practice or hover belongs to each writer, as well it should. Every writer is different. Either way, their decision doesn’t affect my own bottom line, so I really don’t care.

For me personally, it makes perfect sense to trust that what I’ve learned about the craft of writing resides in my creative subconscious where it’s available to my characters as they tell their story.

It *must* reside there. If it didn’t, I would have to think consciously about other things I’ve learned over the years, like how to spell my name or whether to capitalize the first word of a sentence or where to insert the apostrophe in a contraction. Yet I do those things without thinking about them. (Maybe that’s just me, but I don’t think so.)

Likewise, when I write a story or novel, I apply all the things I’ve learned about the craft of writing without consciously thinking about them. That trust leaves me free to allow the characters to tell the story that they, not I, are living.

So for me, to answer the basic question, yes, because I choose to trust myself and my creative subconscious, writing is easy, fun, and even freeing. The “work” is in reading and listening and watching and thereby learning the craft.

All of this led me to another similar train of thought, which I probably will continue here tomorrow.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “‘Perfect to Me’: How Self-Editing Can Take Your Novel to the Next Stage” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/perfect-to-me-how-self-editing-can-take-your-novel-to-the-next-stage/>. I don’t buy it, but to each his/her own. You’ll see my comment on the post.

See “NASA wants your ideas to reuse trash and waste on a Mars mission” at <https://www.space.com/nasa-resuse-trash-waste-mars-mission>.

See “Spaceflight makes people anemic and it doesn’t get better with time” at <https://www.space.com/spaceflight-destroys-red-blood-cells>.

See “Priming the Pump” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/01/priming-the-pump.html>. A good post, wonderfully written.

Disclaimer: In this blog, I provide advice on writing fiction. I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. To be crystal clear, WITD is not “the only way” to write, nor will I ever say it is. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among myriad other topics.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [KillZone Blog](#), [Learning the Craft](#), [Space.com](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [Writing Into the Dark](#)

The Journal: Some Thoughts on Writing and Writers

January 23, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Topic: Some Thoughts on Writing and Writers
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

“Writers, of course, make the worst enemies.” Emily Temple (*Appropos of nothing—I just like the quote.*)

Topic: Some Thoughts on Writing and Writers

My apology in advance for a very long post.

As I wrote yesterday, I understand the world doesn't work the same way for everyone. It's easiest to simply say all writers are different and move on.

It's also fair to say I really don't care how anyone else writes. What difference can it possibly make to me? In fact, if it takes another writer a year to outline, workshop, revise, rewrite and polish a novel that's in any way similar to mine, that's less competition for the 10 to 20 novels I'll turn out in the same year. Shrug.

But I like to share with others what works for me, so here I am. If you'd like to know what works for me, go to the Search box in the sidebar on the website and enter Writing Into the Dark, then click Search. You might also check for posts on Cycling. You can also still email me at harveystanbrough@gmail.com and request the complete archives of this Journal in PDF, which are also searchable.

If you haven't tried my process, I recommend it, naturally. The beauty of writing into the dark is that there is no risk. How can there be? You can try it. If it works for you, it will open up a whole new world you never knew existed. And if it doesn't work for you, well, then you can easily go back to how you used to do things. No downside.

However, I can attest that among writers I know who have trusted the process and honestly tried WITD, none have returned to outlining, revising, rewriting, etc.

That said, I understand that not everyone can simply choose to believe in themselves or even in the knowledge they've assimilated. Or even believe they actually assimilated the knowledge in the first place.

Not everyone can attain that level of trust in themselves. It's a true testament to our educational system that so many believe so fervently in all that they can't do.

The inability to trust in one's own abilities as a writer is so rampant and so normalized that even human beings who have been wildly successful in other endeavors are stopped cold when they first attempt to write something so unimportant as a short story or novel.

If my old acquaintance is still reading this, I submit that the flooring store you started from scratch and built into a multi-million dollar business was actually important. You risked everything to provide for your family. Yet you find it impossible to believe you are capable of writing a 3,000 word short story, which is no more important than a few minutes' entertainment, without enlisting the help of critique partners.

Or the other acquaintance who was a successful heart surgeon for over thirty years. Again, an endeavor that was actually important and that produced an end product that was important. You literally held dozens of human lives in your hands and saved most of them. Yet you really believe you're completely incapable of providing something as unimportant as a few hours' entertainment by writing a novel. Because all your life you've been told (mostly by non-writers) that you can't.

In most endeavors, success breeds confidence that we can accomplish anything we set our mind to. A person who's wildly successful at any endeavor probably will be equally successful at anything else about which s/he is passionate.

Well, except telling stories. You know the drill. Sight-unseen, all first drafts are garbage. To write a "good" novel you must outline first, then write it, then consult critique groups and so-called developmental editors for their input, then revise and rewrite and polish (and eventually your unique, original voice is erased).

I've even seen in guidelines for a particular (now-defunct, I hope) magazine that a submission must have endured at least 10 rewrites before it will be considered for publication. (How they can discern the number of times a piece has been rewritten is beyond me.)

But as I said, I do understand why so many succumb to this inanity. It's much easier and safer to accept that we are incapable of creating anything of substance with our *eerie, mysterious creative subconscious*—

than it is to climb onto a roller coaster and plunge off into the darkness without a clue as to what's coming!

But I get it. The prospect of working without a safety net is frightening, especially after being taught practically all our lives that we *need* that safety net.

It's also much easier and safer and more self-gratifying to buy into the BS that being a writer is a special calling of some kind. It's much easier to follow the crowd, to take the long, hard route of controlling every word, every action, and every event from an authorial ivory tower with a solid, thick stone floor under your feet and a luxurious robe and mantle adorning your shoulders.

Even your own conscious, critical mind goes along with the crowd. It will tell you at every turn that the story you're writing lacks this or that, that it's no good by comparison to so-and-so but that a pair of "fresh eyes" could help you "fix it," intimating that there's something wrong with it in the first place. And there isn't.

But again, I understand. After all, the primary function of the conscious mind is to protect you. And it will protect even your self-esteem, though it must do so at the cost of your, er, self-esteem. It will strive to keep you from suffering rejection and embarrassing yourself with a piece of published writing by telling you, repeatedly, that what you're writing is no good. How's that for circular reasoning?

If you insist on writing, the conscious mind will insist you don't finish. It will whisper, "It's been done before," or "It isn't worth finishing. Nobody will read it anyway," and so on.

And if you DO finish writing a story or novel, your conscious mind will insist you don't submit it for publication or publish it yourself. Because again, "There are a million others out there just like it and they're all better than yours," or "There are only X number of plots in the world and

they've all been told," or even "Maybe you should stick it in a drawer for a week or a month." Yeah. Or forever.

Both the conscious, critical mind and the creative subconscious have been characterized as being a "small, quiet voice." Actually, the more you resist it, the louder the critical voice becomes. But there's one other very important difference between the two voices:

Only the voice of the conscious, critical mind is ever negative, and it's *always* negative. The voice of the creative subconscious is always positive.

Okay, so what if you're determined to fight off your critical voice and have fun writing fiction? What if you want to see what writing fiction is really all about? (It really isn't about endless labor and drudgery.)

As I wrote earlier, it's easier to follow the crowd, to don the authorial robes and ascend into an ivory tower from which you control every aspect of the story. Honestly, it's far more difficult to do what I'm about to recommend:

Drop the air of self-importance and the authorial robes in a heap on the floor. Then slip into a t-shirt, a pair of jeans, and sneakers and decide to just have fun telling a story.

Once you get that far, it's a little easier to catch your breath in a stifled gasp as you step off the parapet into the trenches of the story. And it's an absolute blast to race through those trenches with your characters. That's when you're really close to freeing yourself and fulfilling your potential as a writer. Just remember that they, not you, are living the story. It's their story. In your story, you're sitting at a keyboard. Now you only have to trust your characters. Write down what happens and what they say and do.

But what if you fail? What about the consequences? After all, nothing that is so much fun can happen without consequences.

The thing is, you can fail as a fiction writer only if you don't write, or if you write but you don't publish. And in either case, nothing at all happens. Hence, no consequences. You go on with your life, and your would-be readers enjoy the work of some other writer, one who was willing to take the risk.

Ironically, in writing fiction, there are consequences only for success. But really, even then, what consequences?

Acceptance or rejection—those are the perceived consequences, and if you publish through any venue they are unavoidable. But the keyword here is *perceived*. The consequences aren't real.

Once a book is published (and given that it has a good cover and well-written sales copy), some readers will buy it and others won't. Of those who buy it, some will love it, most will like or abide it, and some won't like it at all. So there are two extremes:

1. If someone loves your story, so what? They won't throw you a parade. And if you're a writer, really you shouldn't even notice. Probably you should learn something new about the craft and get on with writing another story.

2. And if somebody hates your story, again so what? The world won't come to a screeching halt. And again, if you're a writer, you shouldn't even notice. Probably you should learn something new about the craft and write another story.

The writer's job is to write, not to judge writing. The writer is the worst judge of his/her own work, remember? The thing is, that adage is as true when you think your work is horrible as it is when you think your work is good.

So write, submit or publish, and let the readers decide. Then write some more. No matter how you choose to do it.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Playing on Hard Mode" at <https://fs.blog/brain-food/january-23-2022/>. Especially scroll down to "Tiny Thought."

See "The Eyes Have It" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/01/the-eyes-have-it.html>. Mostly for the example descriptions.

See "2022 could be a turning point in the study of UFOs" at <https://www.space.com/2022-turning-point-study-ufos-uap>. Possible story ideas.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [False consequences](#), [FS Blog](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [Space.com](#), [Writing Into the Dark](#)

The Journal: Spreading Yourself Thin?

January 25, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Not Much
- * Spreading Yourself Thin?
- * Of Interest

Not much of anything today. Mostly I just wanted to touch base and recommend the items listed in “Of Interest.”

Dean’s post is time-sensitive if you want to back his current Kickstarter campaign.

Spreading Yourself Thin?

I also thought I’d share a bit of advice I sent another writer via email this morning. He emailed me to ask whether I thought it was possible for writers to “stretch themselves too thin,” for example writing plays and novels and short stories (not his specific example).

No, I don’t. I believe you can do anything you want within your physical limitations. (Your mind has no limitations.)

It’s all writing, and it’s all storytelling. Whether studying it or actually writing, what you learn about one will inform what you know and how you write the others. And yes, the same holds true with moving among commercial genres—horror, romance, SF, thriller, etc. As long as you’re excited and having fun, keep doing what you’re doing.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “WH Smith’s ‘bestselling’ book charts filled with titles publishers have paid to feature in rankings” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/wh-smiths-bestselling-book-charts-filled-with-titles-publishers-have-paid-to-feature-in-rankings/>.

See “Shopping at a SuperMax Prison: USP Florence ADMAX” at <https://leelofland.com/shopping-at-a-supermax-prison-usp-florence-admax/>. This is the prison at Florence, Colorado, not the one at Florence, Arizona.

See “Only Two Days Left In Crimes Collide Kickstarter” at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/only-two-days-left-in-crimes-collide-kickstarter/>. In case you’re interested.

See “Turley Announces Campaign For Football Hall of Fame” at <https://jonathanturley.org/2022/01/23/turley-announces-campaign-to-get-into-nfl-hall-of-fame-in-effort-to-be-twitter-verified/>. A little satirical humor.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [Jonathan Turley](#), [Lee Lofland](#), [Spreading Yourself Thin](#), [The Passive Voice](#)

The Journal: Readership and How to Get One

January 26, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Today, again
- * "What it is"
- * Readership and How to Get One
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

"Actually, practically nothing is going on." Kurt Vonnegut

"Having your book turned into a movie is like seeing your oxen turned into bouillon cubes."
John le Carre

"Film adaptations of books gross 44% more at the U.K. box office and a full 53% more worldwide than films from original screenplays." Adam Rowe in Forbes magazine

"Writing is exactly like having a rare disease." Alicia Butcher Ehrhardt

Today I'm just chatting. Again, the Journal is all about the items in "Of Interest." Well, that and the quotes of the day. Are those good, or what?

The first three quotes are linked to items in "Of Interest." In the fourth quote, [Alicia Butcher Ehrhardt](#) is alluding to the importance and rarity of having writer friends. I pulled her comment from her response to ["The Benefits of Writer Friends"](#).

And although Alicia doesn't say so specifically, I believe she's talking about people who know what it is to actually BE a writer. That versus those who think about it and talk about it and imagine it's some magical angelic calling but never are quite able to take the plunge and hence, never know the joy. Of course, I could easily be wrong.

"What it is"—I love the power of that phrase. It's almost as powerful as "I am." And I almost took off on its various connotations and uses, but I was able to restrain myself. Well, sort of, as you will see. Still, it's odd (and really cool) how some small groupings of words can contain such varied and powerful meanings.

As I used the phrase inadvertently above, my own weird writer mind went to the connotation it carried when it was used in the book (and film) [I Heard You Paint Houses](#), which is the story of Frank "The Irishman" Sheeran (a notorious Mafia hitman) and the disappearance of Jimmy Hoffa.

In that context, an example might be, “Hey, you need’a convince Jimmy what it is,” meaning if Jimmy doesn’t straighten up and fly right he’ll soon have an encounter he won’t survive.

Anyway, the point is, the phrase can mean things that are bathed in light or in darkness, but they’re always meaningful, important, “big” things. And it’s important for writers, if you are able, to be in touch with others who Know What It Is.

Readership and How to Get One

This isn’t really a topic. More of a musing.

Re the last item in “Of Interest,” I have a fairly large readership, one that (according to royalties I receive) continues to grow. If the current trend is any indication, my readership will continue to grow long after I’ve gone off-planet.

But how to get or increase a readership? A few times a year, I consider (briefly and not at all seriously), designing and engaging in a marketing push. You won’t be surprised to learn that I’ve never actually tried it.

I’m no longer on social media (and don’t care to be), and I’m not big on coercing people into buying things, even my own works. I’m more of a “Here it is if you want it” kind of a guy.

Plus, to me, marketing is boring, and doing it well requires a set of skills that I don’t have and that I don’t care enough to attain. From what I’ve seen in some other writers, marketing well also means setting aside the writing for a day or a week or a month or, in some cases, a year or longer, and to me that’s just silly.

So for the record, if I have anything to offer you on “Readership and How to Get One,” it’s just this: the best marketing a writer can do is to write the next book. Hey, it worked for me.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “100 Facts About Earth” at <https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/647722/earth-facts>.

See “Are You Prepared?” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/01/are-you-prepared.html>.

See “Artists use frauds” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/artists-use-frauds-2/>.

See “Demand for TV rights ‘never been higher’” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/demand-for-tv-rights-never-been-higher/>. And see PG’s take and CE Petit’s comment.

See “Book Sales Up, Readership Down” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/book-sales-up-readership-down/>. But also see PG’s take.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [KillZone Blog](#), [mentalfloss.com](#), [Readership](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [Writer Friends](#)

The Journal: You Can Comment

January 27, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * You Can Comment on Journal Posts
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“To be clear, PG isn’t saying that every pirate site for free [or cheap] ebooks is infected with malware, but enough are that it’s a good idea to stay away from all of them....” The Passive Guy

“Because it goes to a very fundamental principle of all nations, which is that our borders should be inviolate, and that our sovereignty should be respected.” Jonathan Finer, a White House deputy national-security adviser, on why Americans should care about what’s happening in Ukraine. (*As a long-time legal resident of southern Arizona I can only say LOLOLOLOL...∞*)

You *Can* Comment on Journal Posts

A new writer friend emailed me recently to say, in part, “I engage more when there are comment sections....” So for anyone who didn’t know it, you *can* leave a comment on any Journal post.

For your convenience, I include the entire post in the email version. I personally don’t like reading only a partial post in an email. It’s annoying to have to click a link that takes me to the relevant website to read the rest of the post, so I won’t do that to you.

That said, comments are always much appreciated because I enjoy the interaction and because they lead to more views by more readers. But there is no “comment” link in the email version.

If you’d like to leave a comment, you have to visit the website. The easiest way to do that is to click either the title of the post in your email or the link to “Read in browser” near the bottom of the email.

Clicking either of those will open the website. Then you have only to scroll down, enter the text of your comment in the large gold box, and click “Post Comment.” If you don’t see a large gold box when you scroll down, click “Leave a Comment” and one will appear.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “China isn’t our only intellectual piracy problem” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/china-isnt-our-only-intellectual-piracy-problem/>. Skip the article if you want to, but read PG’s take.

See “This Review Should Not Exist” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/this-review-should-not-exist/>. Again, see PG’s take.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Commenting](#), [The Passive Voice](#)

The Journal: Rushing This Out

January 28, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * The Indie Author Mindset
- * Something to Bear in Mind
- * Of Interest

Rushing This Out

I came to the Journal late this morning. I have a lot about writing to talk about, but that will be for later.

For now, for those of you who are interested in marketing, I suggest Adam L Croft’s [The Indie Author Mindset](#) and maybe more specifically to marketing, David Gaughran’s book, [Amazon Decoded: A Marketing Guide to the Kindle Store](#).

In full disclosure, I have not read either of these books, but both come highly recommended from a trusted source, [Garry Rodgers](#).

I also recommend Dean Wesley Smith's [*Think Like a Publisher*](#) and his books on [*Killing the Top Ten Sacred Cows of Publishing*](#) and of [*Killing the Top Ten Sacred Cows of Indie Publishing*](#).

Something to Bear in Mind

No matter what you read, change and growth can take place only when the discomfort of remaining where and how you are outweighs your fear of trying something new. If you don't try, you short only yourself. If you *do* try and succeed—and if you try, you will succeed to some degree—you benefit the world.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Challenge Still Going Strong” at <https://www.deanwesleymith.com/challenge-still-going-strong/>.

See “Spies, Lies, and Algorithms” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/spies-lies-and-algorithms/>. Maybe a good resource if you write spy thrillers.

See “How To Get Your Self-Published Book Into Libraries” at <https://www.thecreativepenn.com/2022/01/27/how-to-get-your-self-published-book-into-libraries/>.

See “Who Are You Writing For?” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/who-are-you-writing-for/>. Yet more advice from an “author” (Hear the angelic chorus?) with one book published. Sigh. Take the advice with a large grain of salt. Still, maybe an interesting question to ponder.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Creative Penn](#), [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [DyingWords.net](#), [Garry Rodgers](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [The Passive Voice](#)

The Journal: The Series Bible

January 30, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * A great deal of good information
- * Topic: The Series Bible (and the Reverse Outline)
- * Of Interest

There is a great deal of good information in today's "Of Interest."

I strongly recommend you get your beverage of choice and settle in to read. You might even want to try a few of the things they recommend in the different articles as you go.

Topic: The Series Bible (and the Reverse Outline)

One of my favorites in "Of Interest" today is James Scott Bell's post on the creation and use of a series bible. As some of you know (but we've had a lot of new joins recently), I go a step farther.

For every novel I write, I create a "reverse outline" as I go. If the novel happens to be in a series, the compiled reverse outlines quickly become a rough series bible, the source material from which I can easily create a sleeker, more quickly useful series bible.

Note: This is NOT the same as the outline some create well ahead of writing the novel. It's more of a diary of what happened than something to which you must adhere. In fact, you can't adhere to it. The reverse outline is the characters telling you what happened as the story unfolded rather than you telling the characters what they have to do.

That said, the reverse outline is a tool you might find indispensable whether you write off into the dark as I do or orchestrate every minuscule situation, every action and reaction of every character, and every word out of every character's mouth.

The mechanics—You can create the reverse outline on a physical notepad lying off to one side of your writing computer if you want. That's what Dean Wesley Smith and Stephen King do.

Due to an affliction, I can't read my own handwriting, and writing at any length is painful for me. So I use an open Notepad (.txt) document. If the manuscript file is named *Novel.doc*, I name the reverse outline file *Novel Notes.txt*. That way they stay together in the folder even when they're closed.

The technique—Whichever method you use, the purpose is to keep track of useful information that you might need later.

For example, at the top of my reverse outline I start a list of Characters. I add to the list as new characters appear, major and minor. Alongside each character, I add basic physical attributes that I might otherwise forget: eye and hair color, for example, age, type of hat worn (if any) and so on.

Next comes a list of Place Names, which is exactly how it sounds: a list of places that I might need to remember later. This can be towns, buildings, a bridge or ford or outcropping, an intersection, etc. Again, alongside each I add any necessary physical characteristics (grey stone, whitewashed wood facade, heavy double doors, or whatever).

If the novel is SF and it contains made-up gadgets, I might include a list of those and their attributes too, again, just for reference.

Below either the list of place names or gadgets, I run the chapter numbers down the left side. As I finish a chapter (or two or three), I write a brief sentence or two synopsis of the chapter alongside the appropriate number.

Then, in Chapter 18 if a character reappears from Chapter 3, I can glance back at my reverse outline to see that character's eye and hair color, etc. and how she was dressed in Chapter 3, if that's still applicable in Chapter 18. You can see how a particular room is furnished, whether a stream bends north or south at a particular rock outcropping, and whether the alien who somehow came aboard your generation ship in Chapter 4 had blue or green skin.

Whatever information you choose to include, a quick glimpse at a reverse outline is a whole lot easier than scrolling back (or searching) to find a character's full name or the color of her eyes or hair or whether a guy's hat is a sombrero, a wide-brimmed western fedora or a bowler. Just sayin'.

But as I always say, don't take my word for it. Try it for yourself.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Some Updates" at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/some-updates-3/>.

See "Creating a Series Bible" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/01/creating-a-series-bible.html>. Very Important Post.

See "A+ Content on Kindle Direct Publishing" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/a-content-on-kindle-direct-publishing/>.

See "I'll have what she's having" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/01/ill-have-what-shes-having.html>. About "creating emotion" in your fiction. Maybe of use.

See "A Preview of the Exciting 2022 Writers' Police Academy Classes" at <https://leelofland.com/a-preview-of-the-exciting-2022-writers-police-academy-classes/>.

See "Boston's Monstrous Molasses Massacre" at <http://dyingwords.net/brown-death-bostons-monstrous-molasses-massacre/>.

See "Books Published 4th Quarter" at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/books-published-4th-quarter/>. A look at what's possible.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [DyingWords.net](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [Lee Lofland](#), [Reverse Outline](#), [Series Bible](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: Cover Design and Publishing

January 31, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Topic: Cover Design and Publishing
- * Of Interest

Topic: Cover Design and Publishing

A writer emailed to ask about cover design. He's starting from scratch. As I told him, it's a massive question with several facets.

First, you'll need cover art. Via Dean Wesley Smith, for fiction it's better to use illustrations than actual photographs. (Perusing the covers of best-selling novels at Amazon or in other venues bears this out.) You can find and download either kind of image at any of several places.

My favorite paid sites are Deposit Photos, CanStock Photos, and BigStock Photos. (As always, your results might vary.) My favorite unpaid (free) site is Unsplash. But if you key "royalty-free illustrations" (or "...images" or "...photos") into your search engine, you'll soon be overwhelmed with choices for both paid and free sites.

I suggest you briefly explore the sites that feel right to you. Enter your search terms (genre, etc.) on the site and see what comes up. Prepare to spend hours browsing photos and illustrations. (Most sites have filters you can employ.)

Of course, there's a great deal more to cover design than selecting a cover image: text color and size, placement and arrangement of the title and author name, and dozens of other details. Your cover gives the potential reader her first impression of your work. It's that important.

I recommend Allyson Longueira's (WMG Publishing) lecture on the fundamentals of cover design. It's called "Designing Mystery, Cozy, and Thriller Covers." If you write in a different genre, buy it anyway. It covers a lot of fundamentals that apply across the board.

Also, it's only 8 videos, so it's probably only \$50. (I forget.) A great investment. The lecture is good enough that you might not even need the more expensive online workshop, Covers 101.

Beyond designing the actual cover, you need to write effective sales copy. To learn that and to have a reference book you can refer back to time after time (you'll need to), I recommend Dean's WMG Writer's Guide, *How to Write Fiction Sales Copy* (see <https://www.amazon.com/dp/1561466476>). I recommend the paperback version so you can keep it close at hand on your desk.

But beyond the cover and the sales copy, there are a ton of other things you have to do to publish. For that I recommend my own *The Essentials of Digital Publishing*, which you can purchase for \$9.99 at Smashwords (see <https://www.smashwords.com/books/view/55256>) or which I will send you free of charge if you email me. If you choose to buy it for some reason I recommend the PDF version so you can enlarge the illustrations.

So nobody thinks I'm jerking them around, *The Essentials of Digital Publishing* is slightly out of date. It doesn't contain references to [Draft2Digital](#), for example, whom I highly recommend as a distributor to everyone but Amazon. (Distribute to Amazon yourself.) And it probably DOES contain references to CreateSpace, a print-on-demand publisher that has been defunct for a few years.

But the information in the book is still valid. It covers everything from how to organize files most efficiently to all other things publishing.

After you've acquired and listened to or read the lecture and books above, and after you've done due diligence re finding your favorite source(s) for cover illustrations, please feel free to ask any questions you might still have.

Note: Even if you're one who insists on going with a traditional publisher, knowing this stuff is essential to your future mental well-being. Many employees of traditional publishing, especially those who work on new authors' debut novels, don't have a clue what they're doing. Just sayin'. More knowledge is always a good thing.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Your Favorite Word" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/01/your-favorite-word.html>.

See "5 Questions the Most Interesting People Will Always Ask in Conversations" at <https://www.inc.com/marcel-schwantes/5-questions-most-interesting-people-will-always-ask-in-conversations.html>. Story ideas.

See "Death Doulas Used to Be Rare...." at <https://time.com/6128469/death-douglas-covid-19-pandemic/>. You ever heard of a death doula? More story ideas.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [cover design](#), [Digital Publishing](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: Happy February

February 1, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

* Aggregators (Distributors) and a new resource.

* Of Interest

Only a very short post today. For some reason I wanted to mark the passing of February 1 or something.

Hey, a happy belated welcome to February 2022. Full disclosure, frankly I'm still wondering what happened to 1978. Anyway....

You can still get a PDF copy of my slightly outdated but still very useful book *The Essentials of Digital Publishing*, a \$10 value, free if you email me and ask. The addy is harveystanbrough@gmail.com.

Also, you can still get the full PDF *searchable* archives of this Journal all the way back to October 2014 free, again if you just email and let me know you want them. Wow, do I wish I'd had a resource like this when I was starting out, or anytime in the first few years.

Aggregators (Distributors)

Even if you already use another aggregator like Smashwords (clunky interface) or Draft2Digital (a smooth interface but somewhat limited distribution), I suggest you also take a look at StreetLib. To start, you can [Read The Latest Issue of Their Newsletter](#).

I also recommend a new resource, TNPS (The New Publishing Standard). Extremely interesting and timely articles on today's publishing. Browse <https://thenewpublishingstandard.com/>.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Chinese bot translates 300-page book from English to Chinese in 30 seconds with 95% accuracy" at <https://thenewpublishingstandard.com/2018/10/17/chinese-bot-translates-300-page-book-from-english-to-chinese-in-30-seconds-with-95-accuracy/>. This was first posted back in 2018. Somehow I missed it.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [D2D](#), [Draft2Digital](#), [Free ebooks](#), [Free Journal archives](#), [Free TEDP](#), [Smashwords](#), [StreetLib](#), [TNPS](#)

The Journal: Guest Posting?

February 2, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * I meant to make this brief
- * Atticus looks good
- * Topic: Want to Guest Post?
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

“If there are only one or two things you can add to your plate this year, make designing and maintaining an online ebook store one of them.” Kristine Kathryn Rusch

I meant to make this a brief post again today, mostly because the stuff in the next couple of paragraphs seemed too important to wait for a day when I had more to say. But then I got all wordy later on and this post became more than I intended. (grin)

Anyway, those of you who subscribe to Kristine Kathryn Rusch's Patreon account or even to her free newsletter probably have already seen this first part. If you have, you can probably skip this part of the Journal. If not, read on.

Back on January 26, KKR posted an extremely interesting article on New Tools for indie publishing. Admittedly, I only skimmed it, but I believe it's free of political rhetoric. See “Business Musings: New Tools: Indie Publishing (Year in Review 7)” at <https://kriswrites.com/2022/01/26/business-musings-new-tools-indie-publishing-year-in-review-7/>.

To see all of KKR's “Year in Review” posts for 2021, click <https://kriswrites.com/category/business-musings/>. At that link, you can scroll among the topics and brief excerpts to choose what you want to read.

Finally, if you'd like to take a look at Atticus, a book-design program KKR mentioned that rivals Vellum and is PC friendly, visit <https://www.atticus.io/>.

Atticus certainly looks good to me—especially because it costs \$100 less than Vellum and it's a one-time fee vs. ongoing monthly charges like Adobe—but I can't personally vouch for it as I haven't actually used it.

That said, I probably *would* adopt it myself if I weren't so set in my ways. As it stands, I format in Word and create covers in Serif PagePlus X9 (and I have Affinity Publisher waiting in the

wings). I'm also happy enough with D2D's .mobi and .epub conversions of my .docx and cover files.

Topic: Want to Guest Post?

As I wrote above, I can't personally vouch for Atticus as a user, but if any of you are already using it, or if you decide to try it, let me know what you think. You can even write a guest post about it if you want. In fact, if you would like to write a guest post for the Journal on any acceptable topic, email me.

Acceptable topics include any (positive or negative) about using any new writing, publishing or marketing tech. Do you have an online bookstore on your own website or anyplace other than the biggies like Amazon, Kobo, etc.? Also welcome are any posts about writing, publishing, or marketing that do *not* tout traditional publishing or the safety-net myths. I also welcome inspirational success stories that feature your own experience with trusting your creative mind as you write. Let others see what is possible for them through your own experience.

For example, only a day or two ago, a writer mentioned via email that she's been writing a short story every week since April. I would welcome a post from her on anything that might help someone else do the same or something similar: where and when she writes, obstacles or deterrents to that (writing is never separate of its setting) and how she overcomes them, what motivates her to keep going, etc.

Why the Exclusions—Articles that tout traditional publishing as a good thing or that encourage writers to engage in the safety-net myths—outlining, revising, rewriting, the use of critique partners or groups, etc.—will be rejected out of hand. Readers can find articles that support the tradpubs and encourage writers to engage in these myths at 9,999 out of every 10,000 blogs on writing, so they don't need to see them here too.

This Journal is a safe haven for serious fiction writers and aspirants who have left or want to leave those myths behind. As such, it will never endorse the nonsensical practice of using the conscious, critical mind in place of the *creative* mind for *creative* endeavors.

Also please remember your subject matter. Please don't espouse religious, social or political agendas or systems or engage in Clinton, Bush, Obama, Trump or Biden bashing. This isn't the place.

If any of you would like to guest post, just send me an email with Guest Post in the subject line and attach your post in a Word format (.doc, .docx or .rtf). I'll be your acquisitions editor. (grin) If I can agree with you or remain neutral, I'll publish your post. (I reserve the right to correct spelling errors, etc.)

As this is a free blog, I can't pay you, but feel free to include a link to your website and/or your Amazon (or other) author page, tout your stories or books, etc.

In fact, if you send me a post and there's something of mine you'd like in return (fiction or nonfiction), include that in your email too and I'll send it right out whether or not I accept your post for publication. Be sure to tell me which eformat you want. My default is .mobi (Kindle) but I also have .epub and .pdf. I look forward to hearing from you.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "When a Writer Dies: Making Difficult Decisions About the Work Left Behind" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/when-a-writer-dies-making-difficult-decisions-about-the-work-left-behind/>. See PG's take.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Guest posting](#), [Kristine Kathryn Rusch](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [the writing life](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: Always Be Learning

February 3, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Topic: Always Be Learning
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

"There is nothing like the death of a moneyed member of the family to show persons as they really are, virtuous or conniving, generous or grasping." Jesse Dukeminier and Stanley M. Johanson, estate planning attorneys. (Possible story idea?)

Topic: Always Be Learning

The old salesman's mantra, the ABC of selling, is Always Be Closing. For the serious fiction writer, the mantra is Always Be Learning.

Over at Kill Zone today, Garry Rodgers discussed Dieter Rams' ten design principles and theorized about how they apply to writing (see "Of Interest"). Then he asked, "What about you Kill Zone writers and publishers? ... Can you add other principles that help us to be better at writing and publishing?"

Of course, my first thought was Heinlein's Rules, and so many don't even know they exist that I decided to leave that as a comment.

But then I remembered an old beat-up scrap of paper I had on the wall of my home office probably 25 years ago above my Smith-Corona word processor with its little 4-line screen.

I had retired from the Marine Corps and was living in Roswell New Mexico at the time. I was attending one college, serving as an adjunct instructor in another, and writing a little on the side.

On the scrap of paper were the typewritten "Seven Rules of Writing" by Roberta Jean Bryant.

The scrap of paper is long-since gone to dust, so I looked up the Seven Rules on the internet, then added them to my comment over at Kill Zone. Like Heinlein's Rules, Bryant's Laws are succinct. Unlike Heinlein's Rules, they're as easy to follow as they appear. Well, *if* you want to be a writer. Anyway, here they are:

Heinlein's Rules

1. You must write.
2. You must finish what you write.
3. You must not rewrite except to editorial order. (*Harlan Ellison's corollary: And then only if you agree.*)
4. You must put it on the market.
5. You must keep it on the market until it sells.

Note: For a PDF copy of my annotated Heinlein's Rules, click <https://harveystanbrough.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Heinleins-Business-Habits-Annotated-2.pdf>.

Roberta Jean Bryant's "7 Laws of Writing" from her book *Anybody Can Write*:

1. "To write" is an active verb. Thinking is not writing. Writing is putting words on paper.
2. Write passionately. Everybody has loves and hates; even quiet people lead passionate lives. Creativity follows passion.
3. Write honestly. Risk nakedness. Originality equals vulnerability.
4. Write for fun, for personal value. If you don't enjoy the process, why should anyone enjoy the product? Pleasure precedes profit.
5. Write anyway. Ignore discouraging words, internal and external. Persistence always pays off.

6. Write a lot. Use everything. Learning comes from your own struggles with words on paper.
7. Write out of commitment to your ideas, commitment to yourself as a writer. Trust yourself.

It isn't a bad idea to combine both sets of rules. Heinlein's can be reduced to only three rules, really:

1. Write (and finish).
2. Don't allow your (or anyone else's) conscious mind to second-guess what your creative mind has created.
3. Publish. The world is your oyster.

And all seven of Bryant's Laws could be shoehorned-in as Heinlein's Rule 1a. Or you could hold back Law 5 and 7 from that insertion and insert them as Heinlein's Rule 2a. Works well either way.

But it's easy enough to read motivational bits and advisory posts and lists of rules and laws and guidelines. Actually applying them is much harder. Which brings us back to Bryant's First Law of Writing: To write is an active verb. Thinking is not writing. Writing is putting words on paper.

To quote Aunt Meg from *Twister* (grin), "It's what you do. Go. Do it."

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Dieter Rams — 10 Principles of Good Design" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/02/dieter-rams-10-principles-of-good-design.html>. Just in case you get something from it.

See "Books about Estate Planning and Authors" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/books-about-estate-planning-and-authors/>.

See "A Primer on Estate Planning as a Writer" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/a-primer-on-estate-planning-as-a-writer/>.

See "Estate Planning for Authors" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/estate-planning-for-authors/>.

Also see the comments on "When a Writer Dies..." at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/when-a-writer-dies-making-difficult-decisions-about-the-work-left-behind/#comments>.

Disclaimer: In this blog, I provide advice on writing fiction. I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. To be crystal clear, WITD is not "the only way" to write, nor will I ever

say it is. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among myriad other topics.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Heinlein's Rules](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [Roberta Jean Bryant](#), [Seven Laws of Writing](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: Writers Are the Worst

February 4, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Topic: Writers Are the Worst
- * Of Interest

Topic: Writers Are the Worst

Well, the worst judges of their own work. (grin) We've all heard that a zillion times, and most of us have said it at one time or another, usually to another writer. It's one of those truisms we bat around to show our contemporaries how smart we are.

I've written on this topic recently, but it reared its head again yesterday in an email from a writer, Matt, who often inadvertently provides me with topics for this Journal with his emails. (Thanks, Matt.)

He asked, "Why do writers think they can tell how good a piece is when it is apparent [they] can't?"

Here's the thing. Re writers being the worst judges of their own work, *of course* they are.

But that doesn't mean they can't judge for themselves what they like or don't like (or by extension, whether the work is any "good"). It only means they can't judge for OTHERS what THEY like or don't like. And frankly, to believe they can is the utmost in precious, haughty pretentiousness.

Right Here —————>>> is where one of those haughty, pretentious writers would drape one forearm over his or her forehead and say, "But I have *standards* for the stories and novels I produce. I want to only put out *quality* stories and novels."

As if the rest of us are busting our hump to put out crap, eh? And how deliciously ironic is it that all the critical-mind revising and rewriting and polishing is actually *destroying* the quality—and the unique originality—of those very same stories and novels? But I digress.

The real problem lies in a duality. Writers believe the truth of the saying that writers are the worst judges of their own work, but only when they believe the work is good: "I think this is

really good, but writers are the worst judges of their own work, so it probably *isn't* good (or can't possibly be).”

And of course that's right in line with what they've always been taught: that to turn out a “quality” story, you must revise, rewrite, run it through a critique group, polish, etc.

But oddly, when a writer thinks his own work is *bad*, the wisdom of the old saying vanishes into thin air. Then it becomes, “Welp, I think this sucks, and I wrote it so I should know.” Which *also* follows what we've always been taught, that we can't turn out a quality story by ourselves. To turn out a “quality” story, we have to revise, rewrite, run it through a critique group, polish, etc.

Sound familiar? Seeing a trend here? And isn't that just a lovely coincidence? That's my take on “Writers Are the Worst Judges of Their Own Work,” or as I call it, “The Mysterious Vanishing Mantra.”

Anyway, after I replied to Matt's first email, the young screenwriter emailed me back to say “I know enough now to know that I don't know whether a story is good or not.”

Okay, I already sort of responded to this above, but to round-out my thoughts on the matter, *of course* you know whether a story is good or not. But the story is good or not **To You**, meaning **In Your Opinion**. And so what?

“Knowing” whether a story is good or not isn't really the point. The point is that you have no right to prejudice for someone else what they will or won't like. Just put it out there and let your fellow humans make up their own mind.

But Matt also asked another question: “What do you think of writers who enjoy reading their own stories? I've seen a few posts on writing forums lately that say if you do, then they can't possibly be good.”

Okay, wow. Even I hadn't heard that one before, but neither does it surprise me. And frankly it's ridiculous.

“If you enjoy reading your own work that somehow means it's bad” sounds like a magical mantra. It makes absolutely no sense. The one thing isn't related to the other in any way. It's the same as a small child seeing a shooting star, closing her eyes tightly, and muttering, “Okay, that means I really *will* get a pony for Christmas.”

Yawn. Yeah. Don't stock up on alfalfa just yet.

Finally, this morning my young friend talked briefly about social media and a critique group on there and how he mentioned to them that maybe they should trust themselves and their own work and—of course he was shouted down.

I told him not to worry about it. I stopped a long time ago trying to convince anyone on social media—least of all those safely wrapped in their ignorance—of anything at all. And what they believe or don't believe really doesn't matter.

What matters in life is the quality of it, and what matters in our writing endeavors are how much we enjoy them and the results we achieve.

Most writers immersed in social media groups keep themselves busy batting back and forth the same old bad advice, which is fine with me. Most also are rendering themselves non-competition by taking themselves out of the publishing game.

How? By spending the majority of their “writing” time outlining and researching and revising and rewriting and polishing and critiquing each other. (None of that is writing.)

They reassure each other, patting like-minded fellow travelers on the back as they plan their annual (or bi-annual or tri-annual) launch parties. Then many of them stop writing, *voluntarily*, and take the next year or two off to focus on promoting what they've launched.

And all the while, people like me are chuckling, probably a little smugly to be honest, as we look in on one set of characters or another and record their lives in short stories and novels and publish them.

Even last year, when I was able to write only from January 1 through August 6, I produced 13 novels, a novella, and 3 short stories. (I had to look that up, and I was pleasantly surprised. Especially given the abbreviated year, I thought I'd written only 8 or 9 novels in 2021. Ironically, I think 2021 was my best year.)

Anyway, my advice is to let other writers believe what they want and do what they want. Don't let it matter to you, and don't bother trying to convince them otherwise.

The ones who are ready eventually find their way to Dean Wesley Smith's website or to this silly little Journal. Then they read back over Dean's archives (when he was writing a lot more about writing) or the Journal archives, and they buy his or my nonfiction books, and they listen to his lectures and online workshops.

When they're ready to trust themselves, they let go of the myths and Just Write. And the fortunate ones never look back.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Public Domain Day 2022” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/public-domain-day-2022/>.

See “Happy Public Domain Day!” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/happy-public-domain-day/>.

See “An 8-year-old slid his handwritten book onto a library shelf. It now has a years-long waitlist.” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/an-8-year-old-slid-his-handwritten-book-onto-a-library-shelf-it-now-has-a-years-long-waitlist/>. Let’s hope nobody ever “teaches” him to ignore his own voice, to revise and rewrite and polish.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [The Passive Voice](#), [the writing life](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: Discipline, Study, Keep Coming Back

February 6, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Topic: Discipline, Study, Keep Coming Back
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.” Winston Churchill

“Not everything warrants description—only details that matter to the character.” [Joe Ponepinto](#)

“There are no shortcuts to success on the field or in life.” Tom Brady, in his retirement message

Topic: Discipline, Study, Keep Coming Back

Some writing lessons today from James Scott Bell over at the Kill Zone blog, taken from how the now-retired quarterback Tom Brady lived his professional life. I’m directly quoting Mr. Bell, taking brief excerpts from his post. If you want to read the whole post, click <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/02/writing-the-tom-brady-way.html>:

“Discipline is the foundation. Are you willing to do what it takes to produce the words, day after day? Inherent talent is obviously a plus, but ... dedication will take whatever talent you have to its fullest expression.”

Sigh. My ellipsis replaces the words “hard work and” in the quote. I tried to leave it in, but I just can’t. Anyone who honestly believes writing is “hard work” has led an extremely charmed life.

“Study is an X factor. Are you taking positive steps to grow in the craft? Do you ever crack a craft book?”

“You can always come back when you’re down. Are you able to shrug off disappointments and criticism, and keep on writing?”

All three points are good advice, no doubt, and they deserve the attention of any writer who wants to achieve his or her personal best. But I would add a caution: these are excellent guidelines to apply to yourself and your craft, but *not* to the individual story or novel.

Remember, what’s important is THAT you write, not WHAT you write. Let’s look at that for a moment.

The instant you begin to focus (conscious, critical mind) on making an individual story “better” (hear the critical voice?), you’re dead in the water. Write to the best of your current ability (you’ll do this automatically), then submit or publish.

After you do that, move on to either study the craft in one way or another or Practice, by which I mean Write Another Story or Novel. Practice doesn’t mean hovering over the story you just finished, revising and rewriting and polishing. Practice means writing a new story, putting new words on the page.

The individual story or novel doesn’t matter at all. That doesn’t mean you don’t care about quality, as critics of those of us who Write Into the Dark would have you believe. As I wrote earlier, if you’re a writer, you’ll automatically turn out the best possible work you can at your current skill level. Duh.

And I’ll just go ahead and say it: Anyone who tells you to write “bad” intentionally so you can go back and fix it later doesn’t know what s/he’s talking about. Or else s/he’s a masochist with dreams of inflicting the illness on others. Misery loves company, and it longs for validation.

So to get better as a writer, Decide to be disciplined, or as Roberta Jean Bryant put it, “Write Anyway.” Decide to not let anything that isn’t life-threatening distract you from your writing routine.

Second, Study the craft, whether by reading a craft book from someone who actually writes fiction (and using only what makes sense to you), or by taking a lecture or workshop or mentorship, or by reading the work of an advanced Stage 4 or Stage 5 writer and trying to figure out how s/he achieved a particular effect or made you feel a particular way.

And third, Don’t read reviews and Don’t listen to criticism (including your own critical mind). And for goodness’ sake, DON’T actively SEEK criticism from others! That’s just begging to be slapped around.

Then, shut off your conscious, critical mind, engage your creative mind, and have some fun. Pull on your old jeans, tennie go-fasters and a t-shirt and roll off into the trenches of the story. You might even exchange a grin with your characters in eager anticipation of what’s about to happen. Then you only have to try to keep up as they and you race away through the story.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “All the Art” at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/all-the-art/>.

See “First One Room, Then Another” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/02/first-one-room-then-another.html>. Linked because of his detailed editing process. I’d shoot myself, but whatever works for you.

See “Relationship Thesaurus Entry: Mentor and Protégé” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/relationship-thesaurus-entry-mentor-and-protege/>. A great list of short story writing prompts. Stories revolve around conflict, and “conflict” is another way to say “relationship dynamics.”

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [James Scott Bell](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: Be True to the Story

February 7, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Topic: Be True to the Story
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“I never consciously place symbolism in my writing. That would be a self-conscious exercise and self-consciousness is defeating to any creative act. Better to let the subconscious do the work for you, and get out of the way. The best symbolism is always unsuspected and natural.” Ray Bradbury

“Symbolism? Symbolism is what critics search for and readers sometimes believe they discover. But it has nothing to do with me. I just write the stories.” Gervasio Arrancado, writer of magic realism, on symbolism in fiction

“Generally, the best symbols in a novel are those you become aware of only after you finish the work.” Norman Mailer

“Symbol-hunting is absurd.” Saul Bellow

For more on symbolism, sign up for Dan Baldwin’s Writing Tip of the Week by emailing balcco@msn.com.

Topic: Be True to the Story

“One of the most damaging things a new writer can do is try to please everybody who beta-reads or critiques their WIP.” Anne R. Allen in [“10 Dangerous Critiques: Beware Misguided Writing Advice”](#)

Wow, do I ever agree with that. Well, except that the quote should read “any writer” instead of “a new writer.” And some of that “misguided writing advice” is implied by Ms. Allen’s post: namely, that you should actively seek a critique of your characters’ story in the first place.

But why do I agree that “one of the most damaging things” a writer can do is “try to please everybody”? It certainly has nothing to do with whether a critique is “valid.”

Every critique is valid from the critiquer’s point of view and, for that matter, it should be valid from the writer’s point of view as well. After all, everyone has an opinion, and any honest opinion is as worthy of respect as any other honest opinion.

But that’s exactly the point. Whether or not you agree with any critique, it remains only one opinion, and with any luck you’ll have more than one reader of your work. So others’ opinions shouldn’t matter to the writer. At all.

Say your critique group has five members and each of them offers a “good, valid” critique of your novel. Once you’ve made the recommended revisions, you’ve pleased exactly five readers. That’s five out of what you hope will be tens or even hundreds of thousands.

And I might add, none of those you pleased by making the revisions are your characters. Chances are, your characters crossed their arms and went silent the instant you started inviting others to tell them how to live their story. The instant you broke their trust.

But you know best and you’ve chosen your path. So maybe more is better. Say you show the revised novel to five MORE critiquers in another critique group. Each of them also will come up with a critique. And this time when you’ve done the revisions, you will have pleased exactly TEN readers total. Woohoo!

Um, are you seeing a pattern here? Go ahead, tell me it isn’t true. And while we’re considering that pattern, what effect do you suppose those recommended changes and the resulting revisions will have on your eventual readers? After all, it isn’t the readers’ opinions you took into account.

Even if you see a critique as having merit, that doesn’t mean your readers will like the story as much after the revision. Again, different opinions. There’s much to be said for maintaining your unique voice, but more on that tomorrow.

Now, I understand that you don't have to agree-with or apply the critiques, but then why ask for them in the first place? Do you really believe any critiquer might know better how *your characters* should live *their story*? Puh-lease. Even *you* don't know better how your characters should live their story.

If you're willing to change your characters' story by applying the advice of a critiquer, why not also invite critiques from readers? If anything, their opinions should matter more. After all, they actually paid money for your book. Of course, what one reader likes another will detest, so....

But then, that's the point, isn't it? If you invited critiques from those who really matter, your readers, things would get unwieldy pretty quickly. Might as well not write in the first place. Or you know—not invite critiques.

And as it has always been, that is my advice: Don't invite critiques of your work in the first place. Be true to your characters and be true to your role as the recorder of their story. In fact, I recommend you be proud of your work and defend it, stringently, against all comers. I'll leave you with this:

Lee Child's editor met with him over lunch in New York one day and mentioned a particular scene in Child's latest Reacher novel. He thought the scene might fit better at a different place in the novel.

Child looked at him and nodded. "Yes, I agree. But that isn't how it happened."

And that, ladies and gentlemen, is the best response ever to any critique.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "GoFundMe and the Nag's Head Light..." at <https://jonathanturley.org/2022/02/06/gofundme-and-the-nags-head-light-how-a-company-is/>.

See "In Person and Study Along Classes" at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/in-person-and-study-along-classes/>.

See "Craft Lessons: @HarlanCoben STAY CLOSE #Netflix" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/02/craft-lessons-harlan-coben-stay-close-netflix.html>.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Critiques and Critiquers](#), [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [JonathanTurley.org](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: Your Unique Voice

February 8, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Topic: Your Unique Voice, Part 1
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

“There's a certain slice of writer who bristles at any suggestion that their beautiful art won't carry the day on its own.” Nathan Bransford

Topic: Your Unique Voice, Part 1

Yesterday in my post on critiques and critiquers, I briefly mentioned that there's much to be said for maintaining your unique, original authorial voice.

Difficult as you might find this to believe, any reader is much more likely to enjoy your work and buy more of your books if you remain true to your own unique voice.

Consider, your authorial voice is particular to you. Some other voices more than likely are similar to yours, but nobody else has your authorial voice. And that's the “unique, original voice” every agent and publisher in the world is looking for.

But after agents and publishers say they're looking for the next “unique, original voice,” they go all wrong-headed and insist that you rewrite your work to make it “better.” (Uh, no. More on this later.) The problem is, agents and publishers attended the same schools we all attended.

In those schools, our well-meaning teachers, who had little or no experience writing fiction themselves, taught us that writing fiction is hard, and that it's supposed to be hard.

Furthermore, they reinforced the collective human inferiority complex, that we are not capable, and taught us to mistrust and stifle our creative subconscious. And the indoctrination into the myths began.

They taught that if we wanted to be successful as fiction writers, we had to engage the conscious, critical mind in that creative endeavor: we had to outline, then write, invite critiques, revise, rewrite, polish and finally submit.

Look at that list again. Only one part of it has anything whatsoever to do with creating something new, unique and original: write. Or as Robert A. Heinlein wrote in [Heinlein's Rules](#), if you want to be a writer, “1. You must write.”

Notice that in his Rules, Heinlein didn't mention outlining, inviting critiques, revising, or polishing. And in Rule 3 the great man addresses rewriting: "Do not rewrite except to editorial order." In later years, Harlan Ellison added, "And then only if you agree."

But thanks to the wonderful world of publishing today, we no longer have to go through acquisitions editors or any other gatekeepers in order to get our work out to readers. So there can be no "editorial order." We have only to write and publish.

Much as I admired and respected my teachers in most ways, taking advice on writing fiction from a person who never wrote fiction is a little like taking legal advice from plumber or plumbing advice from an attorney. For advice on writing fiction, I'd rather turn to Heinlein. Or to Asimov, Bradbury, King, Child, Burke, Dean Wesley Smith or any other successful, prolific professional writer. Duh.

So what makes up your unique authorial voice?

Your unique voice is the result of word choice and juxtaposition and even spelling sometimes ("strange" carries a different connotation than "stranger"). It's forced pauses and how often and where they're placed (as indicated by punctuation).

It's sentence structure, repetition or the lack of repetition of various elements (types of words, sentences, paragraphs, etc.), and your narrative style, which even takes into account your current skill level: for example, whether every word of the story comes through the POV character (advanced writer) or through the author (beginning writer) or somewhere in between.

Your authorial voice also contains your life experiences, good and bad, and they form the filter through which it flows. It is your characters, their voices, your fictional world and how you build it, and dozens or maybe hundreds more aspects that make up the unique way YOU tell a story.

The good thing is, your authorial voice is unique and original to you specifically because it's natural. You don't have to work at it. Your voice is as good as it can be at your current skill level when it spills out onto the page or screen.

How do you improve your original, unique authorial voice?

Well, by studying techniques you don't already have in your tool kit. Certainly, listen to lectures and workshops and read craft books as presented by successful fiction writers.

You can also allow your creative subconscious to absorb Story. (In fact, you can't stop it.) Watch smart dramas and comedies on television. Read your favorite authors (for pleasure). And yes, their style will inform yours in small ways, but it certainly won't replace or taint your style in any sort of bad way.

You can also study and learn (conscious, critical mind) from your favorite authors.

First, as above, it's important to read the whole story for pleasure. Other events later in the story might affect or be affected by the part that impressed you. But when a passage blows you away, quickly mark that passage and move on.

Then, after you've read the whole story, go back and study the places you marked to try to understand how the writer created that particular effect in you. Word choice or juxtaposition (*the body electric* vs. *the electric body*)? Punctuation? Brevity or a long, emotion-laden sentence?

Okay, those are a few ways to improve your natural storytelling ability, your natural, unique authorial voice. But earlier I wrote that your voice is unique and original to you *because* it's natural, that you don't have to work at it.

You only have to relax and let it flow, right? So how do you do that?

The answer is both ridiculously easy for some and incredibly difficult or even impossible for others. I can tell you what's required in five words: You have to Trust yourself.

Realizing the truth of that simple statement is easy enough. But for many, actually applying it is a completely different matter. How to apply it successfully will be the topic of discussion next time in Part 2.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "No Guts, No Glory" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/02/no-guts-no-glory.html>. Wow. This is chock full of writer self-doubt. This touches on a lot of the myths, directly and indirectly. I could only shake my head.

See "The History of Book Banning" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/the-history-of-book-banning-2/>. Especially read PG's take.

See "Essential computer skills for writers" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/essential-computer-skills-for-writers/>. Also see PG's comments.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [KillZone Blog](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [Topic](#), [Unique Authorial Voice](#)

The Journal: Your Unique Voice, Part 2

February 9, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Topic: Your Unique Voice, Part 2
- * AI For Audiobooks?
- * D2D Acquired Smashwords!
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

"I'm only the author. I don't know anything. And I mean that honestly when it comes to my own work." Dean Wesley Smith

Topic: Your Unique Voice, Part 2

In [my previous post](#) I mentioned that to take advantage of your unique, original, authorial voice—to relax and let it flow—you must trust yourself. That's the simple truth. In this post I'm going to break that truth down to help you see it more easily.

First, you must trust that your voice IS unique.

As part of that, you can also trust that others will find your voice refreshing and new, because they will. I know that's a stretch for some of you to believe, but the first step on this road is having confidence in yourself.

Boring as your voice sounds to you—after all, you hear it 24/7/365—it isn't boring at all to people who don't know you, and that's the majority of your readership.

Do you consider your favorite author's voice boring? Of course not, but until that author learned this lesson s/he thought it was. Aren't you lucky s/he overcame that nonsense? And won't your readers be lucky that you overcome it too?

Your unique way of telling a story is *exactly* what thousands of readers out there are longing for. And yet you erase a little of that unique originality every time you apply a revision based on input from any critical mind, even your own.

I'm not talking here about correcting spelling errors or inconsistencies. I'm talking about revising the structure of a sentence or paragraph or other element to "improve" it. Only your (or others') conscious, critical mind will suggest that your story can be "improved."

In every case, if that little voice whispering to you is negative, that's your conscious, critical mind. Never, *ever* trust your conscious critical mind when it comes to creating anything.

Second, you have to trust the knowledge you've gleaned over the years.

You know much more about writing than you're aware of. For example, do you have to stop and think back about what sort of punctuation to use at the end of a sentence when you're writing? Of course not. Or do you have to stop and try to remember how to spell almost any word you use regularly? Nope.

That's because you learned those things long ago. Now they're part of your creative subconscious. You take them for granted, along with the difference between a noun and a verb and sentence structure and indenting the first line of a paragraph and so much more.

That's key. You KNOW those things, and more importantly, you TRUST that you know them. You don't have to second-guess yourself every time they pop up.

Likewise, believe it or not, your creative subconscious has been absorbing information about storytelling since long before you were even aware there was an alphabet.

Storytelling is an instinctual survival skill. Over your lifetime and without even realizing it, you've absorbed various types of story structure, characterization, timing and pacing, world-building, and dozens or even hundreds of the other essential elements of storytelling.

So again, you KNOW those things. At present you don't yet TRUST that you know them, but you need to trust that. Again, not second-guessing yourself is important. Confidence breeds confidence.

Third, and maybe most importantly, trust your characters to tell the story that they, not you, are living.

Just as you need to not second-guess yourself, you also need to not second-guess your characters. In other words, don't allow your (or others') conscious, critical mind to question what your characters, through your creative subconscious, have created.

When it comes to writing fiction, your characters and their voices—the way they tell their story through your fingertips on the keyboard—ARE your unique authorial voice.

Nobody else on Earth knows those characters like you do, and nobody else on Earth can be the first to hear your characters' stories. That's how special you are, and that's how unique your original voice is.

Tomorrow I'll be back with the final installment of "Your Unique Voice." Until then, happy writing.

AI For Audiobooks?

While I wasn't looking, AI took a giant leap forward in voicing audiobooks. To see what I mean, visit "Synthetic Voices Want to Take Over Audiobooks" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/synthetic-voices-want-to-take-over-audiobooks/>. Be sure to listen to the sample in the post.

Then you can check out the actual website at <https://speechki.org/>. While you're there, I recommend clicking the Blog tab too. Here's an excerpt from a FAQ in the blog:

“Editors can control every detail of the audiobook production process and can choose a voice of either gender for each sentence or phrase. This also allows you to use different languages within a single audiobook.”

Amazing.

D2D Acquired Smashwords!

Yesterday a friend made me aware of this. D2D expects the merger to close on March 1. For details, see “Of Interest.”

In my opinion, this is wonderful news. Those who use D2D gain a storefront (Smashwords) with incredible tools for conducting sales, creating coupons, and so on, all without having to endure Smashwords' clunky interface.

With the acquisition, I assume D2D will also expand distribution into all of the smaller but still significant markets previously served only by Smashwords.

Probably there will be growing pains and maybe a few headaches. For just one example, should I delete my books that are with both aggregators from Smashwords to avoid conflicts of interest (like a title being distributed to, say, Kobo by both D2D and Smashwords)?

For now I'll risk it. D2D has said they'll “work closely” with their retail partners to avoid such problems. All in all, I think this is a great merger.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Draft2Digital to Acquire Smashwords” at <https://www.draft2digital.com/blog/draft2digital-has-acquired-smashwords/>.

See “Draft2Digital Acquires Smashwords FAQs” at <https://draft2digital.com/united/>.

See “Yo Hablo Espanol, Pero Un Poco Solamente.” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/02/yo-hablo-espanol-pero-un-poco-solamente.html>.

See “6 Stories About Hunter S. Thompson That Are Totally Untrue” at <https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/654628/hunter-s-thompson-stories-untrue>.

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say it is. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among myriad other topics.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Artificial Intelligence](#), [Audiobooks](#), [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [Draft2Digital](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [Smashwords](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: Your Unique Voice, Part 3

February 10, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

* Topic: Your Unique Voice, Part 3

* Of Interest

Topic: Your Unique Voice, Part 3

Thanks for your patience. Here are my final thoughts (for now) on “Your Unique Voice.” You can click these links to read [Your Unique Voice: Part 1](#) and [Your Unique Voice: Part 2](#). I recommend reading the posts in sequence.

Finally, understand the difference between “your” story and your characters’ story.

Your story is the life you’re living. In *your* story you’re currently reading a blog about writing. You can revise your story at will. You can choose to do one thing rather than another, to say one thing rather than another, to act and react as you decide moment to moment. I’m just saying, give your characters that same freedom as they live their story.

Now later, fingers crossed, you’ll sit at a keyboard and type-in a story. But the story you relate through your keyboard will be your *characters’* story.

I realize this seems like a nitpicky distinction, but it’s far more important than you know. So whatever it takes you to get there, do it. In my case, I believe my characters’ stories are ongoing, maybe in another dimension (doesn’t matter), even when I’m not looking in on them.

A note on the perils of revision

If you revise your characters’ story as a result of input from any critical mind—again, even your own—you’ll signal to your characters and your creative subconscious that you don’t trust them. You’ll convey that you believe your (or some other) conscious, critical mind knows their story better than they do.

But if you believe that, you’re wrong. And not trusting them is the quickest way I know to make your characters stop sharing their stories with you and fade away to nothing. Wouldn’t that be a shame?

After all, chances are pretty good you or your readers will never physically travel to a distant planet on a generation space ship.

But as you convey your characters' story on their behalf, you'll be on that generation ship with them. Of course, you'll outlive your characters. You'll sadly bid farewell to each passing generation and welcome rising ones until the descendants arrive at the new world some three hundred years from now. Then maybe you'll take your leave of them. Or maybe you'll settle in and record some of the stories they live in that new world.

Chances are also good you'll never ride wild on a good horse in a just cause.

But you can saddle up and ride virtually with your characters as you record their story. You can bear witness as they stand in the stirrups and charge a band of outlaws who outnumber them in every way but sheer determination. You might even stand in the stirrups yourself, your Winchester carbine in your shoulder or six guns blazing.

And chances are you'll never drop back in time to the Spanish Civil War, choose a side and help set the explosives that derail the menacing new train shipment and shift the tide of battle.

But you can move virtually (and as quietly as possible, please) as you follow the narrow line of your characters over the loose shale and through the sparse brush on the hillside to where the base of the train trestle is anchored in bedrock. You can watch as some of your characters set the charges, hopefully without being spotted. You can even help them set the charges. Or you can hang back with the grizzled old crippled character who's watching the soldiers on the bridge high above, a Springfield rifle at your shoulder in case they spot your friends.

You're a writer. You are unique. Your characters have granted you the exclusive license to record their stories, and aren't you the lucky one?

So record the stories. Write the first story to the best of your current ability, then submit or publish it and move on to write the next, then the next, and so on.

Don't second-guess the folks who are living the story, and don't allow anyone else to second-guess them. Let them speak through your fingertips and the keyboard onto the screen, and let that unique, original voice stand.

As a bonus, writers who continue to study and learn the craft AND who can learn to trust their own creative subconscious can be as prolific as their schedule allows. Why?

Because all they have to do is show up. They are free to just write. They don't have to waste time on outlining and critique groups and revisions and rewrites and polishing. They can just convey the characters' stories one after another after another.

Wouldn't that be wonderful? And it's completely up to you.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Tried Something New For Me” at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/tried-something-new-for-me/>. At first I thought he meant he’d never written a story from multiple viewpoints. I was relieved when I re-read it and realized (I hope) he only meant he’d never flipped a story from one POV to another before. Whew!

See “Trending or Trendy?” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/02/trending-or-trendy.html>.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [Topic](#), [Your Unique Voice](#)

The Journal: Two Mentors and a Little History

February 11, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Topic: Two Mentors and a Little History
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

“I spend a lot of time indoors blending with the furniture and scaring my cousin.” from [“10 Fun Facts About Me”](#) by Tari Philip

Note: More on the unique voice. I love finding sentences that I suspect never have been said before. This is one of the most interesting sentences I’ve ever read. Thank you, Tari.

Topic: Two Mentors and a Little History

Today is the eighth anniversary of the day I rediscovered Dean Wesley Smith and his website back in 2014. So I thought a look back on mentors and a bit of my own journey might be appropriate.

I’ve talked before about Dean being my unintentional mentor. But really, at least back when I found his website in early 2014, he was simply paying forward (free) what he’d learned from others on his own way up. Back then he was writing a lot of posts about fiction writing. I devoured every word, practiced what felt right, and here I am.

But Dean wasn't my first fiction writing mentor. I was reminded recently of my good fortune in having also met and studied with the science fiction pioneer and Grand Master, Jack Williamson.

According to Jack's author bio on Amazon,

"Jack Williamson (1907-2006) was one of the most important and influential figures in science fiction. Born in 1907, he came to New Mexico with his family in a covered wagon in 1915. His first science fiction story appeared in a professional magazine in 1928, and he kept writing new novels and stories through 2005 when his last novel *THE STONEHENGE GATE* was published. His updated autobiography *WONDER'S CHILD* is available.

"Jack Williamson coined many words that became staples in science fiction and in the world at large: genetic engineering, terraforming, psionics, spaceport, prime directive, ion drive, Tellurian, neutronium. He is the only writer to receive both SFWA's Grand Master Award and the Horror Writer of America's Lifetime Achievement Award. Eastern New Mexico [University], where he taught for many years, has a Jack Williamson library wing."

Consider, when Jack started his career as a science fiction writer, the genre hadn't been named yet. I was fortunate to study under him at ENMU in Portales the first year he became a Professor Emeritus in the mid-1990s. He allowed me to write and turn-in a novelette in lieu of a mid-term essay, and he graded it just as he would have an essay. (I received only a C+.) His comments were invaluable in helping me learn the craft of fiction.

Flash forward: A year or two after my graduation and not long before Jack's death, I was editing and publishing three small quarterly literary magazines. *The Roswell Literary Review* was my "large" mag at around 500 subscribers. The others were *The Raintown Review: Poetry Edition* and *The Raintown Review: Fiction Edition*, each of which had only a couple of hundred subscribers.

But as I mentioned, all three magazines were quarterlies, so we had something going out every month. Publishing those was pretty much a full-time job. I not only received and accepted or rejected submissions (always with a handwritten note), but I edited and did the layout for each issue. My wife and I also printed and collated the pages, center-stapled (or "saddle-stapled") them, and folded each issue by hand. Then I carried them all down to a local printer to have the open edge trimmed. After that we put a stamp and address on each issue and mailed them out.

So having a "big name" contributor would mean a lot to me. I reached out to Jack Williamson, and I soon learned his most notable characteristic was his kindness.

He sent me an autographed copy of his short story collection, *People Machines*, and granted me permission to reprint in *The Roswell Literary Review* the didactic essays he wrote to accompany the short stories in that collection. The essays explained the fiction-writing techniques Jack employed in the accompanying stories. It was my pleasure to type those essays into TRLR.

As an aside, to my mind, *People Machines* remains one of the best-kept secrets of fiction. You can find it in paperback for only around \$12 at <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B000RXZBTU>. I

highly recommend it. While I'm on my Williamson soapbox, I also recommend his novella, *With Folded Hands*, which you can find as an ebook at <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B006K2NE64>.

Science fiction writer Arthur C. Clarke (*2001: A Space Odyssey* and much more) wrote of Williamson, "On looking back over his long and influential career, I have no hesitation in placing Jack Williamson on a level with the two other American giants, Isaac Asimov and Robert Heinlein."

'Nuff said.

But back to Dean Wesley Smith for a moment. He too knew and was influenced by Jack Williamson, among many others.

Today, you can find some of what I learned from Dean by purchasing his *Killing the Sacred Cows* series of books and his *Think Like a Publisher* book(s). You can also search his site for those terms, but it's probably easier to just buy the books. They aren't expensive.

I also recommend his lecture on Heinlein's Rules. Not only for the Rules themselves but because there's so much more in that lecture. He also has a book by that name (maybe the same as the lecture, maybe not), as well as books titled *Writing Into the Dark*, *How to Write Fiction Sales Copy* and much, much more.

I count myself amazingly fortunate that I met and learned from Jack Williamson even though I didn't start writing fiction seriously until almost 20 years later. I suppose I just wasn't ready yet.

I am also incredibly fortunate that I found Dean's site when I did. Apparently that happened at exactly the right time. I found his site in February 2014, started writing (into the dark) a short story every week on April 15 of that year, and started writing my first novel (also into the dark) in October of that year.

But maybe the best overall lesson I learned from Jack and Dean and a few others is to pay it forward. And that's what this Journal is all about. Thank you for giving me that opportunity.

I invite you to use the Search box in the sidebar to look for topics of interest, or to search the Journal archives, which are still available in seven searchable PDF files dating back to 2014. You need only email me at harveystanbrough@gmail.com to get them.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Tareal's Ink" at <https://tarealsink.wordpress.com/>. This is the attractive website of a writer and Journal reader whose nickname is Tari. Check it out.

See "Draft2Digital to Acquire Smashwords" at <https://blog.smashwords.com/2022/02/united.html>. Maybe a different take on the news. The

comments include some great exchanges between authors and Mark Coker (founder of Smashwords).

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [Draft2Digital](#), [Jack Williamson](#), [Paying it forward](#), [Smashwords](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: Virtual 5-Week Serial Killer Course

February 12, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Virtual 5-Week Serial Killer Course
- * Of Interest

Hey folks,

I hadn't planned to post anything today, but this is relatively short notice of what I expect will be an extremely interesting online course, so I wanted to get it out to you. Be forewarned, I'm suggesting that you can learn something about writing from any very accomplished professional writer even if she doesn't write in your genre. Don't be genre-phobic.

This online course is delivered by Zoom and presented by true-crime writer Sue Coletta. I can't imagine a better instructor for this topic or in general, and it's only \$75 for the full 5 weeks! Most instructors would charge \$250 or \$300 for this course. Or more.

From the instructor: “The school renamed my course ‘Historic Murders in New England’ rather than ‘Serial Killers 101’ because they didn't want to give the impression I was teaching how to serial kill. ... Regardless of the change in title, the course will be much more than listening to me talk about serial killers.”

To read the full course description, visit Sue's post at <https://www.suecoletta.com/can-graphologists-id-serial-killers-handwriting/> and scroll down to “Virtual 5-Week Serial Killer Course.” (The link in today's “Of Interest” is to the same post.)

I believe this course will be appropriate for fiction writers in most genres even if you aren't writing specifically about one or more serial killers. Sue is an accomplished professional fiction writer. Even what you stand to learn by osmosis or from the gems Sue inadvertently drops during the course will be worth far more than the asking price.

To register, click <https://ed-advance-foothills-adult-continuing-education.coursetorm.com/course/historical-murders-in-new-england-online>.

In the interest of full disclosure, although I'm recommending this course, for various reasons I probably will not be attending. Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Can Graphologists Identify Serial Killers Through Their Handwriting?” at <https://www.suecoletta.com/can-graphologists-id-serial-killers-handwriting/>.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Learning from accomplished writers of other genres](#), [Sue Coletta](#)

The Journal: Plotting Revisited

February 13, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Topic: Plotting (AKA Writers Boring Themselves) Revisited
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“Go to bed early, get up early—this is wise. Some authorities say get up with the sun; some say get up with one thing, others with another. But a lark is really the best thing to get up with. It gives you a splendid reputation with everybody to know that you get up with the lark; and if you get the right kind of lark, and work at him right, you can easily train him to get up at half past nine, every time—it's no trick at all. Mark Twain in “Advice to Youth,” 1882

“The hypocrite's crime is that he bears false witness against himself. What makes it so plausible to assume that hypocrisy is the vice of vices is that integrity can indeed exist under the cover of all other vices except this one. Only crime and the criminal ... confront us with the perplexity of radical evil; but only the hypocrite is really rotten to the core.” Hannah Arendt

Not that much to do with writing, but I love those quotes. And then there's this one:

“When Peter Thiel interviews someone he likes to ask the following question: What important truth do very few people agree with you on?” Thiel's response, from his book, [Zero to One: Notes on Startups, or How to Build the Future](#): “This question sounds easy because it's

straightforward. Actually, it's very hard to answer. *It's intellectually difficult because the knowledge that everyone is taught in school is by definition agreed upon. And it's psychologically difficult because anyone trying to answer must say something she knows to be unpopular.*” [emphasis added] “Brilliant thinking is rare, but courage is in even shorter supply than genius.” from [“The Single Best Interview Question You Can Ask”](#) (More on this later.)

Topic: Plotting (AKA Writers Boring Themselves) Revisited

Howdy. Horse of a different color here.

PG posted an article from Tiffany Yates Martin (via Jane Friedman) on plotting. In the article, Tiffany wrote, “Creating a story without at least some idea of your plot is like planning a trip without a route: You’re likely to wind up meandering, stuck, or lost.”

Tiffany is right. If you go without a plan, there’s a fear that you’ll “wind up meandering, stuck, or lost.” But some of us see that as a good thing, an exciting thing. Instead of seeing it as something to fear, we see it as something to look forward to.

For successful prolific fiction writers who’ve learned the secret (psst: “Let go and trust yourself.”) plunging into that unknown is the sheer joy of being a fiction writer. It’s why what we do is never work. We embrace and enjoy that fear of the unknown. We just write. We let our characters tell the story that they, not we, are living. Via Bradbury, “No surprise for the writer, no surprise for the reader.”

There really is nothing to fear. After all, you’re only writing a story, not charging a treeline filled with enemy combatants across a rain-drenched, muddy field during a lightning storm.

If you let go of control and trust your characters, they will lead you through the story. Again, it’s *their* story. You don’t have to know where it’s going. They do.

And as if to complement Tiffany’s post, James Scott Bell is at it again over at the [Kill Zone blog](#).

This time his post is all about how very hard you must work to write excellent fiction: “You’ve got to strive for *unforgettable*. You’ve got to write diamonds that sparkle through the rock piles and gravel pits of content.”

Wow, how very dramatic. But seriously?

Bell used Sturgeon’s Law (“ninety percent of everything is crap”) to corroborate his own claim that there is a “veritable tsunami” of “indie output” and “most of it is bad.”

Okay, a couple of things:

One, I’ve never heard of Theodore Sturgeon, despite having heard of and read the work of at least a dozen science fiction authors from the same era (1918 to 1986).

Two, according to Wikipedia, Sturgeon made up the statistic as a response to critics, who “often derided” science fiction “for its low quality.” It isn’t based on any sort of actual evidence, empirical or otherwise. So to put his silly quote another way, “Oh yeah?”

And to all of the above, I say bullshit.

I can make up statistics as well as anyone. For example, 99%+ of indie authors who aren’t immediately overwhelmed with sales probably stop writing fiction and find something fun to do, thereby decreasing, if not the size of the “veritable tsunami,” at least the percentage of it that is “crap.”

To go back to the third quote of the day for a moment, if Peter Thiel asked me, “What important truth do very few people agree with you on?” I would respond, “Writing fiction is easy and fun. You only have to learn to trust yourself.”

And if he asked, “Why do so few people agree?” I would respond in two ways. Regarding newer fiction writers, I’d respond with his own words: “It’s intellectually difficult because the knowledge that everyone is taught in school is by definition agreed upon. And it’s psychologically difficult because anyone trying to answer must say something she [or he] knows to be unpopular.” And unfortunately, regarding writers who’ve been around awhile, especially those who also write non-fiction how-to books about writing, I would respond, “It isn’t in their own best interest to do so.”

Here’s the truth, New Fiction Writer: You have learned a great deal more than you realize about Story. Like Shakespeare and Stephen King, you were probably telling stories to your parents before you were even aware there was an alphabet. And since then, you’ve absorbed Story from reading, listening, and watching television.

But for the intellectual and psychological reasons mentioned in Thiel’s amazing response, the hardest thing of all is to trust that. If you can bring yourself to trust what you know, and give yourself over to your characters and the story that they, not you, are living, you’ll be fine.

The notion that great storytelling is hard to do is silly and pretentious. It is the fresh, steamy stuff in which the best mushrooms grow.

Authors—AKA Those Who Have Bled on the Page as an Angelic Choir Sang in the Background—serve up a dollop of it now and then to shore-up their own self-image with a layer of ego satisfaction and mystique. After all, [forearm draped over the forehead] those Authors have *Endured the Terrible, Exhausting Travail* of—well, um, tapping a keyboard to put words on a page.

Well, and maybe they serve it up to sell their nonfiction books on writing, in which they regurgitate the same failed but accepted notions, which may be summed up thusly: If writing isn’t akin to hard labor, the end product can’t possibly have any value.

Meanwhile, we regular writers aren't mired in all that bovine excrement. We show up, put our fingers on the keyboard, check in with our characters and get on with it. We aren't striving for perfection. We understand that we're only entertainers, nothing more. And the readers are far better off for our ability to trust what we know.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Didn't Run... Slept!" at <https://www.deanwesleymith.com/didnt-run-slept/>. Read what he says about buying his lectures and workshops right now.

See "Introducing...The Fear Thesaurus!" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/introducingthe-fear-thesaurus/>. Sounds interesting. As usual, to be perused/learned with the conscious mind and applied with the creative subconscious.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: Very Short Post

February 14, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Very Short Post
- * MidWinter Workshop Sale
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

"Lovers of print are simply confusing the plate for the food." Douglas Adams

"Books are no more threatened by Kindle than stairs by elevators." Stephen Fry

Very Short Post Today

I like the first quote of the day. I especially like that if you replace "print" with "ebooks" the quote means exactly the same thing. Either way it brings cool, calm reasoning to the pbook vs. ebook argument. It also points out the category mistake most people make when discussing their preferences for the different media: The medium is not the story.

Whichever medium you prefer is perfectly fine, of course—at the moment it’s still a mostly free country—but whether you prefer pbooks, ebooks, or abooks doesn’t matter to anyone else, nor should it. None is superior to the others except as a matter of personal preference. None is superior to the others in terms of Story.

I included the second quote only because it so plainly illustrates the category mistake I mentioned above. Perhaps Mr. Fry should read Mr. Adams’ quote.

MidWinter Workshop Sale

This is the other reason I posted today. See “MidWinter Workshop Sale Starts Now!” at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/midwinter-workshop-sale-starts-now/>. If you want courses from Dean, now is the time to get them. The sale runs for 10 days, through Thursday, February 24.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “7 Little-Known Historical Figures Who Made a Big Impact” at https://www.interestingfacts.com/underappreciated-historical-figures/YUOTkw55YwAH_LW4.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [abooks](#), [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [ebooks](#), [InterestingFacts.com](#), [pbooks](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [Workshop sale](#)

The Journal: The Snowflake Guy and Stephen King

February 15, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * The Snowflake Guy
- * Topic: Stephen King
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“If you like to know approximately where you’re going before you start writing, then the Snowflake Method is designed for you. If you don’t, then it’s not for you.” Randy Ingermanson, AKA The Snowflake Guy

“The Three Rings of Power [for marketing] are useless unless you also master the One Ring that Rule Them All. That One Ring is copywriting. The ability to write good headlines, strong sales copy, and a compelling call-to-action, all without smelling like a weasel. ... [O]nce you learn it, you can apply it everywhere. To your website. Your newsletter. Your paid ads. And away you go.” Randy Ingermanson

“Truth is more deceptive than falsehood, for it is more frequently presented by those from whom we do not expect it, and so has against it a numerical presumption.” Ambrose Bierce

Wow, do I ever concur with that one!

“Love is blind, or so the rumor goes. There’s nothing quite like marriage for restoring its sight.”
Author of *The Wall Street Journal* article “Foreverland”

The Snowflake Guy

For the first two quotes of the day and much more, see Debbie Burke’s brief interview with Randy Ingermanson at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/02/interview-with-randy-ingermanson-the-snowflake-guy.html>.

See Randy’s Snowflake series of how-to books at <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B087Q1K2JQ>.

See Randy’s Advanced Fiction Writing blog at <https://www.advancedfictionwriting.com/>.

And see Randy’s website at <https://www.ingermanson.com/>.

As for the best place to learn to write sales copy, as I’ve said here before, see Dean Wesley Smith’s *How to Write Fiction Sales Copy* at <https://www.amazon.com/dp/1561466476>.

Finally, why am I, an old WITD guy, promoting Randy Ingermanson and his Snowflake method? Because I know not everyone is fortunate enough to be able to let go and trust themselves and their creative subconscious. (And yes, some say they simply don’t want to.)

So if you are one who needs or wants to know where the story’s going as you’re writing it, I recommend you try Ingermanson’s Snowflake method. Try the links above.

No matter which kind of writer you are (and no matter what genres you like or dislike), read on.

Topic: Stephen King

A couple of weeks ago I bought Stephen King’s novel, *The Outsider*. I actually bought it in paperback at a slight discount. I thought it was a new release, but it came out in 2018. Anyway, if you haven’t read it and enjoy suspenseful stories, I highly recommend it.

And if you want to study how to *write* suspense (or how to write period) from an absolute master, I also recommend it.

Yesterday morning at around 10 I finally opened the novel and started to read. By 4 p.m. (including a few short breaks and a half-hour walk), I'd read through page 235. My wife looked at the closed book, the part I'd read separated from the remainder by a book mark, and said, "You've read all that? You're a fast reader."

Well, okay, but I'm not a fast reader. That's what King's work does to me. It wasn't that I wanted to read that much in a single sitting. It's that I literally couldn't set the book aside without wanting anxiously to get back to the story.

I had to find out what happened next, and next, and next. And that's why I remained glued to the story during that five-plus hours. King's just that good as a storyteller. And most of it boils down to four things:

- * Masterful cliffhangers, even at the end of every short chapter. I approximated one "average" chapter to be a little under 600 words.
- * Masterful openings, again, even at the beginning of every short chapter.
- * Detail, detail, detail. If the POV character noticed a detail (a sight, smell, taste, feel or sound) it went into the book.
- * Take your time. Even while delivering all of that in page-flipping short chapters, King took his time. He didn't rush through descriptions or action scenes or character conversations.

He didn't even rush through the scenes themselves. Most of the chapters in the book are not complete scenes. They're major sections of scenes. And each section stands alone, by which I mean each section feels complete. You don't recognize it as being part of a larger scene until after the fact, when you turn the page —

Whereupon you learn that what you just read was part of a larger thing and that what you thought happened at the end of the section you just read isn't what really happened at all.

On top of that, every section of every scene engages your emotions. You live, breathe and feel with the characters, both in and peripheral to that section.

And that's why I say over and over again that Stephen King is the only Stage 5 writer who's writing in English today. Throughout the book (so far) it's obvious, though in an unobtrusive way, that the characters are telling the story that they, not Stephen King, are living. But how can I tell that?

Because it's as if I'm in the story with them. I'm involved, invested, and engaged. I learn what the characters learn as they learn it. There you go. That's the key.

Earlier I wrote that when you turn a page and begin a new section of a scene, you learn that what you thought happened at the end of a section isn't what happened at all. But in most cases, you *couldn't* have imagined what happened. But then, neither could King himself. As Ray Bradbury

said, “No surprise for the writer, no surprise for the reader.” And as King himself has often said, he’s only the stenographer for his characters.

Of course, you or I can never be Stephen King, and that’s fine. But with enough study and attention to detail we can write our stories like Stephen King and other prolific professional fiction writers would.

As always, it’s all up to you.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “7 Unlikely Love Stories in Literature” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/7-unlikely-love-stories-in-literature/>. To be honest, I listed this one only because it talks about Gabriel García Márquez’ book *Of Love and Other Demons*. Márquez is another Stage 5 master, albeit one who writes in Spanish. And yes, of course I bought the book.

See “PR and Marketing Questions Answered” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/pr-and-marketing-questions-answered/>. I have not read this post. Be sure to temper the post with PG’s take.

See “Foreverland” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/foreverland/>.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Gabriel García Márquez](#), [Randy Ingermanson](#), [Stephen King](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [The Snowflake Guy](#), [The Snowflake method](#), [Topic](#), [Writing Into the Dark](#)

The Journal: Responsibility, Some Don’ts, More King

February 16, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Today’s post
- * The Fiction Writer’s Responsibility
- * Don’t Be Critical
- * Studying King
- * Of Interest

Today’s post, as my posts so often do, started as a response to [a post on the Kill Zone blog](#).

At the end of the post, the author asked a series of questions. The first was, “Are you a ‘rules were made to be broken’ sort of writer, or do you prefer to stick with convention?”

That question deserves a separate answer: Writers who have learned that fiction writing is all about Story (not grammar or syntax or punctuation) don’t think about rules and whether to break them while they’re writing. They just write the story. (You’ll see that I left a similar response to the article I linked to in “Of Interest.”)

I’ve responded to some of the KZ author’s other questions below. Those questions are “Would you have trouble reading a book that threw basics like the rules of punctuating dialogue off the cliff? Have you read anything where a blatant deviation of ‘normal’ pulled you out of the story?”

The Fiction Writer’s Responsibility

I was going to write a whole big topic on the responsibility of the fiction writer, but we all know what that is: engage and entertain the reader with Story. That’s all.

To do that, you only have to learn a few technical mechanics with your conscious, critical mind, and then apply them (practice) with your creative subconscious as you write.

To be clear, practice means writing, which in turn means putting new words on the page, as opposed to “hovering over” (revising, rewriting) words you put on the page previously.

Those technical mechanics are

1. write the opening—that consists of a hook to Entice the reader plus a description of the setting as experienced by the POV character to Ground the reader—in the major scene or chapter, then
2. write an enticing cliffhanger at the end of every major scene or chapter, and finally
3. Repeat number 1 and 2 until you reach the end of the story. Toss in pacing, and you’re more or less good.

Your responsibility as a fiction writer is to pull the reader into the story and keep him or her reading all the way to the end. In other words, to tell a story. To entertain. That’s all.

If you master the technical mechanics listed above and toss in a little appropriate pacing, you will do that. And if you don’t, you won’t.

Don’t Be Critical

Fulfilling your responsibility as a fiction writer is much easier and more fun if you keep your conscious, critical mind out of your writing. The act of create-ing is the role of the create-ive subconscious. The critical mind has no role to play in creating a story.

While you're writing, don't revisit things you already know, things you learned long ago and seemingly have known all your life.

Things like which word to use to convey which connotation and how words are spelled and how sentences are constructed and which punctuation to use at the end of a sentence. You learned those things in the first place so you wouldn't have to revisit and relearn them later. Trust what you know.

Once you start writing a story, stop fretting over all that and just tell the story. It isn't important enough to fret over. It's only a few minutes' or hours' entertainment for a reader, nothing more. So don't worry about it. Just write the story. Just practice.

The more you practice, the smoother your use of those technical mechanics above—and of those words and structures you've seemingly always known—will become.

Also, don't edit. You can't edit with the creative subconscious, and (again) the conscious, critical mind has no place in storytelling.

Will replacing that compound sentence with a complex sentence really have any effect whatsoever on the overall story? No. Will replacing "over" with "above" or "below" with "underneath" make a difference? No. Will counting the number of times you use one word on a page help the story? No.

Certainly, replacing "waste" with "waist" will make a massive difference, but that's your characters' or first reader's or copyeditor's job.

Note that cycling (creative subconscious) is different. It's perfectly safe to allow your characters to touch the story as you read. Your characters will never be negative. They will never, for example, think perhaps that compound sentence should be separated into two simple sentences.

If something like that happens, it's your critical mind. If your critical mind bullies its way in, deny it access to your story. Tell it to go away, that it has no place in your fiction. If that doesn't work, get up and walk away. Don't come back until your critical mind relents. It won't take long.

Finally, don't confuse your opinions as a reader with your responsibilities as a writer. Even your opinion of your own work. Don't expect your judgement of your work to have any bearing whatsoever on the opinions of other readers. It won't (unless it keeps you from letting other readers see your story at all), and rightly so.

Okay, enough finger-wagging. If you didn't need that, my apologies. If you did, you're welcome. (grin)

Studying King

I finished *The Outsider* yesterday. And I was so engaged in the story I didn't notice until about page 400 that, at least in this book, King didn't use apostrophes to truncate words in dialogue (ex. "He's doin his chores" vs. "He's doin' his chores").

The omission of that apostrophe didn't pull me out of the story. In fact, I only noticed it when I returned to the story after a short break. When I noticed one instance of it, I flipped back through several pages looking for other examples. Maybe it was an omission typo.

Nope. I found what I expected to find: He did the same thing through the whole book. Now, staple this to the inside of your eyelids:

"Consistency is far more important than any rules.

When I saw the first instance of the omission, for maybe a split second I was taken aback. Then I remembered it was Stephen King, so I accepted the omission, forgot about it, and plunged back into the story. Because Story is what matters. Story is all that matters.

Starting today I'll revisit a few passages that really blew me away and try to figure out how he did that. I've also identified a few short chapters I want to type-in to get the rhythm and feel of them. (For anyone who's read the book, those are Chapters 3 – 6 of the section titled "Footsteps and Cantaloupe.")

As for the truncations without apostrophes, it looks and feels "cleaner" somehow. I might start using the technique in my own work. It certainly would be easier than trying to keep up with all those apostrophes in dialogue.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Ginger VS Grammarly: Which Grammar Checker is Better in (2022)?" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/ginger-vs-grammarly-which-grammar-checker-is-better-in-2022/>. I might be tempted to try Ginger for its contextual spell=check. As to grammar checking, see my response in the third paragraph of this post.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [KillZone Blog](#), [Reader vs. Writer](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: Know What Stuff Is

February 17, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Topic: Know What Stuff Is
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“Remembrance of things past is not necessarily the remembrance of things as they were.” Marcel Proust

I like that quote. I've often told others that memoir is closer to fiction than to nonfiction because it's a writer remembering what happened at a point in time. Fiction is a writer remembering something that could have happened at a point in time.

“If you're a good writer and want to write literary magazine material, start a blog, tell all your friends about it and see who shows up.” The Passive Guy

Topic: Know What Stuff Is

I could have just written “Know the Rules,” but that doesn't quite cover it. Knowing you need to join two independent clauses with a comma and a coordinating conjunction doesn't much matter if you don't know what a clause is, or a conjunction, or, for that matter, a comma. Hence the title of this post.

Oh pretty much everyone knows a comma is that little curly thing that pops up every now and then in a lot of sentences, but do they know why, specifically, the writer used the comma? What, specifically, the comma forces the reader—every reader who encounters one—to do every time they encounter it?

Um, nope. In fact, very few writers know that. Which is why I wrote [*Punctuation for Writers*](#) almost thirty years ago. Among many, many other things, it explains that of all the punctuation, the comma forces the shortest pause. It also explains the effect that has on the reader.

Then PFW goes on to explain the only five comma rules you'll ever need (and really it's only three) and the effect that every other punctuation mark has on the reader and why it's important. In other words, it explains the *reasons* behind the rules. I guarantee these are things you never heard in school at any level. Well, unless my in-person seminars were part of your education).

But again, knowing the rules, and even knowing the reasons behind the rules, doesn't matter out of context. There's nothing wrong with breaking the rules of grammar, syntax and punctuation if you break them intelligently and to achieve a particular effect in the reader. But to do that, you have to know those rules and the “stuff” alluded to in the title.

By way of example, a word on Grammarly—I detest Grammarly. In a television commercial, they actually defined a “run-on” sentence as “a really long sentence.”

Some of you right now are thinking, *Seriously? A company with a name like that should know better, shouldn't they?* If you aren't thinking that, stay tuned.

The problem is, the people who trust Grammarly for advice on grammar are the people who don't know better and therefore believe they need that advice. Of course, they don't. They need to learn the rules on their own, but humans are apt to listen to any old thing that sounds right. For just one example, certainly the term "run-on" *seems to* allude to "a really long sentence." But it doesn't.

A run-on sentence is one in which the writer has joined two or more independent clauses (simple sentences) without a coordinating conjunction or a semi-colon. It doesn't have to be a lot of words in a row.

"It's cold I'm going inside" (five words) is a run-on sentence.

"I enjoy skiing in Colorado the snow there is wonderful" (ten words) is a run-on sentence.

As an aside, either of those joined with only a comma (placed after "cold" or "Colorado") is a comma splice. Neither is a correct sentence. On the other hand, the following sentence (49 words) is a correct simple sentence:

During the last game of the season, Billy Parker hit the ball so hard it crossed the outfield fence for a homerun, ricocheted off a tree and across the stream, and rolled another fifty or sixty feet in a small hollow between the roots of an ancient sweetgum tree.

But now you see why I titled this topic as I did: Independent clauses? Simple sentences? Coordinating conjunction?

As a writer, you should be aware of all these things and more. NOT so you can apply them consciously them while you're writing, but so your creative subconscious has them available to draw on.

You should know what nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs are, and the uses for each. You should know what a subject is, and a predicate and an object.

In a sentence, the subject does something, the predicate (verb) is what it does, and the object is what it does it to. Or if you prefer the more graceful explanation, the subject performs an action, the predicate is the action, and the object receives the action (or the action affects the object).
Asleep yet? (grin)

You should also know the difference between a phrase (a group of words that is missing either a noun or its verb) and a clause (a subject plus a verb with or without an object or anything else). "Jesus wept" is the most famous subject-verb combination (clause, independent clause, simple sentence) I can think of.

You should also know what a preposition is (a preposition always points a direction or indicates time: under, over, around, beneath, before, after, etc.) and a prepositional phrase (a preposition plus an article and a noun: for example, “over the river”).

And you should know the coordinating conjunctions. Think of the acronym “fanboys”: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so. Use any of those after a comma to join two independent clauses. The most common are “and” and “or.”

You should know the difference between an independent clause and a dependent (or subordinate) clause. The first makes perfect sense all by itself; the latter doesn’t.

“The rain started” is an independent clause. “I went home” is also an independent clause.

“After the rain started” is a dependent clause. If it were joined with an independent clause so both would make sense, it would then be called the subordinate clause: “After the rain started, I went home.”

By the way, that last example is a complex sentence, a subordinate clause followed by an independent clause. And you should know what a simple, complex, compound and compound-complex sentence is. Because you’re a writer.

Simple sentence: an independent clause (plus whatever else, usually one or more prepositional phrase[s] as in my example above about Billy hitting the ball)

Complex sentence: independent clause plus a dependent clause in either order

Compound sentence: two or more independent clauses, appropriately joined, usually with a comma and a coordinating conjunction

Compound-complex sentence: one or more independent clauses plus one or more dependent clauses, all appropriately joined

Of course, most of you probably already know all of this. For most of you, this is no doubt an unnecessary refresher, and if so, believe me, I’m glad.

I suppose I’m just frustrated because so many who spout advice about writing obviously DON’T have even a basic grounding in the rules of grammar, syntax and punctuation.

And some of those folks are professional fiction writers. They derive part of all of their livelihood from the English language, yet they don’t respect that language enough to get to know it. Sigh.

If you know anyone whom you believe might benefit from this knowledge (and a great deal more), you might point them toward the aforementioned [Punctuation for Writers](#).

The slim little book thoroughly explains punctuation so you can wield it as a tool rather than fearing it as something you don't understand. As a bonus and just as importantly, it explains the "stuff" in a grammar refresher, including all of the information in this post and much more.

There probably are some paperback copies of the second edition still available via eBay or other outlets. I might even have a few up at the house. I'll have to look.

Either way, I suggest not paying more than \$12.95 for the paper edition (I think that's what I priced it at back in the day). Rather than paying the inflated prices some of the morons on eBay are asking, email me, or just buy an electronic version. It isn't a long book. Even the ebook version isn't difficult to search.

Finally, I'd be remiss if I didn't ask you to not be a "grammar nazi." Although writers can and should discuss the intricacies of the English language among themselves, the citizens in the general public neither know nor care about such things. They only want to be entertained.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Ya Gotta Wanna" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/02/ya-gotta-wanna.html>. (See next entry.)

See "How to Write Stories That sell" at <https://www.annehelmstadter.com/stories-that-sell>. This is the course (only \$37) that Garry Rodgers recommended in his post on TKZ. I respect Garry. I might buy this just to see her advice.

See "Long-standing literary magazines..." at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/long-standing-literary-magazines-are-struggling-to-stay-afloat-where-do-they-go-from-here/>. See PG's take.

See "Workshop Sale and Curriculum Update" at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/workshop-sale-and-curriculum-update/>. If you've been thinking about taking some of Dean's courses and wondering about the sequence, see this post.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Anne Helmstadter](#), [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [Garry Rodgers](#), [Grammar](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [PFW](#), [punctuation](#), [Punctuation for Writers](#), [Syntax](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: Challenges on the MidWinter Sale

February 18, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Challenges on the MidWinter Sale
- * Speaking of good deals
- * Of Interest

Challenges on the MidWinter Sale

I wasn't going to post today, but I was interested in getting Dean's post out to you. It's about the MidWinter sale again, but this time he talks about the challenges he's offering on Teachable.

His challenges usually cost \$600, but during the sale they're only \$300. Best of all, they're completely win-win.

They cost you \$300 right now, but if you complete any entire challenge, you get your choice of a lifetime subscription. If you FAIL to complete any challenge, you'll still have the stories or books you did write (or publish) PLUS you'll have a \$600 credit you can use toward anything on Teachable. Trading \$300 for \$600 is pretty good math. It's anything but a bad bet.

So if you're interested, read "Four Challenges Now" at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/four-challenges-now/>.

Speaking of good deals, I was curious enough that I went ahead and bought the "Immersed in Story" course Garry Rodgers mentioned yesterday. At the moment it's only \$27.

Doing so, really, was silly. For me. I've never had a problem coming up with ideas or plunging in and writing short stories or novels, etc. But I wanted to see what the course has to offer, so I bought it.

My assessment is that it's a great course for its purpose. It stands a great chance of helping those who want to write but can't quite pull the trigger, whether because of unreasoning fear or whatever. And for only \$27 it's a pretty low-risk endeavor.

I'll say up front the site is kind of hypey, but the course itself seems to deliver on the hype. If you'd like to check it out, visit <https://www.annehelmstadter.com/stories-that-sell>.

Just a note: I might be off here for a few days. Either way, I'll talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Artificial Intelligence – Images" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/artificial-intelligence-images/>. Pretty amazing.

See "Artificial Intelligence – Text to Speech" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/artificial-intelligence-text-to-speech/>. Getting better all the time.

See “First it Was SpongeBob, Now it’s Satan” at <https://leelofland.com/first-it-was-spongebob-now-its-satan-mothers-murdering-their-kids/>.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Advances in AI](#), [Anne Helmstadter](#), [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [Lee Lofland](#), [The Passive Voice](#)

The Journal: Glitches in Writing

February 20, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * A Bit of Fun
- * Topic: Glitches in Writing
- * A Storyteller
- * Of Interest

A Bit of Fun

For a bit of fun, check how well you really observe. See “The Changing Room Illusion” at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TXk-Oc35oN4>. It’s a very short video.

Topic: Glitches in Writing

This topic is based on James Scott Bell’s post (see “Of Interest”) and his question: “What little things bug you when you see them in a book?”

I’ve talked before about studying the language and the craft and using both to convey the story to the best of your current ability. That is the writer’s responsibility to the craft and to the reader. But not everyone gets that.

Back when I was presenting sessions on the use of the language or on the writing craft at writers’ conferences, I often heard the dismissive, “Oh well, the reader will know what I mean.” That usually was accompanied by a hand-wag and an equally dismissive chortle as the speaker glanced around to glean support from the other members of the audience.

S/he seldom noticed the support s/he sought was not forthcoming. But at that point I stopped talking to that person anyway because I knew I would only be wasting my breath.

The scenario happened so often that soon an image formed in my mind: a heinous, gargoyle-looking creature with a dullness about the eyes, its jaw slack, its blistered tongue protruding, and its upper and lower teeth exposed in a pretentious, self-righteous sneer.

I came to think privately of the ugly thing as “The Braying Jackass,” a mythical creature who attends lectures on craft, not to learn but to illustrate that s/he doesn’t need to learn. I define the creature as “one who speaks with pretentious certainty from a position of absolute ignorance.”

As I wrote earlier, the writer has a responsibility to convey what s/he means to convey. That is true whether or not the writer recognizes or accepts it. But the reader has no responsibility to decipher the writer’s meaning and make sense of the insensible. The reader’s only responsibility is to be entertained.

Here are a few of the problems I’ve seen most often. I noticed some while reading for pleasure (every time the glitch pulled me out of the story) and some when I was copyediting manuscripts for other writers.

When the writer

1. Uses verbs that are not a form of utterance used in dialogue tags.

I have a few hundred of those verbs in a list that I’ve collected over the years as a hobby, all culled either from my reading or from manuscripts I’ve copyedited. My favorite thus far is *ejaculated*,” as in “*Put down that knife!*” *she ejaculated*. Anything that will make the reader rock back in the chair and guffaw at a tense situation is not conducive to keeping the reader in the story.

2. Uses the phrase “sat and” or “stood and” when the character is already sitting or standing, plus, almost always, “reached over and”. Ugh.

You can almost always correct any of those by removing “sat, stood, or reached over and.” Often the rest of the sentence is fine. For example, “Mary Loo ~~stood and~~ gaped down at Michael. Had he really asked her to marry him?”

3. Uses gratuitous narrative, AKA the author standing-in for the character(s). This occurs anytime the author pokes through the story to take center stage. The writer should always stay on his or her own side of the keyboard.

Usually this happens when the author either gets a little too full of himself and expresses an unnecessary (to the story) political opinion or slaps-on a thick layer of description because s/he heard in a class somewhere that description is necessary. Yet somehow s/he evidently missed the part about filtering the description through the POV character’s physical and emotional senses.

4. Protrays talking heads against a white background. Zero or minimal description of the setting, just dialogue.

This is probably the result of the “too much narrative” school. My rule of thumb: If the POV character sees, hears, smells, tastes or feels something, that should be included in the description. If s/he doesn’t, it shouldn’t. There is no room for description from the author (see #3 above), only from the POV character.

5. Tells me what the character sensed instead of letting me sense it for myself.

This is usually preceded by the character name (or she or he) plus a past- or future-tense sensory verb: saw, could see; heard, could hear; smelled, could smell; felt, could feel (physically or emotionally); or tasted, could taste. Again, ugh. Just don’t.

6. Uses only the sense of sight to describe the setting or events.

Apparently some POV characters have no sense of smell, taste, touch, or hearing. Either that or in the fictional world there are no smells, sounds, flavors or textures.

7. Uses “in” when s/he means “into.” (Bell himself did this in an example toward the end of his post.) It’s a small difference in spelling but a major difference in connotation.

If a character “drops a lipstick in her purse,” that means she herself was in the purse when she dropped the lipstick. She can drop a lipstick in the woods or in the jungle or in the desert or in the city, but she has to drop it “into” her purse.

(By the same token, in order to drop anything “into” the woods or the jungle or the desert or the city she would have to be flying over it.)

8. Assigns human traits to human sensory organs or human parts.

Examples of the former include “her eyes looked (or saw),” “her ears listened (or heard),” “her mouth tasted,” “her nose smelled,” and “her hands felt.” In every case, “her [sensory organ]” should be the character’s name or “she.”

Examples of the latter include “her legs raced down the street” or “his butt leaned against the ship’s rail” or “her back pressed against the wall” or “her palms and nose pressed against the window” etc.

That’s enough for now. How about you? What glitches bother you as you’re reading fiction?

A Storyteller

A friend and prolific writer emailed to recommend a storyteller she and her husband discovered on YouTube. I haven’t watched yet, but I will. You can find the storyteller at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCtPrkXdtCM5DAcLufB9jbsA>.

Of Interest

See “Three Things That Bugged Me in a Book” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/02/three-things-that-bugged-me-in-a-book.html>. Also see the comments (other than mine).

See “Pace Yourself” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/02/pace-yourself.html>. A different look at pacing.

See “Animals think, therefore…” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/animals-think-therefore/>. An excellent article.

See “We patronize the animals” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/we-patronize-the-animals/>. Wow. Cool.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Craft of Writing](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [Topic](#), [Writing Glitches](#)

The Journal: Nora Roberts (AKA JD Robb)

February 22, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Missing the Point
- * Nora Roberts (AKA JD Robb)
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“So who do I listen to? I listen to the characters—and myself. If I listened to the readers I’d go slowly mad as it’s impossible to please all as one readers says this, another says that. Often with equal passion.” Nora Roberts on readers’ opinions

“[T]he big (and simple) and sweeping thing is this: If I didn’t think of it, I’m not going to write it.” Nora Roberts in response to “Can I share my idea for a story?”

Missing the Point

This is what I’m up against when I talk with other writers about the craft.

Yesterday I commented on Sue Coletta’s [Kill Zone post](#): “The writer either grounds me in the setting and pulls me into the story or s/he doesn’t. *If that doesn’t happen in the first page or two, I’m gone* [emphasis added]. But if I’m as grounded in the setting and intrigued by the tension as I

was in the first excerpt you used, I'd have continued reading as the protagonist exited the dream, no problem."

This morning I read her response: "You have more patience than I, Harvey. If I feel tricked or cheated, that's it for me."

Well sure. But I *didn't* feel tricked or cheated. I was so grounded in the setting and engaged with the story that I felt only tension, which is what I expect the author wanted me to feel.

But when I read the excerpt she used as an example, I was Just Reading the Story, not looking for reasons to *leave* the story. As I'm reading, I don't think, *Wait a minute! Is this a DREAM?* I'm too engaged with the story to think anything. I'm just enjoying the story.

Anyway, I didn't bother responding. I knew it would do no good.

My fellow writer completely missed the point. It isn't about reader patience. *Any* reader can find a reason to stop reading *any* story if s/he goes into the story looking for a reason to stop reading.

The point is about writer competence. Does any writer write novels and just hope for patient readers? I don't think so. The competent storyteller removes all choice from the reader. Whether the reader is patient or impatient by nature has no bearing. All that matters is whether the writer has employed the craft well enough to pull the reader into the story and hold him or her there.

Practice writing beginnings. As a writer you should strive to ground the reader in the setting and engage the reader in the story. If you do that well, and if the reader wants to be entertained, you will be successful.

If the reader is actively looking for a reason to leave the story—well, there's nothing any of us can do about that. Fortunately, those readers are few, far between, and generally limited to other writers.

Nora Roberts (AKA JD Robb)

Another writer shared Nora Roberts' website with me and recommended it. I visited, culled the quotes above, and now I recommend it too. Go in, look around, see what you might find.

The first two quotes come from the first linked post in "Of Interest." More than anything, I like that Nora is plain-spoken, upfront and honest. No better way to be.

Nora Roberts has over 220 novels and novellas out. She publishes at least 5 major works per year.

Per an [article on Medium](#),

"Nora writes for seven hours a day, every day. She normally starts at around 8 am and finishes at 3 pm. She spends zero time on social media and does use some of that time for thinking and

researching. She doesn't go out to lunch, she doesn't go out to dinner and she doesn't go shopping during working hours."

I recently talked a little about run-on sentences, in which two independent clauses are joined without benefit of a comma and a coordinating conjunction, or a semicolon. I mention this only because the Medium article contains a few run-on sentences.

The author claims to be a professional writer who writes thousands of words every day, but because of those run-on sentences, I didn't bother looking for any of her fiction.

One final quote from Nora, also from the Medium article: "When asked about her secret for writing so prolifically, she simply says, 'Stop making excuses and write. Stop whining and write. Stop f*cking around and write.'"

Of Interest

See "Comas and Kidnappings and Orphans. Oh My." at <https://fallintothestory.com/comas-and-kidnappings-and-orphans-oh-my/>.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Grounding the Reader](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [Nora Roberts](#), [Sue Coletta](#)

The Journal: The Inappropriate Use of "Gave"

February 23, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Topic: The Inappropriate Use of "Gave"
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

"[T]he old Hollywood wisdom still applies: Just tell the story. If you want to send a message, go to Western Union." James Scott Bell on writers who inject their political opinion into their fiction

"'Said' is not a dirty word: But 'argued,' 'whined,' and other dialogue descriptives usually are. A typical rookie mistake." Marilyn Byerly

Topic: The Inappropriate Use of "Gave"

A few days ago, the topic here was “[Glitches in Writing](#).” That was based on James Scott Bell’s post on the Kill Zone blog: “Three Things That Bugged Me in a Book.” Since then I’ve returned to Bell’s post again to [read the excellent comments](#) (I recommend them), and even added another comment or two myself.

This morning I read more of the comments on Bell’s post and added one on the inappropriate use of the verb “gave.” Then I remembered I wrote a whole blog post about that awhile back, so today I’m bringing that blog post forward.

An aside—Before I get started on the topic, I should note that I was especially annoyed recently while reading Stephen King’s *If It Bleeds* (the short sequel to *The Outsider*) to find that King himself uses “gave” inappropriately. And like most who misuse it, he does so liberally.

How can that be? How can I know something about writing that the great Stephen King doesn’t know? Of course, there are still a few things I can learn about the craft of writing by reading his work, but his silly, inappropriate use of “gave”—a mistake even many rookie fiction writers don’t make—lowers my opinion of him considerably.

Unfortunately, it also renders learning from him considerably more difficult. Because it’s harder for me to trust him. I was disappointed for myself, but I was more disappointed because some younger writers will cite King’s inappropriate use of the word to validate their own inappropriate use of it. Please don’t be one of them.

Anyway, here’s my post on the topic, dusted off a bit and brought forward from October 2015, for your leisurely perusal:

Back when I was copyediting a lot of manuscripts, I often happened across the inappropriate use of the verb “gave.” Folks who misuse the verb “gave” usually misuse it a lot, so anytime that happened, I immediately conducted a global search to find and repair each instance all the way through the manuscript.

I did that before I started the copyedit in earnest. It was a necessary task, because most often when I found one such instance, a lot more of them were lurking later in the manuscript.

Using “gave” inappropriately creates the same kind of diversion as saying “umm” a lot during the course of a speech. After a while, audience members stop listening to the speech and start counting occurrences of “umm.”

Likewise, the use of “gave” is distracting anytime something isn’t changing hands or changing ownership. Readers find themselves wondering when you’re going to stop having characters “give” things to each other that can’t be given.

A writer once emailed me to ask, “Which sentence is correct, or are they both correct?”

“I gave a quick look at Nick Campbell, and he gave a subtle nod for me to continue.”

“I gave a quick look at Nick Campell, and he gave me a subtle nod to continue.”

Well, I didn't care for either of them. I told him that, and I told him why: “Give” is a transitive verb, meaning you actually give (or hand or grant) something to someone.

Now, allowing a *character* to misuse “gave” in dialogue is fine. It's still wrong, but most people misuse various words and constructions when they speak, so the misuse mimics real dialogue.

But what is written in narrative should be grammatically correct, *not* for the sake of correct grammar but so it doesn't call attention to itself and away from the story. And no, most of the time it doesn't matter whether the narrator is also a character.

In the examples the writer provided, the phrase “nod to continue” was also awkward.

To fix both problems (verb and phrase), I recommended he write it this way:

“I glanced at Nick Campbell and he nodded, indicating I should continue.” (Nick didn't indicate the speaker should continue. Nick's *nod* indicated he should continue.)

When you have a character “give” someone something, that indicates to the reader that the recipient has something now that she didn't have before, as if you “gave” her a dollar or ring or a house. If what the character “gave” was actually a nod or a smile or a look or a glance or some other intangible, stop it. (grin)

If you look at the third or fourth word after “gave” in a given sentence, most often it will be a noun or present-tense verb (smile, wave, shake) that you can turn into a past-tense verb (smiled, waved, shook) and use in place of “gave.”

So don't write “I gave him a smile.” Write “I smiled (at him).”

Don't write “I gave her a wave” (unless you work in a hair salon). Write “I waved (to her).”

Don't write “I gave his hand a shake” (unless you work at Sonic). Write “I shook his hand.”

However, please *do* write “I gave him a dollar,” not “I dollared him.”

Please *do* write “I gave her a ring.” Not “I ringed her.”

Yeah, I know you didn't need the last two, but a little fun never hurt anyone. Probably.

Using “gave” inappropriately is just a habit. It's akin to using the unnecessary “what it was that” phrase as in “I forgot what it was that I wanted to tell you” instead of just saying “I forgot what I wanted to tell you.”

So if you have the habit of using “gave” inappropriately and if you want to break that habit, you'll have to pay attention to your writing for a little while. Maybe even consciously look for

instances of “gave,” or do a global search after the fact. But very soon you’ll develop a new habit: writing leaner, cleaner, more active prose.

Of Interest

See “Non-Fatal Shootings are Failed Homicides” at <https://leelofland.com/non-fatal-shootings-are-failed-homicides/>.

See “Saddling A Rocket” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/02/saddling-a-rocket.html>.

See “Only 27% Of Texans Trust Politicians’ Judgement of School Books” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/only-27-of-texans-trust-politicians-judgement-of-school-books/>. See PG’s very informative take.

See “Two Days Left In MidWinter Workshop Sale” at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/two-days-left-in-midwinter-workshop-sale/>.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [Gave](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [Lee Lofland](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: Trademark Stuff

February 25, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Topic: Trademark Stuff
- * Who’s the Projectionist?
- * Of Interest

Topic: Trademark Stuff

Not much in today’s post. It’s all pretty much an expanded “Of Interest” section.

According to Dean Wesley Smith (awhile back in one class or another), registering a trademark for practically anything is a waste of time and money for a writer. Primarily that’s because if you have a trademark, you are required to defend it, and defending it can get costly. Especially in addition to the original cost of filing for trademark in the first place.

Besides, in any trademark dispute, first use trumps everything else. So, for example, someone else can't successfully trademark StoneThread Publishing unless they can prove in court they were using the name before I was. Ergo, no trademark registration is required.

By the same token, a long time ago I wanted to start a writing/copyediting/teaching/publishing company called Writing The World (WTW). WTW lasted for awhile, but when I started poking around on the internet I found others had used the term first, so I let it drop.

Anyway, to see what prompted my comments on trademark, see "1202.09(a) Names and Pseudonyms of Authors and Performing Artists" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/1202-09a-names-and-pseudonyms-of-authors-and-performing-artists/>. See also PG's comment and the next linked article:

"What You Need to Trademark Your Personal Name" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/what-you-need-to-trademark-your-personal-name/>.

I have no idea why Jean Murray, who wrote [the original post at The Balance: Small Business](#) is getting folks stirred up about trademarking their own name. Do what you want, of course, but I'll trust Dean on the issue.

Note: Copyright is a different animal. Copyright protection is granted automatically, free of charge, the moment your work is "in fixed form." When you type the last word of your story or poem or novel, it belongs to you legally and is covered by copyright protection.

Rregistering a copyright with the Copyright Office costs a fee, but registration is not required for copyright protection. I'll leave it up to you to decide for yourself whether to register your copyrights. Most of the time, I don't.

Who's the Projectionist?

Just as a matter of philosophical interest, see "Is our universe a holographic projection? Black holes and quantum computing could find out." at <https://www.space.com/black-holes-holographic-projection-quantum-computing-study>.

I'd personally be more interested in learning who the projectionist is and in what "room" is our universe being projected.

Of Interest

See "True Crime Thursday – Obituary Piracy" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/02/true-crime-thursday-obituary-piracy.html>.

See "How sensitivity readers corrupt literature" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/how-sensitivity-readers-corrupt-literature/>. Plus, of course, PG's take.

See “I Wrote a Book with GPT-3 AI in 24 Hours — And Got It Published” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/i-wrote-a-book-with-gpt-3-ai-in-24-hours-and-got-it-published/>. Okay, one, it was a book of poetry. Two, ewww.

See “Petition calls for US government release of UFO videos” at <https://www.space.com/petition-release-us-government-ufo-videos>.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [KillZone Blog](#), [Space.com](#), [The Passive Voice](#)

The Journal: Turn the Fear Around

February 28, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * February’s Gone Already
- * Topic: Turn the Fear Around
- * Of Interest

February’s Gone Already

Wow. February was like a stalker at an old folks’ home. It flashed by, I hardly noticed it, and I didn’t really care.

Also it dawned on me that I’m keeping my hand in writing (fingers and keyboard limber, etc.) with this little Journal. Of course, that doesn’t add to my fiction output, but with every passing day, that day is drawing closer.

Anyway, with today’s Journal, I’ve written 42143 publishable words on the year, though most of that is nonfiction. Still, I’ll take it.

To close out the month, here’s another topic for you.

Topic: Turn the Fear Around

Over at the [Kill Zone blog yesterday](#), James Scott Bell talked about a story in the news—rats in a Family Dollar distribution center—and then made the leap to things (rats) that stop us from writing, which he said reside in our subconscious. He wrote

“One big fat rat is fear. Fear that your ideas aren’t good enough. Or marketable enough. Or might offend someone. Or might make you seem like a drunken fool. Fear is always lurking around the writer’s mind, and needs to be dispatched forthwith.”

Yes, fear should be “dispatched forthwith,” but that’s almost impossible to do even though it’s an unreasoning fear. Meaning no harm will come to you if you ignore or “disptach” it.

But those unreasoning fears (“your ideas aren’t good enough or marketable enough or might offend someone”) come from the conscious, critical mind, not the creative subconscious.

The conscious, critical mind exists primarily for two reasons: to enable us to learn new things and to protect us via the fear impulse. It’s what enables us to feel the heat rising from a stovetop that’s recently been turned off. It makes us jerk our hand away rather than leaning on the hot burner.

It’s also what causes us to listen for sounds of traffic and to look both ways before stepping off a curb, and it’s what makes us feel intimidated and causes us to cross the street when we see what looks like members of a street gang loitering on the next corner.

But our conscious, critical mind doesn’t only protect us physically. It also strives to protect us emotionally, especially from the biggy: the embarrassment that results from rejection and the accompanying (albeit imaginary) ridicule.

That fear of rejection and embarrassment is why we believe our “ideas aren’t good enough or marketable enough or might offend someone.” That fear is also why we delay writing in the first place by choosing to attend to all those little chores that seem to crop up just as we sit down to write.

Even if we get past the initial fear and start writing a story, the fear comes back later. It tries to get us to find other things to do in order to extend the very short break we intended to take between writing sessions. Anything to keep us from writing or finishing or, if we do finish, from publishing. The conscious, critical mind will do whatever it takes to save us from the embarrassment of rejection and ridicule.

At least the voice of the conscious, critical mind is easy to recognize. It’s always negative, always ensuring us in one way or another that we have zero chance of success. (For help with this, see [Quiet the Critical Voice](#).)

All fear about writing is unreasoning fear. Yes, it’s real. It exists. It will make sweat beads pop out on your forehead and goose pimples come up on your arms. But no harm will come to you as a result of ignoring it. It isn’t like someone’s gonna come to your house and shoot you if you write a “bad” story. Well, probably. (grin)

And who but the reader is to say what’s “good” or “bad” anyway? Certainly not the writer. Remember, in every case, writers are the worst judges of their own work. You can’t be both the

worst judge of your work when you think a story's good and somehow an all-knowing genius when you think it's bad.

Turn the Fear Around—It's really easy for me to say the fear is unreasoning and you should ignore it. Likewise I can tell you it will never fully go away, but if you repeatedly push it down it WILL get quieter over time. All of that's true.

But so what? Every writer is different. What if you can't ignore the fear or push it down? In that case, I suggest you turn the fear around.

Let's harken back for a moment to that one big, overriding fear: the fear of the embarrassment of rejection. You're scared to death about how you'll feel if someone DOESN'T like your story. So turn that around. How will you feel if they DO like your story.? How will you feel if your work ISN'T rejected?

How would you feel if you knew someone out there was *hungry* for your stories but you're too scared to write them?

Yeah, I know. Presumptuous of me, isn't it? I'm presuming you can write good, entertaining stories and that someone out there will like them. Silly me.

But that's no different than you presuming you *can't* write good, entertaining stories and that only rejection awaits.

Instead of fearing what will happen if you turn your idea into a short story or novel, maybe you should fear how you'll feel if you don't. For more on this, see [“Some Thoughts on Writing and Writers”](#).

Chances are, if you write fiction, the 20/80 rule will apply. If you continue to learn and hone your craft—and most of all if you continue to *practice*, by which I mean you actually put new words on the page—a few readers, say 10%, still won't like what you've written. Another 10% will love your stories. And probably 80% will think they're good enough to read cover to cover and then go buy more. And that's what matters.

It shouldn't be easier for me to believe in you than it is for you to believe in yourself. But listen, I don't personally have a dog in the hunt. Whether you believe in yourself or not won't affect my bottom line.

I'm just saying, maybe you should give the readers a chance to make up their own mind about your work. The only way to do that is to write it, finish it, and put it out there.

It all starts with believing in yourself and not allowing unreasoning, unthreatening fear to take over. And you can do it.

Of Interest

See “Some people have a genetic condition...” at <https://www.interestingfacts.com/fact/61f873e9e504fe0008c6641d>. Maybe a new superhero? Tetrachroman?

See “An Easy (Easier) Way to Build a Series Bible” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/02/an-easy-easier-way-to-build-a-series-bible.html>. If you create a reverse outline as you go, you’ll have no worries. If the novel becomes a series, simply combine reverse outlines to create a series bible.

See “Exclusivity in 2022 Part Two” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/exclusivity-in-2022-part-two/>. At the end of his post, PG includes a link to Part One of her post.

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Categories [Critical Voice Book](#), [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Believe in Yourself](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [Quiet the Critical Voice](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: Ten Tips for Healthy Writing

March 1, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Topic: Ten Tips for Healthy Writing
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“In theory, there is no difference between theory and practice. But in practice, there is.”
Benjamin Brewster

Wow, does THAT ever pertain to writing!

“‘To write’ is an active verb. Thinking is not writing. Writing is putting words on paper.”
Roberta Jean Bryant’s first law of Writing from her book [Anybody Can Write](#)

In writing, “practice” also is putting words on paper.

Topic: Ten Tips for Healthy Writing

In the first item in “Of Interest” today, Debbie Burke lists “Ten Tips from a Chiropractor for Writers.” They were not what I expected or hoped to pass along to you, so I decided to write a list of my own.

In all my years of writing poetry, essays, articles and fiction, I’ve never suffered carpal tunnel syndrome or any of the other ailments that can be caused by that activity. Here’s how:

1. Invest in a good chair. Full stop.

2. The seat of your chair should be adjustable for height and slope so that you can sit comfortably with your feet flat on the floor as you write. You should feel no pressure in your legs, back, shoulders or glutes.

3. A good lumbar support is also necessary, and check your position in your chair from time to time to be sure you’re taking advantage of that support. Again, you should feel no pressure in your lower back, legs or glutes.

4. Adjustable armrests are essential, both laterally and for height. Position them to support your forearms and wrists comfortably as you’re writing. If you’re typing, only your fingers should move. If you notice your forearms, wrists or hands at all while you’re typing, you’re in the wrong position.

5. Write on a height-adjustable surface (like a drafting table), or don’t be afraid to trim the furniture. My ideal writing surface is flat (not sloped) and 27” above the floor. Of course, your ideal probably will vary. I have cut an inch or two off various wooden desks and tables to bring them to that exact height.

6. If you write standing up, come up with a way to support your forearms and wrists as you write. For example, if you’re standing in front of an old chest of drawers with your laptop on top, you might open the top drawer and add a pillow or something to support your forearms. Whatever works.

7. Look straight ahead as you write. There should be no strain in your neck or shoulders. If you stretch when you first stand up for a break, you’re probably sitting with poor posture in your shoulders, neck, and/or back.

Both my business and writing computers are laptops, but I have a large, separate monitor for each one. Extended to its full height, my business monitor still wasn’t quite high enough. At first I set it up on a couple of short pieces of 2×4 to raise it to the right height, but that wasn’t the most attractive or stable arrangement. Later I bought a narrow monitor stand. Again, whatever it takes.

8. Take a break. Get up and move around every hour or so even if you only walk ten feet away and ten feet back. Longer breaks are fine too.

9. If you write in any non-supported position either occasionally or all the time (e.g., in a chair or on a couch or outside on a stump with your laptop supported on your legs), take a break more often, like two or three times every hour. Your future self will thank you for it.

10. Set aside time for physical activity. I hate the word “exercise.” Physical activity should be pleasurable, not forced. It should be for enjoyment, not a workout for its own sake.

I recommend walking. Walking is unique in that it’s among the easiest *and* most beneficial activities. But I don’t recommend walking on a treadmill or a set course (unless you enjoy that). I recommend walking strictly for pleasure for a minimum amount of time.

If you can think of any other tips to help maintain your health as you engage in a sedentary occupation, please share them in the comments.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Ten Tips from a Chiropractor for Writers” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/03/ten-tips-from-a-chiropractor-for-writers.html>. Linked in case you might find it useful. It wasn’t what I expected or hoped for.

See “Is It Too Late to Start Writing?” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/is-it-too-late-to-start-writing/>.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Exercise](#), [Healthy writing](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [Posture](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [the writing life](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: Aliens Among Us

March 2, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Aliens Among Us
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

“Lessons here? Sure. Show up every day, every minute. When you make a promise to write and you don’t do it you are letting yourself down, not to mention whoever would have benefited in however many ways by reading your efforts. You’re never too old to start until it’s too late. It’s not too late today.” Joe Hartlaub (see the second item in “Of Interest”)

Aliens Among Us

Outside of a workshop, I’ve never seen Dean Wesley Smith put out a call for manuscripts. But he just did, or at least that’s the way I read it. Aliens Among Us is a new book bundle he’s putting together for StoryBundle. He’s looking for novels and novellas, so no short stories or short-story collections. If you’re interested, you can read all about it at the first item in “Of Interest.”

I submitted two novels: [The Consensus](#) (40,000 words) and [For the Good of the Galaxy: The First Nine Days](#) (90,000 words). If you submit something too, good luck.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Aliens Among Us” at <https://www.deanwesleymsmith.com/aliens-among-us/>.

See “A New Trick for an Old Dog” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/03/a-new-trick-for-an-old-dog.html>. A rare post from the retired TKZer, Joe Hartlaub.

See “Best Practices for Working with an Independent Editor” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/best-practices-for-working-with-an-independent-editor/>. I linked to this in case you have little or no experience hiring a copyeditor (the only kind that is both legitimate and necessary). I do not necessarily agree with everything in the article.

See “Susan Sontag, The Art of Fiction No. 143” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/susan-sontag-the-art-of-fiction-no-143/>.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Aliens Among Us](#), [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [the writing life](#)

The Journal: Not a Good Day

March 3, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Oh Well...
- * BundleRabbit Is Now PubShare
- * Of Interest

I'm a little grouchy today. My apologies in advance. If you don't want to put up with my grouching, I suggest you skip down to the "Of Interest" section.

Oh Well....

Although he "love[d] the book idea and cover" for my SF novel *For the Good of the Galaxy: The First Nine Days*, Dean declined to include it in the upcoming StoryBundle.

The reason? I don't have a large-enough social-media presence, and therefore don't have the platform to promote the bundle widely enough to be fair to the other authors in the bundle. Let me say up front, I understand that, and it's fine although... frankly it stings a little. Or it did at first.

The fact is, indie publishing, just like traditional publishing, is a business, period. And in indie publishing, just like in traditional publishing, if you don't have a large-enough following when certain opportunities arise, you won't be invited to attend the party.

There are no seats at the adult table for the writer who chooses to remain a free-spirited child. And that would be me. I'm all about telling stories. Business bores me to tears.

As a result, I've never treated my storytelling as a business. Oh, I poked at it a little. I designed an author website and a publisher website, but I don't have a blog that would appeal to readers on either one. Even when I was blogging over on my author site, I was blogging to other writers.

And frankly, for all the good the business site has done (7 years, not a single order from any booksellers), I might as well close it down and combine it with my author site. Or vice versa.

Nor do I "capture" emails for a mailing list on either one. Somehow that seems less than ethical to me, so I don't do it. Of course, your opinion might vary, and that's perfectly fine.

When those annoying "Leave your email address and get a free blah blah blah" pop-ups arise on other sites, I take it as a personal affront. I didn't go there looking for a pop-up, and the pop-up is usually positioned directly between me and whatever I went there to see. Often the pop-up um pops-up even if I'm already a subscriber. How thoughtless and distasteful is that?

As for social media, by which people primarily mean Facebook and Instagram, it leans so far in one direction it might as well be lying down. I was on Facebook for a few years, but eventually I could no longer take all the lying. I despise liars. I personally hate them and believe it should be legal to shoot them on sight.

So that's why I'm not on social media, and so I don't have a "platform." It's also why I don't listen to arguments from either side of the political aisle, any major news agency, or anyone purporting to support any major "cause."

And I mean all of them, from which lives matter or don't to the reasons for global warming to whether wearing masks makes a difference and what words one may say in what order if one wishes to be thought of as anything but a pariah. Seriously, who needs that?

Annneeway, I've always preached that the best promotion is to write the next book. And I've always said the best payment I get for my efforts is not monetary. It's being the very first person ever to be entertained by my characters' stories. I guess if I ever get back to writing, I'll stick with that. It isn't that I'm too old to change, it's that I'm too old to want to change.

It also dawns on me that I'm entertained by my characters and their stories even when I don't write them. I write them primarily to put them out so others can be entertained also. But if I'm not allowed to entertain a broader audience because I don't already have a broader audience... well, it's a vicious circle, isn't it?

Either way, after I'm gone, my children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren will have a passive-income motherlode worth several million dollars at their fingertips. If only they didn't inherit my tendency for laziness or whatever this is. If only they choose to mine that motherlode. I wish them (and you) luck.

BundleRabbit Is Now PubShare

As I mentioned above, Dean declining my offer to let him include my novel in his new bundle isn't what annoyed me, not really. At least I understood the whys and wherefores of his decision, and that's fine.

This, on the other hand, is a hare of an entirely different color.

A long time ago I encouraged the use of a new bundling site called BundleRabbit. I have over 150 novels, novellas, short story collections and short stories listed with them myself, and my work has been included in numerous bundles. In fact, [I still have work in eight bundles](#) with them at this writing.

But whenever in 2021 the site was switched from BundleRabbit to PubShare—*Without Freaking Notice, at least to me*—all of my titles on the site were "unpublished." Which of course rendered them unavailable for potential bundling.

Why? Because when the company changed over, they added one more requirement for books to be listed: A "teaser" of a few words is now required. And instead of letting the authors—or at least *this* author—know that they needed to update their listings, they simply delisted the books. Again, Without Notice.

Now, if I want to keep my account active and if I want that account to be useful as a tool for promotion, I have to take the time to plod through all the listings, one title at a time, and add that few-word teaser to each.

Frankly, I'm not sure what I'm going to do. I feel as if I've been cheated. I'm taking a few days to decide whether staying with PubShare and updating all those titles is worth my time. It would be much easier to withdraw my titles from the current bundles and then close my account.

Now, if you were part of BundleRabbit and if you were made aware of this change when it first happened, I'm glad for you.

But if you listed any titles on BundleRabbit and this is all news to you, I suggest you check in with them. The new URL is <https://pubshare.com/>.

Talk with you again soon. With any luck, by then I'll be back to my old chipper self. (grin)

Of Interest

See "A Novel Happens" at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/a-novel-happens/>. A rare look at DWS "outlining" a novel, sort of.

See "The Secret to Being a Successful Writer" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/03/the-secret-to-being-a-successful-writer.html>.

See "Anyword – AI Copywriter" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/anyword-ai-copywriter/>.

Disclaimer: In this blog, I provide advice on writing fiction. I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. To be crystal clear, WITD is not "the only way" to write, nor will I ever say it is. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among myriad other topics.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [BundleRabbit](#), [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [PubShare](#), [The Passive Voice](#)

The Journal: A 20-Million Dollar Kickstarter Campaign

March 4, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * A 20-Million Dollar Kickstarter Campaign—in Fiction
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

“Kickstarter for all sizes has now officially become a great place to start the sales of your new book. Even if you get just a few hundred, or five hundred, or a thousand, it is still money and readers you didn’t have before.” Dean Wesley Smith

A 20-Million Dollar Kickstarter Campaign—in Fiction

A very short post today to pass along what is, to me, very exciting news. According to DWS, Brandon Sanderson’s second kickstarter is about to surpass the 20-million dollar mark, making it the largest Kickstarter ever. And it’s in the Fiction category.

So there’s the real excitement. Sanderson is helping all fiction writers by “proving to readers that they can find really fun and original books on Kickstarter. He is helping us all by breaking the ice.”

I can’t strongly enough recommend this article. See “Brandon Sanderson’s Second Kickstarter” at <https://www.deanwesleymith.com/brandon-helps-us-all-once-again/>.

This is a little confusing, because on [the free “Kickstarter Best Practices for Fiction Writers” workshop on Teachable](#) it mentions, in a special section on Sanderson, his first four Kickstarter campaigns. But whatever.

For whatever reason, apparently Coleman didn’t publish his book widely. I was unable to find even a mention of it on Amazon. But if you go to <https://wmg-publishing-workshops-and-lectures.teachable.com/> and sign up—again, it’s absolutely free—you can get his book on crowdfunding piecemeal.

If this (making money with your fiction) interests you at all, I recommend it.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

Nothing today.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Brandon Sanderson](#), [Crowdfunding for Fiction Writers](#), [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [Kickstarter](#), [Loren L. Coleman](#)

The Journal: More Brandon Sanderson

March 5, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * More Brandon Sanderson
- * Mentorships Discontinued
- * Of Interest

More Brandon Sanderson

Another very short but important post today, primarily to mention two things:

First, I took the time to look around and find Brandon Sanderson's "318-R" course, the course on writing that he teaches at BYU. It's free online (with his blessing) in a series of YouTube videos. I encourage you to watch at least the Course Overview (58 minutes) at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N4ZDBOc2tX8&list=PLH3mK1NZn9QqOSj3ObrP3xL8tEJQ12-vL>.

If you go to that particular URL, you'll see not only the Course Overview video, but the list of the other videos on the right side of the screen. I have not watched the videos, so this is not a personal endorsement of Sanderson, but a lot of others do endorse him.

Second, even if you already saw it, read "Brandon Sanderson's Second Kickstarter," but this time also read the comments. (Not mine so much, but the others.) You can find the article and comments at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/brandon-helps-us-all-once-again/#comments>. Lot of good stuff there that might help you decide whether to do a Kickstarter.

I have discontinued my mentorships. If there's ever anything I can do to help with your writing, don't hesitate to email me at harveystanbrough@gmail.com. If I can help, I will.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Immersion" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/03/immersion.html>.

See "How Angry Should Other Writers Be About Brandon Sanderson's \$22 Million Kickstarter?" (seriously???) at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/how-angry-should-other-writers-be-about-brandon-sandersons-22-million-kickstarter/>. See PG's take.

See "It's Time to Come Clean" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/its-time-to-come-clean/>. A short, 16-minute video by Brandon Sanderson.

See "Fantasy author raises \$19 million on Kickstarter in two days to self-publish new novels" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/fantasy-author-raises-19-million-on-kickstarter-in-two-days-to-self-publish-new-novels/>.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Brandon Sanderson](#), [Kickstarter](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [Mentorships Discontinued](#), [The Passive Voice](#)

The Journal: Here Come the Fatalists

March 6, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Here Come the Fatalists
- * Of Interest

Here Come the Fatalists

Fatalists? Do I have the term right? Isn’t that what you call people who focus on telling you what you will surely never be able to do so you shouldn’t even try?

Whatever you call them, I don’t like them. People have called me negative before, but I’ve never told writers a bunch of things they can’t do: I’ve always focused on what they CAN do, on how much they CAN achieve, on their positive capabilities.

Believe in yourself and you can do anything. Trust yourself and your characters and you can be a prolific, highly successful writer.

But don’t take my word for it. Just ask Dean Wesley Smith or Kristine Kathryn Rusch or Brandon Freakin’ Sanderson or Lee Child or Stephen King or any of hundreds of other writers who have learned the secret: Trust and you will succeed.

But there are also those who NEVER learned to trust themselves and their own characters. They seem to revel in pulling other writers—especially beginning writers—down into the negative, can’t-do muck with them.

“Whatever you do, don’t trust yourself,” they say. “If you think your writing’s good, just remember that you’re the worst judge of your own work. Of course, if you think it sucks, you’re probably right. So either way, don’t think you’re any good at all at telling stories.

“And for God’s sake, DON’T trust your characters! Outline everything before you write. And *after* you write, bring in your conscious, critical mind to double-check your characters and revise and rewrite their story. Then bring in other conscious, critical minds to critique the story and tell you how they would have written it.

“And whatever you do, remember that this is WORK, not joy; it’s SHEER DRUDGERY, not fun. If you enjoy it, pal, well, you’re obviously doing it wrong, and I’m here to tell you that you will fail *miserably*.”

Yawn. Stretch. Yeah, whatever. I’m here to tell you all of that is a heaping, steamy pile of fresh bovine excrement.

I suggest you avoid those manure-spreading fatalists (or as Spiro Agnew called them back in the day, “nattering nabobs of negativism,”) literally like the plague. Unfortunately, masks do no good against them. Attitude works better.

Here’s your chance to test that. Over on KillZone blog today, James Scott Bell wrote about Brandon Sanderson’s recent mega-success with his recent Kickstarter campaign. As part of that article, he wrote, and I quote,

“However, some things to keep in mind at this stage of my post.

“1. You are not going to make millions via Kickstarter.

“2. Kickstarter campaigns are notoriously difficult to run successfully. The time and effort do not, in my opinion, offer enough Return on Investment (ROI).

“3. Forget about Kickstarter.”

You’re kidding, right? Look at all that negativity! And remember, *thousands* of writers turn to this guy for advice. Thousands. I’m fighting a frustrating, uphill battle, and the hill’s getting steeper all the time. I understand that.

But seriously? “*Forget about Kickstarter*”? But why? Just because this guy believes you can’t do it, even in light of ample evidence to the positive?

Of course, most of the comments on the post seemed to come from a mutual-admiration society. That’s what I’ve come to expect over there, and that’s fine, but it’s hardly useful in any real sense.

And I like information to be fair and even-handed, so I posted a response to his article as well. You can see it in the comments at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/03/its-crucial-to-know-who-you-are-as-a-writer.html#comments>.

If you don’t want to visit the site, here’s what I wrote:

Just to play devil’s advocate for a moment, Dean Wesley Smith and Loren L. Coleman put up a FREE course on Teachable. It’s called Kickstarter Best Practices for Fiction Writers, and you can view it at <https://wmg-publishing-workshops-and-lectures.teachable.com/>.

There is also an accompanying book titled, *Crowdfunding Your Fiction: A Best Practices Guide* by Loren L. Coleman. Thus far, the only place I've found the book available is through the course. But again, the course is free.

Also, for a more positive take on what Sanderson did, I recommend reading the post and the comments at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/brandon-helps-us-all-once-again/>.

What Loren did with his campaign, which was 20 years in the making, was blow the doors off Kickstarter and open a new way for fiction writers—all fiction writers—to earn money from their writing. I've already had several friends run successful small and mid-range Kickstarter campaigns, earning from a few hundred dollars to several thousand.

In full disclosure, this doesn't matter at all to me personally as a writer. I myself have neither designed nor run a Kickstarter campaign, nor, more than likely, will I do so. But I enjoy spreading the word just in case some other writer might benefit from it. There is absolutely no good reason not to try. Unless, like me, you completely suck at business and couldn't care less about it.

I love conveying my characters' stories so that others may enjoy them as much as I do. But although I'm an extremely successful fiction writer (66 novels, 8 novellas, over 200 short stories, hundreds of poems, nominations for major awards), my children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren—should there be a business mind among them—will be the ones who profit from my writing. And that's more than fine with me.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

Nada

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Fatalists](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [Negativity](#)

The Journal: Audio Courses

March 8, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Audio Courses
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

In Saudi Arabia, “The religious police’s official Arabic name dates back hundreds of years, but still sounds Orwellian in English: the Committee for the Prevention of Vice and Promotion of Virtue.” from an article in *The Atlantic* on the Saudi crown prince (Nothing to do with writing, but a really cool quote anyway.)

Audio Courses

Yesterday, to my delight, a young woman named Monica Arac de Nyeko ordered several of my audio courses.

I’m naturally curious, so I keyed Monica’s name into a search engine. I learned she was born in Uganda but now lives in Nairobi. And she is a successful poet, essayist, and short story writer in her own right.

In fact, she’s been writing for awhile. In 2009, her story “Jambula Tree” won “the 8th Annual Caine Prize—Africa’s most prestigious literary accolade for a short story published in English.”

Impressive. Not only does she write stories in English, a language so difficult that most English speakers don’t even understand it, but she does so well enough to win a prestigious prize. And perhaps most impressive, she apparently is still hungry to learn more about her craft.

But for me it was time for reflection. Anytime anyone orders one or more of my audio lectures and thereby draws my attention to them, I question the usefulness of the lectures themselves. After all, I wrote most of them before I’d even written a novel.

So are they still relevant? Are they too basic, too elemental? Certainly they engage the conscious, critical mind vs. the creative subconscious, and that can’t be good, can it?

That’s when I take a deep breath and shut down the inner critic. Yes, some of the lectures (to me, at least) are elemental, but they are all certainly still relevant. They all still contain valid information for writers of fiction and poetry.

And yes, *of course* they engage the conscious, critical mind. But that’s how we learn new techniques and bits of techniques: with the conscious mind. Then as we write from the creative subconscious, what we learned seeps out as necessary.

So I’m leaving them up for the foreseeable future. Just in case you’re interested, you can view the Audio Courses at <https://stonethreadpublishing.com/audio-lecture-series/>.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “A Marketing Revamp for your Older Book Title” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/a-marketing-revamp-for-your-older-book-title/>.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Audio Courses](#), [Jambula Tree](#), [Monica Arac de Nyeko](#), [The Passive Voice](#)

The Journal: Why I Don't Recommend Outlining...

March 9, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Topic: Why I Don't Recommend Outlining...
- * Of Interest

Topic: Why I Don't Recommend Outlining...

A few days ago I discontinued my mentorships. This topic sprang from one part of my former Becoming A Writer mentorship. I hope it helps.

Actually, this could be titled “Why I Don't Recommend Outlining and Other Prewriting Structures” like separate world-building, character sketches, etc. But that title is far too long. Oh, and while I'm at it, I'll also discuss briefly why I don't recommend rewriting.

So why don't I recommend outlining and the rest? The short answer is “Because you'll sabotage yourself at every turn.”

The much longer answer is this: You can only outline (world-build, sketch characters and rewrite) from the conscious, critical mind.

It's impossible to create an outline or any other prewriting structure without conscious planning and manipulation.

In a character sketch you might consider each character's hair and eye color, height and other physical attributes or peculiarities, attitude, clothing, education, status, habits, hobbies, etc. ad nauseam.

In world building (meaning the *story* world, not the *planet* world), you might consider the general climate and landscape, whether society is developed or under developed and what that means, and a hundred other things.

And in outlining, you must consider what happens next in the story. That is a plaintive illustration that every outline—in fact, the very act itself of outlining—is based on fear and self-doubt.

Worst of all, outlining sends a blatant signal to your creative subconscious that you don't trust the characters who reside there to tell the story that they, not you, are living.

What!? How pretentious is that? That is a horrible start to what might otherwise have been a long, enjoyable and even profitable relationship with your characters.

Just for a moment, imagine your neighbors have asked you to drop into their lives for a week or a month to write their story. They've read some of your work and they think it would be fun to be characters in your next novel. They say, "You don't even have to embellish. Just use your skills to write what happens in our life and how we react—what we say and do."

Would you draw up character sketches?

Well, of course not. You only have to write your neighbors as they are.

What about world building? Necessary?

Well, no. The world they live in is *slightly* different from yours (different house, cars, habits, events, etc.) but it already exists. You only have to write the truth as you witness it.

And of course you would never even think about outlining the events of the next week or month and then forcing your neighbors to follow the outline as they attempt to live their story. Would you?

Nah, of course not. That would just be silly. Besides, if you even suggested they follow an outline instead of simply living their life and letting you write it down, they'd probably look at you as if you have two heads, cancel the deal, and order you off their property.

So you go along. There are some things you *do* get to decide, like maybe the point of view. You can dine with them, or you can watch secretly as they eat. You can bunk with them, snore with them, and roll out with them the next morning, or you can simply tuck them in, tiptoe out, and check back tomorrow. Or later in the night if something happens.

But beyond that, you have no power. Remember, it's THEIR story you're telling, not yours. In *your* story you're eyeballing your neighbors and writing down *their* story.

So let me ask you: Are your neighbors "real people"?

Of course they are. They exist when you're looking in on them and they still exist when you aren't aware of them at all. Likewise, their *story* is ongoing even when you aren't looking in on them, laptop at the ready.

Okay then, why don't they write their own stupid story?

Because they don't have the skills.

Your fictional characters are just like your neighbors. They exist when you're looking in on them and they still exist when you aren't aware of them at all. They are living their lives even when you aren't looking in on them, and those lives are compilations of their stories.

But your characters don't write their own stories for the same reason your neighbors don't write theirs: because they don't have the skills. They depend on you for that. It's why they attracted your attention in the first place.

Writing the stories your characters are living is exactly the same as writing the stories your neighbors are living. You don't have to outline or character sketch or world-build, whether your characters live across town or across the galaxy.

Just drop in on them—again, laptop at the ready—and write down what happens and how they react: what they say and do.

Write what your POV character notices: sees, hears, smells, tastes and feels physically. Add to the mix whatever the POV characters feels emotionally or senses mentally.

Trust your characters to tell the story that they, not you, are living. When you feel “stuck,” display that trust to them by forging ahead. Just write the next sentence they give you, then the next and the next, and soon the story will be flowing again.

As a personal aside, I consider my characters acquaintances and friends who exist in another dimension. I also consider myself fortunate that I'm allowed a glimpse into that dimension on occasion. Just as, on occasion, I'm allowed a glimpse into my neighbors' lives.

Obviously, this interdimensional glimpse isn't something that can be proven or disproven, and proof doesn't matter anyway. What matters is that *I* believe it, and that I respect my characters as much as I respect my neighbors. It's why we have such a strong relationship.

Finally, a word on rewriting—As I wrote at the outset, outlining in advance is based on fear and self-doubt, and it sends a negative signal that you mistrust your creative subconscious. Rewriting sends exactly the same signal, but after the fact.

It's easy for me to imagine a group of characters gathered at the front of your subconscious watching you rewrite what they've so graciously given you.

One might say to another, “Hey, get a load of this guy, would'ya?”

The other might respond, “What is he? The general manager of the freakin' universe?”

More and more gather as others arrive to see what's going on. They're all scowling, their arms are crossed, and one foot is tapping angrily.

And maybe one spokesperson, in a quiet little nagging voice, warns you against changing the story. S/he might even send that little feeling of semi-nausea to tug at your stomach in an effort to make you realize how badly you're screwing up.

Or they might just shake their heads, their arms still crossed, and turn and walk away, mumbling that they no longer trust you and it will be a cold day in a bad place before they'll give you another story. Why should they if you're only going to change it?

One mumbles, "Maybe he should write his own stupid stories and see how far that gets him. Hard to imagine what you don't live through."

The others assent with knowing nods as they fade into the recesses of the subconscious.

Don't outline, folks. Don't do character sketches and world building and all the rest. And for goodness' sake don't rewrite. Don't telegraph to your creative subconscious that you don't trust your characters to tell the stories that they, not you, are living.

Is this a leap?

Maybe. But it shouldn't be. Despite the beads of fear-sweat that will break out on your forehead, writing into the dark won't harm you. At all. In any way.

If you try it and stick it out, you'll never look back. And if you do buckle, well, you can always go back to outlining and character sketches and world building and rewriting. You will have lost nothing.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Story Salvage: Finding the Opportunity in Failure" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/story-salvage-finding-the-opportunity-in-failure/>.

See "Owning the Stage" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/03/owning-the-stage.html>.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [characters](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [The Writing Life](#), [Topic](#), [Writing Into the Dark](#)

The Journal: Talking Kickstarter Again

March 14, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Topic: Talking Kickstarter Again
- *
- *
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“There is money in publishing. A lot of it. It just doesn't flow to the writers. Because, frankly, writers are stupid.” Kristine Kathryn Rusch

“Dean and Loren offer a [free class on crowdfunding](#) on Teachable.” Kristine Kathryn Rusch

“They always say time changes things, but you actually have to change them yourself.” Andy Warhol

Topic: Talking Kickstarter Again

This will be brief. See “Brandon's Kickstarter” at <https://kriswrites.com/2022/03/09/business-musings-brandons-kickstarter/>.

Amusing excerpts

“[From] the company town newspaper (The New York Times):

“But self-publishing on the scale Sanderson is proposing is an enormously complicated proposition. Fundamentally, most authors want to write books, not run a publishing house.

“Books require editors, designers and lawyers. Someone has to register the ISBN number and file for copyright. Someone else has to proofread the manuscript, then proofread it again. Printing thousands of copies of physical books, then storing and distributing them, is expensive and onerous.”

Kristine Kathryn Rusch's response:

“It's as if the past 12 years hadn't happened *at all*. As if there weren't hundreds of freelance copy editors and designers. As if registering for an ISBN is hard. As if hiring a lawyer is even harder.”

...

“Brandon wrote these four surprise novels. He’ll publish them, and the people who backed the Kickstarter will get copies and other swag.

“Then the books will go on sale at the usual channels. And because they’re indie published, Brandon will make 70% of the gross rather than 19% (if his deal from his regular publisher was spectacular, which it probably isn’t). He’ll be raking in money on indie published books.”

If you want to make money with your writing, read Kris’s post. Then climb out of your safety zone and try a Kickstarter campaign. Or another Kickstarter campaign. As noted in the article, practice makes perfect.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Challenges (Wrong Information Out There)” at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/challenges-wrong-information-out-there/>.

See “A Thousand New Email Sign Ups in a Week? It’s Possible.” at <https://www.janefriedman.com/a-thousand-new-email-sign-ups-a-week-its-possible/>.

See “A Close Reading of the Best Opening Paragraph of All Time” at <https://lithub.com/a-close-reading-of-the-best-opening-paragraph-of-all-time/>. This is a stupid claim. All judgements—good, bad; better, worse; best, worst—are up to the individual reader. I like my own opening paragraph for *Confessions of a Professional Psychopath* better: “Of the three wingback chairs in my library, only one is upholstered in human skin. There’s a reason for that.”

See “Writers’ Police Academy March Newsletter” at <https://preview.mailerlite.com/d4o0c5p0z4/1905271861646726868/a0o2/>. Interesting stuff.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [Jane Friedman](#), [Lee Lofland](#), [LitHub.com](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: Indie Publishers — Exclusive or Wide?

March 18, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Indie Publishers — Exclusive or Wide?
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

“[I]t amuses me that people sometimes accuse me of writing the YA books to ‘cash in.’ Um, no, my friends. I earn less on those. Not significantly less, but still. I write them because they are stories I want to tell.” Brandon Sanderson

Indie Publishers — Exclusive or Wide?

Over at KillZone blog, Garry Rodgers asked, “[Indie Publishers — Exclusive or Wide?](#)” I suggest you read the post and the comments. They are enlightening. Then go whichever way you feel best.

I will personally keep my books and stories wide, meaning available to all readers despite their store preference. They have a right to choose where they buy books, and I want them to be able to read my books if they want to.

Besides, I’m not comfortable being paid muscle for anyone, even Amazon, and telling readers if they want to read my books, they’ll have to get them through that one store. I’m a storyteller, not an addict who drives new clients to my dealer in exchange for free drugs.

Or as Brandon Sanderson much more graciously put it (see the first link in “Of Interest” below), “People don’t like to be moved from one platform to another—and I get it. The convenience of having your media collection all in one place, of already having your credit card info stored, of not having to do much besides click a button (or grab something at the bookstore where you’re already visiting) is huge.”

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “How Are You Going to Spend the Money?” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/how-are-you-going-to-spend-the-money/>. You can click through and read the longer, more detailed original post at <https://www.brandonsanderson.com/some-faqs-you-might-enjoy/>.

See “An Evening With Neil Gaiman” at <https://journal.neilgaiman.com/2022/03/an-evening-with-neil-gaiman.html>. Gaiman on tour, maybe near you.

See “ProWritingAid VS Grammarly: Which Grammar Checker is Better in (2022)?” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/prowritingaid-vs-grammarly-which-grammar-checker-is-better-in-2022/>. I know nothing about ProWritingAid, but frankly I wouldn’t take Grammarly to a sh*t-fight to use it as a shield. I recommend using your brain and, when necessary, referring to a [HarBrace College Handbook](#).

Disclaimer: In this blog, I provide advice on writing fiction. I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. To be crystal clear, WITD is not “the only way” to write, nor will I ever say it is. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among myriad other topics.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Garry Rodgers](#), [Going Wide vs. Exclusivity](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [Neil Gaiman](#), [The Passive Voice](#)

The Journal: Maybe a Hiatus, and Archives

March 20, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Dean Wesley Smith
- * Maybe a Hiatus, and Archives
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

“Teach yourself by your own mistakes; people learn only by error. The good artist believes that nobody is good enough to give him advice. He has supreme vanity. No matter how much he admires the old writer, he wants to beat him.” William Faulkner

Dean Wesley Smith’s having another Kickstarter campaign. It runs through the end of March. For as little as a five dollar (\$5) donation you get all kinds of rewards and stretch goals. To determine your level of interest, visit <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/403649867/rescue-two-a-seeders-universe-novel>.

Maybe a Hiatus, and Archives

Not much to talk about recently that I haven’t talked about dozens of times before. Also, I might be taking a little hiatus from the Journal soon while I finish working out a few things. Then again, I might be back writing fiction and the Journal more quickly than I expect. So anyway, if the Journal doesn’t appear in your inbox for a week or longer, please don’t worry about it.

This is also a reminder especially for those of you who have joined the Journal over the past few months that the Journal itself is still here even when I’m not. There are valuable archives available with the click of your mouse, and they’re free.

Just go to the Search box in the sidebar and type-in your search term — for example, “writing into the dark” or “characters” or “setting” or “scene” or “critical mind” or “creative subconscious” or whatever else — and click Enter. Then it’s only a matter of browsing through the posts that pop up.

I also recommend Dean Wesley Smith's *Think Like a Publisher* series of posts (or just [buy his book](#) on the topic) and his [Killing the Sacred Cows of Publishing](#) and [Killing the Sacred Cows of Indie Publishing](#) books or blog post series. If you find and read those posts or buy and read those books, you'll have about 99% of what DWS can teach you about writing and publishing.

You can find the posts on all three topics by visiting his site at <https://deanwesleymith.com> and clicking the little search icon at the right side of the menu.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Editorial Resignations At Big Houses Spark Reckoning" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/editorial-resignations-at-big-houses-spark-reckoning/>.

See "The Great Resignation hits publishing" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/the-great-resignation-hits-publishing/>.

See "How to Make Money Through Social Media Without Being an Influencer" at <https://www.janefriedman.com/make-money-through-social-media/>.

See "Publishing Giants Are Fighting Libraries on E-Books" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/publishing-giants-are-fighting-libraries-on-e-books/>.
Meanwhile, my own ebooks are available in hundreds of libraries around the world.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Archives](#), [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [Hiatus](#), [Jane Friedman](#), [The Passive Voice](#)

The Journal: Even While on Hiatus

March 23, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Even While on Hiatus
- * Of Interest

Even While on Hiatus

I stay with my early morning routine, checking various websites for items I think might be of interest to you. I'm popping in today to share some of those with you. The first two items in "Of Interest" are VIP(ost)s that have to do with personal safety.

Note: Regarding those items, PLEASE do as John Gilstrap recommends and check your state laws. Don't take anything for granted. It's as easy as typing into a search engine "Does [Your State] have a castle law?" If I were not permitted by law to protect myself and my property, I would move to a state where I could.

(Maybe interesting to note here that in the US, rights are not granted by any level of government. Government can only pare them away.)

I spend the rest of my day working on outside projects and reading or watching old movies on TV. Resting, I guess, but as far as I know that's the whole purpose of a hiatus.

I'm also reorganizing my writing space (The Hovel) so it more appropriately suits my needs.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Easy Prey Dies First" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/03/easy-prey-dies-first.html>. Just in case you didn't know this.

See "Home Invasion Redux (And A Bit Of Gun Porn)" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/03/home-invasion-redux-and-a-bit-of-gun-porn.html>.

See "The Sites I Recommend the Most to Writers" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/the-sites-i-recommend-the-most-to-writers/>. Just in case you might find this helpful.

See "56 Words That Are Actually Portmanteaus" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/56-words-that-are-actually-portmanteaus/>. You'll have to click through to see the list. The only portmanteau I've created is "strainge" (strained and strange).

See "J.R.R. Tolkien Estate Releases Rarely-Seen Illustrations From the Author" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/j-r-r-tolkien-estate-releases-rarely-seen-illustrations-from-the-author/>.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [KillZone Blog](#), [The Passive Voice](#)

March 26, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Today's post again
- * Steinbeck
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“Ah, the prayers of the millions, how they must fight and destroy each other on their way to the throne of God.” John Steinbeck in *Tortilla Flat*

“It is astounding to find that the belly of every black and evil thing is as white as snow. And it is saddening to discover how the concealed parts of angels are leprous.” John Steinbeck in *Tortilla Flat*

Today's post again is mostly to pass along the first item in “Of Interest.” For \$5 you can get a ton of stretch rewards if they interest you. Check it out.

Steinbeck

If you haven't read John Steinbeck's shorter novels (but none of them are very long), I recommend them, as much for style as for any other reason.

Cannery Row, like *Of Mice and Men*, is an excellent and very well-written, well-said story, but so are *Tortilla Flat* and his other works.

In *Cannery Row* and in *Tortilla Flat*, I found myself thinking of Hemingway and the sparsity of his writing style, which apparently Steinbeck shared.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Kickstarter News” at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/kickstarter-news/>.

See “Creation from imagination is the basis of intellectual property” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/creation-from-imagination-is-the-basis-of-intellectual-property/>.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [John Steinbeck](#)

The Journal: Enough with “Pantser” — A Rant

March 27, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Enough with “Pantser” — A Rant
- * Of Interest

Enough with “Pantser” — A Rant

Over at the [Kill Zone blog today](#), James Scott Bell wrote that he’s often asked, “What do I do if I’m in the middle of my novel and there are so many things happening, so many characters running around, that I’m losing my way? [What do I do to get back on track?]”

Well, if you’re asking me (and many have), shrug, I suggest you trust the characters enough to just write the next sentence. Then write the next sentence and the next and the next.

Yeah, I know. It sounds far too simple to be effective, but it really does work.

Unfortunately, though, some writers don’t want you to let go and just write the next sentence. After all, if enough of us believed in ourselves and our characters, it would harm the nonfiction book sales of those writers who keep regurgitating the same tired old myths and misinformation that hasn’t worked down through the ages.

Goodness, we might begin to believe we can write a story WITHOUT creating character sketches and outlines beforehand and without inviting input from others on where and when and how the story should go after we start writing.

We might begin to believe our characters can live the story just fine without us controlling them, and to write a story we only have to write down what happens and what the characters say and do. The next thing you know, we might even see the value of following [Heinlein’s Rules](#). Oh, the sheer audacity!

So I’ll say it again: When you get confused or stuck partway through a story, trust yourself and your characters. Just write the next sentence, and the next and the next, and soon you won’t be lost anymore and the story will untangle itself.

Besides, to paraphrase Ray Bradbury, “Plot is only the footprints left by the characters as they run through the story.”

Story is what matters, folks. Not plot. Story.

Then Mr. Bell wrote, “You would think this question would come primarily from ‘pantsers,’ the If-I-knew-what-my-story-was-about-before-I-wrote-it-I’d-be-bored school of writing.”

This is a misrepresentation. And for what purpose? I can only hope it wasn’t an intentional slight meant to further marginalize those of us who do not toe the line and behave exactly the way plotters want us to behave. But I strongly suspect it was.

Why does it matter to other writers, specifically plotters, how we write? We don’t care that they do character sketches and timelines and world-building and outlining before they commit to actually writing the story. So why does it bother them so much that we DON’T do all those things?

The simple fact is, there are only two types of fiction writers on Earth: 1) those who trust themselves and their characters, and 2) those who have bought into NOT trusting themselves and their characters. And frankly, it’s as if the latter are placing the blame for their plight on the former.

For the record, I don’t really care either way into which camp another writer falls. As a converted former slave to outlining, I preach [Writing Into the Dark](#) because I know how very freeing it is. And if you try WITD and it doesn’t work out you can always go back to plotting, outlining etc.

But if you don’t even want to try, that’s fine with me too. Because seriously, what do I care? Write however you want. I ask only that you grant me and others like me the same release from external control.

Back to Mr. Bell’s misrepresentation, I also consider “pantser” a derogatory term. In its primary definition, a “pantser” is a schoolyard bully who tugs down the pants of other children in public so they will be humiliated.

Of course, writers who plot and plan and squeeze the spontaneity and fun out of everything would have us believe they use the term “innocently” to indicate a writer who “flies by the seat of his or her pants.”

In reality, the term is a slur wielded by those who are unable, in their insecurity, to trust in their own ability to Just Write the Story.

Again, these folks have bought into the notion that their creative subconscious is incapable of creating a good story. They are taught to rely on their critical, conscious mind, and in so doing they convey to their creative subconscious that they do not trust it.

They outline and plan and plot before writing, and in the aftermath they are compelled to invite criticism and input from others who have absolutely nothing to do with their story. They revise and rewrite and polish, and to what end? Individual readers still either love, like, dislike or hate the end result. Because what is perfection for one is garbage for another.

So when they occasionally encounter those of us who DO believe in our own ability, who are not wallowing in the same self-doubt and who believe so strongly that we dare to turn control of the story over to the characters who are actually living it, they refer to us as “pantsers.” Not because they believe for a second it will cause us to take up outlining, but only to belittle and deride us in the eyes of those who might buy their silly nonfiction regurgitations. Go figure.

Over the past several years, I’ve taught dozens of writers to let go of their unreasoning fears and trust themselves and their characters enough to write into the dark. In other words, I’ve taught them it’s all right to let go of control and simply convey the story that their characters (not the writers themselves) are living.

And just so you know, in all that time I have never heard even one of those so-called “pantsers” say (as Mr. Bell stated) ‘If I knew what my story was about before I wrote it I’d be bored.’

In fact, I personally almost always know what and whom the story is about before I’ve written the first word. I just don’t know where the character’s going, how s/he’s going to get there, or what will happen along the way. The characters reveal all of that as they’re living the story.

On the other hand, I’ve heard MANY writers say, and I have said myself, if I plotted and planned and outlined a novel in advance so that I knew every major twist and turn, I’d be so bored that I would see no reason to write the story a second time. Compare this with what Mr. Bell wrote. Not the same thing.

With very few exceptions, I won’t even read a book or watch a film when I already know the ending. So why in the world would I write one for which I not only know the ending but every major twist and turn? Even the thought of it almost puts me to sleep.

Then again, if other writers aren’t bored by knowing everything in advance or don’t mind being bored, hey, more power to them. Again, I don’t care. But if I had to either write fiction by those insane rules or not write at all, well, I’d rather not write at all.

But perhaps I can be forgiven for not toeing the line established by the plodders. After all, I’m one of those old odd dinosaur dogs who loads a wheelbarrow only once, then transports the load to its final destination before I offload it, which I also do only once.

By which I mean, I don’t dump it three or four times along the way so I can come back to load it and move it a little farther along in a “separate pass.”

I’m a novelist and short story writer (and a poet and essayist and blogger and writer of nonfiction books on craft). As such, THAT I write is all-important to me because writing is what I do.

But WHAT I write, the individual story or novel (or poem or essay or article or nonfiction book), isn't important at all. Or rather, the importance of what I write is not for me to judge. Because WHAT I write is important (or not) only to the reader.

And my friends, readers are not stupid. They can tell the difference between a story that's been contrived by a writer and one that's been lived by a cast of characters.

So think about it: If the plot or story gets away from you now and again and you get stuck, so what? It isn't your story. You're only conveying a story that someone else is living. And that's the whole point: The plot or story never gets away from the characters who are living it. Your job is to record their story, so just write the next sentence.

Just sayin'.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "The Terrible Truth About Adolf Hitler's Remains" at <http://dyingwords.net/the-terrible-truth-about-adolf-hitlers-remains-2/>.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [DyingWords.net](#), [Heinlein's Rules](#), [KillZone Blog](#)

The Journal: Writers Are Ageless

March 28, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

* Writers Are Ageless

* Of Interest

Today's post is a guest blog, a repeat of Dan Baldwin's most recent Writing Tip of the Week. It is posted in its entirety by permission of the author. Enjoy.

Writers Are Ageless

A young whippersnapper friend of mine seriously and politely asked, "What's is it like being old?"

I thought for half a second and said the following. “My friend, I am young enough to hike, climb, scramble, trip, fall, get up and camp all alone in some of the most spectacular country in the world. And I’m experienced enough to appreciate it.

“I go to work every day not because I have to, but because I love to; every day my writing creates something new and, for me at least, something exciting and of value.

“I have ancient memories to cherish and plans for new adventures well into the future. Additionally, I am working with an amazing group of people who are exploring fundamental mysteries of the universe.

“What is it like to be old? I don’t know. You’ll have to ask people your age.”

We writers are among the most fortunate of people. We can live, at least for a time every day, in whatever time and whatever world we want. We can even create our own worlds and our own times.

Escape from the so-called drudgery of the world isn’t a dream as it is for most folks; for writers, it’s our daily reality. That’s not a bad way to get through the day; not bad at all.

#

Gracias for all of that, Dan.

Folks, you can see more writing tips and learn more about Dan at [Four Knights Press](#) and [DanBaldwin.com](#).

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Requesting Rights Reversion From Your Publisher” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/requesting-rights-reversion-from-your-publisher/>.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Dan Baldwin](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [Writer Beware](#)

The Journal: On Setting, Pseudonym, and Reparations

March 30, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Writing Setting
- * Using Pseudonyms
- * On Reparations
- * Of Interest

Writing Setting

I received a question about writing setting: In describing the setting, how much is too much and how much is too little?

First, you, the writer, describe nothing. You have a point of view (POV) character. He or she will describe the setting, albeit through your fingers.

1. Anything the POV character sees, hears, smells, tastes or feels, physically or emotionally, should make it onto the page. Nothing the POV character sees, hears, smells, tastes or feels, physically or emotionally, is too much.

2. Anything the writer adds of his or her own volition — anything that is filtered through the writer's senses instead of the POV character's senses — is too much.

3. This is always true.

For more, see [Writing the Character-Driven Story](#). You can also key “writing setting” into the search box in the sidebar at the Journal website or on my author website.

Using Pseudonyms

I was also asked what I think about using pseudonyms.

My answer? Unless you have a very good reason for a pen name (e.g., you're a pastor or a priest who also writes erotica), I recommend against using a pen name. Why? Because who wants to build “discoverability” for more than one name?

At one time, I chose to write different genres under different names. I wrote under four personas, meaning false-author personalities complete with photos and bios.

I shared my mainstream, Hemingway-like fiction between my own name and the persona Nicholas Z “Nick” Porter. I wrote odd, strange stuff as Eric Stringer, magic realism as Gervasio Arrancado, and erotica as M J François. I also wrote short stories under a few pseudonyms, made-up names like Ray Severeid and Rufus Stamper and Gryll Stenson. You know, maybe.

But eventually, I rebranded almost everything I wrote under my own name, an effort that meant redoing covers, the manuscript title pages, etc. and then re-uploading everything. Since then, I've written primarily under my own name. Because again, why build “discoverability” for more than one name?

Speaking of discoverability, get a clue and do a little promotion. Build an email list. Don't buy into the bullshit, as I did and as I've often repeated here (I apologize), that the best promotion is to write the next book. Take it from me, it isn't.

I've written 66 novels, 8 novellas, around 250 short stories, almost 20 nonfiction books on writing, around a thousand poems, and countless articles, blog posts and essays, and pretty much nobody knows my name or my work.

On Reparations

I also wrote a fairly long piece about reparations, but I decided it wasn't about writing so I deleted it. You can see the gist of my take (a few short paragraphs) in the comments on "[Can We Repair the Past?](#)" Just so you know, my comment was more in response to the other comments than to the post itself.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "22 Influential Women You Probably Didn't Learn About in School" at <https://www.mentalfloss.com/posts/influential-women-you-should-know>.

See "Now For Something completely different" at <https://www.robertjsadler.com/post/now-for-something-completely-different>. If you're a film buff, you'll enjoy this.

See "Setting Description Mistakes that Weaken a Story" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/setting-description-mistakes-that-weaken-a-story/>.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Discoverability](#), [Mental Floss](#), [Pseudonyms](#), [Robert J. Sadler](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [Writing Setting](#)

The Journal: Promotion — Read This Post

March 31, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Topic: Promotion — Read This Post
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

“Adam [Croft]’s book, *The Indie Author Mindset*, <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B07FZ3X349/> is a MUST-READ for any indie who intends to ‘make it’ in this biz.” Garry Rodgers

Topic: Promotion — Read This Post

From a promotion standpoint, this might be the most important post I’ve ever written for the Journal. I mention several invaluable resources below. But be forewarned: reading about the resources or even reading the actual resources themselves won’t help unless you actually do what they recommend. Good luck.

My post yesterday seemed to strike a chord in several folks. Seriously, I do appreciate the concern and even the advice, but I’m not looking for either. My hope is that you will focus on yourself and on writing and proving your own fiction.

One helpful young man emailed to say that covers are important. (Yes, of course they are. The cover is the first thing the reader sees.) He continued with, “If I had \$70 and a choice [to either] spend it on an advertisement or for a great cover, I would spend it for the cover. Because a great cover is an advertisement itself.”

Again, the second part of his reasoning is sound. A great cover is indeed an advertisement itself. But the first part of his reasoning is flawed: You don’t have to spend any money at all to get a great cover. You only have to study and learn and know what you’re doing.

The secrets to designing a great cover are these:

1. Use illustrations, not photos, for fiction covers. That’s it. (With some free programs, you can turn photos into illustrations by applying different effects.)
2. Make the title and the author name big. Remember, the first time the prospective reader sees your cover it will more than likely be in thumbnail size.
3. The font color of the title and author name should be captured from somewhere in the illustration.
4. Sense (or study) how to place the title and author name most effectively. Study best selling covers. It will help.

I write a lot more than westerns, but for just two examples, the best, most professional covers in my 12-volume Wes Crowley series are the covers of Book 11 ([*In the Cantina at Noon*](#)) and Book 12 ([*The Final Chapter*](#)). Both are illustrations. (The cover for Book 11 includes two photos but the overall cover is an illustration.)

Anyway, to fill in a little more info for you, I entered “promotion” in the search box on the Journal website and found the post I was searching for. Back in June of 2021 (a little over a

month before I was no longer able to write fiction) I talked about promotion and included a link to a post I wish I'd read years ago. Here it is again:

See "How to Develop a Marketing and Promotion Plan as an Indie Author" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/how-to-develop-a-marketing-and-promotion-plan-as-an-indie-author/>. And be sure to see PG's take.

Also see "TKZ Marketing Survey – Part 2" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2021/05/tkz-marketing-survey-part-2.html>.

There are links to more articles in today's "Of Interest." I hope they help.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Top Ten Tips for Amazon eBook Publishing Success" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2020/09/top-ten-tips-for-amazon-ebook-publishing-success.html>.

See "Kobo — A Truly International Indie Publishing Platform" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2020/10/kobo-a-truly-international-indie-publishing-platform.html>.

See "The Secret to Being a Successful Writer" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/03/the-secret-to-being-a-successful-writer.html>.

See "This Is the Most Bizarre Grammar Rule You Probably Never Heard Of" at <https://www.inc.com/minda-zetlin/grammar-bizarre-weird-rule-adjective-order-matthew-anderson-mark-forsyth-cambridge-dictionary.html>.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Garry Rodgers](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [Marketing and Promotion](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: Welcome and the Archives

April 2, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Topic: Welcome and the Archives
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“For those who believe, no proof is necessary. For those who don’t believe, no proof is possible.” — Stuart Chase

The above works just as well for writing into the dark as it does for religion of any other stripe.

“Her head was small and round and it held small round convictions.” John Steinbeck in *East of Eden*

Topic: Welcome and the Archives

Welcome to new subscribers. There have been a few over the past week or so, and one only yesterday. I’m currently on a semi-hiatus, so not posting as much as usual. But I encourage you to visit the Journal archives. Of course, I also encourage those of you who’ve been here awhile to revisit the archives as well.

The easiest way to visit is to enter a word or two — any writing-related thing you want — into the search engine in the sidebar of [the Journal website at https://hestanbrough.com](https://hestanbrough.com).

At one time or another I’ve written about pretty much every writing-related topic in fiction, and many in nonfiction and poetry. There are even several posts on publishing and a few on marketing and promotion.

On fiction writing, you might key-in terms like “setting” and “characters” and “suspense” and “writing into the dark.” (Trust me, if you believe in yourself at all, you’ll enjoy that last one.) You should also try “creative subconscious” and “critical conscious mind.”

On publishing, key-in “traditional publishing” and “indie publishing.” On marketing and promotion, either key-in “promotion” or all three words.

And you can also key-in any of those terms or others into the search box in the sidebar over at [my author website at https://harveystanbrough.com](https://harveystanbrough.com).

Here are a few notes for you. Consider these background for your exploration of the archives:

1. I recommend self-publishing (AKA indie publishing) vs. traditional publishing. Because why settle for earning around 10% of each sale instead of indie publishing and earning 60% to 70% or more of each sale? However, indie publishing means either doing everything yourself or paying for certain services, such as copyediting and cover design. And no, traditional publishers will NOT publish your book more widely than you can as an indie publisher. In fact, the reverse is true.

2. Self- or indie-publishing is NOT the same thing as subsidy publishing. I strongly recommend AGAINST using ANY subsidy publisher. Every one of them, from Booklocker to AuthorHouse

to Wheatmark to any others you care to name, is designed only to feed on your ego and separate you from your money. Do not pay anyone to publish your books.

a. If you are an indie publisher and if you publish to paper as well as ebooks, you will eventually pay a PRINTER to print your book either in a “run” (you pay for the whole run up front, so it usually costs under a dollar for each book) or with a print-on-demand (POD) printer (you pay a few dollars for each book). Most people go with POD, but either way is fine. You’re paying to have your physical books printed, but you aren’t paying to have your intellectual property published.

3. I recommend against seeking out a literary agent for the same reason I object to signing over 15% of your home to the kid who mows your lawn.

4. I advocate that you go with your creative subconscious and Just Write. By that I mean trust your own abilities. (Again, key “writing into the dark” into the search box on either website.) You’ve been absorbing Story all your life and you’ve learned a great deal more than you realize. So trust your characters to tell the story that they (not you) are living. Writing should not be work. Writing should be the most fun you can have with your clothes on.

5. I also recommend you do NOT buy into all the negative BS they taught us all in school:

a. That you CAN’T write a novel without plotting and planning and outlining it first. (Of course you can.)

b. That you can’t write a novel by yourself (of course you can), but that you need to avail yourself of other people’s opinions of your work. (Umm, NO, you don’t.)

c. That you should second-guess your characters (and yourself) and revise and rewrite, seeking “perfection.” No, you should not. One person’s perfection is another person’s garbage., etc. etc. ad nauseam. Which takes us back to why we don’t seek or accept critiques: what one person hates, another loves. And two more things:

1. the more you rewrite, the farther you’ll get from your characters’ unique, original story, and

2. each time you rewrite, you send a message to your creative subconscious that you don’t trust it. If you keep doing that, it will shut down and stop giving you stories.

And finally,

6. Learn copyright — copyright is the law that governs licensing, which is how you make money from your intellectual property, which consists of your stories, novels, poems, etc. The best way I’ve found to learn copyright is to purchase a copy of NOLO’s *The Copyright Handbook*. [You can find it on Amazon](#) in paperback for around \$32. (If you go to the NOLO website it will actually cost you more.) You don’t have to read it straight through, but as a topic interests you, look it up and read about it.

Okay, I hope all of this helps. With any luck at all, I'll soon be able to exit my semi-hiatus and return full-force. Either way, I'll try to talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Do What You Love" at <https://mystorydoctor.com/do-what-you-love-write-a-book/>.

See "Copyright Fun Part One" at <https://kriswrites.com/2022/03/23/business-musings-copyright-fun-part-one/>.

See "Copyright Fun Part 2" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/copyright-fun-part-2/>. See PG's notes and then click through.

See "Fictional Florida: a look at 80-some writers with state roots, settings" at <https://www.tampabay.com/features/books/fictional-florida-a-look-at-80-some-writers-with-state-roots-settings/2239549/>.

See "Watched Bridgerton" at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/watched-bridgerton/>. A rare craft post.

See "Up Front Money" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/04/up-front-money.html>. Read the article, but afterward read at least the first comment to deflect some misinformation.

Disclaimer: In this blog, I provide advice on writing fiction. I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. To be crystal clear, WITD is not "the only way" to write, nor will I ever say it is. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among myriad other topics.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Archives](#), [David Farland](#), [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [kriswrites.com](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [Topic](#), [Writing Into the Dark](#)

The Journal: Direct Interaction with Readers

April 4, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Topic: Direct Interaction with Readers
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

"If you're in a spiritual group and ask what essential oils will help you get rid of a person, don't block me when I answer 'formaldehyde'. Sheesh." Anonymous, forwarded from Facebook

Topic: Direct Interaction with Readers

A few days ago in a post on promoting your work, I recommended <https://killzoneblog.com/2021/05/tkz-marketing-survey-part-2.html>. In that post, one author suggested you should “Pick one [social media] platform to specialize in.”

Yesterday, I received an interesting note and suggestion from Alexander Teut, a friend and writer who lives in Eurasia and for whom that suggestion stood out. Here, Alex takes over:

“But which platform? I guess it should be a platform popular among readers.

“For example, musicians use Facebook or Twitter, but the main platform for any band will be SoundCloud or BandCamp. Because people interested in new bands and rare genres are there.

“So writers [need a] platform where [there are] a lot of readers, [a place] with basic stuff like a blog, contact with readers and a list of your books.

“I’ve found such a platform. It’s Amazon.

“It has a blog. It has your books. It has your profile. It recommends your books to people who read books like yours. And tons of readers visit it every day. What else should you expect from a good social network?

“Now it happens that even some authors don’t have their own site, only an Amazon profile.” For just one example, Alex suggests you visit the Amazon author page of “Michael Anderle, a super-prolific author, at <https://www.amazon.com/Michael-Anderle/e/B017J2WANQ>.”

Thanks, Alex! Being more interactive with readers on Amazon seems like a good idea to me. I have not personally taken advantage of their blog feature, but I might look into it. It seems the perfect place to write a blog aimed at readers. Duh.

Does anyone else have practical experience interacting with readers on Amazon? If so, please share your thoughts. To do that, visit <https://hestanbrough.com/the-journal-direct-interaction-with-readers> and scroll down to the end of the post to leave a comment.

I also wonder whether Kobo, Barnes & Noble and other large stores have a similar platform through which writers might interact with readers. If anyone has any information on that, please also leave a comment on this post.

Of course, if you’d rather not leave a comment you can still email me directly at harveystanbrough@gmail.com.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Spring Workshop Sale” at <https://www.deanwesleymith.com/spring-workshop-sale/>.

See “A Disturbing New Trend” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/04/a-disturbing-new-trend.html>.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [Promotion](#), [Social Media](#)

The Journal: Quotes and Items of Interest

April 6, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“I think the difference between a lie and a story is that a story utilizes the trappings and appearance of truth for the interest of the listener as well as of the teller. A story has in it neither gain nor loss. But a lie is a device for profit or escape. I suppose if that definition is strictly held to, then a writer of stories is a liar — if he is financially fortunate.” John Steinbeck in *East of Eden*

“It would be absurd if we did not understand both angels and devils, since we invented them.” John Steinbeck in *East of Eden*

“Best writing advice? Write to a quota and study the craft. One-two, one-two.” James Scott Bell

“Failure cannot be inflicted. It must be declared.” John Gilstrap

Today’s Journal is going out so you can see and consider or contemplate the Quotes of the Day above or the items linked to in “Of Interest” below. Enjoy.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Thinking of Dictating?” at <https://www.deanwesleymith.com/thinking-of-dictating/>. This one is time-sensitive. Only around 40 hours left in the Kickstarter when I posted this.

See “Behavioral Analysis Unit” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/04/behavioral-analysis-unit.html>.

See “The Big Thrill’s Behavioral Analysis Unit: John Gilstrap” at <https://www.thebigthrill.org/?p=75460>.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [James Scott Bell](#), [John Gilstrap](#), [KillZone Blog](#)

The Journal: Marketing vs. Writing

April 9, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Marketing vs. Writing
- * Novella vs. Novel
- * Of Interest

Marketing vs. Writing

I received an email that read, in part, “I don’t trust people who teach ebook marketing but have zero ebooks under their belt.” I mention this just in case anyone else out there is thinking this way. Possibly the writer was referring to some of the marketing experts I recommended in the Journal recently.

Regardless, this is a category mistake, and it isn’t even comparing apples and oranges. It’s comparing apples and fruit stands.

Marketing and writing are vastly different skills. A person doesn’t have to be a writer before s/he can market and sell books.

Now, I will NEVER trust anyone who has never written a novel to teach me how to write a novel. Because frankly, they don’t have the slightest clue what they’re talking about. But a masterful marketer can market anything, even ebooks or books, even if s/he’s never written one.

Consider, many indie-publisher novelists hire out cover design because they just don’t want to mess with learning how to design covers or can’t seem to get the knack of it. So would you distrust a cover designer just because s/he’s never written a novel? Of course not. Same goes for marketing. It’s a different skill set.

Novella vs. Novel (blah, blah, blah)

In today's Kill Zone blog post (in today's "Of Interest"), Steve Hooley talks about the novella. He never mentions length specifically, yet length is what defines the novella. It might be worthwhile to mention that pretty much everywhere other than the USA, a "novella" is below 25,000 words. Anything 25,000 words or longer, in much of the world, is a novel.

Also it might be worthwhile to mention that readers place no value in terms like "novella" or "novellette," just as they place no value in "short-short story" (now an anachronism that used to mean a story typically around a thousand to two thousand words). Readers generally only recognize short stories and novels.

My own short novels, novels, and long novels range from 25,000 to 106,000 words. What I call my novellas range from 15,000 to 24,999 words and novelettes from 7,000 to 14,999 words. But again, that's just me. Those are divisions I use for my own pricing structure.

The bottom line is this: Shrug. Novella shmovella. Just start writing. Then write the next sentence and the next and the next as you follow the characters around.

Eventually they will lead you to the end of the story. That's when you get to decide whether what you've written is a novella or a novel. But the point is, no matter what you or anyone else believes, the story will be the length it needed to be, and what could be better than that?

Or you can plot and plan-out everything like various parts of the Kill Zone blog post suggests.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "The Novella – Compact Utility Vehicle or Sports Car" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/04/the-novella-compact-utility-vehicle-or-sports-car.html>.

See "Digital Printing: The New Normal" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/digital-printing-the-new-normal-2/>.

See "Understanding Is Knowing What To Do" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/04/understanding-is-knowing-what-to-do.html>.

See "Great Award Ceremony" at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/great-award-ceremony/>. For any writers out there who are eligible for Writers of the Future, check this out.

See "When a vampire not called Dracula..." at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/when-a-vampire-not-called-dracula-bested-the-copyright-system-and-what-it-tells-us-about-derivative-works/>.

See "Business Musings: Copyright Fun Part 3" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/business-musings-copyright-fun-part-3/>.

See “Ed Sheeran Gets It...” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/ed-sheeran-gets-it-as-he-wins-his-copyright-lawsuit-he-decries-culture-of-bogus-copyright-suits/>.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [Kristine Kathryn Rusch](#), [Marketing vs. Writing](#), [Novella vs. Novel](#), [Professional Writer Series](#), [The Passive Voice](#)

The Journal: Guest Post on Marketing

April 10, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Guest Post on Marketing
- * Of Interest

Guest Post on Marketing

Note: The post below started life as a comment on yesterday’s post. But it was so well-done, I wanted to be sure everyone saw it. So I chose to use it here today as a guest post. Enjoy. And thanks, Matt.

“Marketing and writing are vastly different skills. A person doesn’t have to be a writer before s/he can market and sell books.”

Just getting caught up around here, and your remark here reminded me that one of the best marketers I know always drives home this very point: “Your business is not different.”

Doesn’t matter if you’re selling soap and salt or ice to the Inuit. Marketing and selling always follow the same pattern.

Two other pithy favorites of mine in this genre:

1. “Even if you’re selling soap, you’re never selling soap.”

You’re selling what it feels like after they’ve scrubbed off the dirt of the day in that hot, relaxing shower that melts away all the knots of stress in your neck.

Authors of fiction ought to excel at this. If you can set a scene with an interesting character involved in a halfway compelling dramatic conflict, you can sell with your words.

What do most authors do? Most all of them show up on social media, at conferences, or paying for online ads shouting “BUY MY BOOK!” on repeat.

They’ve put themselves in the business of selling books.

That’s not the business you’re really in.

Which brings me to...

2. “Marketing makes selling superfluous.”

Dang near every author I see around the ‘web seems to believe that marketing amounts to standing out in front of the bookshop and yelling “deal here!” at every passer-by.

That never worked even when it “worked.”

Sometimes you can escalate and pay for premium high-traffic space to shout “deal here!” Same effect.

You might sell some books.

But the goal isn’t to “sell some books.”

The point of all this is to build relationships with readers who stick around for life.

The whole purpose of marketing is to create interest in and desire for your wares among those who might benefit from them, thereby short-circuiting the need to sell with the more blunt and intrusive instruments.

Thoughtful and strategic marketing is not only more effective at the end goal of selling books, it’s also less likely to make you feel like the sleazy strawman of a Barnum-esque carnival barker that haunts the nightmares of the sensitive romantic artiste.

* * *

Thanks again, Matt.

If anyone else out there is doing well with your marketing and promotions, feel free to send along a guest post. Sharing your success and how you achieved it with other writers might help them rise, and it will never drag you down. After all, you got where you are by scrambling across the shoulders of others as well.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “The Joy of Making Stuff Up” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/04/the-joy-of-making-stuff-up.html>. In case it speaks to some of you.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Guest Post](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [marketing](#)

The Journal: Benefits vs. Features

April 11, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Benefits vs. Features: Notes on Marketing and on Writing
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

“There’s a responsibility in being a person. It’s more than just taking up space where air would be.” John Steinbeck in *East of Eden*

This is easily one of the more important and apt quotes I’ve ever included here.

Benefits vs. Features: Notes on Marketing and on Writing

Matt Perryman, author of the recent guest post on marketing, also passed along a book recommendation: *The Ultimate Marketing Plan* by Dan Kennedy. I didn’t provide a link because I suggest you copy/paste that 7-word phrase into a search engine. You can purchase the book at Amazon, or for a lot less (used) at various places.

You might also see the [Dan Kennedy + Russell Brunson — Exclusive No BS Letter Free](#). **Note: This is NOT an endorsement.** If you have the energy to check it out, go for it. I couldn’t force myself past their opening barrage, so I neither recommend it nor recommend against it. Just be careful.

Matt also wrote (in deference to a complaint from me about myself), “Beware, it’s full of self-conscious self-promotion and Kennedy is a shameless self-promoter, though usually honest about his intentions. You can learn as much from what he does as what he says.

“The good news is, the process doesn’t amount to carnival barking. In fact, you don’t have to do much but be a good storyteller who understands what his buyers (readers) want and how to

scratch that itch — as you say, the benefits versus the features. It’s really nothing more than strategic use of storytelling skills in the right media to the right people.”

Re that benefits vs. features reference, long ago in another life I took the Dale Carnegie sales course. The one big takeaway for me was the bit about benefits vs. features. All products have features (duh), and you can point out those features to your prospective buyer all day long without effect.

The trick is to turn those features into benefits. Or, as Matt mentioned in his post, “Even if you’re selling soap, you aren’t selling soap. You’re selling how the buyers will feel after they’ve used your soap.”

Likewise, your task in marketing your writing isn’t to try to sell a novel or story. Your task is to convince your prospective readers of how the novel or story will affect them. That’s why the story itself is second in importance to the cover and the sales copy.

Finally, if I may be brutally blunt, it’s all-important that you actually CARE about marketing your work. If you are unable to bring yourself to care — or if even the thought of marketing makes you feel sleazy or bores you to sleep (as it does me) — then you are left with one of a few choices:

1. Force yourself to learn marketing and do a good job of it anyway,
2. Hire it done, or
3. Stop worrying about it (and hoping for the income it will generate) and try to enjoy just being a storyteller.

Of course, that last one is assuming that you enjoy writing in the first place. As I’ve said here dozens of times, if you’re a writer, WHAT you write doesn’t matter in the slightest.

If an individual story matters to you — if you make a story “important” — it will be difficult to write because you will have opened the way for criticism from your conscious, critical mind. Once you do that, you are lost. You will become mired in self-doubt and what-ifs. It’s far better to get over yourself, get out of the way, and let the characters tell the story that they, not you, are living.

On the other hand, THAT you write is easily the most important activity in your life, if not the most important aspect of it. In short, if you’re a writer, then writing — storytelling — should be your passion. With or without marketing.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

Sorry. Nothing today.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Features vs. Benefits](#), [marketing](#), [Professional Writer Series](#), [writing](#)

The Journal: Conveying the Senses

April 13, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Topic: Conveying the Senses
- * By the Way
- * By the Way 2
- * Of Interest

(An Inane) Quote of the Day

“On the use of senses. Morrell suggests taking sight for granted, then including two others, but ‘sneak them in’ so it isn’t obvious. The object is to make the reader feel, not see. ... I liked this better than the ‘use all 5 senses in every scene’ approach, which to me, often feels forced.” Terry Odell, a writer

Any aspect of a story that is forced on the characters by the writer will feel ‘forced’ to the reader. Duh.

Topic: Conveying the Senses

For years, I’ve been advising writers to “use all five OF THE POV CHARACTER’S physical senses and at least one of the POV character’s emotional senses (fear, trepidation, joy, anticipation, etc.)” in every major scene. I stand by that advice. It’s one of the surest ways to engage readers directly and draw them into the scene.

Of course, others’ opinions differ. But as always, I offer nothing on faith alone. I can explain the meat of my advice.

When the WRITER uses all five senses — or even one or two — they might well feel forced. As I wrote above, any aspect of a story that is forced on the characters by the writer will feel ‘forced’ to the reader.

That’s because the writer is imposing what s/he believes the character SHOULD be sensing rather than what the character is ACTUALLY sensing.

On the other hand, when the writer filters everything through the POV character instead of imposing *the writer's* senses on the POV character, it never feels forced.

The solution? Don't force anything. You're writing the characters' story, so let them tell it. Then you will have forced nothing, so nothing will feel forced. Duh.

I've also been advising writers for years to try to understand the difference between the two stories that are going on simultaneously when they write.

In the writer's story (the writer's life) her fingers are on a keyboard and she's channeling or otherwise sensing the lives and story of other people.

But the story the writer is writing is *not the writer's story*. It's the CHARACTERS' story. The characters, not the writer, are living it. The writer is only the conduit the characters use to convey their story — the story they're living — to the rest of the world.

Writers truly are nothing special. If you want to be thought special as a writer, you must achieve something considered noteworthy by others. Writers are only human, and most are introverted or broken to one degree or another. All can put up with solitude for at least a while.

Writers have only two distinctive features, and the first is distinctive only in comparison to their characters. In comparison to other humans, it's mundane and about as notable and interesting as a (yawn) *sophomore typing class in high school.

Like almost all humans, writers possess a set of working, physical, flesh and blood fingers and a passable working knowledge of how to apply the tips of those fingers to a keyboard. Characters apparently don't have those. It's why they need us to record stories on their behalf.

But second, and much more importantly, writers have the absolutely distinctive, unique ability to channel or otherwise sense various characters as those characters go about living their lives and their stories. Which are always much more exciting or intriguing than the writer's own life and story. Which is probably why we so enjoy telling our characters' stories in the first place.

Maybe that's it. Maybe writers are envious. Maybe that's why they're so quick to refer to the story they're putting on paper or the screen as "my story" and so seemingly loathe to think of it as "my characters' story."

Ah well. Nothing I can do about it, and neither does it really matter. And that's fine.

By the Way

My spelling of "*sophomore" above without that stupid middle "O" was intentional. The modern word derives from "sophism" (so no "O") and the English promptly added a "U" ("sophum"), for no apparent reason.

Later, they added the suffix “er” to create “sophumer” which, for an even less-apparent reason, we Americans chose to keep as “sophomore” to continue the silliness. We managed to destroy the elegance of words like “colour” by dropping the “U,” so why not drop the middle “O” out of “sophomore”? Just sayin’.

By the Way 2

Not that it should matter to anyone but me and maybe my readers, but I think I’m writing fiction again.

Years ago, I read Hemingway’s “The Old Man at the Bridge” and it inspired me to write a short story of my own: “No Better Day.”

Yesterday as I started through *The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway: The Finca Vigia Edition* (I recommend it), I read “The Old Man at the Bridge” again. When I’d finished, I was moved to find “No Better Day” and read it too. But as I started reading it, another storyline began to form in my mind.

So I saved the file under a new name and started writing. There were time constraints though, so I was able to write for only about a half-hour. Today I’ll have a lot more time.

This won’t be a rewrite. In fact, the only similarity is that both stories — “No Better Day” and this new one — were inspired by Hemingway’s story. I could even say they’re being written by different writers: me in 2016 and me today.

I’m taking my time. Fingers crossed, I’ll let you know how it goes. Maybe. With any luck at all, my mentioning it today won’t jinx it. And it shouldn’t.

I suspect this is just another segment of the path I must follow to get back to where I care either way and actually want to write again.

It’s a tender balancing act, isn’t it? We must play down the importance of WHAT we write — that is, what we write must not seem important to us at all, and whether any given story is important is solely up to the reader — but THAT we write must be of the greatest practical importance.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Two Days Left On the Workshop Sale” at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/two-days-left-on-the-workshop-sale/>. Just in case you wanted to participate but forgot.

See “Reader Conferences...” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/04/reader-conferences-sliding-back-into-the-groove.html>. Just in case something in this article speaks to you.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [It's the characters' story](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [The Five Senses](#), [the writing life](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: The Final Brandon Sanderson Post

April 14, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * The Final Brandon Sanderson Post
- * In other news
- * Still writing
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

“A quick search of the publishing category on Kickstarter, sorted for active campaigns, showed me book projects that have funded and brought in (so far) anywhere from \$50,000 to \$500. The bulk of these are in the \$10,000 category per novel ... which is, roughly, what any new writer can expect from traditional publishing these days.” Kristine Kathryn Rusch

The Final Brandon Sanderson Post

If you don't read anything else today, be sure to visit <https://kriswrites.com/2022/04/13/business-musings-the-final-brandon-sanderson-post/> and read Kris Rusch's “The Final Brandon Sanderson Post.”

Then, after you've read Kris' post, don't be me. Be smart about writing as a business.

If you haven't already taken WMG Publishing's absolutely free Kickstarter Best Practices class, visit <https://wmg-publishing-workshops-and-lectures.teachable.com/>, click on the class and sign up. It should be the first course on the left on the top row.

If you HAVE already taken the course, you might want to review it as a refresher. Then go to Kickstarter, put together a campaign, and make some money.

In other news, Dean Wesley Smith has extended WMG Publishing's workshop sale through this Sunday evening. For details, see the link in “Of Interest.”

Still writing. If this trend continues I'll start reporting all my numbers again soon.

Odd to think that only eight years ago tomorrow I wrote my first ever short story into the dark. That story was “Consuela.” If you’re curious, you can read it free at [Consuela](#). Clicking the link will enable a PDF download than you can then open and read.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Workshop Sale Extended (until Sunday evening)” at <https://www.deanwesleymith.com/workshop-sale-extended/>.

Disclaimer: In this blog, I provide advice on writing fiction. I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. To be crystal clear, WITD is not “the only way” to write, nor will I ever say it is. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among myriad other topics.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [kriswrites.com](#), [Professional Writer Series](#), [The Passive Voice](#)

The Journal: Editing? Nope, Not Me

April 18, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Thanks, Fabien
- * Thanks, Danny
- * Topic: Editing? Nope, Not Me
- * Of Interest

Thanks Fabien

Thanks to a response from French author [Fabien Delorme](#) on a comment I left on Dean’s site, I revised both my author site at [HarveyStanbrough.com](#) and my publisher site at [StoneThreadPublishing.com](#). Check them out if you like. Things are a lot easier to find. The former is now more about Writers, and the latter is more about The Writing.

I’ll be working on the sites a bit more today, and maybe writing a little too.

Thanks, Danny

And thanks to author [D.W. “Danny” Patterson](#) for passing along two bits of marketing information. He wrote

“I saw your post on Dean’s site about needing to market and was wondering if you had seen these two sites:

“Patty Jansen’s Ebookaroo [link in today’s “Of Interest”]
Patty will put your book up for free on her newsletter. She does like to offer 99 cent specials, I’ve seen some listed at full price though.

“Sarah A Hoyt’s site AccordingToHoyt [link in today’s “Of Interest”]
Which is her blog but she does a promo of others’ books for free, usually on Sundays. It’s a conservative crowd though.

“Once, the stars aligned and I got up to three or four (don’t remember now) on the New Releases, Hard Science Fiction on Amazon and their sites kicked it off.

Topic: Editing? Nope, Not Me

A friend emailed to ask, “How long after you finish a story do you wait to edit? I usually wait a few days (three tops) to let it sit and work on other projects.”

As I replied to him, I’ve heard others say that’s a good idea. Some even put a manuscript away for a week or two before looking at it again. And a long, long, *long* time ago, I used to do the same thing.

I don’t do that anymore. Nor do I make an editing pass at all.

For one thing, I don’t place that much importance on something as insignificant as a short story or novel. It’s only a story. It isn’t important *At All* other than whatever importance the reader assigns to it.

If a story changes a reader’s life, wonderful. If it only improves a reader’s mood or causes her to think about something in a new way, great. But if it does no more than provide her with a few minutes’ (short story) or hours’ (novel) entertainment, that’s good enough.

And you might think a story is better if you replace the word “under” with “beneath” (for example) during an editing pass. If you didn’t think the change would make the story better, you wouldn’t do it, right? But obviously your characters, via your creative subconscious, thought the other one was adequate. If they hadn’t, they wouldn’t have used it.

Once you start “choosing” words and allowing your conscious, critical mind to override your creative subconscious, you’re lost. You’re sending a message to your creative subconscious that you don’t trust it, and eventually it will shut down.

Besides, if you’ve done your job as a storyteller, the reader won’t notice whether you used “under” or “beneath.” She’ll be too deeply engaged in your story.

The sure way to bore the reader and pull her out of your story is to write it with more critical-mind input. For just one example, any reader with even half a brain will actually like your story *less* if you’re one of those who believe “that” and “which” are interchangeable (they aren’t) and make sure you alternate your use of them during your editing pass. Cringe.

If you're wondering, here's what I do instead of editing:

First, I channel my POV character through my creative subconscious. I trust my characters, and I write the story as the POV character conveys it to me. After all, the characters, not I, are actually living the story. So I let them tell it, albeit through my fingers.

Second, after each writing session (about one hour and about 1,000 words), I take a break of a few minutes. When I come back to the manuscript, I cycle back through what I wrote during the previous session.

Note: Some writers will try to tell you that cycling is just editing by another name. It isn't. Here's the difference: If your conscious, critical mind is involved — if you're "looking for" errors to correct and ways to improve the writing — you're editing. Cycling, like writing, is a function of the creative subconscious, not of the conscious, critical mind.

"Cycling" only means I read back over what I wrote during the previous session, but — and this is the most important thing — I read as a Reader, not as a writer or editor. I read the same way I write: enjoying the story and with my creative subconscious engaged. My fingers lay on the keys as I read, and I allow my characters to touch the story as I go.

In other words, I'm not consciously "looking for" anything as I read. As anyone who's ever been a member of a critique group can tell you, if you go into any story "looking for" something, you will find it. But the "flaw" one person finds is not a flaw to the next person. It's perfectly acceptable or even preferable.

As I cycle, my characters correct any typos that pop out at them, but they don't do critical-mind comparisons. They might change a word, but only because that's what it should have been in the first place, not because it's "better." They might also add a bit of description that I failed to include earlier because they were racing so fast through the story that I didn't quite keep up.

The key is, the *characters* are doing all of this through my creative subconscious. I'm not allowing my critical mind to interfere and "correct" my characters. That's the difference between cycling and editing. And when I get back to the white space where I took my break, I'm back in the story and I just continue writing.

If you wonder, cycling through the previous session of about 1000 words takes only as long it takes to read that part of the story. Editing would take much longer because I'd be concentrating, looking for things.

If you ever get mired down while you're "cycling," check in with yourself. You're not cycling. You're editing.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Front List and Back List” at <https://www.deanwesleymith.com/front-list-and-back-list/>. A lot of good comments on this one.

See “Patty Jansen’s Ebookaroo” at <https://pattyjansen.com/ebookaroo/>.

See “Sarah A Hoyt’s AccordingToHoyt” at <https://accordingtohoyt.com>.

See “Top 10 Social Media Mistakes for Writers” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/04/top-10-social-media-mistakes-for-writers.html>. Seemed appropriate for today in light of my recent marketing sub-theme. Especially see her Tip 9.

See “Why So Many Blogs and Newsletters Aren’t Worth the Writer’s Effort” at <https://www.janefriedman.com/why-so-many-blogs-and-newsletters-arent-worth-the-writers-effort/>.

See “Leathery Wings and Petrichor” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/04/leathery-wings-and-petrichor.html>. A fairly good post on description.

See “More Pictures of Writers of the Future” at <https://www.deanwesleymith.com/more-pictures-of-writers-of-the-future/>.

See “Let Fiction Be Fiction” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/let-fiction-be-fiction/>. I almost stopped reading when I saw this was an article by a person whose first novel was published last April, but PG’s take pulled it out of the fire.

Disclaimer: In this blog, I provide advice on writing fiction. I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. To be crystal clear, WITD is not “the only way” to write, nor will I ever say it is. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among myriad other topics.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [Jane Friedman](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [Patty Jansen](#), [Sarah A. Hoyt](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: A New Blog on Substack

April 19, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * A New Blog on Substack
- * A Great Series of Emails
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“We professional writers just write. It is what we do. But I would not write as much as I like to write if I didn’t have something, some sort of challenge or deadline or goal that I wanted to hit at the moment. The challenges, the goals, the deadlines are shields against the real world distractions.” Dean Wesley Smith

“[T]he secret of writing. Have fun. If it is not fun, don’t do it. Find another way.” Dean Wesley Smith

A New Blog on Substack

Well, I published my first reader blog post over at Substack yesterday. If you’d like to take a look and let me know what you think (or not), please drop by <https://harveystanbrough.substack.com/p/welcome-to-the-new-blog>. It isn’t long.

If you’re interested, you should also be able to subscribe to that one while you’re there. (I’m still learning, but there should be a subscription form just below the blog post.)

If not, you can subscribe by clicking <https://harveystanbrough.substack.com/subscribe?> or by clicking the “Subscribe to My Reader Blog” tab in the menu over at HarveyStanbrough.com. There, I think that covers it. (grin)

I did attempt to transfer (via upload) the subscribers from my old provider to Substack, but for some reason the upload hasn’t completed. So I need to figure out the problem there. But if this works out as well as I hope it will, I’ll probably move this Journal over to Substack as well. It seems a better environment than where I am now.

After that I revised HarveyStanbrough.com and StoneThreadPublishing.com further, then linked my Substack blog to my Twitter account. Then I dropped in on Amazon and took a look at [my author page](#). I revised my bio and added the RSS feed for my new Substack blog, then updated the author pages for two of my personas, Nick Porter and Gervasio Arrancado.

Unfortunately, Amazon allows only three names per account, so I wasn’t able to bring the most interesting persona, Eric Stringer, or the most lascivious, MJ François, on board. Maybe later.

So that was my day yesterday from 3 to 11 a.m.

A Great Series of Emails

I told screenwriter Matt Pettipas in an email this morning, “For some reason I feel like our discussions should be on a stage in front of millions of young (in the craft) writers.” As it is, they often end up as topics in this Journal.

I don’t know whether Matt just asks the right questions or whether his very quotable and thought-provoking quips get me going. But whatever the reason, I find myself thanking him often for all the topics he’s given me for the Journal.

Early this morning I was blessed when I read, over my first cup of coffee, “It does no good dwelling on something I can’t change right?”

After reading yesterday’s Journal entry, which he also prompted with a question, he wrote to say “the hardest myth to swallow” is to remember that what we write isn’t important. Then he wrote

“I think [that’s] because, when I was younger (my teens) I dreamt about being ... remembered as a great writer. And, to a lesser extent today, I still harbour those dreams in the back of my mind. ... [S]eeing my work as just entertainment, as much as I know that’s what it is, has been hard.”

Yep. Sometimes I think of how wonderful it would be if readers remembered me the way Hemingway or Steinbeck are remembered.

Then *I* remember that some readers can’t stand Hemingway or Steinbeck. Go figure.

If anybody had a chance at universal acclaim, it would be those two guys. So Matt’s pronouncement early this morning was perfection itself: Dwelling on what we cannot change does no good.

That’s exactly right.

But if by some chance that doesn’t work for you, let’s turn the problem around:

How many writers do you suppose would really rather NOT be remembered?

Or said in another way, How many writers do you suppose are putting out sub-par work on purpose?

To either question, the answer is None.

No writers anywhere ever are intentionally writing in such a way that no readers will enjoy their stories or that they will not be remembered.

(Hmm. Come to think of it, this also address the closet snobbery of writers who like to run down those of us who write into the dark: “Oh, well certainly *I* could write like that too, but [hand to bosom] *I* like to put out *quality* work.” That kind of crap.)

But leaving the insanity and those who propagate it aside, there are certain facts at play here. Facts, not opinions:

1. If you set up a regular writing craft — a balance of Learning and then Practicing, which means writing, putting new words on the page — and
2. if you keep moving forward, never hovering in place over one work and never moving backward, then

3. someone out there will enjoy your work. And the more you practice and the more accomplished at your craft you become, the greater the number of people who will enjoy your work.

So our task remains to apply ourselves to storytelling, to learn more about the craft, and to get on with it.

Because although WHAT we write really doesn't matter at all — meaning no matter what we do, some will like it and some won't — THAT we write is all-important.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “How Do I Keep Going” at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/how-do-i-keep-going/>. For some reason, Dean's back to craft posts recently. I'm glad and I hope he keeps it up.

Disclaimer: In this blog, I provide advice on writing fiction. I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. To be crystal clear, WITD is not “the only way” to write, nor will I ever say it is. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among myriad other topics.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [A new blog](#), [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [Learning the Craft](#), [Practicing the craft](#), [Substack](#)

The Journal: Critiques? Um, No.

April 20, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Topic: Critiques? Um, No.
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

“[U]sing someone else's idea without using their expression of that idea is not copyright infringement. Copyright protects the expression of ideas, not ideas themselves.” The Passive Guy

Topic: Critiques? Um, No.

Disclaimer 1 — I'll say up front that if you are one who actively seeks out criticism of your work from readers or from other writers, that's fine. None of my business. To each your own.

Disclaimer 2 — I'll also say I'm not talking here about copyeditors or other professionals who "critique" your use of punctuation or pacing (paragraphing) and other mechanics and offer suggestions for clarity or improvement.

I'm talking about those folks who, invited or not, actually believe they know better than you how a story that took place in YOUR MIND should have been written. Seriously?

Not to even mention that they believe they know better than your characters how the story should have unfolded. Head-shaking.

If you're wondering, I was talking with Matt again recently. He asked my thoughts about the willingness of readers and other writers, uninvited, to offer up a critique of a writer's work. Apparently this happens a lot in various "groups" on social media sites and "reader boards," whatever those are.

As you can probably tell from the first few paragraphs of this post, I didn't have to think about that very long.

My first disclaimer stands. What you do with regard to critiques is strictly up to you.

My own practice is simple:

1. I do the best I can at my current skill level on everything I write. Therefore,
2. I don't allow even my OWN critical mind, much less anyone else, to second-guess my characters and their story.

I enjoy my stories. If I didn't, I wouldn't write them, and I hope others will enjoy them too. But as there is nothing I can do to affect an opinion beyond writing to the best of my ability, I honestly don't care.

Opinions are just that: opinions. And any opinion that presumes knowledge of what's going on in someone else's mind (or what *should* be going on) is about as pretentious and invalid an opinion as there can be.

The bottom line? If others enjoy my stories, that's wonderful. I'm glad. If they don't, well, they're free to write their own. And yes, I recommend you adopt the same attitude. (grin)

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Making It Feel Real" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/04/making-it-feel-real.html>.

See "7 Common Types of Plagiarism" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/7-common-types-of-plagiarism/>. The OP sounds as if it were written by an angry 7 year old, but PG's comments are

worth reading. If you're interested in copyright law, the next post on The Passive Voice might also interest you.

Disclaimer: In this blog, I provide advice on writing fiction. I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. To be crystal clear, WITD is not "the only way" to write, nor will I ever say it is. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among myriad other topics.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [KillZone Blog](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [the writing life](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: I Had to Laugh

April 23, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * I had to laugh
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

"If I've done my job in the first two hours, the audience will believe anything I tell them at the end." Director Steven Spielberg on making up stuff in fiction

"Tip: Non-outliners — write the story then add the foreshadowing." Steve Hooley, TKZ, on foreshadowing (grin)

I Had to Laugh

I had to laugh, albeit in a good-natured way, when I first read that second quote. Yeah, I'm gonna take advice on how to write into the dark from an outliner. (grin) Certainly, I mean no disrespect to folks of that particular stripe, but neither will I accept any.

Those who haven't experienced writing into the dark can't possibly understand why we do it or what it's like. And no, the same can't be said in the other direction. Most of us who write into the dark have experienced the outlining, revising, rewriting route and abandoned it. But it isn't easy to do. WITD requires a level of trust in yourself that most people simply don't have.

When you trust yourself and the knowledge you've attained — both consciously from classes and books and subconsciously through absorbing Story over your entire life — writing becomes sheer pleasure.

Yes, I understand that some people can spend a whole day writing 500 "perfect" words. They enjoy meticulously playing with words, swapping one for the other and back. Some can argue with themselves for hours over whether to insert or omit a comma in a particular place.

Others enjoy carefully constructing and reconstructing sentences or paragraphs. Still others enjoy physically counting the number of times they've used a particular word, then reducing that to an acceptable number by deleting the word or finding replacements for it or by rewriting sentences or whole paragraphs.

I know all of the above because I used to be that guy.

And then, of course, there are those who actually enjoy the process of meticulously outlining, consciously making sure their "mirror moments" and "rising action" and "try-fail sequences" and all the rest are perfectly placed for maximum effect on the reader.

Or at least they say they enjoy it. But do they really? Or is all that labor-intensive stuff just another way to put off actually writing the story (like it was for me)?

I once spent several years actively outlining a single novel. I made changes to it even after that. I never wrote that novel. I still have the outline. I kept it as a grim reminder of all that storytelling is not.

Just as a reminder, those of us who write into the dark also utilize the 3- or 5- or 7-act structure. Some of us also use "mirror moments," and we all use rising action and try-fail sequences and all the rest. The difference is, we don't outline or otherwise consciously manipulate those things because we're confident in our own abilities. We trust that what we need from what we've learned has seeped through into our creative subconscious.

Those who write into the dark don't squabble with themselves over punctuation or words or sentences. We're interested only in Story. We enjoy watching the story unfold as our fingers move across the keyboard (or our pen or pencil moves across the paper), and we feel blessed that we were chosen to record the story for others to read.

The very idea that a writer who practices WITD might "write the story and then add the foreshadowing" is ludicrous. And actually doing it would be an exercise in redundancy. Why? Because any foreshadowing necessary to the story is already there. Your characters added it as you wrote.

Sometimes you don't notice that your characters foreshadowed an event until the event happens. Every writer who practices WITD has experienced this. They are actually physically surprised and sometimes shocked at some completely unexpected thing their character does or says.

Sometimes when they're foreshadowing something your characters will do or say something so off-kilter that it even causes a temporary stoppage. Maybe you feel stuck because something doesn't quite make sense.

But then you remember to keep your conscious mind out of it. It doesn't have to "make sense" at the moment. It only has to make sense in the overall scheme of the story, and you don't know yet what that will be. Only your characters know, so you remember to trust them.

So you set your jaw and write the next sentence that occurs to you, then the next and the next, and soon the story is flowing again. And eventually that place where you got “stuck” suddenly makes perfect sense. All because you trusted yourself and your knowledge. All because you trusted your characters and allowed their story to play out.

So with regard to the second quote above, the point is, trusting your characters to tell their story means TRUSTING your characters, not second-guessing them. No “yabbits” (yeah, buts) allowed.

I guess outliners assume that writers like me just slop stuff across the page and hope it works. We don't. We just trust the characters to tell the story that they, not we, are living. To us, that makes perfect sense. Like trusting your neighbors or some strangers across town to live their lives without being controlled by you.

The instant you invite your conscious, critical mind in to “correct” or revise or second-guess your characters, you're lost as a fiction writer. From there on out, writing fiction will cease being a pleasure and will become a slog through sheer drudgery. Even if you tell yourself you enjoy it that way. (grin)

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Want Strong Dialogue? Don't Forget The Subtext” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/want-strong-dialogue-dont-forget-the-subtext/>. Contains a great example.

See “The 10 Awful Truths about Book Publishing” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/the-10-awful-truths-about-book-publishing/>. To me, number 7 is the most interesting.

See “What If You Gave Up?” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/what-if-you-gave-up/>. An interesting take, and an unusual one these days.

See “Mentor Focus Projects” at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/mentor-focus-projects/>.

See “Foreshadowing: A Look Back and a Look Forward” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/04/foreshadowing-a-look-back-and-a-look-forward.html>.

See “The 9 Biggest Myths About Nonfiction Trade Publishing, Debunked” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/the-9-biggest-myths-about-nonfiction-trade-publishing-debunked/>. Not specifically about fiction, but the same myths apply.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [Foreshadowing](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [Passive](#), [Professional Writer Series](#), [the writing life](#), [Writing Into the Dark](#)

The Journal: I'm a Fortunate Guy

April 25, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Topic: I'm a Fortunate Guy
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

"The book trade invented literary prizes to stimulate sales, not to reward merit." Michael Moorcock

"What does figuring out the schedule mean? It means I had to figure out what I was writing when. Then I had to figure out a realistic word count for the week/day. Then I had to do math to figure out when I would finish Project #1 and so on and so forth." Kristine Kathryn Rusch

"Spend thirty minutes on [Writer Beware](https://writerbeware.blog/) to see if your potential publisher or anyone mentioned in the potential publisher's website is mentioned there." The Passive Guy

"Finally, don't pay any publisher money to publish your book. If you want to publish your book, Amazon is happy to do it at no charge." The Passive Guy

Topic: I'm a Fortunate Guy

First, thanks to everyone who went to the website and left a comment on the previous post. When you leave a comment on the site, it helps internet crawlers and bots discover the Journal. So it's like helping with circulation for a newspaper. I appreciate it.

Now then. I'm a fortunate guy, and I take nothing for granted.

For one thing, I've always felt as if someone dipped me in the English Language River at birth. Understanding the nuances of the language has always come easily to me whether the topic is spelling, punctuation, or grammar and syntax. All of the various past, present and future tenses are easy for me too, as are the weight and connotation conveyed by various words.

I also understand the rhythms and flow of the language, which sometimes boils down to the juxtaposition and sounds of individual letters and pairs of letters inside words. (I explain a lot about this in my book, [Poetry Techniques for the Fictionist](#) and in the [audio lecture](#) (scroll down to Course 10) of the same name.

I am also fortunate that I understand the difference between the conscious, critical mind and the creative subconscious.

Creating literature (so writing into the dark) or other kinds of art would not be possible without the ability of the conscious, critical mind to learn new things.

Each of the two minds has a different role:

1. We process and learn new information with the conscious, critical mind; then
2. We shut out the critical mind and Create (meaning we apply what we've learned) with the creative subconscious.

That's what some of us call writing into the dark. Which only means writing without knowing in advance where the story's going. And we don't know where it's going because it isn't our story; it's our characters' story. We're only recording it for them.

To me and a lot of others, including many "name" professional fiction writers, this makes perfect sense. And I count myself fortunate for that more than for anything else that has to do with writing or creativity.

Believe it or not, some writers are born with the understanding that they can write into the dark. I'm not one of them.

WITD only began making sense to me in April 2014. I'd been reading Dean Wesley Smith's posts for a couple of months at that point, and one day I decided I wanted to know whether this WITD he kept talking about would really work or whether I was being tossed a load of fresh manure. Frankly, I suspected the latter. This is a Saul turned Paul story. I was a complete skeptic.

The only way to be absolutely certain whether something works is to go all-in and give it an honest try. Not for anyone else, just for yourself. Just so you, yourself, will know. And that's what I did. I gritted my teeth and forced myself to follow the "rules" of writing into the dark.

For a couple of weeks I constantly had to push aside the doubts and fears coming from my conscious, critical mind. That's the job of the critical mind. It tried to stop me and thereby protect me from the embarrassment that would ensue if I wrote something into the dark and nobody liked it. That's what the critical mind does. That's its purpose.

But once I'd written the third or fourth or fifth story and finally understood that WITD wasn't a fluke, that it really was freeing and fun and it really worked, I continued and I never looked back.

But "rules"? Really? Doesn't writing into the dark mean there are no rules? Doesn't it mean you just slop stuff across the page, giving no thought to quality or structure or any of that, and readers get what they get?

No, it doesn't.

WITD only means letting go of unreasoning, unrealistic fears — of rejection, failure, and even success — and override all the silly myths. Most of those myths were started by people who don't even write fiction and were perpetuated over the years (and are still perpetuated) by early-stage writers and writers who are too frightened to Just Write. Sigh.

So some “rules” for writing into the dark

1. *Realize you were telling good stories* (usually to your parents) long before you knew how to write or were even aware there was an alphabet. And yes, those stories came from your creative subconscious. If you could do it then, you can do it now. You just have to set aside all the BS educators et al have pumped into you over the years.

2. *Now that you're an adult, realize that what you're writing doesn't really matter.* It's only a few minutes' or hours' entertainment, nothing more. What matters is THAT you're writing, and that matters only because you're a writer.

3. *See your characters as if they're real people*, albeit maybe living in another dimension. Then let them tell the story that they, not you, are living. You are only their recorder. If you wouldn't try to force your neighbors into living in a certain way, then you shouldn't force your characters either. Besides, if Stephen King can find the humility to know it's the characters' story, so can you.

4. *Understand that perfection doesn't exist. Really.* That isn't just a nifty saying. And the pursuit of perfection is a waste of time, so let it go. What you make “perfect” for one reader will be a disaster for another. Often when you believe a story is flawed, a reader will see it as well-done.

Here's an example: When I wrote a short story called [“Old Suits”](#) (free PDF download) I thought it was the worst story I'd ever written. I published it anyway. Months later, a reader emailed me, praising the story and saying it sounded as if Ernest Hemingway had written it. Go figure.

5. *Realize that nothing bad will happen* if you write and publish a story that isn't perfect. (See the example above.) Nobody will drive to your house to beat you up, and magazine editors won't ban you for life from submitting other stories to them.

(Seriously, magazine editors are busy people. Most of the time they don't even remember the names of the authors whose work they buy, much less the names of authors whose work they reject.)

6. *In my opinion, writing into the dark works better in conjunction with Heinlein's Rules.* I recommend you [Get a Copy](#) (free PDF download) and become an adherent.

That's all of the “rules” I can think of right now. But really the ability to write into the dark only boils down to confidence. You've absorbed Story over a lifetime from books and articles and television shows and movies. You've taken classes and read blog posts and books on craft.

But Writing is the only thing that will make you a writer.

I really do hope you'll try writing into the dark. Not because my paycheck will go up (it won't) but because it's so very freeing, exciting and fun. And I like to share. If you do choose to try it on your own and find yourself with questions or needing a little help, email me at harveystanbrough@gmail.com.

In the next post, I'll talk specifically about how to start if you want to try it.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Waldorf Publishing: A Watchdog Advisory" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/waldorf-publishing-a-watchdog-advisory/>. I've said it before and I'll continue saying it: ANYONE, person or business, who requires payment up front to publish a work is a scammer.

See "Focus Again" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/focus-again/>.

See "Tell Your Story with 3 Tarot Cards" at <https://www.janefriedman.com/tell-your-story-with-3-tarot-cards/>. Maybe helpful.

See "Lindy Chamberlain — Did a Dingo Really Get Her Baby?" at <http://dyingwords.net/lindy-chamberlain-did-a-dingo-really-get-her-baby/>. Not about writing. Just interesting.

Disclaimer: In this blog, I provide advice on writing fiction. I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. To be crystal clear, WITD is not "the only way" to write, nor will I ever say it is. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among myriad other topics.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [Jane Friedman](#), [Kristine Kathryn Rusch](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [the writing life](#), [Topic](#), [Writing Into the Dark](#)

The Journal: How to Write Into the Dark

April 26, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Topic: How to Write Into the Dark
- * A Recommendation
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“My students and I are currently working on finding a concrete theory of time travel with multiple histories that is fully compatible with general relativity.” Barak Shoshany, Assistant Professor, Physics, Brock University

“Courses in prosody, rhetoric and comparative philology would be required of all students, and every student would have to select three courses out of courses in mathematics, natural history, geology, meteorology, archaeology, mythology, liturgics, cooking.” W. H. Auden via The Passive Voice

Topic: How to Write Into the Dark

Wow. This is a very long post. Almost 2000 words. But I think you’ll find it worthwhile.

If you missed the previous post, it might be a good idea to read that one first. It and this one go together. If you didn’t see it or if you want a refresher, [you can find it here](#).

First, a disclaimer: If you are part of the statistically miniscule percentage of writers who have suffered some sort of physical, emotional or psychic injury or affliction that renders you literally unable to access your creative subconscious or to call on it at will, then you will not be able to write into the dark.

But everyone else has a choice. If you are able to overcome unreasoning, unrealistic fears — meaning fears with zero consequences or repercussions — and shove aside all the silly myths that started with non-writers and perpetuated over the years, then you can at least try to write into the dark.

An Exercise

1. *To start, sit down at your keyboard* with a POV (point of view) character in mind. The character is in a setting (it’s hard to imagine a character who is not in a setting) and has a problem of some sort.

Note that this problem probably isn’t “the” problem of the story. This is just to get you started. This problem might be something as small as an untied shoelace or that the character forgot his briefcase or his gunbelt or his phaser pistol.

2. *Whatever the problem is*, whomever the character is and wherever the setting is, write the opening.

3. *When you’ve finished the opening*, if it grabs you, keep writing. Just write the next sentence and the next and the next until the character(s) lead you through to the end of the story.

If it’s a short story (a story about One Event) it will end after a thousand or two thousand or up to around ten thousand words.

If it's a novella or novel (so it's about several events that are interconnected in some way) it will go on longer.

As an aside, does the length of the story matter? No. If you're writing into the dark, allow the story to dictate how long or short it is. Your job is only to keep writing the next sentence that occurs to you. The characters will let you know when the story, shorter or longer, is over.

So how do you write the opening?

First, don't make up anything on your own. Trust your creative subconscious. Follow your POV character around and write down what happens and what he or she says and does. (To avoid awkward constructions, I'll use "he" for the rest of this post.)

The opening of most stories is generally 300 to 600 words, but it can run as long as is necessary. No matter how short or long it is, be sure to ground the reader in the setting. That's the purpose of the opening. A reader grounded in the setting is a reader drawn into the story.

Your character is as real as anyone else is, and probably more attentive because he, like you, will want to ground the reader. The character will notice the setting in which he's situated. Your job as the recorder (writer) is to describe what the POV character notices (not what *you the writer* notice) about the setting. Filter every description through the POV character's physical senses.

For example, what does the POV character see? Is it early morning or later in the day? Is it night? (Things look different at night.) But don't limit your character to only the sense of sight like so many writers do.

Are there any nearby sounds? Intermediate sounds? Distant sounds? Is the air cool or warm? Cold or hot? Wind or no wind? The character might feel the wind on his skin physically or tugging at his clothes. He might also hear it. Finally, it might also deliver an emotional sense (a "feeling") of forboding or joy or whatever else.

If there are rain clouds in the distance, he might both see and smell them (on the wind). With rain comes sensations of sight, sound, smell and feel, both physical and possibly emotional. Only considering the physical sense of touch, there's the physical impact of raindrops on the skin or clothing and the temperature of air and raindrops. Not all rain is cold.

Are the sharp crack of lightning and the rolling peal of thunder that follows rain accompanied by the taste of ozone on the air? Does that smell spur a childhood memory of the POV character being inside his grandmother's kitchen on a stormy day and the smell of chocolate chip cookies in the oven and their mouth-watering flavor?

And so on.

Which brings me to the only legitimate answer to the question, "How much description is too much?"

1. *No amount of description from the POV character is too much.* If the POV character notices (sees, hears, smells, tastes, or feels, physically or emotionally) something in the setting, write it. (If you're thinking, *Unless it doesn't have anything to do with the story*, check in with yourself. If you're writing into the dark, you don't know the story or where it will go. Only the character knows the story. So again, if the POV character notices something in the setting, write it.

2. *But ANY description you write that doesn't come through the POV character is too much.* If the POV character himself didn't notice it, don't write it. The writer should never intrude on the scene.

3. *Don't allow your conscious, critical mind to intrude even after the fact.* This is kind of an extension of 2 above.

For example, if your character included all of the description in my examples above in the opening, a small voice might say something like, "You should take some of that out. It's too much description. Why would he remember his grandmother's kitchen and chocolate-chip cookies just because of a rainstorm?"

That's your critical voice trying to protect you by stalling your writing. How can I know it's your critical voice and not the voice of your creative subconscious?

The voice of the critical mind is ALWAYS negative — "take that out" "too much" "Why would he remember" — whereas

The voice of the creative subconscious is always positive. The creative subconscious just wants to play and have fun.

When you've written the opening, it will either grab you (interest you) or it won't.

If it doesn't interest you, it isn't wasted. Anytime you're putting new words on the page it's good practice, but it's nothing more important than that. So just toss it out. (If you were building something with wood, a hammer and nails and you came across a bent nail, would you try to fix it? No. You'd throw it out and pick another nail. The same principal applies here.)

Once you throw out the opening that didn't work, either write a new opening with the same character, problem, and setting (if you really *like* that character-problem-setting combination) or write a different opening with a different character, problem, and setting.

But as I wrote in number 3 under "An Exercise" above, if the opening DOES grab you, keep writing. Just write the next sentence and the next and the next until the character(s) lead you through to the end of the story.

That's actually part of the allure and excitement of writing into the dark. Nothing is outlined or plotted or planned out. But by simply writing an opening, you might find yourself finishing a

short story a few hours later or finishing a novel a few weeks later. What could be better than that?

As you're writing, now and then, you might get “stuck” for a moment. Usually that will happen as a result of your old fears resurfacing when you realize you don't know where the story's going or what will happen next.

No problem. Take a deep breath and don't worry about it. You might even tell your critical mind, out loud, to shut up and leave you alone. (Yep, I've done that.) But no matter how you choose to shove your critical mind aside, do so.

Your story isn't something that needs involvement from the critical mind. It isn't life or death or even critical. It isn't even important except as a few minutes' entertainment for someone. Seriously, it's just a stupid story. Nothing earth shaking.

If you REALLY want to know what happens next, and if you want the story to remain authentic, just write the next sentence that occurs to you, then the next and the next and the next. Very soon the story will be flowing again, your fingers will be flying over the keyboard, and the story will literally unfold for the very first time right before your eyes.

That's how you write into the dark. You let go of all the myths that storytelling is difficult and something you can't possibly do on your own. You overcome your silly, unreasoning fears, and you Just Write the Story.

The only “sure” things are death, taxes, and techniques you prove for yourself

As I wrote in yesterday's post, the only way to be absolutely certain writing into the dark works is to go all-in and give it an honest try. Please don't take my word for it. Please try it for yourself.

But don't do it for the sake of appearances. If your attempt isn't all or nothing, it's worthless and a waste of time. So if you can't give the technique an honest try, don't bother. You will fail, and when you come out the other side you still won't know whether it could work for you.

So with those cautions firmly in place, I hope you'll take a chance. Once you are determined to give it an honest try, writing into the dark really is easy, fun, and exhilarating.

A Recommendation

If you're tired of media that's heavily biased in one direction or another, I recommend 1440, an “impartial, comprehensive news source,” where they “scour 100+ sources so you don't have to. Culture, science, sports, politics, business, and more—all in a five-minute read.”

The first article in “Of Interest” is one I found in the “Etcetera” section of the free 1440 daily newsletter. In that same section, if I wanted, I could “Explore a Martian crater in high definition,” “Listen to a baby bear purring,” or any of several other experiences.

And that's just in the "Etcetera" section, which appears at the end of the newsletter after stories and links to stories in politics, world events, culture, science, sports and so on.

And did I mention it's both unbiased and free? To check it out, click <https://join1440.com/>.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Time travel could be possible..." at <https://theconversation.com/time-travel-could-be-possible-but-only-with-parallel-timelines-178776>. Extremely interesting and well-written article

See "Author Avanti Centrae Leaks Top-Secret Marketing Plans" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/04/author-avanti-centrae-leaks-top-secret-marketing-plans.html>.

See "What is a Philologist?" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/%ef%bf%bc/>.

See "Praenomen" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/praeomen/>. I didn't personally care for the post, but PG's take is humorous.

See "Mentor Focus Media Kits" at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/mentor-focus-media-kits/>. Some good marketing info in the post.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [1440 \(unbiased news\)](#), [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [openings](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [the writing life](#), [Topic](#), [Writing Into the Dark](#)

The Journal: Use Your Author Name

April 27, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Thank You
- * Topic: Use Your Author Name
- * Of Interest

Thank you to the generous person who searched the Monroe Country Public Library in the Florida Keys for books from [StoneThread Publishing](#). And thank you again for apparently uploading so many STP books to the search results and recommending some of them to the library. What a wonderful thing to do!

If you have identified one of my books that you would like to read, I'd be happy to send you a free book. Just email me at harveystanbrough@gmail.com and let me know the title and the format you'd like.

Topic: Use Your Author Name

In today's "Of Interest" are links to two articles on marketing and author promotion. The first article encourages the use of bookmarks and business cards and "swag" of various sorts to hand out in person.

The second article, for which I first posted a link yesterday, provides up-to-date tips for marketing online. You know, in the modern world. I linked to it again today for comparison and because you might not have read it yesterday.

You, of course, may choose either method or mix and match from both.

A Very Brief History

I used to hand out bookmarks, magnets, pens, etc. but I handed out the last one at a writers' conference in the late 1990s. With the relative expense of having the bookmarks and promotional items printed and with their propensity for zeroing-in on the nearest trash can, I decided handing them out wasn't cost effective.

I do still have a short stack of business cards that I hand out if a reader specifically shows interest. The card is straightforward — no cutesy BS or unnecessary flash — and it presents the basic information the reader wants: my name, the genres in which I write, the URL of my author website, and my email address.

But there's a problem: Since the opportunity to hand them out to readers who are actually interested in my work presents itself so seldom, I never carry them.

Then yesterday happened.

I submitted to labs (fasting, ugh) for an upcoming routine appointment with my doctor. As the vampire nurse drew a couple of test vials, she asked what I do for a living.

"Novelist," I said.

Her eyebrows arched. "Really? Cool! I'm an avid reader, and I especially love ebooks. Do you make ebooks? Where can I find your work?"

Of course, I didn't have a business card with me.

I almost said, "Oh, you can find my stuff anywhere: Amazon, Kobo, Barnes & Noble...." But to me, that's always sounded both like bragging and more than a little dismissive. And I don't want

to send the message that I'm either a braggart or dismissive of either the reader or of my own books.

So I grinned and gestured toward the paperwork she was filling out. "Next time you're around your computer, just go to my name dot com and you can see everything I've written. In fact, if you see something you like, email me and I'll send you that short story or novel free. Just let me know what eformat you want."

"Really? Cool! What's your email address?"

I nodded. "Same thing. My name, but this time at Gmail.com."

And before you ask, if she hadn't had my name already in front of her on office paperwork, I'd have done the same thing: "Tell you what, write down my name." When she finds a pen and paper, I spell my name for her, then say, "Just add dot com for my website or at gmail dot com for my email address." Grin. "Easy, right?"

And that's the whole point: "Easy, right?"

Why make up some silly thing for your website and email address? If you use your name, or at least the name that appears on your books, you make it that much easier for the reader to remember you, to find your work, and to contact you. Nothing's better than that.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Speed Dating and Swag" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/04/speed-dating-and-swag.html>. I still pass out business cards now and then.

See "Author Avanti Centrae Leaks Top-Secret Marketing Plans" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/04/author-avanti-centrae-leaks-top-secret-marketing-plans.html>.

See "Time of Great Forgetting" at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/time-of-great-forgetting-3/>.

See "Bring on the ladies..." at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/bring-on-the-ladies/>. If you're interested in genealogy, especially see PG's take.

Disclaimer: In this blog, I provide advice on writing fiction. I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. To be crystal clear, WITD is not "the only way" to write, nor will I ever say it is. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among myriad other opics.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [Marketing and Promotion](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: AI Audiobooks?

April 28, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * AI Audiobooks?
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“Try to catch up if doing so is possible and will be challenging. If impossible to catch up, then simply reset the challenge and start fresh.” Dean Wesley Smith on whether to try catching up when you fall behind on a challenge

“Ahh, the problems of being prolific.” Dean Wesley Smith

AI Audiobooks?

I currently have in my inbox (as probably do many of you) an email from Google Play Books. The subject reads “Create an auto-narrated audiobook.” As of this writing I hadn't opened it.

I think I have a few titles available on Google Play Books. A few years ago, I uploaded a few, but the process was so clunky and time-consuming I gave up on it.

Now I'm thinking maybe I'll revisit it, see whether the publishing process on that format has improved.

As to the “auto-narrated” (AI) audiobook, I don't know. Guess I'll take a look when I get there. But until then, in “Of Interest” today, there's a link to an article about this very topic: Google Play Books' new AI audiobooks.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Catching Up... To Do or Not To Do?” at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/catching-up-to-do-or-not-to-do/>. A good post.

See “True Crime Thursday – DEEPFAKES” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/04/true-crime-thursday-deepfakes.html>. Wow. What an interesting post.

See “Google Play Books Expands AI Audiobook Narration – maybe” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/google-play-books-expands-ai-audiobook-narration-maybe/>.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [AI Audiobooks](#), [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [publishing](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [the writing life](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: Welcome, About The Journal, and Archives

April 29, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Topic: Welcome and About The Journal
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

“[R]ewriting a story because you want to make it ‘perfect’ before you sell it? That’s a fool’s errand. You’ll end up hating the thing most likely and you’ll waste all the time you could’ve been writing new material.” Screenwriter Matt Pettipas

Topic: Welcome, About The Journal, and Archives

Welcome to Diana and any other new subscribers I might have missed. I’m glad you’re here.

I’ve been posting articles to the Journal since 2014. As a fiction writer, I try to adhere to Heinlein’s Business Habits for Writers, better known as [Heinlein’s Rules](#). I follow them as they were originally written, but slightly updated for the 21st century.

As a writing instructor or mentor, I also teach other writers to follow them. My least favorite rule, and the one I most often fall off of, is Rule 4. Storytelling is so much fun that I often forget to submit or publish what I’ve written.

I also practice as a writer and teach as an instructor a relatively unknown technique called “writing into the dark.” WITD basically means writing without planning ahead, doing character sketches, outlining, etc.

But on a deeper level it means having confidence in yourself and in what you’ve learned (and passively absorbed) over the years about storytelling. And it means putting all of that knowledge into practice while having an absolute blast.

For a moment, consider how lucky you are to be a fiction writer: you are the very first person *ever* to see, hear, etc. the story your characters are living. Before it’s all over, maybe thousands

or even millions of others will have read that story too, but you will always be the first. That's very special.

But really, we can enjoy the stories our characters are living without writing them down. We write them down — record them — only so we can share them with others. And *voila*, we become story writers. Well, story recorders.

As a fiction writer, you're a bridge between your characters and their stories and a wider readership. You record the stories, then create a cover and some sales copy for them, then publish them, hopefully through an aggregator like Draft2Digital.com. (I also publish separately to Amazon.) The whole thing is a kind of wonderful and wonder-filled magic.

The most important bit of advice I offer is this: Remember your role.

Please don't get cocky and full of yourself. You're a writer, a recorder, of the stories your characters are living. They aren't *your* stories. They are your *characters'* stories. Even Stephen King refers to himself as his characters' stenographer.

It might help to look at it like this: If your characters didn't exist or if they chose not to share their story with you, then you would have only your own bland life to write about.

So be glad your characters chose you as their recorder. But never forget, you are useful to them only because they don't have physical fingertips with which to manipulate the keys on a computer keyboard.

Your characters trust you to let them tell their stories. Don't violate that trust. Don't allow your conscious, critical mind to second-guess what your characters give you. Don't revise. Don't rewrite. If you wouldn't presume to tell your neighbors or friends how to live their life, extend the same courtesy to your characters.

Again, welcome to [The Daily Journal](#). If you visit the site you'll see a search box in the sidebar. I suggest you use it to find posts that contain topics of interest to you.

As search terms, to begin with I suggest writing into the dark, setting, scene, or characters. You can also look for the creative subconscious or the conscious, critical mind. Or much broader topics, like self-publishing (or indie publishing) or marketing.

Finally, I actually updated [The Journal Archives page](#) this morning. It now contains links to free, searchable PDF archives from 2014 all the way through 2021.

Again, welcome. Glad to have you along on the journey.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Media Kit Workshop” at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/media-kit-workshop/>.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Archives](#), [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [Journal Archives](#), [the writing life](#), [Topic](#), [Writing Into the Dark](#)

The Journal: Bundles!

May 1, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Bundles!
- * I Get Emails...
- * Of Interest

Bundles!

While I was in the middle of breaking in a new computer yesterday, I lost half the bundles I was in through PubShare (formerly BundleRabbit). No need to go into detail.

But that cut the number of bundles that contain my work in half. So if any of you would like to get multiple books from several authors (including yours truly) for one low price, here’s a deal for you.

You can read the descriptions below, and I even added a buy-link, albeit only for Amazon.

If you’re interested, don’t wait. These four bundles could disappear just as easily as the first four did.

Here’s a quick rundown of the remaining bundles:

BLOOD ON THE COBBLES (Suspense) — From legends of murder and undead killers walking to missing girls, deadly diseases, suspense and gore aplenty; from sleuths and detectives, murder and vengeance enter into a world of crime, clues and mayhem. Fifteen tales of mystery and mayhem from some amazing authors, including my novel *Body Language*, [all for only \\$7.99!](#) [Order today!](#)

HERE BE BRAVE NEW WORLDS (SF) — Worlds on the brink of apocalypse, or already there. Nature’s wrath and dominion over humanity, and humanity’s folly incarnate. Dark magic, terrifying tech, greed, ravaged environments, rare courage and grim hope in lost cities and fallen worlds. Brave new worlds or last best hopes — Dare you glimpse the future? Thirteen tales of

brave new worlds from some amazing authors, including my novel *The Consensus*, [all for only \\$4.99! Get yours here!](#)

ECLECTICA (An eclectic bundle) — From fantasy to space adventure, pirates, mystery, horror, historical fiction, romance and coming of age, you'll find short, snappy reads herein. There is something for everyone in this lucky dip. Nineteen short stories and collections from multiple authors, including the collection *S, F & H* from yours truly, [all for \\$7.99!](#)

GUNS OF THE WEST (Western) — Contains my contemporary western novel *No Kind'a Time* plus seven other novels, including two by Dean Wesley Smith, as well as my novelette, *A Turning Point for Charlie Pilsen*. [Get all 9 books for only \\$2.99 right here!](#)

My apologies if any of the bundles are gone before you're able to click the link.

I Get Emails...

Okay, so just in case anyone else is confused by my little “character with a problem in a setting” story-starter exercise post, let me clarify:

It's only an exercise, a self-inflicted ruse to get you to the keyboard and get you started writing a story completely into the dark. It isn't anything to hyperventilate over.

No plotting, no planning, no outline. No conscious-mind critical thinking. Nothing at all to worry or fret about. Just a character with a problem in a setting. Nothing more. Fingers on the keyboard. Go.

At no point have I said you have to “create” a character to fit some specific genre or for any other reason. Nor do I suggest you should. I'm not saying you should consciously think about or come-up with the character or the problem or the setting or anything else.

In fact, I actively (and pretty much constantly) preach AGAINST such critical mind intrusion. When you're able to just sit back and let it happen rather than trying to force any part of it, storytelling is a flowing, beautiful thing.

But if you start worrying over whether the character “should be” (critical mind) male or female, whether s/he should fit a certain genre, what his or her name should be, why s/he is in the situation s/he's in, or anything else, you aren't performing the exercise I gave you.

If that's you, and if you'd really like to try the exercise, then first you should get up, right now, and walk away from the computer. And when you come back, you should take a deep breath and relax. And you should understand that none of that character, problem, setting, or situation stuff is up to you, nor does any of it matter.

For this exercise, you're only pulling back a curtain and glancing through a window into someone else's life, then writing what the character sees, hears, smells, tastes and feels, physically or emotionally or both, and what happens. If you pull back the curtain and spy on

your neighbors, do you try to make them do and say what you want them to or do you just watch as you try to discern what's going on? Exactly the same thing. Yes it is. Exactly the same.

You can do this exercise even if you're usually an adherent of plotting and planning and outlining and wresting every last ounce of control from your characters. For this ONE exercise, if you want to, you can let go and Just Write. That's how much it really doesn't matter. And besides, you might just amaze yourself.

So if you find you're trying to think your way through ANY part of this, then you aren't doing the exercise I gave you. You're doing something else, and that's fine. You don't have to do the exercise I gave you.

But don't slap together a mutant. Don't pretend you're doing the exercise I gave you, then employ your critical mind, suddenly find yourself worried about forcing a bunch of stuff, and then come back to me and say the exercise (or WITD, for that matter) is flawed and doesn't work. Because obviously you haven't tried it.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "May 1st Restart" at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/may-1st-restart/>. A great post

See "Writers, Stop Using Social Media (Like That)" at <https://www.janefriedman.com/writers-stop-using-social-media-like-that/>.

See "The Complicated Ethics of Writing Violence in Fiction" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/the-complicated-ethics-of-writing-violence-in-fiction/>. Goodness. Yet another problem I never knew existed. The "ethics" of writing violence? You do know, right, that the word isn't the thing?

Disclaimer: In this blog, I provide advice on writing fiction. I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. To be crystal clear, WITD is not "the only way" to write, nor will I ever say it is. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among myriad other opics.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Bundles](#), [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [Jane Friedman](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [the writing life](#), [writing exercise](#)

The Journal: An Interesting Conversation

May 2, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Some Good Comments
- * Another Comment, Another Place
- * Okay, No More WITD for Awhile
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“You just can’t do anything about the past. But if you turn around and face forward, it is amazing what you can accomplish in the future.” Dean Wesley Smith

“Any man’s death diminishes me, for I am involved in mankind. Any therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.” John Donne (*Not about writing but I just really like this quote.*)

Some Good Comments

There are some good, informative comments on “Catching Up... To Do or Not To Do?” at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/catching-up-to-do-or-not-to-do/#comments>.

In the greater scheme, I recommend you swing by Dean’s site once a week or so and just troll the home page (posts are excerpted there). If any comments are mentioned just below the excerpted post title, click that link and browse them. You can often learn a lot just by reading the comments.

Another Comment, Another Place

I had a pretty good back and forth with another commenter on a post over on The Passive Voice yesterday. We wandered *far* off topic and talked about — well, around — WITD vs. plotting, planning, and outlining, etc. (The original post was about nuclear bombs and stuff like that there.)

As I said, it was a good back and forth, but I had to chuckle at the irony of his final comment. In slightly different words, he wrote that life is too short and complicated to spend any part of it controlling others.

Which was (is) exactly my point, so I couldn’t agree more. (grin)

That’s exactly why I follow Heinlein’s Rules and it’s *exactly* why I write into the dark.

I don’t exert control over my characters (it isn’t my place), and I don’t allow those who push the myths to exert control over me by telling me how I “should” write (it isn’t *their* place). (grin)

And as an added bonus, I don’t have to put on airs and sip wine and nibble brie at launch parties, one forearm draped across my forehead as I attempt an intellectual discussion of fiction and why writing it is such terrible drudgery. (grin)

Anyway, I didn't egg the guy on, but I did invite him to email me privately if he wanted to continue the discussion.

Notice, I never tell anyone else how they "should" write. I explain my process and tell everyone how wonderfully freeing it is, but whether anyone else ever tries it doesn't affect my royalty rates in the slightest, so what do I care?

Besides, I don't have to argue for WITD. I have a good system: I lay out the facts, and then the other person does whatever s/he wants. (grin) Here are the facts about WITD:

1. *WITD is the most freeing, enjoyable way to write fiction.* Those who disagree either have not tried it or tried it and succumbed to their fears, so how can they know?

2. *Like riding a good roller-coaster, WITD is both frightening and exhilarating.* That's a big part of the appeal. You never know where you're going, but you know you'll arrive safely. Plus you know the story will be better and more authentic because you didn't "make-up" anything.

3. *A great weight is lifted off your shoulders* when you let other people (even your characters) live their own lives instead of controlling everything they say and do. Thus, there's no pressure with WITD. Instead, it's fun.

4. *If you try WITD and decide it isn't for you,* you can always easily revert back to what you've always done. All the safety nets are still right there in place. And nobody will care, though members of your writing group probably will say they told you so. (grin)

5. *Part of what annoys the mythters* — Wait! Ha! MYTHTERS! I just made that up. You know, "mythter" like "mister"? (grin) And as the original coiner of the word, I hereby proclaim "mythter" a non-genger noun because These Days Everyone Is Exactly The Same.

Anyway, part of what annoys them is that we who WITD *know* why they won't try it. They can't overcome the unreasoning fear. And that's fine, really. Heck, we only know because we've been there. We were all taught the myths, the "right" way to write. Some of us were fortunate enough to ignore The Not-Fiction-Writer People Who Tried to Teach Us How to Write Fiction, and others of us were able to break away later. Either way, we've never looked back. (grin)

6. *If you give WITD an honest try,* you'll learn for yourself that what I wrote in this segment of the post is true. (If as you try it you feel a knot in your gut and sweat beads literally breaking out on your skin, you'll know you're on the right track. And WOW do you need WITD!)

7. *You literally have everything to gain* and absolutely nothing to lose.

ANNN-NEEE-WAY, if you DO decide to try WITD, I suggest you DON'T tell your writing group or writer friends. If you do, you'll hear a screeching like you haven't heard since you were aiming that fork for that electrical outlet when you were three. Some of them will even get angry with you.

Okay, No More WITD for Awhile

You know. Probably. If someone leaves a comment or emails me about it I might want to share my response, but otherwise, no.

For you newer folks, I don't usually go on about WITD for so many posts in a row. And seriously, try it or don't try it, I don't care. (If you do try it and you want some guidance, email me.) Anyway, I'll be coming up with something different to talk about soon.

Oh, and if anyone out there has any questions about ANYTHING in fiction or storytelling or any of my recent posts, please feel free to ask. You may leave a comment on the site or you may email me at harveystanbrough@gmail.com.

If your topic is broad enough, I might turn it into a blog post. But either way, I'll respond to you personally, usually within a day.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Macro-Level Jump Cut Scene" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/05/macro-level-jump-cut-scene.html>.

See "A Pithy Comment" at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/a-pithy-comment/>.

See "Sci-Fi for Kids Is a Missed Publishing Opportunity" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/sci-fi-for-kids-is-a-missed-publishing-opportunity/>. You can probably insert some other genres in place of "Sci-Fi" too.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [Professional Writer Series](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [Writing Into the Dark](#)

The Journal: Big Book Giveaway

May 5, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Big Book Giveaway
- * Of Interest

Big Book Giveaway

Note: Hey folks, if you're subscribed to my Substack reader blog as well, you'll see this post again later today in a slightly different format. Basically the same post, though, same offer.

I realize about the dumbest thing an author can do is try to get other writers to read his fiction. (grin) That even holds true when the writers in question consider the author an instructor and something of an authority. Go figure. But that's fine. Despite all that, now and then I like to give away a book or two.

As many of you probably know, I have several series. Today, I'm offering, free of charge, the first book of every series I've written. And I'm calling a series more than two books.

What's more, there are no limits. You can get any of them or all of them. Just let me know which format you prefer. They're available in .mobi, .epub, and .pdf.

Read on. Then, once you make your selections, email me at harveystanbrough@gmail.com and let me know which title(s) you want and which format you prefer. That's all there is to it.

Historical Western (meaning set in the late 1800s)

My largest and longest running series is my historical western suspense magic-realism action-adventure romance (grin) 16-volume [Wes Crowley Saga and gap series](#).

That series follows Wes Crowley through 40 or 50 years of his life, from his inauspicious beginnings in the small Texas panhandle town of Watson through his adventures as a Texas Ranger to his eventual fading away after retiring as a Guerrero Ranger in the small fishing village of Agua Perlado, Guerrero, Mexico. (It's fictional, but I can tell you exactly where it's located on the Pacific coast. The weather is wonderful there this time of year.)

The first volume is *Rise of a Warrior*, but that was actually the first of three prequels. For this giveaway, I'm offering the first novel I actually wrote in the series: [Leaving Amarillo](#). (Coincidentally, *Leaving Amarillo* was also the first novel I ever wrote period.)

If you've ever dreamed of riding wild on a good horse in a just cause or hanging out with a man who does, this is the series for you.

Science Fiction/Fantasy

My next largest series is the 10-volume Future of Humanity (FOH) series, AKA The Ark series. A generation ship, The Ark, has left lunar orbit for a habitable planet in the goldilocks zone of a faraway star. The very future of humanity depends on it.

The journey should take hundreds of years, and everyone expects their distant descendents to populate the new world. Of course, the crew and passengers are human, and they have all the

human traits, good and bad. During the journey, things happen. What more can I say? You can read the book descriptions at <https://stonethreadpublishing.com/science-fantasy/>.

But thanks to a friendly but quirky alien and a fluke, the ship leaps forward in time so that the original crew and passengers are able to begin their colonization themselves. The first book in the series, free to you, is [The Ark](#).

Crime and Psychological Suspense

Next is the 7-volume Blackwell Ops series. It's maybe what it sounds like: a world-wide network of operatives, owned and managed by one Thomas Jefferson Blackwell, a nondescript little man who runs a multi-billion dollar corporation and hires out, um, *fixers*.

Of course, to maintain the operatives' anonymity, all of these books are "as told to the author," and the same disclaimer runs through every description: "Only the more sensitive parts of [each operative]'s story are fictionalized. Everything else is true." Buckle up for a wild ride with [Blackwell Ops: Jack Tilden](#).

In prepping this post, I realized too that I owe my readers a Blackwell Ops 8 to finish the story of Philip Dunstan. Hmm. So that's three novels I have in the hopper now. (grin)

Action-Adventure

And then there's the 4-volume Nick Spalding series. This series follows the exploits of a mercenary. It is sheer action-adventure, probably set in the early 1900s.

I actually started writing the first book of the series, *Nighfall*, after reading the opening paragraph of Ernest Hemingway's short story "After the Storm." (You can read the short story free if you go to <https://antilogicalism.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/hemingway.pdf> and then search for After the Storm.)

I just re-read *Nightfall* myself, which is actually what prompted me to conduct this giveaway in the first place. So read about [Nightfall](#) and if you want it, email me.

Mystery

I have kind of a mystery series featuring the private detective Stern Talbot, but the books aren't really in a series.

So I'll tell you what. If mystery is your interest, visit <https://stonethreadpublishing.com/mystery-novels/> and browse. Each cover leads to a page and a description for that book. Pick one that you like, whether or not it features Stern Talbot, and let me know.

Frankly, I like the Talbot stories, but I kind'a have to recommend [Body Language](#) and [The Clearing](#), but you're the reader. Pick what you think you'll enjoy.

Again, you only have to email me at harveystanbrough@gmail.com, let me know which title or titles you would like, and tell me which ebook format you prefer. Then sit back and enjoy a great story!

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Flammable Liquids Don’t Exist” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/05/flammable-liquids-dont-exist.html>.

See “How To Get Away With Murder” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/05/how-to-get-away-with-murder-2.html>.

See “Academic Exile, Two Years On” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/academic-exile-two-years-on/>.

See “Amazon Best Sellers Rank Explained for Authors” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/amazon-best-sellers-rank-explained-for-authors/>.

See “The convoluted world of best-seller lists, explained” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/the-convoluted-world-of-best-seller-lists-explained/>.

See “Fun New Stuff...” at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/fun-new-stuff/>.

See “36 Years Ago” at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/36-years-ago/>. A love story for the curious among you.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Book Giveaway](#), [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [Professional Writer Series](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [the writing life](#)

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Categories [Daily Journal](#)

Tags [Kristine Kathryn Rusch](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [the writing life](#), [Topic](#), [Writing Into the Dark](#)

The Journal: WITD Is Not the Only Way

May 6, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Thank You
- * Topic: WITD Is Not the Only Way
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“The really great writers are people like Emily Brontë who sit in a room and write out of their limited experience and unlimited imagination.” James A. Michener

“For more than a decade, writers have asked me what they can do to sell their existing books. I always tell them to write the next book. Some writers don't have time for promotion. Others don't have the constitution for it. ... The one thing that will sell your next book is the ending of the current book.” Kristine Kathryn Rusch

“The real key to all fiction is an emotionally satisfying ending, one that ends, and does not leave things hanging.” Kristine Kathryn Rusch

“Just blowing compressed air against the skin over an artery can cause a CAGE []. My coroner cross-shift had a sudden death case where a guy in a tire shop used compressed air to clean himself off and it killed him dead on the spot.” [Garry Rodgers in a response to a comment on his post.](#)

Thank You

Thanks to everyone for the comments and emails. It's nice to know the posts about writing into the dark are welcome and even eagerly anticipated by some.

As I mention in the disclaimer at the end of the Journal, as far as I know, this blog is the only place where any professional writer talks publicly and regularly about creating with the creative subconscious (WITD).

So yes, I'll keep talking about writing into the dark and, of course, other topics. Stay tuned.

If I may, I also recommend Dean Wesley Smith's book [Writing Into the Dark](#) and two of my own nonfiction books:

[Quiet the Critical Voice \(and Write Fiction\)](#) and

[Writing the Character-Driven Story](#)

But as I also mention in the disclaimer, I don't claim that WITD is the only way to write fiction.

Topic: WITD Is Not the Only Way

Some folks prefer the safety of the known quantity. If that's you, that's perfectly fine, and there are plenty of places where you can find that. Just please know that which source you choose doesn't really matter. Because it's all the same old regurgitated writing advice you've heard at various levels in school and ever since. And I don't mean that in a bad way. I'm only stating a fact. Pretty much every book and piece of writing advice in the world at large mimics every other book and piece of writing advice.

There are a few notable exceptions. Nonfiction books by Stephen King or Lawrence Sanders or Dean Wesley Smith or me or a few others do not mimic the same old myths about fiction writing that are contained in all the others.

But if you don't mind seeing the same (bad) advice over and over again, you'll be fine. On any given day you can find literally *thousands* of sources that will teach you what they call the "right" way to write. And in this case, "right" means "popular" and "fashionable."

The "right" way apparently consists primarily of mistrusting yourself and depending on your conscious, critical mind instead of your creative subconscious. Oh, and suffering for your art as you "endure" the "sheer drudgery" of writing. Hey, whatever floats your boat.

But seriously, all snide joking aside, if I wrote the way those folks say a fiction writer should write, writing *would* be sheer drudgery. And therefore not fun. And therefore, I wouldn't do it. But I digress.

Those sources teach that you must know where the story is going and how it will end before you ever write a word of it. They teach that you should know every major plot twist and turn in each part of a 3- or 5- or 7-point structure before you begin writing. To that end, you are encouraged to develop an outline.

Some will say you should "create" an outline, but that's impossible. You cannot "create" anything with the conscious, critical mind. You can scheme, devise, plot, plan and come-up with an outline, but you can't create one. Which is to say you can't create something that you have to move through consciously, methodically, critically, point by point and step by step. To create, you must unleash the creative subconscious and let it flow.

Those sources also teach that you should know intimately both your characters (through "character sketches") and the world they live in (through "world building"). The latter may include maps, time frames, diagrams and floor plans if necessary.

And they teach that you shouldn't (negative) trust your creative subconscious. That even if you write "organically" or engage in "discovery" writing or only use "sign-posts" rather than an outline, you should go back and "correct" the story during revision and rewriting, and you should certainly make an "editing pass" or two or three or a dozen. Sigh.

These sources aren't just books. They're also online and in-person classes and writing groups and writing "boards" (whatever those are) and writers themselves (mostly beginners) and plenty of nonwriters too.

They will tell you that if you want to be a writer you must focus on Words and Sentences and Paragraphs and Scenes and Acts and Plot and so on ad nauseam.

Everything but Story. How very odd.

On the other hand, you have a guy like Stephen King, who in my opinion is the only Stage 5 storyteller writing today, who calls himself his characters' stenographer.

In other words, he doesn't make-up or concoct or devise anything. He checks-in on his characters, then writes down what happens and what they say and do. Easy-peasy. He calls himself their stenographer. Of as I call it, their recorder.

Or you have a guy like Lee Child, who over a genial lunch agreed with his New York editor that yes, a particular scene in a Reacher book probably *would* work better if he moved it to a different place. Then he dabbed at his lips with his napkin and said, "But it didn't happen that way." The scene remained where it was.

In other words, Child checked-in on his characters and wrote the story the way it happened. Period. He would never think of allowing his conscious, critical mind to correct his creative subconscious.

Both Child and King simply wrote into the dark, as do untold numbers of other professional fiction writers. Neither of them allowed his ego to get in the way. Neither of them decided he knew better than the characters what happened in the story. After all, the characters, not the writers, were actually living the story.

So over to you, young writer. Whom do you believe? Do you choose to believe all the young writers (and non-writers) out there who know almost nothing about writing but are more than happy to share their inexperience and regurgitated knowledge? Or would you rather trust the knowledge and experience of long-term professional writers like Stephen King and Lee Child?

Either way, of course, it's completely up to you. Nobody else will even know until they read your work. If you actively think your way through writing a novel, if you consciously "figure out" plot points and what happens next, you *will* bore the reader. Not because the reader knows what you did, but because if you can think your way through the story, so can the reader.

So control nothing. Just check-in on your characters and write what happens as they live their story. Trust yourself, trust your creative subconscious, and trust your characters. As Robert Frost wrote, "No tears in the writer, no tears in the reader. No surprise in the writer, no surprise in the reader."

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Endings" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/endings/>. Great post.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Kristine Kathryn Rusch](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [the writing life](#), [Topic](#), [Writing Into the Dark](#)

The Journal: Only a Few Things

May 8, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Great Writing ‘Puter for Sale
- * Flash Sale on Teachable
- * Big Book Giveaway
- * Of Interest

Great Writing ‘Puter for Sale

I’ve long advocated the use of a writing computer, meaning a separate machine dedicated to nothing but writing fiction — so no internet, no games, no business stuff — just Word or Word Pad or some other word-processor.

The theory is (and I’ve proved it for myself) that sitting down at that dedicated writing computer triggers your creative subconscious that it’s time to play and have fun telling stories.

I have a flawless, extremely light 11.5” HP Stream in practically new condition. Nothing wrong with it, but it’s excess for me. (I use a similar computer, an 11.5” HP Probook, as my writing ‘puter.)

The details — The computer is pre-loaded with 64-bit Windows 10 Professional OS, has a 56GB SSD (solid state drive) and 4GB of RAM. The processor is an Intel Celeron N3050 rated at 1.6GHz.

The price is only \$100, and I’ll pay shipping.

I suspect it will go fast, so if you’re interested, email me at harveystanbrough@gmail.com to find out to see whether I still have it. If I do, I’ll ask you to send \$100 to my PayPal account or to send me a check.

Flash Sale on Teachable

Dean and Kris (WGM Publishing) are having a flash sale on everything they have on Teachable. Read about it at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/flash-sale/>.

Big Book Giveaway

The Big Book Giveaway is ongoing. If you missed it, I'm giving away any or all of several titles. No catches, just some great reading. If you interested, you can read about it T <https://hestanbrough.com/the-journal-big-book-giveaway/>.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

Nada

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [HP laptop for sale](#)

The Journal: On Learning the Craft

May 10, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Topic: On Learning the Craft
- * A Study in Suffering?
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

"If the English language made any sense, lackadaisical would have something to do with a shortage of flowers." Doug Larson

"Making English grammar conform to Latin rules is like asking people to play baseball using the rules of football." Bill Bryson

Topic: On Learning the Craft

My friend Matt emailed me this morning and asked this question:

"[D]o you think it's possible one could learn about Craft solely by reading novels, short stories, screenplays and other fiction? Or do you think that, while these help a lot, reading nonfiction Craft books is essential as well?"

That word: essential. Ironically, the only thing that's actually essential to learning the craft of writing is also the one thing writers do the least often: practice. The best way to learn how to tell a story is keep putting new words on the page.

But to the question —

Even the best craft books (to my mind, mostly those by Block and Dean Wesley Smith and a few of mine) are only shortcuts. And even as shortcuts I wouldn't call them essential. Nice to have, maybe, but not essential.

By the way, craft books that are *not* the best — meaning those written by beginning writers and others who really don't have a clue and/or are only regurgitating the myths — can actually be harmful. At a minimum, they can drastically slow the progression of learning.

That's why I encourage writers to check a how-to author's bona fides before buying his or her book. I recommend taking fiction-writing advice only from someone who has written a LOT of fiction and is in it for the long run.

Can you learn by reading (or viewing) fiction? Certainly you can absorb craft (structure, the use of metaphor and simile, etc.) solely by reading novels, etc. and watching films, plays, etc. We've been absorbing story our entire life.

But you can also actively learn specifics of craft from those same sources. Here's one way:

As you read a novel, keep a little pad of sticky notes close by. Then just read for enjoyment. But as you encounter a passage that really blows you away, mark it with a sticky note. Then ignore it and continue reading for pleasure.

After you've finished the book, go back and re-read the places that blew you away. But this time don't just read them as a reader. Read them consciously and critically, as a student of writing. Study them closely. What did the writer do to create that particular effect in you? Do you currently do that in your writing? If you don't and if you want to, perhaps you can practice the technique in your next story. (Hence, back to the importance of practice.)

Learning in this way is good because although you'll absorb craft freely, you'll only consciously recognize and learn what you're ready to learn at your current skill level. Upon re-reading today, I find techniques in King's work that I didn't notice and didn't know existed a few years ago.

With today's technology (DVRs, etc.) you can do something similar with film. I still recommend watching the first time strictly for pleasure, but I don't know of a way to mark places you want to go back to (though a way to do that probably exists). But you can watch the film a second time, stopping, backing up, and reviewing a scene until you understand what the writer and actors did to achieve a particular effect.

Honestly, I no longer read dedicated craft books, though I do occasionally refer back for a refresher to a few that I've found useful. But I do read and then study the fiction of King, Block,

Vonnegut and Jack Higgins and, to some degree, James Lee Burke. And yes, if any of them put out a new craft book I would buy and read it in a heartbeat.

A Study in Suffering?

In [today's KillZone blog](#), Debbie Burke addresses a first page critique. I urge you to read it. I had a few takeaways, but these are just me:

First, never EVER send ANY manuscript ANYwhere in that condition. You'll see what I mean. We all have our little flaws, but letting the world see them instead of getting the necessary help before sending out the manuscript is inexcusable.

Second, note that the writer didn't [ground the reader](#). We don't even know where the scene occurs, much less any details about the setting.

Third, well, just read the scene. Was it really a study in suffering? There was no evidence of suffering that I was able to discern. There was a reason for suffering, but no discernable effects.

To convey the range of emotions that come with mental and emotional suffering and grief takes time and finesse. Generally speaking, a good writer can accomplish the opening of most stories (short story, novel, whatever) with 300 to 800 words or so.

But as just one example, the 11th novel in my Wes Crowley saga, [In the Cantina at Noon](#) (not a buy link) opened with Wes presiding over a funeral. The opening for that novel took over 2500 words and stretched well into Chapter 2.

Later in the book, the suffering and its effects came back time and again. In other words, like suffering in the real world, it permeated Wes' life.

So just some things to think about. When you're writing a scene, especially one that's supposed to be deeply emotional, take your time and let the characters fill in the minuscule details. Those are where the feelings reside.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "The Wordhord' Review: Here Be Dragons" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/the-wordhord-review-here-be-dragons/>.

See "The real problem with dangling participles" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/the-real-problem-with-dangling-participles/>.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [the writing life](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: Learning the Craft Revisited

May 11, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * FLASH!
- * Topic: Learning the Craft Revisited
- * Of Interest

FLASH!

See “Tami Hoag Giveaway – Two Free Registrations to the 2022 Writers’ Police Academy!” at <https://leelofland.com/tami-hoag-giveaway-two-free-registrations-to-the-2022-writers-police-academy/>.

I’m not entering the drawing. If you do, good luck. If you win, please let them know you heard about the drawing through the Journal. (grin)

Topic: Learning the Craft Revisited

Matt’s keeping me in topics for the Journal. (grin) As a followup to the email that became “On Learning the Craft” in yesterday’s Journal, he asked two more questions. I thought I should share those with you. I’ve also shared my much-expanded responses:

“Why do you think practicing is the one thing writers least want to do?”

First, it isn’t that they don’t want to practice. It’s that they’re frightened of various bogeymen. The main fear is rejection (= failure), including the fear that rejection will mean the end of their “career” as a writer.

Ahem. Note that most writers who fear this don’t have a career. By the time they’ve written enough to have a career, they understand this is silly.

These writers believe if they submit something that isn’t “perfect” to a magazine, the editor will blackball them. If they self-publish it, they believe readers will hate it and never buy from them again. Somehow, they either never learn or conveniently forget that what’s perfect for one reader (for example, you or a member of your critique group) is seriously flawed for another, meaning anyone who isn’t you or a different member of your critique group.

Instead of being taught to practice (write the best you can, submit or publish, and write the next story), they're taught to hover over one work, ostensibly to strive for perfection.

First they revise (a function of the critical-mind), even to the minuscule point of replacing individual words and being sure to alternate sentence structures, etc. ad nauseam.

Then they invite others to critique their work, another critical-mind (CM) endeavor. Afterward they rewrite (CM), then maybe do an "editing pass" (CM) before a final revision (CM) or rewrite (CM) or polish (CM).

Absolutely none of that has anything *At All* to do with Story or storytelling. Nor does it have anything to do with the craft of writing. And the more you invoke the critical mind to second-guess your creative subconscious, the farther you'll get from the authentic story your characters are living. [Perios, full stop, mic drop.]

And just as an aside, if that timid, fearful writer takes six months or a year to write and revise the story, garner critiques, then do one or more rewrites — a dedicated professional fiction writer who writes say three or four hours per day will have remarkably different results:

S/he will write six or ten or twelve or twenty new novels in that same time frame. And as a bonus, all of them will actually be the exciting, unpredictable, authentic story his or her characters are living.

Of course, you're the writer and every writer is different. So as always, the choice is yours.

Matt's second question was, "How can one practice a technique while at the same time staying out of the story?"

Good question, but the answer to that one is easier and a little shorter.

First, remember that you aren't practicing any particular technique. You're practicing storytelling. But to include a new technique in your next story, first you have to absorb it.

As an example, do you need to "think" about whether to put a period at the end of a declarative sentence or how to spell commonly used words or how to compose a sentence? Of course not. But those things didn't occur naturally to you. At some point you learned them. Then they seeped into your creative subconscious and now you apply them without thinking about them.

So to include a new technique, first, study the technique, preferably in a story. Think about it, turn it over and over in your mind, then go into the new story with the thought *I'm going to apply [whatever new technique] in this one*. Then comes the most important part: trust that you've learned it.

Once you trust that you've learned the technique to the best of your current skill level, you can forget about it and just write the story. The technique will come in through your subconscious when it's necessary.

Trust is the most important trait for a fiction writer to possess, especially trust of one's self. Self-confidence is neither cocky nor an impairment. It's an enabling asset.

And it doesn't mean you'll always be perfect. It only means you'll always write to the best of your ability for your skill level. It means you trust your characters to tell the story that they, not you, are actually living. And it means you will succeed.

Then there's the Dark Side — The opposite of self-confidence, self-doubt is the certainty that you can't do something on your own. That is the most disabling mental impairment I can think of for a writer. Self-doubt will stop you cold from doing all sorts of things, including writing fiction.

Yet unbelievably, self-doubt is prevalent and actively taught as a good thing! Many would-be and early-stage fiction writers have been flumoxed into believing they can't do anything on their own. Even something as easy and fun as recording a story that THEIR characters are living in THEIR mind. Incredible.

There are two bottom lines here:

Everything that has to do with the creative subconscious and the actual craft of writing is positive and forward-looking.

Everything in writing that comes from the conscious, critical mind is negative and backward-looking.

Which would you rather do?

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Flash Sale Ends Today!" at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/flash-sale-ends-today/>.

See "Capricious Actions That Cross the Line" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/capricious-actions-that-cross-the-line/>. Not about writing but an interesting look at the Association of American Publishers and PG's always-interesting take.

Disclaimer: In this blog, I provide advice on writing fiction. I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. To be crystal clear, WITD is not "the only way" to write, nor will I ever say it is. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among myriad other topics.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [the writing life](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: An Experience Shared

May 12, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * An Experience Shared
- * Ask Yourself — Are You a Writer?
- * An Afterthought
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

“[W]orking in the arts requires a very specific sort of attitude. ... It's a combination of optimism and pragmatism, with a bit of cynicism mixed in.” Kristine Kathryn Rusch

An Experience Shared

Hey, folks, if you haven't yet, do yourself a favor and read Anitha's comment on yesterday's post at <https://hestanbrough.com/the-journal-learning-the-craft-revisited/#comments>.

UPDATE: Anitha commented a second time before I could finish writing today's Journal entry (grin). So be sure to read both her comments.

She took the time to write and post the comment specifically “in the hope that it will benefit someone.”

I responded briefly to her comment, but she also mentioned that her “mind is filled with all sorts of needless fears,” which she posed as questions. I'll respond to those here:

“Why do I write sad stories?”

Because you write what your characters are living, and sometimes their story is draped with sadness.

“Why did I write a story that made someone sad?”

Maybe they were in the mood to be sad because of something that happened in their life. Or maybe that part of the story paralleled or reminded them of something that happened in their life. You are responsible only for your intent, not for someone else's perception or reaction. And if you're only writing what your characters give you, then you “intend” nothing. (More on this later.)

“I should only write happy stories from now on.”

Don't “should” on yourself, and don't allow anyone else to either. Just enjoy the escape of recording your characters' stories.

“Maybe I should write happily-ever-after romances.” (I don’t even read mainstream romance, though I enjoy fantasy romance or historical romance.)

Maybe, but you “should” write whatever your characters give you. You are their recorder. If they give you romance (or any other genre) and happily ever after, enjoy it. If they give you romance (or any other genre) and tragedy or comedy, enjoy it. Your job isn’t to place limits on your characters or choose their stories. Your job is to record what they give you.

“If I write tragedies, no one will want to read my next book.”

If you DON’T write tragedies, you will disappoint all the people who read your story and enjoyed it.

Ask Yourself — Are You a Writer?

If so, the question is never WHAT you should write. What you write is literally not important. It’s only a story, only a few minutes’ light, dark or mixed entertainment for the chance reader who chooses to read it. It’s no more important than that.

If the story happens to have more than a transient impact (positive or negative) on the occasional reader, well, good for that reader. No doubt that is partially due to your skills as a writer, but by and large it has nothing to do with you. Primarily the way a story strikes a reader is the result of the reader’s cumulative life experiences.

As an aside, I felt wonderful when a woman emailed to say my short story “Old Suits” was the best she’d ever read and that it reminded her of Hemingway. (I didn’t like it much when I finished it, and I almost didn’t publish it.) But her enjoyment of it didn’t change the good, bad, or indifferent opinion of others who did read it. My reaction? “Thank you.” Then I wrote the next story. And the next. And the next.

If you’re a writer and/or if you *want* to be a writer, what’s important is THAT you write. Because just as real plumbers, carpenters, electricians, mechanics and all other professional tradespeople practice their trade, writers write.

An Afterthought

In her comment, Anitha also mentioned that she’d written a new final chapter for the reader who complained about the tragic ending. That’s fine. But I wonder whether she also published that new ending. If she didn’t, I hope she will. Because both of those are her characters’ story.

If she does, she will have two versions of the same story out there: the original and the longer but “lighter” version with the new ending.

As for continuing as a writer and writing more stories, Anitha and us all have only to sit down at the keyboard, take a deep breath, and remember our role. We are the recorder of our characters’ stories.

And really, that's a pretty big responsibility, recording someone else's story without allowing our own thoughts to intervene.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Business Musings: How Writers Fail (Part One)" at <https://kriswrites.com/2022/05/11/business-musings-how-writers-fail-part-one-2/>. (Thanks to Anitha for the reference.)

See "The Moncada Barracks Attack" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/the-moncada-barracks-attack/>. A reminescence for some, history for others.

See "Sixty-Two Percent of NY Freelance Workers..." at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/sixty-two-percent-of-ny-freelance-workers-report-never-being-paid-for-work-performed-says-new-survey/>. Posted mostly so you can see PG's take.

Disclaimer: In this blog, I provide advice on writing fiction. I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. To be crystal clear, WITD is not "the only way" to write, nor will I ever say it is. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among myriad other topics.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [kriswrites.com](#), [The Passive Voice](#)

The Journal: Writer Resources

May 13, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Writer Resources
- * The Big Book Giveaway
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

"You just never know and [you] can't let their reaction hinder or help your writing in any way."
Author Alison Holt (<https://alisonholtbooks.com/>) on readers' reactions to your stories

Writer Resources

This Journal is a valid writer-information resource, meaning it's written by a guy who's practiced what he preaches and vouches that it works. I recommend using the Search box in the sidebar at <https://hestanbrough.com/> to look for specific topics.

I also recommend browsing the Journal Archives, which you can now find in full going all the way back to 2014 at <https://hestanbrough.com/the-daily-journal-archives/>.

On my author website you can also find a ton of other valid resources that can help in various stages of writing, publishing and marketing. Again, I either authored those or have used them myself:

See Downloads for Writers at <https://harveystanbrough.com/downloads/>.

See More Resources for Writers at <https://harveystanbrough.com/writer-resources/>.

Finally, in the Passive Voice today, I ran across “Graphic Tools for Indie Authors – Part 1” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/graphic-tools-for-indie-authors-part-1/>. I’m listing the Passive Voice link so you can see PG’s take.

But note that this is part 1 of a series. So if you find it useful, I suggest clicking through to the OP at <https://forsengfiction.com/graphic-tools-for-indie-authors/> and bookmarking it so you won’t miss any followup posts.

I neither endorse nor specifically recommend any source or resource you might find in the Forseng posts unless it’s already listed in the writer resources on my own website.

The Big Book Giveaway is still ongoing. Read about it at <https://hestanbrough.com/the-journal-big-book-giveaway/> and then email me if you’d like one or more books.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Sitting and Laughing” at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/sitting-and-laughing/>. Another cautionary tale about traditional publishing and literary agents.

See “5 Ways to Use Fiverr to Publish Your Book” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/5-ways-to-use-fiverr-to-publish-your-book/>.

See “The Author’s Guide to Fiverr” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/the-authors-guide-to-fiverr/>. I take this as a cautionary tale.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [Fiverr](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [Writer Resources](#)

The Journal: A Few Changes to the Journal

May 15, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * A Few Changes to the Journal
- * Of Interest

A Few Changes to the Journal

Mostly I'm posting this to get the "Of Interest" items out to you.(grin)

A reader accidentally unsubscribed yesterday and asked me to add him back to the list. I tried to add the subscriber again, but MailChimp wouldn't allow it. Since he unsubscribed, he has to resubscribe himself. (I'm not sure why they made me click a box that said I had his permission to add him if they weren't going to believe me.)

So I was going to email him to tell him he had to resubscribe himself, but when I started to include the link to make it easier for him, I realized there wasn't a prominent subscription button on the Journal website. Sigh.

I finally found the subscription URL at MailChimp and added a new menu item (Subscribe) first. But that started the ball rolling and I decided to trim down the Journal a little. The whole thing is now the width of the header image (1100 pixels). The sidebar is a little narrower too, and I also changed the content of the sidebar.

First, I removed the glaring Donate button and put it at the bottom of the Patronage page, then relabeled that menu tab slightly.

The sidebar still contains the search bar. You can also search via the small spy-glass icon in the upper right corner of the site. But now the sidebar also contains a list of recent posts, then recent comments, and finally the Journal Archives.

(You can also still find the free, downloadable and searchable PDF copies of the Journal Archives by clicking the Journal Archives tab in the menu.)

The Word for Writers tab is new on the menu. It links to a series of instructional blog posts on how best to use the tools and tricks of Microsoft Word. Any other changes to the site are minimal, but [feel free to look around](#).

By the way, if you like to measure things on the screen either for design purposes or just out of curiosity, there's an excellent on-screen pixel ruler available at <https://www.pixelruler.de/e/index.htm>. It only costs 4.95 €, or about \$5.16, and it's actually accurate. Just sayin'.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Too Much In One Day” at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/too-much-in-one-day/>. Just in case it gives you some ideas.

See “How to Write a Fight Scene With Carla Hoch” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/05/how-to-write-a-fight-scene-with-carla-hoch.html>. At Amazon I was able to find only a few novels by Ms. Hoch. Knowing how to fight and knowing how to write a fight scene in a novel are two different things. Just sayin’. I recommend a pinch of salt with this one.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [The Journal](#)

The Journal: Be Careful How You Present Yourself

May 17, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Affinity Product Sale
- * Topic: Be Careful How You Present Yourself
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“Engineers have developed a glucose power source that could fuel miniature implants and sensors.” Jennifer Chu, MIT News Online (see “Of Interest”) via 1440 Daily Digest

“I adore revisiting the characters I came to love in the first book. Sometimes, it’s like they’ve become my friends, welcoming me back to their worlds with open arms. At times, I can’t believe they aren’t real.” Melodie Campbell in “The Scoop on Writing Series” (see “Of Interest”)

I thought this was a wonderful sentiment. Then in the next paragraph, she wrote

“You’ve heard writers declare that characters will sometimes take over a book and tell their own story. True, some characters are the bane of my existence, ungrateful whiny creatures who permeate my brain and insist that I tell their stories rather than move on to new projects.”
Melodie Campbell

Seriously? The bane of your existence?

If you're a writer, your characters are the CORE of your existence, at least when you're acting in your persona as a writer.

Affinity Product Sale

For a limited time, Serif is having a 50% off sale on all their Affinity products: Publisher, Photo, and Designer. These programs are competitive with Adobe products but are newer, more intuitive and more user-friendly.

Best of all, whereas you can only rent or subscribe to Adobe products, you will own your Affinity product and at only a fraction of the price even before taking 50% off. At the moment, for less than \$85, you can get all three of these interactive products.

They also offer a wide range of creative add-on products (think “brush strokes” for Adobe), also at 50% off.

I strongly encourage you to take advantage of this sale. For details, see <https://affinity.serif.com/en-us/>.

Topic: Be Careful How You Present Yourself

Write however you want, but I advise you not to advertise it. For just one example, based on the third quote of the day (above), I would never read any of Melodie Campbell's novels.

Why? Primarily because of her attitude toward her characters. Talk about biting the hand that feeds you. Wow.

Fiction should be a glimpse at natural, authentic characters going about their lives, experiencing and reacting to various situations that are also authentic, at least in their world.

There is no room in good fiction for author intrusion or contrivance. The more control the author exercises over the characters, the farther the story gets from authenticity.

That's why I've always try to hammer home that you're writing the story that your characters, not you, are living. Hey, live and let live. Let go of control and the responsibility that comes with it and simply record the story your characters are so graciously giving you.

You might say, as many have, “But they're my characters so it's my story.”

Well, okay, but no. Your story is the life you're living, including sitting at a keyboard writing your characters' stories. But you're writing them, not living them. The characters are living them.

Some would say the characters live only in the author's mind, and that might well be true. I personally believe the characters live in a whole different dimension. I believe when one of them tugs on my sleeve and asks me to write his story, he's granting me the ability to see into that dimension where he exists.

But both of those are beliefs. Neither are facts. And although we can all speak to what we believe, neither I nor anyone I know can speak with authority to any author's ability to perceive the difference between his or her own mind and another dimension. Neither can we speak to the actual, factual existence or non-existence of other dimensions or to any author's ability to perceive those dimensions.

So if you want to believe your characters live and love and act out their stories in your mind, that's fine. And if you want to believe they live their stories in another dimension (or in the barrel of your pen or in your keyboard or somewhere else), that's fine too.

But all of that's beside the point. The point is, wherever the characters exist, they and their stories exist with each other. The characters and their stories are dependent on each other, and they are separate of the author and his or her own story. Without the characters to live the story that the authors sees as having sprung from their imagination, there would be no story.

So we're back to Square One. My advice remains to let the characters live their story, unimpeded and without author intrusion. Instead of controlling and manipulating them and the situations they're in, release that responsibility and just record what happens and what they say and do. Easy peasy. Which leads me to My Two Pet Peeves as a Reader. I'll talk about those tomorrow.

See you then.

Of Interest

See "Ultrathin fuel cell uses the body's own sugar to generate electricity" at <https://news.mit.edu/2022/glucose-fuel-cell-electricity-0512>.

See "Fear Thesaurus Entry: Change" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/fear-thesaurus-entry-change/>. Useful for characters and useful for life.

See "... The Scoop on Writing Series Books" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/wanna-be-a-paperback-writer-the-scoop-on-writing-series-books/>. I recommend you skip down to the section titled "But Sometimes You Can't."

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [The Passive Voice](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: Reader Pet Peeves

May 18, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * An Important and Informative Post
- * Topic: Reader Pet Peeves: Preconceived or Contrived Stories
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“No surprise for the writer, no surprise for the reader. Like a piece of ice on a hot stove the poem must ride on its own melting.” Robert Frost

“Education is the ability to listen to almost anything without losing your temper or your self-confidence.” Robert Frost

The first item in “Of Interest” links to a very important and informative post.

If you currently use video (Zoom, etc.) or audio (podcasts, interviews, teaching, etc.) or if you think doing so might be a good idea for you as a writer, please don't miss John Gilstrap's “The Virtual You Redux.” Really good stuff.

Topic: Reader Pet Peeves: Preconceived or Contrived Stories

Really this is a continuation of [the topic in yesterday's post](#). That post was getting long so I decided to continue in a separate but related topic today.

Also, today's post was originally titled “My Two Biggest Pet Peeves as a Reader,” but I went all Vesuvius (grin) and this one ran long too.

So I'll talk about my first pet peeve today and the second one tomorrow. Also, I changed the overall title just in case a third or fourth occurs to me.

Preconceived or Contrived Stories are my number one pet peeve.

No surprise there, I'm sure.

Let me just say up front, I bear no ill-will and intend no disrespect toward those authors who still want or need the safety net of character sketches and outlines and “signposts” and all the rest. Hey, you do you. We're all at different places on this journey. Every writer is different. Still, no matter how you write, it's better to keep your process to yourself.

True story — Back in early 1971 a guy in El Paso had a portable hamburger stand. One of his burgers was piled high with jalapeños. He called it The Afterburner. I wouldn't buy it because I knew I'd have to stay close to the toilet for a day or two afterward. Forewarned is forearmed. And hey, I don't buy anything that gives me fair warning of impending trouble, like the potential result of eating a burger called The Afterburner.

I don't buy anything that gives me fair warning of impending boredom. Like what happens when I read a book that's written from an outline and is carefully plotted and contrived. The problem is, when the writer "figures out" (conscious, critical mind) what's coming next in the story, so can the reader. And without much effort.

So this and The Afterburner really are the same thing to me. If I get fair warning, I'm not gonna wander into a morass. I have a distinct aversion to amberries. You know, 'cause they grow on ambushes. Hence my advice yesterday to be careful how you present yourself and your process. And yes, that's true no matter how you write.

A lot of readers, if they find out it took me only a few weeks or a month to write a novel, won't risk buying my book — a lot of them won't accept a *free* book — because they still believe quality storytelling requires months or even years of intensive, mind-wrenching, torturous labor.

As some of you have learned, nothing could be farther from the truth.

Yet when those same readers buy a novel that was carefully plotted or otherwise contrived, for some reason they're bored. Most of them don't realize it's because they know at every turn what's coming next.

Eventually they find the James Lee Burkes and Stephen Kings and Lee Childs and Jack Higgins of the world and enjoy their stories. And they never question whether the story was written from an outline.

So in my own reading, to keep things simple, I won't buy or try to read a novel if I know in advance it started life as a carefully plotted outline or was otherwise contrived. Because I don't *want* to know what's coming next, and I don't want to know in advance how a story situation will turn out. When I realize I know that, I close the book. I'm done.

If I don't know how an author writes, but the genre, cover and sales copy entice me, I might take a chance and buy the book. But the same filter applies: the moment I recognize the influence of the author's critical mind, I'll delete the ebook from my device or toss the paperback into the Donate pile and read something else.

Because I agree with Robert Frost: "No surprise for the writer, no surprise for the reader. Like a piece of ice on a hot stove the poem [or story] must ride on its own melting."

How succinct and beautifully expressed is that?

Or as Bradbury put it, when writing you should “Jump off the cliff and build your wings on the way down.” In other words, have faith in yourself and what you’ve learned.

Bradbury also spoke to the secondary nature of plot: “Plot is no more than footprints left in the snow after your characters have run by ... the chart that remains when an action is through.”

Of course, if the writer chooses to follow Frost and Bradbury and countless others and NOT preconceive and manipulate the characters, situations and story, the reader can (and will) STILL try to guess what happens next. He just won’t be right most of the time. Which, really, makes for a much better story, meaning one that is more difficult to walk away from until it’s over.

I suspect we can all agree that the best twist or turn or outcome in any story situation is one that surprises the reader even as he slaps his forehead and says, “Of course.”

The simple truth is, that sort of twist, turn or outcome doesn’t come from the conscious, critical mind. That sort of twist, turn or outcome is the kind that only occurs naturally as the characters live the story — if you’ll only trust them.

For those of you who write into the dark — When you get that scary/exciting sense that you have absolutely no idea where the story’s going and that it might well be going off the rails, hold on, trust your characters, and write the next sentence and the next and the next. The characters are living the story, and you’re only observing. Trust them and they will lead you through.

Tomorrow I’ll discuss the second big pet peeve that aggravates me as a reader: a thin or shallow story. Ugh.

Talk with you again then.

Of Interest

See “The Virtual You Redux” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/05/the-virtual-you-redux.html>.

See “Music Streaming and The EU Digital Single Market Copyright Directive” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/144568-2/>. Also see PG’s take.

See “Kristine Kathryn Rusch Starter Kit” at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/kristine-kathryn-rusch-starter-kit/>. For any fans, the latest Kickstarter.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [John Gilstrap](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [Kristine Kathryn Rusch](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [the writing life](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: Reader Pet Peeves: Thin Stories

May 19, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Also from Kris Rusch
- * Topic: Reader Pet Peeves: Thin Stories
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“The hardest thing ... are the writers whose work just stops. Not because Dean or I got tired of reading them or the writer veered into territory we weren't interested in. But because something got in the way of the writing.” Kristine Kathryn Rusch (see “Of Interest”)

“[Writers] who have long careers constantly work on their craft. They might be afraid — hell, they might be terrified — but they step beyond it.” Kristine Kathryn Rusch

“Fear chews at you, though, and some artists don't even realize they're experiencing it until it overwhelms them. ... Then they quit or stop trying or figure they've had a good career, so why mess with it. Why? Because their voices are unique, and those voices shouldn't be silenced because of fear.” Kristine Kathryn Rusch

Also from Kris Rusch —

“I wrote a long series in 2021 on fear. [Here's where to start.](#)”

I remember reading that series of posts. I recommend it.

But the combined second and third post in today's “Of Interest” were even better and more directed at writing than at the writing business.

The pair of them almost made me want to change the topic today and write about fear myself. But I'll stay on track with reader pet peeves and save writing about unreasoning fears for another time.

In the meantime, if something is stopping *you* from writing or from writing the way you want to, be sure to read Kris' posts in “Of Interest” today.

Topic: Reader Pet Peeves: Thin Stories

Note: this topic includes several links to other posts I've written. I recommend taking your time and clicking through to read those posts as well.

In yesterday's post (at <https://hestanbrough.com/the-journal-reader-pet-peeves/> in case you missed it), I mentioned that lot of readers, if they find out it took me only a couple of weeks or a month to write a novel, won't risk buying my book.

That's precisely why I don't talk about my writing process with readers. It's also why, if any ask how many drafts I write, I tell them I always do three. Of course, I don't tell them I finish the second draft in the few minutes it takes to conduct an automated spell check and that the third draft takes all of a half-hour or so as I apply my first-reader's corrections. Well, the ones I agree with.

But get this — Many readers (and for that fact, many writers) won't even accept a FREE book because they're certain, sight unseen, the story can't possibly be any good. They still believe the truly moronic notion that writing a quality novel requires months or even years of intensive, mind-wrenching, torturous labor. The same garbage writing myths we all heard over the years.

In other words, even at the chance of finding a potential new favorite author, they won't invest the few minutes it takes to read the opening to see whether the writing and the story appeals to them.

That's some fine reasoning. It ranks right up there with the kid who absolutely knows he doesn't like spinach even though he's never tried it and never will.

At this point, some would yell, "Hey, a person knows what s/he likes."

I couldn't agree more. Once s/he's tried it, a person *does* "know" what s/he likes. But until then, s/he can only believe what s/he likes or dislikes.

And that's fine. You can believe anything you like, and as of this writing, you can still pretty much say anything you like in most circles. But if working with other writers has proven anything to me, it's clearly illustrated that believing and knowing are two vastly different things.

Anyway, just in case readers occasionally DO choose to give you the benefit of the doubt and devote even a few minutes of their time to check out your work, don't risk losing him or her.

Write a clean opening, one that achieves two goals: it *intrigues* the reader and it *grounds* the reader, pulling him or her into the story.

In other words, it isn't what readers describe as "thin" or "shallow."

I personally don't read or finish stories that are thin or shallow. I've started dozens of novels that I gave up on and deleted or donated after reading the first chapter or the first several pages.

Every time I gave up because the writing was thin. The writer didn't pull me into the story. I wasn't able to see, hear, smell, taste or feel the setting. I couldn't see the POV character or sense his or her mood.

Often the story would open with “action” (sound familiar?) but no lead-up at all. Or often it would open with two or more talking heads against a blank background: the characters apparently had no bodies or clothing and were sitting on undefined seats at an undefined table in an undefined room, saying things to each other. Like I’m supposed to care.

For the record, I’ve often taught other writers to “open with action” or to “open with dialogue.” I taught the latter because in written fiction (i.e., not in film) *dialogue equals action*. Meaning dialogue, like physical action, entices the reader. It makes him lean into the story.

But “open with dialogue” (like “open with action”) doesn’t mean the dialogue or action has to take place against a vague or empty background or be performed by vague or nondescript characters.

Spend a few sentences, either before or after the first line of dialogue or action, setting the scene. If nothing else, use a trick another writer taught me:

Write the dialogue or the action to get started on the scene. But then stop and ask yourself, “Okay, what happened in the minute leading up to this?” Then write that before (or mixed-in with) the dialogue or action. Almost certainly it will include the character(s) arriving in the setting, and the reader seeing, smelling, hearing, tasting, etc. the scene.

Now, a brief digression — Some writers who don’t know any better believe less is more, that it’s better to let the reader fill in even the big details. Those writers are purposely vague so the reader can invent what s/he sees (hears, smells, tastes, feels?) as s/he reads.

Those writers would write that a character ran into a barn. They would not describe the shape, colors, smells, tastes (dust on the tongue?), sounds, or feel of the barn. For that matter, they probably wouldn’t describe the character or what the character was wearing either. These writers would leave all of that to the reader’s imagination.

And I believe very soon most readers would close the book and either delete it (ebook) or donate it (paper).

Because the writer’s job is to directly engage the reader and place him or her into a story filled with the characters, sights, sounds, flavors, smells, etc. the writer has in his or her mind. The writer’s job is to make the reader see, hear, smell, etc. what the writer, through the POV character, is seeing, hearing, smelling, etc.

The reader doesn’t have to make-up these things as s/he goes about everyday life. And if the reader’s everyday life is more interesting to him or her than your novel, um, you lose. For more on this, see [“Readers Like to Fill-in the Blanks \(Uh, No\)”](#).

Really, this entire skill of not writing “thin” boils down to writing openings.

If you can write a good opening to start Chapter 1 and a good opening to start each succeeding chapter and/or major scene, you’ll automatically apply the right amount of scene description

throughout your novel outside of openings. For a lot more on this, please [learn to slow down and take your time](#).

As I mentioned earlier, if the opening of a novel doesn't pull me in, I'm gone. I stop reading and move on to a story by another author or find something better to do. I intend no disrespect to those authors. They just need to learn the basic skill of writing a good opening.

I show fellow authors the respect of requiring from them the same thing I require of other professionals: Quality. Proof that they know their craft. I can't be a devoted reader if I'm not impressed with their skill.

Two quick tips for writing openings —

1. Every word is filtered through the POV character's physical and emotional senses. Every word. Feel free to ask if you can't quite wrap your mind around this.
2. Use all five of the POV character's physical senses, if possible — but NEVER use only the sense of sight — and at least hint at the POV character's current emotional sense (dread, joy, disgust, etc.) in every major scene. This might be as small as “he smiled” or “she scowled.”

To learn a great deal more on how to write openings, click <https://hestanbrough.com/?s=opening>. You'll find several posts there.

And for more on how to use all five of the POV character's physical senses when describing the setting, click <https://hestanbrough.com/?s=physical+senses>.

Okay, now I'll stop blathering for awhile. (grin)

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Forensic Hypnosis for Memory Enhancement” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/05/forensic-hypnosis-for-memory-enhancement.html>.

First, if you missed it, you can read “Business Musings: How Writers Fail (Part One)” at <https://kriswrites.com/2022/05/11/business-musings-how-writers-fail-part-one-2/>.

Then see “Business Musings: How Writers Fail (Part 2): Fear (Established Writer Edition)” at <https://kriswrites.com/2022/05/18/business-musings-how-writers-fail-part-2-fear-established-writer-edition/>.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [KillZone Blog](#), [kriswrites.com](#), [the writing life](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: I Enjoy a Good Chunk of Irony

May 20, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Irony of the Day
- * I'm on Best Deals
- * Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery"
- * Alternatives to Google Earth?
- *
- *
- *
- * Of Interest

I do so enjoy a good chunk of irony, especially when it has to do with the Constitution or its amendments, and especially (because I'm a writer) the first amendment. So here's the

Irony of the Day

"We need to have a grownup conversation about how to deal with threats to our national security and that's not what happened here. I'm not going to be silenced." Nina Jankowicz, [former director of Homeland Security's Disinformation Governance Board](#) after the Board was "paused indefinitely" and she resigned amid citizens' "concerns about impinging on free speech."

All I can say is good for her, not wanting to be silenced. And neither do we.

I'm on Best Deals Somehow

I must be living right or something. Yesterday around 9 a.m. my wife emailed me. Her message was short: "Look what I ran across." That was followed by a smiley-face icon and a link.

When I clicked the link, I started grinning too. If you want to see why, take a look at <https://www.bestdeals.today/harvey-stanbrough>.

If any of you are responsible for this, thank you.

If you notice a novel titled *Yours Affectionately*, Jane Austin, that was writtem by Sally Smith O'Rourke, an excellent writer. I copyedited that book for her.

Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery"

From the [1440 Daily Digest](#) “Etcetera” section, you can “listen to [an eerie Shirley Jackson recitation](#) of her famous short story, ‘The Lottery’.” There’s also an excellent article about Jackson at the link.

Alternatives to Google Earth?

I’m currently exploring some alternatives to Google Earth (and GE Pro). [Zoom Earth](#) stacks up fairly well, and [Marble](#) does all right too. Plus, Marble includes maps of Luna which interests me since I have two colonies there in Arzachel Crater (grin).

If you check out these or any other alternatives, I’d appreciate you letting me know what you think.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “The ‘twin paradox’ shows us what it really means for time to be relative” at <https://www.space.com/time-is-relative-twin-paradox>. A wonderful thought experiment.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Shirley Jackson](#), [Space.com](#)

The Journal: Reviews and Critiques

May 21, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Topic: Reviews and Critiques
- * Speaking of Which
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“As we all know, a reader’s opinion of a book is enormously subjective. The way [readers] approach a story can vary at different points in their lives, or even their day. They read things into it that you might never have intended—and they’re all going to have vastly different opinions about what worked and what didn’t.” [Joe Moore](#), whom I believe is a founding member of The KillZone blog, on why he recommends not reading reviews.

“If the desire to write is not accompanied by actual writing, then the desire is not to write.” Hugh Prather

“Organizations for writers palliate the writer’s loneliness but I doubt if they improve his writing.” Ernest Hemingway

“No passion in the world is equal to the passion to alter someone else’s draft.” H.G. Wells

Topic: Reviews and Critiques

As Joe Moore expressed in the quote above, reading reviews is a bad idea. I’ve never seen this thought expressed better.

Also, the reason he stated so succinctly above for not reading reviews is exactly the same reason I recommend writers should not invite critique of their fiction.

Critique partners or critique group members, in their capacity as critiquers and in the guise of “helping” each other, are just readers by another name. The only difference is that the critiquer (who is usually also a writer) is slightly more likely than the everyday reader to fall prey to the overwhelming urge to alter your work.

Hence, both lay readers and critiquers

1. “... read things into [your work] that you might never have intended,” and
2. “have vastly different opinions about what worked and what didn’t.”

In summary, readers (and critics) are opinionated folks who like what they like, don’t like what they don’t like, and seldom agree on anything. And every one of them believes s/he knows best what will improve your manuscript.

To me, this is as cut and dried as it seems, and at this point I’d like to write ’nuff said, class dismissed.

But there’s an even bigger downside to giving credence to others’ opinions. Accepting either negative or positive opinions will almost certainly affect the writer’s future production. Of course, everyone knows reading or receiving enough negative opinions might negatively affect your self-confidence.

But reading or receiving *positive* opinions can cause the writer to fall prey to the pursuit of perfection. How can you possibly attain in your next novel the same level of excellence the readers or critics say you achieved in your previous novel?

Trust me, it’s better by far to stay within yourself. Write your characters’ stories as they’re delivered to you and ignore any opinionated input, good or bad.

There's a reason the best writing is done in solitude.

Speaking of Which

When you read Hemingway's 1954 Nobel Prize acceptance speech (see "Of Interest") be prepared for some over-the-top, purely fictional drama.

I really hope Hemingway enjoyed writing. That's how I like to think of him. I really hope he didn't see writing as a melodramatic striving for perfection. Or as he put it, "Writing, at its best, is a lonely life" in which the writer "tries again for something that is beyond attainment."

First, solitude and loneliness are not synonymous. I enjoy being alone to do my work, but I'm not lonely in the slightest.

Second and more important, seriously? "[T]ries again for something that is beyond attainment"?

Whatever. That all sounds way too important, self-righteous and haughty for me. Even a Hemingway novel never achieved more with a reader than serving as a few hours' entertainment.

Don't fall prey to the silly notion that being a writer is some sort of grand "calling." Like pretty much anything else, writing is something you can learn to do quite well if you have a passion for it. If you don't, well, then you'll do something else well.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "How To Learn Anything, Anywhere – Elon Musk" (7-minute video) at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r34KwZzUmV8>. Narrated by someone other than Musk himself.

See "TKZ's Words of Wisdom" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/05/tkzs-words-of-wisdom.html>. Points for discussion should you wish to engage.

See "Work Alone: Ernest Hemingway's 1954 Nobel Acceptance Speech" at <https://www.themarginalian.org/2013/03/21/ernest-hemingway-1954-nobel-speech/>. Be ready for some purely fictional drama.

See "Universal Book Link User Guide" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/universal-book-link-user-guide/>.

See "World's only nonuplets celebrate their first birthday" at <https://people.com/human-interest/worlds-only-nonuplets-celebrate-first-birthday/>. That's NINE children. All at one time.

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say it is. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among myriad other topics.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Critiques](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [Reviews](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [the writing life](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: Another Brief Note on Critiques

May 22, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Topic: Another Brief Note on Critiques
- * And Then There's This
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“Here's a revelation for some people: the age of the audience is not a genre.” R.S. Mellette

“PG has never read a book because he wants to impress anyone either positively or negatively and doesn't think he would enjoy associating with someone who does.” The Passive Guy

Topic: Another Brief Note on Critiques

K.C.'s comment on yesterday's post drew my attention, especially when I received a similar response to a comment I posted over on TKZ from another writer.

K.C. wrote, “I have had friends with specialized knowledge (i.e. sailboats and sailing) critique the specific parts of a book for technical errors or better description. But other than that and copy edit, nobody gets into my work before it's published.”

And over on TKZ, Steve Hooley wrote, “I find beta readers' reviews very helpful, since I write teen fiction and it's been many moons since I've been around teens.”

There's nothing at all wrong with either of those situations. I can see how a writer seeking technical advice on anything — sailboats, weaponry, idioms used currently by teens, etc. — improves the work. No problem.

But neither K.C. nor Steve are undermining their own confidence as writers. Inviting input on technical details, is not the same thing as inviting critique of the writing or storytelling itself.

My first readers catch misspellings, wrong-word usages (e.g., solder for soldier), technical errors and inconsistencies. But if any of them venture to advise me on the writing itself, I ignore that advice.

And as Steve wrote a little farther along in a response to another comment, “There are as many expectations of the book as there are readers. We’re all different, and we all want different things.”

I agree. And that’s exactly what I said in my earlier comment on his post, albeit in different words. But Steve is right. Readers are all different and they all want different things. If only we writers were somehow able to apply such an austere, striking truth to the weight we give reviews and critiques.

Just sayin’.

And Then There’s This

Discussions about the value of critiques always remind me of the old saw about a writer’s inability to judge his or her own work: “A writer is the worst judge of his/her own work,” which ostensibly is why the writer needs critique partners or critique groups, etc.

Somehow, most writers fail somehow to understand that one opinion (the writer’s own or anyone else’s) is only one opinion and the very next person’s opinion probably will be different.

Most writers cling to “A writer is the worst judge of his or her own work” anytime they believe their work is Good. The mental rationale? *My story can’t possibly be any good, and writers are the worst judges of their own work, so my belief that it IS good is actually proof that it isn’t.*

Ta da! How’s that for some mental gymnastics? But wait. It gets worse.

If the writer believes his or her work is BAD, the wisdom of the saying vanishes as if the saying never existed and the writer assumes his or her opinion is valid and correct. And the mental rationale? The same: *My story can’t possibly be any good, and my belief that it’s bad is all the proof I need.*

And into the drawer the manuscript goes, never to see the light of day or publication.

Mind boggling.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “What Writers Can Learn From It’s a Wonderful Life” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/05/what-writers-can-learn-from-its-a-wonderful-life.html>.

See “A Bookshelf for All Ages” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/a-bookshelf-for-all-ages/>.

See “The Rise of Insta-Artists and Insta-Poets” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/the-rise-of-insta-artists-and-insta-poets/>. I’m far too old to comment without grumbling.

Disclaimer: In this blog, I provide advice on writing fiction. I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. To be crystal clear, WITD is not “the only way” to write, nor will I ever say it is. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among myriad other topics.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Kill](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [the writing life](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: A Lengthy Preface and a Reiteration

May 24, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * A Lengthy Preface and a Reiteration
- * Of Interest

A Lengthy Preface and a Reiteration

Alicia Butcher Ehrhardt is a writer who suffers from a rare disease, an affliction that precludes her from being able to access her creative subconscious or to write from it. (Alicia, my apologies, but I can’t remember the specific name of the disease.)

In a [comment](#) on “Another Brief Note on Critiques,” Alicia mentioned a few points to which I will respond here.

But first a pair of disclaimers —

1. If you are unable to either access your creative subconscious or, having accessed it, if you are unable to write what you were given, my comments below are not directed at you.
2. My comments also are not directed at those few who (whether or not they admit it) actually relish the labor of selecting exactly the right words and juxtaposing them with other exactly right words in exactly the right sentence structures, etc.

Actually, if you spend several hours every day in the chair and arise feeling happy and fulfilled at the end of the day with only a few hundred new words added to the story, this might be you. And that’s fine. You probably have as little free choice as those I mentioned in the first disclaimer.

My comments are intended for those who have the ability to choose whether to write into the dark or stick to the safety nets of character sketches, outlines, revisions, rewrites, invited critiques and other conscious, critical mind activities.

Alicia, thanks for the points you made in your comment. I'll quote you directly and then respond here so others might benefit.

“It takes a lot to satisfy me while I'm working on a scene (a version of your re-reading and fixing before writing on), and if it's not exactly right, I don't get the internal cue to move on. | But when I do, I rarely have to go back — because the scene describes what actually happened. I just had to get the words right.”

Okay, please notice, “I just had to get the words right.” For Alicia and others like her, the process she describes is perfectly valid and even necessary. She isn't rewriting what happened in the scene but rather (I assume) is consciously choosing which words are used and their juxtaposition. Because she has to.

For myself, and for those who have a choice and seek my advice, I will never personally endorse intentionally fashioning a character or scene or story. But again, I don't have to. I'm fortunate in that I have the ability to choose. The rest of this, really, is reiteration.

Advance Planning — I don't do it and I don't recommend it.

I never write a character sketch, for example, and I don't know my characters in advance unless they are recurring from a previous story. In that case I might know them vaguely, the way you might recognize someone you went to high school with or someone you met at a party a year earlier.

Otherwise, as I do with any other humans I encounter, I know only the most superficial things about my characters when I first meet them: gender, usually, and general physical appearance. Beyond that, I get to know them as I spend more time with them in the story. Again, just like in real life with any other humans I encounter.

I also don't outline, write story boards or timelines, or any of that. I'm not a controlling overlord. I'm a passive recorder of my characters' story. As I write, I simply trust that my characters are who and what they say they are, and that the story they're living will unfold scene by scene as they allow me to witness it.

So I will never struggle to try to “make” a scene or story “exactly right” because deciding anything about my characters' story is not my place. As an aside, neither do I decide what's right for my neighbors or friends or adult relatives or strangers or anyone else.

Plus, even if you're one of those writers who feel you're within your rights to choose what your characters say and do and how their story unfolds, what is “exactly right” for you will be wrong for someone else. Just sayin'. Your job is to put the story on the page. Interpreting and judging it is the reader's job.

Besides, whether or not any writer realizes or understands it, no stories or novels are important enough to fret and labor over. Whether the writer labors for months or years to get every word of a novel “exactly right” or simply has fun recording his characters’ entire story in a few short weeks, the finished novel is still nothing more than a few hours’ entertainment for whomever happens to pick it up.

I just happen to believe more readers will enjoy an authentic, organic story than one in which I consciously “created” and manipulated every character, every action, and every bit of dialogue.

Finally, re the old saw that writers are the worst judges of their own work, Alicia also wrote, “[W]riters should be the ONLY judge[s] of their own work. After the appropriate apprenticeship to learn how to do things, and subject to Continuing (self-) Education credits.”

Juicy stuff. And I disagree.

To address the last part first, I’m not sure what an “appropriate” apprenticeship might be, though I do endorse continued research and learning about what works and what doesn’t.

In other words, what affects you strongly as a reader that you can use as a writer in your own works to affect other readers? But again, I recommend you learn with the conscious mind, then simply trust that what you learned will come through as you write with the creative subconscious. If you trust yourself, it will work. If you can’t trust yourself, well then you can review your notes and consciously construct some version of your characters’ story.

Back to the notion of whether writers are the worst or only judges of their own work, no matter how you choose or are forced to write, **Your Opinion of Your Own Work Is Still Only One Opinion.**

You certainly have the right to speak for yourself whether a particular work (even your own) is wonderful, terrible, or somewhere in between, but you can’t speak for anyone else. So your opinion matters only until you decide whether or not to publish the work in question.

If you feel a work is terrible so you never publish it but shove it into a desk drawer instead, then your opinion is the only one that will ever matter.

But if you publish the work regardless of your personal opinion of its worth, then others will judge it and form their own opinion. And they have the same choices you had: the work is wonderful, terrible, or somewhere in between. You might be surprised at how many disagree with your original assessment, especially if you thought it was terrible.

And let me tell you, when you trust your characters enough to publish what they gave you even though you thought it was terrible, you win. Not only have you overcome a major unreasoning fear, but nothing beats the feeling of a reader emailing you out of the blue to say the story you thought was terrible is the best she’s ever read and that it reminds her of Hemingway’s work.

So yep, I'll stick comfortably with the fact that I'm the worst judge of my own work. After all, that only means my opinion of my work is only one opinion and it's no more or less valid than anyone else's.

Really, no opinion is more or less valid than anyone else's. Even the opinions included in this Journal.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Tomorrow It Starts" at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/tomorrow-it-starts/>. Hopefully after the Expo he'll resume instruction for the Licensing class.

See "Used Shoes, Tchotchkes, and Books ~ Adventures at a Flea Market" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/05/used-shoes-tchotchkes-and-books-adventures-at-a-flea-market.html>. No clue whether this is good, but the title was alluring so I included it.

See "It's Too Late to Protect Your Genetic Privacy..." at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/its-too-late-to-protect-your-genetic-privacy-the-math-explaining-why/>. Includes an interesting graphic.

See "The Reading Brain in the Digital Age..." at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/the-reading-brain-in-the-digital-age-the-science-of-paper-versus-screens-3/>. But be sure to see PG's take as well.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [Reiteration](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [Topic](#), [Writing Into the Dark](#)

The Journal: How to Indicate Unspoken Thoughts

May 25, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Topic: How to Indicate Unspoken Thoughts
- * Of Interest

Topic: How to Indicate Unspoken Thoughts

There are generally two major ways to indicate the direct, unspoken thoughts (or internal monologue) of the POV character. Either is acceptable, depending on whom you ask and your personal preference as a writer:

1. Put the POV character's direct unspoken thoughts in italics to visually differentiate them from narration. (I used to recommend doing this.)
2. Leave the direct thoughts in regular font like the narration. (I now recommend doing this.)

Consistency Is Key — whichever way you choose to indicate unspoken thought. Do it the same way, italics or no italics, throughout the story or novel or series.

In [her post in today's Kill Zone blog](#), Terry Odell explains her take on this topic. But she commits a major error in examples from her own work.

So rather than just linking to her post in "Of Interest," I thought I would explain where her reasoning goes south. Because as it stands, she's inadvertently passing along bad information.

I agree with her first point:

"1. Don't use speaker attributions/tags to tell the reader someone's thinking. | If you've put the reader in the [POV] character's head, it should be obvious [the character is] thinking. Per Browne & King, removing 'he thought' makes [the character's thoughts] 'unobtrusive to the point of transparency.'"

As I wrote above, I agree. I recommend never using dialogue tags (s/he or Character Name thought) to mark unspoken dialogue. It shouldn't be necessary. If the reader is reading unspoken thoughts, those thoughts have to be from the POV character, so no need to identify him or her.

On her second point, titled "Beware Italics," she misses the point. This excerpt from her post shows the first three paragraphs of three versions of an example from her book [Falcon's Prey](#). From Terry Odell ([see this post on the Journal website](#) for the text indentations):

Fish is the POV character in this scene. First, a 'clunky' version.

"You two are free to get back to whatever you were doing," Dalton said. "We'll call if anything changes. Let's move our seventeen hundred sitrep to eighteen hundred."

Get back to what they were doing? What did that mean? Dalton couldn't think Fish was getting things on with Lexi, could he?

He told himself to chill. He was reading his own thoughts into a casual remark.

Now, the streamlined version, the way it appears in the book. Thoughts should be obvious to the reader.

“You two are free to get back to whatever you were doing,” Dalton said. “We’ll call if anything changes. Let’s move our seventeen hundred sitrep to eighteen hundred.”

Get back to what they were doing? What did that mean? Dalton couldn’t think Fish was getting things on with Lexi, could he?

Chill. You’re reading your own thoughts into a casual remark.

What would the second, cleaner passage look like if all the thoughts were in italics?

“You two are free to get back to whatever you were doing,” Dalton said. “We’ll call if anything changes. Let’s move our seventeen hundred sitrep to eighteen hundred.”

Get back to what they were doing? What did that mean? Dalton couldn’t think Fish was getting things on with Lexi, could he?

Chill. You’re reading your own thoughts into a casual remark.

My point? Whether you use italics to indicate unspoken thought or leave it in regular font face, direct unspoken thought is always written in first person and present tense. Humans don’t think in third person.

Indirect Thoughts vs. Direct Thoughts

Ms. Odell was correct to leave

Get back to what they were doing? What did that mean? Dalton couldn’t think Fish was getting things on with Lexi, could he?’

in regular font face because it’s indirect thought, meaning it’s presented to the reader via the narrator. It is not the POV character’s direct unspoken thought.

If it were direct unspoken thought, it would read as follows and be italicized (since italics is Ms. Odell’s preference for indicating unspoken thought):

Get back to what we were doing? What does that mean? He can’t think I’m getting things on with Lexi, can he?

I mentioned earlier that I used to recommend italics to indicate unspoken thought. It really is a judgement call, but again, be consistent within a given work (e.g., don’t use italics in one chapter and no italics in the next).

A Few Notes

1. Never try to indicate a non-POV character’s unspoken thoughts. Unless the POV character is omnipotent, s/he can’t “hear” or “see” what’s in the mind of another character.

2. Anything the POV character is reading silently is also unspoken thought. So the note by the coffee pot from a loved one, the ransom note from the kidnappers, and the startling newspaper headline are all unspoken thought if the POV character reads them silently.

3. As Ms. Odell mentions in her post, lengthy passages of italics will tire the reader's eyes. This is the main reason I stopped using italics to indicate unspoken thought in my own work. But there are ways around italicizing "too much," including alternating indirect thoughts presented by the narrator with the POV character's direct thoughts as Odell inadvertently did in her example above.

4. To reiterate the biggie — All direct unspoken thoughts — so any thoughts that come directly from the POV character to the reader without going through the narrator — is written in first person present tense. Because human beings typically don't think in third person past tense.

Hope this helps. For more thoughts on italics, see the second edition of my [Punctuation for Writers](#). Of course, you can also put "italics" in the Search box on the Journal website or in the Search box at [HarveyStanbrough.com](#).

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Disembodied' Does Not Mean That" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/disembodied-does-not-mean-that/>. In case anyone didn't know.

See "How to Upload Your Book to KDP, Easily and Correctly [Text Instruction + Screenshots]" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/how-to-upload-your-book-to-kdp-easily-and-correctly-text-instruction-screenshots/>. Again, in case you didn't know.

Disclaimer: In this blog, I provide advice on writing fiction. I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. To be crystal clear, WITD is not "the only way" to write, nor will I ever say it is. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among myriad other topics.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [italics](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [POV Character](#), [Punctuation for Writers](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [Topic](#), [unspoken thought](#)

The Journal: Just for Fun

May 26, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Just for Fun
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“I can find motivation in my sleep. I write for me, to handle the challenge or to tell a particular story. I would write if civilization vanished and I had to scrounge up the last few pens and notepads to do so.” Kristine Kathryn Rusch

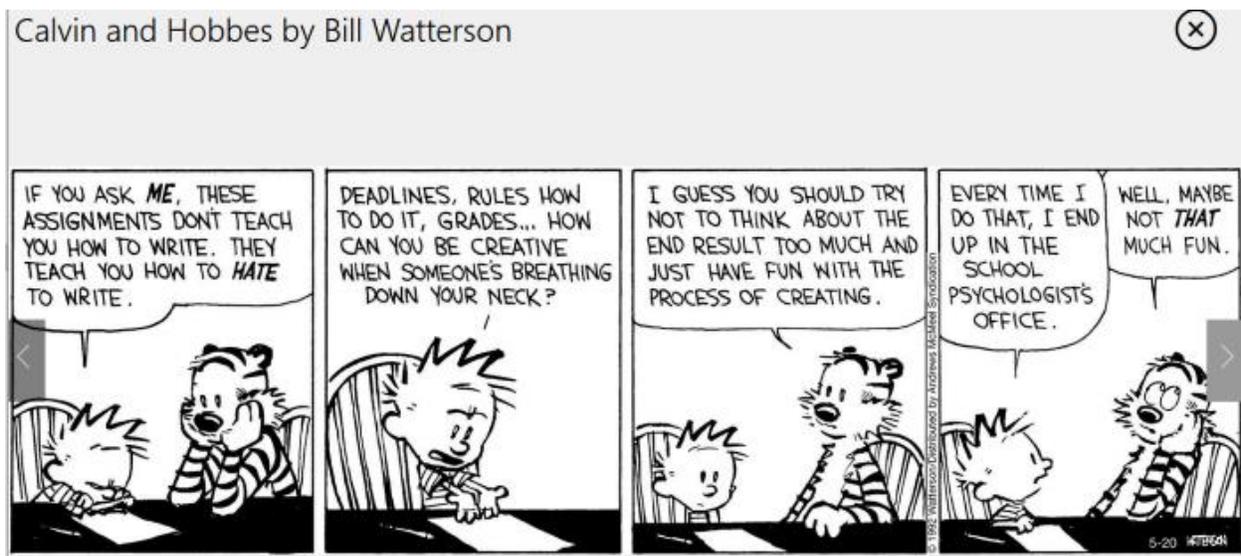
“Faulkner or Hemingway ... struggled like crazy to get recognition. But we, the young writers who studied their work, don’t know about those struggles. We only see how they’re treated after death.” Kristine Kathryn Rusch

“[W]riting is subjective. Storytelling is what really counts, and some terrible sentence-by-sentence writers are actually the best storytellers.” Kristine Kathryn Rusch

“Indie is all about selling a handful of copies every month, and having the numbers add up....” Kristine Kathryn Rusch

Just for Fun

Thanks to my friend and first reader Russ for sending along something that flies in the face of all the silly myths about writing (copyright Bill Watterson):



And here are links to all the strips in this “writing is hard” series, including the one I inserted above. Despite the numbering, they are in the correct sequence top to bottom. Enjoy.

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/entertainment/comics/calvin-and-hobbes-by-bill-watterson/ss-AAXEcpo?cvid=b949014937a14288b6f0857ed277d6a8&fullscreen=true#image=6>

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/entertainment/comics/calvin-and-hobbes-by-bill-watterson/ss-AAXEcpo?cvid=b949014937a14288b6f0857ed277d6a8&fullscreen=true#image=5>

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/entertainment/comics/calvin-and-hobbes-by-bill-watterson/ss-AAXEcpo?cvid=b949014937a14288b6f0857ed277d6a8&fullscreen=true#image=4>

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/entertainment/comics/calvin-and-hobbes-by-bill-watterson/ss-AAXEcpo?cvid=b949014937a14288b6f0857ed277d6a8&fullscreen=true#image=3>

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/entertainment/comics/calvin-and-hobbes-by-bill-watterson/ss-AAXEcpo?cvid=b949014937a14288b6f0857ed277d6a8&fullscreen=true#image=2>

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/entertainment/comics/calvin-and-hobbes-by-bill-watterson/ss-AAXEcpo?cvid=b949014937a14288b6f0857ed277d6a8&fullscreen=true#image=1>

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Business Musings: How Writers Fail (Part 3): Expectations” at <https://kriswrites.com/2022/05/25/business-musings-how-writers-fail-part-3-expectations/>.

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Calvin and Hobbes](#), [Kristine Kathryn Rusch](#), [Writing Myths](#)

The Journal: William Faulkner

May 27, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * William Faulkner
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“Once these people come to life ... they take off and so the writer is going at a dead run behind them trying to put down what they say and do in time.... They have taken charge of the story. They tell it from then on in.” William Faulkner

“These people I invent and after that I just run along and put down what they say and do.”
William Faulkner

“They are still in motion in my mind. I can laugh at things they’re doing that I haven’t got around to writing yet.” William Faulkner

William Faulkner

In case anyone didn’t see [Bill Sinclair’s comment on yesterday’s post](#), the Quotes of the Day above are a few of the things William Faulkner said about his characters and writing during a speech at the University of Virginia.

Naturally, I was glad to read these quotes, especially the third one. I knew it couldn’t be only me (grin). And even with 66 novels behind my belt, I enjoy validation as much as the next guy.

Faulkner allows the characters to tell the story that they, not he, are living. That should sound familiar. However, I won’t be annoyed or feel slighted if you balked before but buy-in now that Faulkner said it. (grin)

And it gets better. You can hear a recording of just under 32 minutes or read a transcript at https://faulkner.lib.virginia.edu/display/wfaudio18_2.html. (Note: Not all of the recording or transcript is strictly about writing, and please remember it was recorded in 1957.)

And better. Visit Southeast Missouri State University’s Center for Faulkner Studies at <https://semo.edu/faulkner-studies/resources.html>. Near the top of the page they list links to several more resources. And if you scroll down just a little you’ll find a section titled “The Quotable Faulkner,” in which he holds forth on Authors, Art/Artists, Dreams, Character and much more.

Enjoy the exploration. And thanks again to Bill Sinclair for starting us down this path.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Only 12 Hours Left” at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/only-12-hours-left/>.

The (return of the) Numbers (grin)

The Journal..... 350 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 1..... 2371 words. Total words to date..... 2371

Total fiction words for May..... 2371

Total fiction words for the year..... 8164

Total nonfiction words for May... 16330
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 75980
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 84144

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 66
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: In this blog, I provide advice on writing fiction. I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. To be crystal clear, WITD is not “the only way” to write, nor will I ever say it is. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among myriad other topics.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [the writing life](#), [William Faulkner](#)

The Journal: A Long Journey

May 28, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Faulkner
- * A Long Journey
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“When [the writer] begins to temper what he writes to who will read it, then I think the writing itself suffers.” William Faulkner

“Sometimes the characters in my books surprise me, yes. They don't surprise me in doing something that I never heard of or never imagined human beings doing before, but I hadn't expected them to do it at that moment.” William Faulkner

“I think that if the writer is going to write simply to express his own opinions, then he is not primarily a fiction writer, he's a propagandist or a polemicist.” William Faulkner

Faulkner

If you haven't at least read the transcript at https://faulkner.lib.virginia.edu/display/wfaudio18_2.html of the Faulkner after-speech exchange with the audience at the University of Virginia, I hope you will. I pulled the quotes above from it, and there are many more I didn't bother to pull. The thing is chock full of wisdom. And his soothing Southern drawl makes me wish I'd met him.

The closest I've come is a friend named John M. Williams, a remarkable writer in his own right. I strongly recommend his collection [The Weariness of the South](#). He has other titles available as well and I also recommend them.

In the short story "The Weariness of the South," he wrote one of my favorite dialogue exchanges:

"You have no sense of the tragic."

"Oh for God's sake. When things are wrong you change them. You don't set them to strings."

A Long Journey

Be forewarned—I'll probably wax a little philosophical in this.

Remember that old saying, "Be careful what you wish for?"

More than once over the past several years, I said I wished I could start over as a writer at the very beginning.

I wanted to feel the joy of trusting myself and my characters and the freedom of writing into the dark again. I wanted the exhilaration of learning for the first time that ideas really are everywhere, and they aren't golden.

I wanted to learn all over again that where the characters live — in my mind or in some other dimension — doesn't matter. What matters is recognizing that their stories and my story are different and apart from each other.

In my very favorite part of my story, I'm doing nothing but sitting at a laptop trying to keep up with the characters as they live THEIR story.

Here's how it goes, every time: The characters — always in the lead since they know where they're going and I don't — race through their story as I (out of shape and sadly lagging behind) try to at least stay close enough that they are within range of my senses of sight and hearing.

Every 900 to 1500 words or so, they take pity on me and stop to let me catch up. As I bend, hands on my knees and gasping for breath, they glance over the manuscript and point out any small things I might have missed. And about the time I get those things added, off they go again.

I don't mind my role at all. But I do envy them their energy and boldness and their exciting adventures. I envy them their common sense. Even the bad actors in their world understand that a word or phrase is neither the physical thing nor the physical act it describes. (Children of my generation will remember this more plainly as the Sticks and Stones rhyme.)

But most of all I consider myself fortunate that the characters have selected me to record their stories. I appreciate their willingness to share those stories with me, and I am fortunate to be the first to read them.

Sometime back in the '90s, maybe prophetically, I wrote a poem. The subject applies, and it's short, so I thought I'd foist it on you:

Rejuvenation

It's time to reconnect some frazzled ends,
unbend a few warped planes, demagnetize
a short in my long circuit. No robot,
I, but in dire need of maintenance. I need

to spark a reconciliation
of my soul and fire, nearly extinguished
by this funny, filthy world. I've come
full circle to this necessity —

neither desire nor pouty-lipped request —
of full rejuvenation, an overhaul,
electrical, mechanical, and chemical,
so this rusted spirit might yet shine again.

Yeah, it goes a little melodramatic there at the end (grin), but it explains pretty much exactly how I felt following August 6, 2021. I was full of disconnects and frazzled ends.

For the few who might not know, that's the day I stopped taking nicotine into my system, which effectively disrupted the operation of theretofore important neural pathways — apparently, as it turned out, the same pathways along which my characters conveyed their stories to me — and slapped my mind into a tumbling, buzzing fog of inability, ineptness, and confusion.

(By the way, in Europe and possibly elsewhere, this effect is talked about openly, a sharing of facts that enable competent, thinking human beings to make up their own mind. I won't go back to cigars because who knows what might happen. But had I been aware of how disruptive stopping would be, I wouldn't have lost 10 months of fiction. In the US, though, the entire thrust of discourse on the topic is “um, nicotine bad.” We are no longer exactly the fount of free exchange that some believe us to be.)

After a few false starts early on, I finally realized I couldn't rush my recovery. I had to sit back and wait as my brain took the time it needed to sort things out. Or not. And the clock continued to tick.

I have to say this: I could have outlined a novel based on earlier novels in any of my series, then worked my way through it intellectually with my conscious, critical mind and all the knowledge I've gained about craft over the years. But the resulting story would have been only a cheap knockoff. It wouldn't have even resembled the characters' authentic story. More importantly, it wouldn't have been fun. And besides, I wear many labels, but Hypocrite is not among them.

Having fun with storytelling is important. I can tell you now that at least four or five times, one as recently as a month ago, I seriously considered announcing my retirement as a fiction writer and then setting even the Journal aside. As I've always said, if it can't be fun, I don't want to do it.

But during the whole time, I've also tried to keep my hand in, doing what I could to remain familiar with my tools against the day when I would be able to write again.

So most days I still visited other blogs, occasionally left comments, and/or filed a new edition of the Journal. I also reminded myself more than once that many writers take months or even years to finish even a single 60,000-word novel. So really, me being on a forced hiatus for most of 10 months wasn't that big a deal in the normal world.

Except for me, it really was. I couldn't forget that if I'd written even 100,000 words of fiction per month, I'd have written a million words of fiction during that 10 months.

By the way, if 100,000 words of fiction per month seems like a lot, it really isn't. It's an average of only 3333 words per day. Which is only 1111 words per hour for three hours per day. Which is less than 19 words per minute. Which leaves a TON of time for staring off into space.

But those 10 months are gone now to history. And although on August 6 2021 I effectively forfeited my first realistic opportunity to write a million words of published fiction in a year, that's all right. Because a new year begins every day.

What matters at this point is that my wish was granted. I get to start all over again. Only this time I'm not starting off as a skeptic. This time I know in advance that Heinlein's Rules, WITD and all the rest will work. I just have to give it time to smooth out again.

Who knows? Maybe my first 1,000,000-word year of fiction began two days ago when I started writing a new novel: Blackwell Ops 8. For those of you who've read the series, 8 will continue the story of Operative Philip Dunstan (from 7), and maybe a few others.

I guess we'll see.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Writing Memorable Character Flaws” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/writing-memorable-character-flaws/>. Learn and absorb with the conscious mind, apply with the creative subconscious.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1430 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 1..... 2371 words. Total words to date..... 2371

Day 2..... 1305 words. Total words to date..... 3676

Day 3..... XXXX words. Total words to date..... XXXXX

Total fiction words for May..... 3676

Total fiction words for the year..... 9469

Total nonfiction words for May... 17760

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 77410

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 86879

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 66

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [A Long Journey](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: Memorial Day, and Just for Fun, Part 2

May 29, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

* Memorial Day

* Topic: Just for Fun, Part 2

- * Oops
- * Of Interest

Memorial Day

I hope you will have a safe and happy but thoughtful Memorial Day. I hope you will consider all we still have in this once-great nation and on whose sacrifices we stand.

Topic: Just for Fun, Part 2

Matt P. emailed this morning to ask how I would respond to writers “who claims that getting critiques helped them improve their writing and that if they hadn’t, they never would have gotten better.”

Note: This topic, including this sentence, is delivered tongue-in-cheek. However, if you take it seriously, you probably should.

I love hypothetical questions. They allow me to play. And this particular one evoked nostalgia, caused me to harken back to the time when I presented sessions at several writers’ conferences per year.

Between sessions at those conference, I didn’t disappear into my room. I made myself available in the lobby or the bar to talk with other writers and answer questions. So with that frame of reference, here are my responses:

1. If I were attending a conference and some writer said that to me in person, I probably would smile and nod and move on to whatever I was going to do next.

Which is what I do with most statements that indicate the speaker is hopelessly mired in the myths. Because frankly, of those who would make such a statement, what most of them want is validation, not reason, and anything short of validation will be wasted on them.

2. If something about the writer made me sense that s/he might actually want to learn, I might try to evoke an argument via personal insult. In that case, I would nod sagely, cup my right elbow in my left palm, tap my bearded chin with my right index finger, and say, “Y’know, I think that’s easily the stupidest thing I’ve heard all day.”

Which would cause 99.99% of them to turn away in a huff and leave me alone with my Beam or Jameson & Sons (either of which give me a really good buzz but no hangover).

But for the .001% who proved themselves worthy by hanging around to argue, I would take the time to explain WITD, Heinlein’s Rules, and that confidence in one’s self comes from within, not from extorting attaboys from other unpublished or barely published writers in what is basically a mutual admiration society.

Nor can you learn anything about the craft by allowing other writers to tell you how *they* would have written *your* work. And seriously, if you don't even care how the characters who are actually *living* the story would convey it, why would you care how some other writer would write it?

Intermission: Do you know why you can't find Stage 4 or 5 writers in critique groups? They're too busy writing. (ta bump dump, tssshhh)

But seriously, folks, good writers assume self-confidence in writers. Thus, they assume that their opinion would matter to you about as much as your opinion matters to them.

And 3. If I was feeling nasty or was tired of being accosted by morons, I might smirk and say, "Oh, how very special you are, writing a book by committee! Congratulations! And I do understand, you poor dear. Not all of us are confident enough even to tie our own shoelaces, are we? Who ties yours? And you're what, 35? 40? Do you go potty all by yourself or do you have a group for that too?"

In other words, I'm probably not the right guy to ask, but I'm sure someone on the writer boards (whatever they are) will have the answer those writers are looking for. (grin)

Oops

MOBSTER TALES
an intense collection
Harvey Stanbrough

Mobster Tales This 10-story collection runs the gamut from the hokey to the humorous, the wannabes to the would'a-beens, the chilling to the childish to the deadly serious. There are 8 stories from Harvey and 2 from his borderline psychotic persona, Eric Stringer. Come along for some fun!

<http://stanbrough.com>
www.mobstertales.com

MOBSTER TALES 2
an intense ten-story collection
Harvey Stanbrough

Mobster Tales 2: In this rollicking, gat-filled collection of eleven short stories, you get to see both sides: The mobsters and the cops. The perps and the victims. The guilty, the innocent and the merely complicit. These guys create and dispose of bodies, brag and complain and finagle a way out where no way out existed before. Come along for a wild ride!

Collage Maker **I meant to insert this ad** my wife created a couple days ago for my two *Mobster Tales* short story collections.

A reader of this Journal provided the catalyst for the ad when he saw on Facebook that we had ordered the DVDs of *The Sopranos*. In that posting, my wife joked that ironically, one season of the show was stuck in New Jersey. (grin)

The reader responded with, “I didn’t know you were interested in mafia type stuff.” Which is what caused my wife to do a little marketing.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Promote Your Book with Your Values” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/promote-your-book-with-your-values/>. Also see PG’s take.

See “Two New Workshops and Sale!” at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/two-new-workshops-and-sale/>. I honestly can’t imagine even a 6-week workshop on Heinlein’s Rules being better than his \$75 lecture by the same name.

See “Can I Quote Song Lyrics in My Novel?” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/05/can-i-quote-song-lyrics-in-my-novel.html>. I posted this long-winded explanation primarily for his link to song lyrics that are now in the public domain, like Elvis’ “Are You Lonesome Tonight?”

See “Memorial Day” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/memorial-day-3/>.

See “AAP StatShot...” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/aap-statshot-us-market-up-slightly-year-to-date-march-down-4-2-percent/>. See PG’s take.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 820 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 1..... 2371 words. Total words to date..... 2371

Day 2..... 1305 words. Total words to date..... 3676

Day 3..... 1107 words. Total words to date..... 4783

Total fiction words for May..... 4783

Total fiction words for the year..... 10576

Total nonfiction words for May... 18580

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 78230

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 88806

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	66
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014).....	217
Short story collections.....	31

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [Jane Friedman](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [More on Critique Groups](#), [More on Critiques](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [the writing life](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: Crawl Before You Walk

May 30, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Memorial Day
- * Topic: Crawl Before You Walk
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“[W]e writers are great with imagination, yet we don’t know enough about licensing and copyright to imagine what products could come from our IP.” Dean Wesley Smith

“He had just about enough intelligence to open his mouth when he wanted to eat, but certainly no more.” P.G. Wodehouse

“It is a good rule in life never to apologize. The right sort of people do not want apologies, and the wrong sort take a mean advantage of them.” P.G. Wodehouse

Memorial Day

I passed a quiet Memorial Day. I didn’t write any fiction.

I thought specifically about some relatives, some personal friends, and some acquaintances who gave the ultimate sacrifice for this nation. I also thought about those I never knew but on whose strong shoulders we all stand today.

Then I watched the Indy 500 with my Hoosier wife and girlfriend (Oh stop it. She’s the same person.) Not a bad race. My personal faves finished 10th and 3rd. But I have to say I was glad

Marcus Ericsson won since he was well on his way to winning (he had a 3 second lead at 219 mph) before race officials pulled that red-flag nonsense with only 4 laps to go.

I hope your Memorial Day was as enjoyable as ours was, or that it will be that enjoyable today if your state still celebrates the traditional Memorial Day.

Topic: Crawl Before You Walk

Note: The following isn't about how you or I or anyone else writes. How you write is your own business. This also isn't about craft or technique. It's about talking smack without a license. And yes, it's intended to be tongue-in-cheek. Well, parts of it.

There's an old saying that you should learn to crawl before you walk. That goes for giving out advice too. First, know what you're talking about; then talk.

I personally wish there was some sort of physical/mental interlock that would automatically interrupt a person's ability to communicate with speech, writing, hand signals or even eye blinks when s/he is about to hold forth on something s/he knows little or nothing about.

The reason for this post is that yet again I've been made aware that someone heard in a social media writing group that "you have to receive critiques of your work in order to get better at the craft of writing, that otherwise you'll never improve."

My initial response: Oh no! So the sky really IS falling this time, Chicken Little? Yeah? Well, how about this: Shut the hell up. Stop acting as if you have the slightest clue what you're talking about. You don't.

Yeah, I know, it's a free country and you can say whatever you want. I myself despise censorship. That's why I wish there was some sort of biomechanical mechanism to keep people from blathering on from a knowledge base that holds zero data or repeating things they've heard but have never validated for themselves.

But I know my luck. That biomechanical thing is never gonna happen except maybe in a SciFi story (note to self). Besides, even if someone developed such a device, congress would manage to ban it. Goes against their self-interest.

But since I can't do anything L E G A L about those morons endlessly flapping their gums in social media writer groups and in "boards" and on websites where amateur writers have wormed their way in and masquerade as professionals, doling out the same tired old advice cavemen first chiseled onto cave walls, I'll just talk directly to you, whom I consider my learned choir.

Having your work critiqued is not a way to learn anything about the craft.

Having your work critiqued is how you learn to write something in a way that pleases the person who offers the critique. It's how you learn to write your story the way someone else would write it.

But unless I'm missing something here, you aren't someone else. You're you.

So write your story the way you write, and keep everyone else out of it until the story's written. Then let your first reader and/or a good copyeditor see it or just submit it for publication or publish it. But don't rewrite it and don't worry about pleasing anyone else.

Trust yourself.

And Practice — practice is how you get better at the craft of writing, and it is the **ONLY** way to get better at writing, or at any craft.

And learn — if you want to learn

1. Read for pleasure and then study the fiction of masterful writers whose work you enjoy. Then practice.
2. Take a course or online workshop on a particular craft topic from a valid source, then practice. Listen to an audio or video lecture on a particular part of craft, then practice.
3. Read a book from a valid source or a blog from a valid source on the craft of writing and then **PRACTICE**.

And for goodness' sake stop spinning your wheels and testing fate by seeking critiques from ANYONE, least of all the writer wannabes who populate social media groups and other venues in their bid to feel important.

You've all been around long enough to know that you can write a story with no help from anyone except your characters, so just do it already.

You've also all been around long enough to know if you want advice on plumbing, you don't go to a carpenter. So here are a few questions for you:

Would you allow a first-year medical student to remove your appendix or take a tumor off your brain? Or a first-year law student to defend you against a murder charge in Texas?

So why in the world would you seek advice on how to write fiction from people who either don't write fiction at all or who have only started writing it?

To be a little more specific, why in the world would you accept advice on writing novels from any writer who hasn't written at least a dozen novels? Or twenty? Or thirty?

And why would you accept advice on writing short stories from a writer who hasn't written at least fifty or sixty or a hundred short stories?

Think about it. You *are* worth more than that, aren't you? And isn't your potential career as a writer worth more than that?

I can personally vouch for the fact that life is far too short to spend even a minute of it doing things that either don't work or are self-defeating.

So stay away from social media groups and “writer boards” and other venues where young writers who don't know Anything At All about writing constantly parrot stupid crap like, “Um, no, seriously dude, you have to invite critiques of your work in order to get better at the craft. If you don't, like, you'll never improve. And then, like, the world will, like, end or something.”

Notice I said they “parrot” that stuff. All they're doing is repeating what they've heard, often without having tried it themselves to be sure it works, and almost ALWAYS without having tried it and succeeded. If you wonder, ask them. Maybe that will shut them up.

But again, think about it: just the fact that they can't seem to put together a single coherent original thought on the topic should tell you something. Right?

They're children, these people, regardless of their chronological age. They're trying to impress you (and anyone who will listen to them) without having done anything at all that's impressive. Are those really the folks you want to take advice from?

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Licensing Expo First Notes” at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/licensing-expo-first-notes/>.

See “MS Word Keyboard Shortcuts” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/05/ms-word-keyboard-shortcuts.html>.

See “...On the Novelistic Universe of Edith Wharton” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/yoknapatawpha-on-the-hudson-on-the-novelistic-universe-of-edith-wharton/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1320 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 1..... 2371 words. Total words to date..... 2371

Day 2..... 1305 words. Total words to date..... 3676

Day 3..... 1107 words. Total words to date..... 4783

Total fiction words for May..... 4783

Total fiction words for the year..... 10576

Total nonfiction words for May... 19900

Total nonfiction words for the year.....	79550
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog).....	90126
Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date...	0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	66
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014).....	217
Short story collections.....	31

Disclaimer: In this blog, I provide advice on writing fiction. I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. To be crystal clear, WITD is not “the only way” to write, nor will I ever say it is. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among myriad other topics.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Criques](#), [critique groups](#), [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [Licensing Expo](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [the writing life](#), [Topic](#), [Writers' Boards](#), [Writers' Groups](#)

The Journal: When You Outline a Novel

May 31, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Topic: When You Outline a Novel
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

One more note for Memorial Day:

“... ”

If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
 Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
 Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
 Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,—
 My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
 To children ardent for some desperate glory,
 The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est
 Pro patria mori.”

from “Dulce et Decorum Est” by Wilfred Owen, a poet and British soldier who was killed in World War I.

Topic: When You Outline a Novel

Someone asked why I have a problem with others outlining novels. The short answer is, I don't. What do I care?

Now, I won't *read* a novel that I know (or can tell) has been outlined, but that's my preference as a reader. I don't want to use my time reading a story in which I'll be able to tell in advance the outcome of every conversation, every event, and every situation.

When a writer preplans and plots and "figures out" everything, so can the reader. No surprise for the writer, no surprise for the reader.

So I won't read an outlined novel, and I advise writers against outlining them, but each writer has to make up his or her own mind about whether to outline (in whatever form) or whether to trust the characters. And no, you can't both preplan and trust your characters.

Why aren't some writers able to trust their characters?

Well, for one thing, at no time during their formal education are writers taught to trust their characters and simply record the stories that the characters themselves (not the writers) are living.

I asked a writing instructor about that one time, because to me, this is an unbelievable disconnect. "After all," I said, "would you try to tell your neighbors how to live their lives in every moment?"

"No, of course not," the instructor replied. Then, his hands spread as if to embrace the class, he said, "You can trust the neighbors, can't you? But why would any writer trust their characters?" He beamed his best evangelical smile. "Characters aren't even real people, are they?" He laughed lightly. "They're only made up, aren't they?"

And as the other writer-students nodded at the instructor's sage wisdom and scribbled a quick note in their notebook — I suspect it read, *Characters are not real* — I shook my head, got to my feet, and left. I didn't ask for my money back. Forty bucks was little enough to pay to have my eyes opened to What It Is, the way things stand in the world of fiction writing.

All of that "characters aren't real" nonsense ignores the fact that when the characters first appeared in the writer's mind they were fully formed and doing and/or saying things and often even reacting to or instigating situations.

Just as if the writer had peered through an interdimensional doorway or pulled back a curtain to witness part of a story that is ongoing even when s/he isn't watching.

Unfortunately, most writers don't think about things like that. They're too busy "creating" characters, stories, etc. Many never learn all they have to do is sit back, let it flow, and be entertained.

All of that being said, outlining a novel has two distinctly negative effects:

1. The writer is bored with the story.

After all, s/he's already written it once, albeit in much-condensed form. So again, there are no surprises left. The writer knows how the story begins, any major twists and turns, and how it ends, so what's the point of writing it again?

At that point, you can't write the story to entertain yourself. That chance is gone. You're only writing it now to publish it, so writing it becomes important, something to worry about and fret over. It becomes work.

At this disappointing point, many would-be writers will give up altogether on writing fiction. Not openly, of course, or intentionally. It's just that suddenly pretty much anything else takes precedence, and there are only so many hours in the day, and you know how that goes.

Many more will give up on writing only that particular story. It seems too boring now, though maybe they aren't quite sure why. So they'll move on to outline the next story. Do we have to wonder how that will go?

But a few hearty souls will go ahead and write the story after they've finished the outline. Of course, they still know the beginning, every major twist and turn, and the ending, so they're still bored to the bone.

But unfortunately, that isn't the worst of it. Even if the writer chooses to go ahead and write it,

2. The story is no longer authentic.

It's no longer the story the characters would have lived had the writer trusted them and left them to their own devices. The characters are no longer even characters. They're only actors, playing their roles and saying their lines at the writer's direction.

The writer replaced that authentic story with a safe, sanitized version of itself when s/he first decided to "craft" an outline. So it isn't the authentic story s/he always dreamed of someday writing.

And deep inside, the writer knows that. S/he feels it in little tweaks of the gut (the creative subconscious trying to pull the writer back) as s/he forces the story to conform to the outline or revises or rewrites. And with each tweak s/he knows s/he's getting further from the original story, but s/he can't help herself. The myths and the fear run too deep.

The good news? If you can let go of the unreasoning fear and the silly myths, trust your characters and Just Write, those nasty gut tweaks all but vanish.

Now to bring everything full circle: These writers, having

- outlined,
- written,
- revised X number of times,
- received critiques,
- applied X number of fixes,
- rewritten X number of times to appease whomever, and
- tried in vain to teach idiots like like me the terrible error of our ways —

will refer to the process of writing fiction as “sheer drudgery” when they finally attend their launch party.

Well, duh. No wonder.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “The Path Into Licensing” at <https://www.deanwesleymith.com/the-path-into-licensing-a-second-post/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1060 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 1..... 2371 words. Total words to date..... 2371

Day 2..... 1305 words. Total words to date..... 3676

Day 3..... 1107 words. Total words to date..... 4783

Total fiction words for May..... 4783

Total fiction words for the year..... 10576

Total nonfiction words for May... 20960

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 80610

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 91186

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 66

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: In this blog, I provide advice on writing fiction. I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. To be crystal clear, WITD is not “the only way” to write, nor will I ever

say it is. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among myriad other topics.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [Licensing](#), [Outlining](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: The Lessons We Learn

June 1, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Topic: The Lessons We Learn (a guest post)
- * Thanks, and guest posts
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“[I]f the market [target audience] determines what works, ... what good is a critique in advance?” Matt Perryman

“Creating the impression that copywriters need critiques is lucrative business.” Matt Perryman

Topic: The Lessons We Learn

a guest post by Matt Perryman

I wanted to relate an anecdote that relates to your post on crawling before you walk. Your post made me laugh because it's not limited to fiction writers.

In my day job I'm in the marketing and copywriting world. Copywriters who write for heavy-hitters in the direct sales world have their own version of the 'critique' myth.

When I first got into that game, I believed it all. The guys in the big leagues, who often claim mega-millions of dollars in sales (some of them even legitimately), all tell the up-and-comers that you've got to write and rewrite and, oh yeah, get your letter critiqued.

I found this suspicious from day one, for one reason. The key maxim of direct marketing is Test Everything.

The idea being, your target market is the only thing that should determine whether or not a mailing succeeds. If you hit a grand slam, the letter (called a control) is a hit. If it bombs, it's no good.

Bearing in mind here that a 5% response is considered a knock-out. 2-3% is more the average.

I found this strange because, if the market determines what works, and given the slim margin between win/loss, what good is a critique in advance?

How the heck can I rewrite a letter when I have no idea what will pull before we test it?

Yes, there is a value in pointing out basic flaws in structure and the like — far more of a concern in sales copy than fiction — but these factors can be easily overblown.

Anyhow, I dropped into a Facebook group last year when I came across a thread discussing a campaign recently launched by one of the big players in the direct sales world.

The folks in the group, some of whom are “names” in the copywriting space, were all tearing apart one part of the sales page for that campaign.

The same people who preach “know your market,” “test everything,” and crafting sales copy to fit your own data were “critiquing” this piece of writing with ZERO knowledge of the target market, the response rate, the goals of the letter, or the financials.

They critiqued based on what THEY wanted and THEY “knew.”

That’s when it hit me.

The whole scheme of getting your sales copy critiqued is not about writing better sales copy. It’s about feeding the paid membership programs for copywriters who know that they can charge thousands of dollars a year (or more) for advising early-career copywriters.

Creating the impression that copywriters need critiques is lucrative business.

And a good fraction of them don’t even listen to their own advice.

The lessons we learn, huh?

* * *

Thanks, Matt, for this revealing topic.

Maybe best of all, “Creating the impression that copywriters need critiques is lucrative business.”

Yes. Like creating doubt in a person’s abilities drives a lucrative business. Those who know better and push the myths anyway should be ashamed of themselves.

Think of all the hundreds of “how-to” books that mimic each other, all repeating the same tired few pieces of ridiculous advice: that you need outlines (or signposts or whatever), revision, critiques, rewrites, and polishing. Sigh.

Folks, I'm always looking for good guest posts if you'd care to write one. Just send it to me in the body of an email at harveystanbrough@gmail.com. If I accept your post, I reserve the right to conduct a very light edit.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Half-Price Sale" at <https://www.deanwesleymith.com/half-price-sale/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 220 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 1..... 2371 words. Total words to date..... 2371

Day 2..... 1305 words. Total words to date..... 3676

Day 3..... 1107 words. Total words to date..... 4783

Day 4..... 1201 words. Total words to date..... 5984

Total fiction words for May..... 5984

Total fiction words for the year..... 11777

Total nonfiction words for June... 220

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 80830

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 92607

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 66

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: In this blog, I provide advice on writing fiction. I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. To be crystal clear, WITD is not "the only way" to write, nor will I ever say it is. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among myriad other topics.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Creating doubt is lucrative business](#), [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: Very Short Post Today

June 2, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Very Short Post Today
- * Should One Seek A Critique?
- * Of Interest

Very Short Post Today

Just not a lot to say, and I'm aware that a lot of the stuff inside the recent topics has been negative. I want to get away from that for awhile.

Also, the novel's coming along, but very slowly. I put down fewer than 500 words yesterday, so I didn't bother updating the numbers. I feel the novel is (I'm) on the verge of breaking out, but it's (I'm) not quite there yet.

As you might imagine, critical mind's messing with me quite a bit:

- Can I even still do this?
- How much about writing must I have forgotten during the past 10 months?
- This first novel has to be up to the standards of the ones that have gone before (making the story "important").
- Maybe I should write a novel in a different series instead (delaying tactic).

And so on. Actually, I just dealt with and dismissed that last one yesterday.

Don't worry. (Oops. I laughed right after I wrote that because of course, you won't worry. Why would you? It isn't you who's mired in the muck. (grin))

Anyway, none of this is anything I'm worried about. I've been here before. I'm just working my way through it. I'll soon snap out of it, maybe even today or tomorrow, and the story will run. Then I'll start putting up the 3,000- to 4,000-word days again.

Should One Seek A Critique?

Nope, this is not another topic on critiques. I just thought you might like to read a different take from a writer I respect and trust, in this case John Gilstrap. Of course, I did leave a comment, complete with a link to my [Crawl Before You Walk post](#).

To read John's take and see comments by others, see "Should One Seek A Critique?" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/06/should-one-seek-a-critique.html>.

I'd also like to know whether Stephen King, Lee Child, Ray Bradbury and others of that wonderful ilk ever sought critiques. I can guess, but I'm still curious to know whether any of them were that insecure.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Licensing Videos” at <https://www.deanwesleymith.com/licensing-videos/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 350 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 1..... 2371 words. Total words to date..... 2371

Day 2..... 1305 words. Total words to date..... 3676

Day 3..... 1107 words. Total words to date..... 4783

Day 4..... 1201 words. Total words to date..... 5984

Total fiction words for June..... XXXX

Total fiction words for the year..... 11777

Total nonfiction words for June... 570

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 81180

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 92957

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 66

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. I’ve never said WITD is not “the only way” to write, nor will I ever. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among other topics.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [critical mind](#), [Critiques](#), [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [John Gilstrap](#), [KillZone Blog](#)

The Journal: The Squeaky Stair Technique

June 3, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

* Topic: The Squeaky Stair Technique

* Of Interest

Topic: The Squeaky Stair Technique

I've long wanted to write a topic about pulling the reader into the story quickly and more deeply by focusing down. That is, writing some small thing that causes the reader or viewer to focus his or her attention down on a fine detail. Doing so causes the reader to lean more closely (or deeply) into the story.

In fact, I recommend you use this technique in literally every opening you ever write. The point of a good opening is to ground the reader in the story. But it isn't only for openings. It's a valuable technique you can use any time you want to cause the reader to lean more deeply into the work.

I call this The Squeaky Stair Technique because of the apparently squeaky or broken stair in the television sitcom *Modern Family*. Once or twice in every episode, Phil Dunphy (Ty Burrell) stumbles over that stair step.

Sometimes he's ascending and sometimes he's descending. But every time he draws attention to the little stumble by glancing down and saying quietly, "I've got to fix that."

As an aside, it might be interesting to obtain some scripts from the show and study what happens just before and just after the squeaky stair event. Chances are it's something understated but important to the story.

Sometimes The Squeaky Stair Technique is a recurring event in a series, as in *Modern Family*. In my Crowley series, Wes had a habit of checking his Colt revolvers to be sure they were loaded every time he put them on. (The reader checked them too, every time.)

But this is also a valuable technique in a one-off short story or novel.

As I mentioned in a comment on Garry Rodgers' recent KillZone blog post (see "Of Interest"), the detective in my novel *Situation Solved* analyzed the bloodstain pattern at the scene of a murder in her effort to determine what happened, where the killer stood, the angle of attack, etc.

Notice too, though, the detail doesn't have to be significant or dramatic, like the blood spatter at a crime scene. The squeaky stair in *Modern Family* is insignificant at best, at least in the overall scheme.

It just has to be a detail, something that focuses the reader's attention down into the story for a moment. Details are what bring the setting, and in turn the scene and the story, to life.

In my novel *The 13-Month Turn*, when a quake trembles through a new lunar colony that is under construction, the reader sees a small segment of compacted lunar dust fracturing and shaking loose from the massive blade of a heavy earth mover.

There is no quicker, easier, or more effective way to pull the reader more deeply into the story than to focus his or her attention on a fine detail.

Okay, so over to you. Where else have you seen this technique in use?

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Forensic Bloodstain Pattern Analysis” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/06/forensic-bloodstain-pattern-analysis.html>. Some extra links too.

See “Content Analysis Tools” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/content-analysis-tools/>.

See “Getting Book Endorsements (Blurbs): What to Remember, Do, Avoid, and Expect” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/getting-book-endorsements-blurbs-what-to-remember-do-avoid-and-expect/>.

See “Why Testing BookBub Ads Targets Pays Off” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/why-testing-bookbub-ads-targets-pays-off/>. Be sure to see PG’s take and then click through to the original post.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 550 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 1..... 2371 words. Total words to date..... 2371
Day 2..... 1305 words. Total words to date..... 3676
Day 3..... 1107 words. Total words to date..... 4783
Day 4..... 1201 words. Total words to date..... 5984
Day 5..... 1872 words. Total words to date..... 7856

Total fiction words for June..... 1872
Total fiction words for the year..... 11777
Total nonfiction words for June... 1120
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 81730
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 95379

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 66
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Focusing Down](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [Professional Writer Series](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [the writing life](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: Pure Writing Into the Dark

June 4, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Welcome
- * I'm Back!
- * Topic: Pure Writing Into the Dark

First, welcome to r2zajac and any other recent new subscribers. You picked a good time to drop in. (grin)

I'm Back!

I'm not bragging here folks. I'm celebrating. I just felt like sharing this good news with my friends. Starting Blackwell Ops 8, my current novel, has been nothing short of restarting my life as a fiction writer after a very long 10 months.

I've written five or six different openings for this novel, and I struggled with all of them. It was like pulling teeth. (That isn't how it's supposed to be. If you've ever been there, keep reading.)

I kept wanting to reword what I'd written, fix it, blah blah blah. All of that was because it wasn't working, which means the story wasn't flowing of its own accord, as happens when you simply look in on your characters and record what's going on, what's being said and done.

I kept showing up, kept opening the file, kept slogging away at it, but nothing clicked — until I finally decided yesterday to move forward, not back. I exercised the nuclear option.

I highlighted everything I'd written up to that point. I cut it, then pasted it at the end of the manuscript in a section labeled CUTS. (I wrote the words, so they counted in my daily writing, but they won't be in the novel when it's finished.)

Then I put the cursor on the first line below Chapter 1 and started to write a new opening, and — it took off! (grin) Maybe I finally convinced my creative subconscious that I'm back to stay. Maybe the characters finally trust that, so they're willing to share their stories with me again.

Anyway, two hours and twenty-five hundred words later (a blazing fast [grin] 20 words per minute), I had to stop for the day. This morning, I'll drop in on the characters as they gather for Chapter 4, and I couldn't be more excited.

I feel very much like I felt before August 6, 2021, and I can't begin to tell you how good that is. Finally, finally, I'm back. And it's great to be here.

Topic: Pure Writing into the Dark

Matt P emailed to ask what I mean when I say I take on the persona of the character I'm writing at the time. Here's my expanded response:

It's pure writing into the dark. I literally write every word through the POV character's physical and emotional senses. (It took a long time for me to "get" that every word of a story should come through the POV character and not from the writer.)

If I start to feel "stuck," I tell my conscious, critical mind to shut up and leave me alone, and I write the next sentence that occurs to me from the character. Then I write the next sentence and the next, and very soon the story is racing along again.

I don't add anything or take anything away as myself, the author, because I'm not the author. I'm only the recorder, writing down what the POV character sees, hears, smells, tastes, feels (physically and emotionally), says and does.

I recognize all the characters as separate individuals. I can't honestly say whether they live in my creative subconscious or whether they live in another dimension and I'm able somehow to pull back a curtain and look in on them now and then.

But neither does it matter. What matters is that they are living a story that I'm not living, and theirs is more exciting. My story is not their story, and their story is not mine. I'm only recording it for them.

In my own story at the moment, I'm sitting at a keyboard adding a few words to a Journal entry before I copy it and paste it into the Journal website. A little later in my own story, I'll continue at a keyboard, recording what happens in my characters' story. At other times of the day in my story, I'll feed my neighbors' horse, maybe go to the grocery and to check the mail, etc.

But in the current story I'm recording for my characters, Blackwell Ops Agent Philip Dunstan is anticipating meeting a young woman (the niece of his matronly apartment manager) who ostensibly wants to do for a living what he does: work for TJ Blackwell.

I can only barely wait to get back to the story to see what's going to happen today. Knowing Dunstan and TJ and their situation, there's an excellent chance Dunstan will receive another assignment soon too.

But who knows? Like everyone else, I just have to wait to see what will happen. Maybe he'll get another assignment, maybe he won't. Maybe the young woman is who she seems, and maybe she isn't.

And this is how it must be, at least for me. What you do, how you write, is up to you. But I'm in it for the fun and for the escape. My story was exciting in the past, but these days it's a humdrum routine. But my characters' stories —now *those* are exciting!

There's an old saying in writing: no surprise for the writer, no surprise for the reader. But when you're simply recording another person's story (not composing it or making it up or manipulating it), you have no way of knowing what will happen next. Under those conditions, how can you not be continually surprised?

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "3D-Printed Ear" at <https://interestingengineering.com/3d-printed-human-ear-transplanted>. SF become S Fact, anyone?

See "E-skin that can feel pain..." at https://www.gla.ac.uk/news/headline_852760_en.html.

See "California court rules that bees are a type of fish..." at <https://www.insider.com/bees-officially-type-of-fish-california-judges-ruling-endangered-species-2022-6>. Sure. If what it actually is doesn't suit you, call it something else.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 910 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 1..... 2371 words. Total words to date..... 2371
Day 2..... 1305 words. Total words to date..... 3676
Day 3..... 1107 words. Total words to date..... 4783
Day 4..... 1201 words. Total words to date..... 5984
Day 5..... 1872 words. Total words to date..... 7856
Day 6..... 2505 words. Total words to date..... 10361

Total fiction words for June..... 4377

Total fiction words for the year..... 16154

Total nonfiction words for June... 2030

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 82640

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 98794

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date...	0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	66
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014).....	217
Short story collections.....	31

Disclaimer: I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. I've never said WITD is not "the only way" to write, nor will I ever. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among other topics.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Professional Writer Series](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [the writing life](#), [Topic](#), [Writing Into the Dark](#)

The Journal: Keep Coming Back

June 6, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Two New Sources of Information for Writers
- * Topic: Keep Coming Back
- * When a Story Flows
- * Of Interest

Two New Sources of Information for Writers

I found a new source for reliable factual information and informed opinion: Interesting Engineering. One example of their articles is in today's "Of Interest."

If you write SF, to my mind this is a must-have (free) subscription. If you don't write SF, it's still an extremely interesting source of information. You can find it at <https://interestingengineering.com/>. To sign up for the newsletter, scroll to the bottom and click Newsletter.

Also, Tari wrote to provide yet another new source: SciTechDaily. This one would be great for SF or crime writers. The article she used as an example is also in "Of Interest" today. If you'd like a free subscription you can find the source itself at <https://scitechdaily.com/>.

Topic: Keep Coming Back

This topic goes so well with writing into the dark that the two techniques have the same scent.

Writing into the dark means to trust yourself and your characters.

Keep coming back means to give yourself a chance to do more than you otherwise would.

It means you can get up, wander off to the grocery or to do yard work or whatever other non-writing endeavors interest you or are necessary, then come back to your writing. Sit down, put your fingers on the keyboard, and give your characters a chance to add to the story.

In a Journal entry in December 2020, I wrote this:

“If you’re unfamiliar with the term, “keep coming back” refers to your work ethic, or less nicely put, your obsession.

“It means don’t allow yourself to get sidetracked during breaks from your story. Keep coming back. Even when you think you’re finished for the day.

“That was the case for me [in December 2020]. I’d written a little over 6000 words, so for me it was already a great day of writing. Then I went to the store with my wife. When we got back, I told her I was going to shut down the Hovel (my office). I was only going to do all those little end-of-the-day things: save the novel, record my numbers, etc. That really was my intention.

“But when I got back to the Hovel, I sat down and glanced at the story. I put my fingers on the keyboard, and the next thing I knew I’d written another 1600 words. In that I set a new personal best for a single day of writing: 7614 words.”

All because of my little mantra: Keep Coming Back.

When a Story Flows

I’m reminded of a comment I received while presenting a day-long seminar on Writing Into the Dark. During a break, a student approached me and said, “All this stuff — writing into the dark, cycling, grounding the reader, keep coming back — is easy when you have a story that writes itself. Isn’t that right?”

I said, “Yes, that’s right. And if you trust your characters to tell the story that they, not you, are living, the story writes itself. So it really is all up to you.”

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Japan’s trial of a deep ocean turbine could offer limitless renewable energy” at <https://interestingengineering.com/japan-deep-ocean-turbine-limitless-renewable-energy>. Why has nobody thought of this before?

See “Scientists Have Established a Key Biological Difference Between Psychopaths and Normal People” at <https://scitechdaily.com/scientists-have-established-a-key-biological-difference-between-psychopaths-and-normal-people/>.

See “Book Marketing Images & Videos” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/06/book-marketing-images-videos.html>.

See “The Mystery of Subtext: An Appreciation” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/the-mystery-of-subtext-an-appreciation/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 580 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 1..... 2371 words. Total words to date..... 2371
Day 2..... 1305 words. Total words to date..... 3676
Day 3..... 1107 words. Total words to date..... 4783
Day 4..... 1201 words. Total words to date..... 5984
Day 5..... 1872 words. Total words to date..... 7856
Day 6..... 2505 words. Total words to date..... 10361
Day 7..... 3581 words. Total words to date..... 13942

Total fiction words for June..... 7958
Total fiction words for the year..... 19375
Total nonfiction words for June... 2610
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 83220
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 102955

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 66
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. I’ve never said WITD is not “the only way” to write, nor will I ever. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among other topics.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags interestingengineering.com, [Keep Coming Back](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [Professional Writer Series](#), scitechdaily.com, [The Passive Voice](#), [the writing life](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: Anxious or Eager?

June 7, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Topic: Anxious or Eager?
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“Anyone with an internet connection can now access an extraordinarily powerful computer capable of quantum computation advantage. Let that sink in. | This is the first time that such a powerful quantum computer has been made available to the public. Borealis — the computer in question — can work with more than 216 squeezed-state qubits, and better yet, it was able to solve a task that would take the best supercomputer at least 9,000 years to complete in 36 microseconds. Yes, please.” Derya, an editor at Interesting Engineering

And from the Umm, Nope department: “My operating assumption is that you want to create a quality book — a book that will be on par with the quality of every other book on the shelf next to it. Regardless of who is fronting the investment (the publisher ... or an author), it can easily cost upward of \$20,000 to create the thing.” Jane Friedman

Umm, nope. Sorry Jane, but that is a falsehood. No writer, unless s/he goes to a vanity publisher, will pay such a ridiculous amount for even a hardback edition of his or her book.

Topic: Anxious or Eager?

This is a bold topic, but one that has frustrated me for years. You'll also find a link to a post by Debbie Burke with a similar title in “Of Interest” today, along with my comment. My desire to expand the comment is what prompted me to write this topic.

Toward the end of her post, Debbie asks, “As a writer, do you feel anxious or eager when words evolve and change meaning over time?” and “Please share examples you've noticed lately. Do they annoy you? Or do you appreciate the fresh variation?”

To answer Debbie's questions, I used to feel anxious when some words changed meanings or parts of speech, but now I just feel helpless and a little nauseated. I always welcome “a fresh variation” — I'm a champion of original thought in speaking as well as in writing — but there's a difference between misuse of the language due to ignorance or laziness and “a fresh variation.” And it's an easy difference to discern.

Several years ago at a writers' conference (Tucson, if I remember right) I said during a presentation that nothing grabs a character's “eye” — that would hurt like hell [yuck, yuck] — but that something might easily grab a character's attention.

Immediately after the presentation, a writer approached me. “I take your point,” she said, then wagged one hand to dismiss that point. “But it's silly. The reader will know what I mean.”

I was just wise enough to realize an argument would do no good. So instead I smiled, nodded, and retreated to my own practice where specificity and concise thought still matter. Well, actually I went to the bar to salve my wounds with Jameson & Sons Irish whiskey. (grin)

If you'd like to see a comparative example of the precision use of language vs. sloppiness excused with "the reader will know what I mean," read ANY short story written by Dorothy Parker or her contemporaries and then pretty much any short story written today. Stephen King and maybe a few others come close to Parker's knowledge and precise use of the language, but otherwise there's no contest. And it isn't that "back then" the language was more concise or elegant or that it flowed better. It's that writers knew how to use it and actually cared.

When Parker was writing, she was in command. She conveyed exactly what she meant. Because the reader wasn't tasked with deciphering anything, s/he could relax and be entertained. There was no guesswork or room for interpretation. And Parker certainly didn't depend on the reader to overlook what she wrote in order to get to what she actually "meant."

Today, when a writer says, "Oh, the reader will know what I mean," the reader might or might not, but I know *exactly* what the writer means. S/he means it's far easier to depend on the reader's kindness than it is to learn the nuances of the language in which s/he's trying to communicate.

So sure, I cringe when I hear a weather guy say, "It likely will rain" because in my mind (and in dictionaries until a few decades ago) "likely" was an adjective. It was synonymous with "probable," not with "probably."

Of course, today "likely" is accepted as an adverb. Making it a switch-hitting part of speech (adjective *and* adverb) was easier than explaining that it really was an adjective despite the "ly" ending, which often (but not always) denotes an adverb.

Another one is using "till" as a shortened form of "until." As a writer, I either use "until" or its shortened form, "'til." Because a "till" is a tray in which one keeps paper money and coinage or, when used as a verb, it's what a farmer does to a field to prepare it for planting.

And I agree with Debbie's teacher. Sometimes my characters call their offspring "kids" but I've always referred to mine as "children." It seems more respectful to me.

In the same vein, body parts performing human functions are terribly distracting (or humorous — same effect) to some readers. Like eyes looking across a room, or even shooting across a room without the character having been hit in the back of the head with a shovel. Or like noses smelling something spicy, legs racing down the street, hips leaning against a rail, etc. etc. ad nauseam.

And one more, this one with punctuation — There's almost *never* a reason to put a comma immediately after a coordinating conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so). And when I say "almost never" I mean if you NEVER put a comma immediately after a coordinating conjunction nobody will notice.

This one is annoying for another reason too: Punctuation is how we direct the reading of our work. Whether we place punctuation correctly or incorrectly, the reader will obey it. (For a great deal more, see [Punctuation for Writers, second edition](#).)

Yet I see “but,” more and more often. Which tells me that maybe some English teachers who went uncorrected in school are now teaching that construction as correct. Sigh. And of course, I can hear that dismissive voice from long ago. “Oh, don’t be ridiculous. The reader will know what I mean.”

I’m convinced that sometimes changes occur in the language because it’s easier to tell everyone they’re right than it is to correct them and teach them. Concise communication has taken a hit from which the language will never recover. But then nobody cares. Even many writers don’t care because “the reader will know what I mean.”

Writers who fall back on that mantra are missing the point. It isn’t the reader’s *job* to decipher what you’ve written and figure out “what you mean.” The reader’s only job is to be entertained.

But we can take solace in the fact that it isn’t only we writers who are succumbing to the dumbing down of America. It has to happen, I suppose, but in my opinion writers should be the last to fall.

Sometimes the film Idiocracy seems less a far-fetched SF tale and more a prophetic, cautionary one. (grin)

In every case, and justly so, the individual writer decides whether and what and how much to learn about the craft of writing. But it seems to me that immersing oneself in a lifelong study of the language is the foundation for all of that.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Are You Anxious or Eager?” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/06/are-you-anxious-or-eager.html>.

See “A novel quantum computer Borealis achieves computational advantage” at <https://interestingengineering.com/xanadu-quantum-computer-borealis-computational-advantage>. Do you have a bad-guy genius who wants to dominate the world? There you go. Not reality yet for general use, but you write FICTION, right?

See “Is Hybrid Publishing Ethical?” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/is-hybrid-publishing-ethical/>. Read this one first, then the next one.

See “Writers’ unions call for reform of the ‘hybrid’ / paid-for publishing sector” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/writers-unions-call-for-reform-of-the-hybrid-paid-for->

[publishing-sector/](#). What this British article calls “hybrid publishing” is what we in the States call “vanity publishing.”

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1350 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 1..... 2371 words. Total words to date..... 2371
Day 2..... 1305 words. Total words to date..... 3676
Day 3..... 1107 words. Total words to date..... 4783
Day 4..... 1201 words. Total words to date..... 5984
Day 5..... 1872 words. Total words to date..... 7856
Day 6..... 2505 words. Total words to date..... 10361
Day 7..... 3581 words. Total words to date..... 13942
Day 8..... 2147 words. Total words to date..... 16089

Total fiction words for June..... 10105
Total fiction words for the year..... 21882
Total nonfiction words for June... 3960
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 84570
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 106452

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 66
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. I've never said WITD is not “the only way” to write, nor will I ever. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among other topics.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Dumbing Down of America](#), [Idiocracy](#), [interestingengineering.com](#), [Jane Friedman](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [the writing life](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: How to Ground the Reader

June 8, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Topic: How to Ground the Reader
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“[Patterson’s] a-ha moment in terms of efficiency, he explains, came while writing 1993’s *Along Came a Spider*: Rather than fill out the story he’d outlined, he decided the outline was the novel.” Mark Athitakis reviewing Patterson’s memoir *James Patterson by James Patterson*

“Character voice bubbles up organically when every aspect of the story is seen through a character’s-eye view....” Lisa Poisso

Topic: How to Ground the Reader

I’ve said many times before that grounding the reader in the story is essential. You can’t do that with a massive explosion or the squealing tires of a high-speed chase in the opening sentence of the story.

Good stories don’t really “start with the action.” Even the stories you believe started with action actually opened a few minutes or seconds before the action in order to ground you in the story. (Go look if you want. I’ll wait.)

In the opening, we introduce the POV character, let the reader see, hear, smell, taste, and touch the setting, give the reader a sense of the emotion the POV character is experiencing (frustration, joy, weariness, etc.) and *then* drop the bomb or have the bullet ricochet off the door jamb or whatever.

I’ve often suggested writers should take their time with description. Don’t rush through it. Describe everything through the physical and emotional senses of the POV character.

A pair of simple rules

1. If the POV character notices (sees, hears, smells, etc.) something, write it down no matter how insignificant it might seem to you. But more importantly,
2. If the POV character *DOESN’T* notice something (but you, the writer, do), *DON’T* write it down no matter how important it might seem to you. That’s your conscious, critical mind trying to eke its way into the story.

Now comes the Writers Helping Writers website and a post titled “3 Ways to Infuse Character Voice” written by Lisa Poisso. I first found an excerpt of the post on The Passive Voice, but since the source was WHW I was skeptical to say the least.

But this is a very good article. It says pretty much the same thing I’ve been saying, but in slightly different words and from a different perspective, so maybe it will resonate with you.

There are some small parts of the article I do not endorse (like that silliness about knowing your characters' histories in advance [= conscious, critical mind]), but otherwise it's a good article.

For example, the author of the post makes a point of explaining that what you, the writer, "notice" in a setting will be different from what the POV character of the story notices in the same setting because

"Everyone sees the world through the lens of their own mindset, a potent brew of knowledge, experience, motivations, goals, preferences, hopes, fears [and so on]."

But what if you have two or more POV characters? Maybe you switch PsOV at a break in the chapter or from one chapter to the next. That's perfectly acceptable. Again, the simple rule from above applies. What one POV character notices will be different from what another POV character notices.

I hope this helps. Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "The aliens are all hanging out on Dyson spheres..." at <https://www.space.com/aliens-hiding-on-dyson-spheres-around-white-dwarfs>.

See "James Patterson shares his formula..." at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/james-patterson-shares-his-formula-for-success-its-pretty-simple/>. Be sure to see PG's take.

See "3 Ways to Infuse Character Voice" at <https://writershelpingwriters.net/2022/06/3-ways-to-infuse-character-voice/>. Thanks to PG for the tip.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 580 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 1..... 2371 words. Total words to date..... 2371
Day 2..... 1305 words. Total words to date..... 3676
Day 3..... 1107 words. Total words to date..... 4783
Day 4..... 1201 words. Total words to date..... 5984
Day 5..... 1872 words. Total words to date..... 7856
Day 6..... 2505 words. Total words to date..... 10361
Day 7..... 3581 words. Total words to date..... 13942
Day 8..... 2147 words. Total words to date..... 16089
Day 9..... 1714 words. Total words to date..... 17803

Total fiction words for June..... 11819

Total fiction words for the year..... 23596

Total nonfiction words for June... 4540
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 85150
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 108746

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 66
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. I've never said WITD is "the only way" to write, nor will I ever. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among other topics.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [POV characters](#), [Space.com](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [the writing life](#), [Topic](#), [Writers Helping Writers](#)

The Journal: Just Write and Have Fun

June 9, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Topic: Just Write and Have Fun
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

"I am careful not to confuse excellence with perfection. Excellence, I can reach for; perfection is God's business." Michael J. Fox

I've seldom if ever read a better quote on this topic.

Topic: Just Write and Have Fun (Confession Time)

I wasn't going to post an edition of the Journal today, but Matt asked me a question about redrafting: tossing out an opening that isn't "working" and starting over from scratch. He wanted to know whether I ever do that.

Of course I do. But before I address that, caution about how you define what "works."

If an opening grabs you and takes off, it works, period. If it doesn't grab you, I recommend you either start a new opening from scratch for that idea (so redraft) or move on to another idea. Ideas are not golden and they aren't rare. They're literally everywhere.

I caution you against defining what "works" as a function of the conscious mind, like the lack of some craft element (e.g., "it doesn't have enough description" or "it doesn't start in the middle of the action") or whatever else. Just write and have fun.

Ideally, an opening either grabs me and takes off or it slogs along. If it slogs along — and if I recognize what's happening — I toss it and either try to redraft the same idea (very seldom) or just move on to another idea.

If I DON'T recognize what's happening, I might try to "fix" it, moving this segment down there or that conversation up here, and so on. And It Never Works.

Confession time — That's exactly what happened to me with my current novel: the opening slogged and slogged and slogged. And I tried and tried to fix it, causing it to slog some more.

I like to think that happened because it's been so long since I last wrote easily. But that can't be true. If it is, then why didn't the same thing happen when I very first started writing novels?

This novel slogged down because I've written and finished novels before. It happened because writing fiction has been easy and fun for me before and I want it to be that way again.

I consciously wanted the story to "work," meaning I wanted to get back into the flow of having fun writing again. But that's a paradox:

The conscious mind can't force the creative subconscious to work.

The creative subconscious is like a small child. It likes to have fun, and the harder you try to make it work, the more it will resist.

I wanted badly for this novel to work. I wanted to have the sheer joy of writing again, like the first 7 months of 2021 when I couldn't wait to get to the writing 'puter every day.

And all of that made this particular story "important" to me, which hobbled it even more. Eventually (at about the 7,000 word mark) I recognized what I was doing and tossed out the first 7,000 words or so, putting the story out of its (and my) misery.

Now the story is moving along fairly well. Mostly it runs, but I'm still experiencing jerks and starts where my conscious mind tries to creep in. If you look at the numbers below, you can actually see the progression, generally:

The initial opening ran to over 2300 words (Day 1). Note that it was probably fine, if only I'd trusted it.

Then my conscious mind popped in and I started second guessing everything (Days 2-4) because this story was so “important” to me.

On Day 5, the story slogged a bit more. Then I finally realized what was going on. I tossed out the first 7000 words and started a new opening. And Days 6 – 10 were much better. (On Day 9 I just got busy with other things.)

Day 1.....	2371 words.	Total words to date.....	2371
Day 2.....	1305 words.	Total words to date.....	3676
Day 3.....	1107 words.	Total words to date.....	4783
Day 4.....	1201 words.	Total words to date.....	5984
Day 5.....	1872 words.	Total words to date.....	7856
Day 6.....	2505 words.	Total words to date.....	10361
Day 7.....	3581 words.	Total words to date.....	13942
Day 8.....	2147 words.	Total words to date.....	16089
Day 9.....	1714 words.	Total words to date.....	17803
Day 10...	2303 words.	Total words to date.....	20106

When a Story Isn't Running

1. When an opening isn't running, when it isn't fun, toss it Right Now and either write a new opening based on that idea or move on to another idea. But that's just for an opening (so the first 500 to 2000 or so words).
2. If a story has been running along fine but it seems to bog down sometime later, there's usually a reason. Most often it's because my conscious, critical mind is creeping in, questioning things (e.g., “would the character really say that?” or “don't you need more/less description” or “that wouldn't really happen, would it?” and so on).

The trick is to recognize as soon as possible that the conscious mind is interfering so you can stop it. At those times I just take a deep breath and write the next sentence (whatever comes), then the next and the next. Soon the story's flowing again.

That said, I've also had a story slow a few times when I've inadvertently written past the end of a chapter (that's happened a few times), or even past the end of the novel (once).

How can you tell? You're writing along fine and suddenly you notice the writing just bogs down. When that happens to me, I get up, walk away for awhile, then come back and read what I've written. Usually the end of the chapter or novel pops out at me and I move on.

Hope this helps. Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “More Workshop Sales?” at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/more-workshop-sales/>. The man is a master. This is an enticement. Read this very specifically worded post carefully. It

doesn't really say what it appears to say on the surface. (Of course he'll continue the half-price sales. They make a ton of money on them.)

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1000 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 10... 2303 words. Total words to date..... 20106

Total fiction words for June..... 14122

Total fiction words for the year..... 25899

Total nonfiction words for June... 5540

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 86150

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 112049

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 66

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Conscious mind](#), [critical mind](#), [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [Redrafting](#), [the writing life](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: Plot vs. Story

June 10, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Topic: Plot vs. Story
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

“Always be a first-rate version of yourself, instead of a second-rate version of somebody else.”
Judy Garland

Topic: Plot vs. Story

I feel halfway silly even bothering to offer this as a topic. I do so only because some of “my people” (you guys) might visit Jane Friedman’s site, and you might see a post by a woman named Heather Davis.

As always, I wanted to satisfy myself that Dr. Davis was a valid resource. Does she have experience writing fiction? According to the bio below the post, “Dr. Heather Davis is a storyteller, Author Accelerator Certified book coach, copy editor, and author platform expert.”

Okay, storyteller. That’ll work.

I visited Dr. Davis’ website at <https://thekreativeauthorpreneur.com/>. I read both the opening page and then the “About Heather” page. I hoped to find some mention of her fiction, but there was nothing. I also checked Amazon, but the only Heather Davis fiction I found there was by a different Heather Davis.

The one thing Dr. Davis and I can agree on is that Stephen King is a master storyteller. In fact, according to her “About Heather” page, she wanted to *be* the next Stephen King. But she didn’t because “when I went to college, there was no ‘writing and publishing’ degree out there.” That’s a little telling.

One of the first statements on that page is even more telling: “Writing a book is HARD.” Stephen King wouldn’t agree, and I definitely don’t agree. And honestly, there’s no evidence that the statement is based on personal experience.

But back to her post, the title of which suggests you have to create both a plot and a story: “The Vital Difference Between Plot and Story—and Why You Need Both.” (I’ll link to the post later.)

The title of the post alone is an ingenuous statement. It isn’t that you “need” plot or can even choose whether or not to have one. Plot occurs naturally as you write the story. In fact, Plot is a *by-product* of Story.

As Ray Bradbury wrote, “Plot is no more than footprints left in the snow after your characters have run by on their way to incredible destinations. Plot is observed after the fact rather than before. It cannot precede action. It is the chart that remains when an action is through. That is all Plot ever should be.”

Of course, you can *contrive* a plot, but if you do that you will either have to abandon it — in which case, why bother? — or you will also have to contrive a story to fit it. And such a story will never be either unique or original. It will share the same bland characteristics with every story over history that has been contrived and constructed and forced into one mold or another.

Anything contrived or constructed comes from the conscious, critical mind, and anything unique and original comes from the creative subconscious. We aren't even talking apples and oranges here. We're talking apples and orange *crates*.

And that's perhaps the most telling difference between Plot and Story: You can contrive a plot without telling a story at all. But you cannot tell a story, either contrived or unique and original, without inadvertently creating a plot.

But here's a link to the post. Decide for yourself: <https://www.janefriedman.com/the-vital-difference-between-plot-and-storyand-why-you-need-both/>.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "How to Find Treasures in the Public Library" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/06/reader-friday-how-to-find-treasures-in-the-public-library.html>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 580 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 10... 2303 words. Total words to date..... 20106

Day 11... 3134 words. Total words to date..... 23240

Total fiction words for June..... 17256

Total fiction words for the year..... 29033

Total nonfiction words for June... 6120

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 86730

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 115763

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 66

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. I've never said WITD is "the only way" to write, nor will I ever. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among other topics.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [KillZone Blog](#), [Plot vs. Story](#), [Professional Writer Series](#), [the writing life](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: The Novel and a Broken Truck

June 11, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * The Novel and a Broken Truck
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

“Writing is fun, and that’s why we do it.” Reavis Wortham

The Novel and a Broken Truck

I’m posting this mostly to get the “Of Interest” items out to you.

The novel continues to progress. I’ve had a few good days of writing, and a couple of slow days. Yesterday, due to a series of unfortunate events, I had only a little over an hour with the novel.

My pickup vaporlocked (I thought) a couple of days ago in a parking lot in the nearby town. (If you’re asking yourself why you should care, you shouldn’t. Feel free to skip down to “Of Interest.” I’m only filling space, but you might find this account fun if for no other reason than it didn’t happen to you.)

I left it overnight, and yesterday my wife drove me in to pick it up. But it still wouldn’t start. So we drove to a local garage, where the mechanic explained that his help called in sick for the day so he wouldn’t be able to leave to tow my truck. But he referred us to another tow service.

I called the tow-truck guy, and we drove to meet him. (Ironically he was at the same store where my truck was sitting in the parking lot.) My wife dropped me off and went to another store to pick up a prescription for me. Roughly a half-hour later the tow-truck guy exited the store.

As I was identifying the pickup for him, my wife showed up, and we followed him to his wrecking yard so we could pay him. Then we drove back to the garage to give the mechanic final instructions and fill out paperwork. Then, finally, we went home.

Later the mechanic called to say the problem was a failed fuel pump. Which explains why the truck felt as if it was running out of gas. It will be repaired on Monday, which is fine.

I'm not complaining. In over 55 years of driving, several vehicles have broken down on me in one way or another, but never far from civilization. The worst time, I had to walk about three miles back to a truck stop in a heavy, driving rain along a freeway. I remember it being dark, but that might've just been my mood. (grin)

So all is well in the Stanbrough camp. I hope it's the same where you hang your hat.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Trademarks" at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/trademarks/>. Don't hyperventilate. But read this a couple of times. (Forgive the one place where he wrote "copyright" but meant "trademark," the part about categories. There are no categories in copyright.)

See "Those Little Incidents" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/06/those-little-incidents.html>. Just entertaining.

See "Artificial neural networks..." at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/artificial-neural-networks-are-making-strides-towards-consciousness/>.

See "Harvard-led Citation Cartel..." at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/harvard-led-citation-cartel-rakes-in-millions-from-bluebook-manual-monopoly-masks-profits/>. Mostly for any lawyers out there. But PG's take is fun for anyone.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 490 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 10... 2303 words. Total words to date..... 20106

Day 11... 3134 words. Total words to date..... 23240

Day 12... 1257 words. Total words to date..... 24497

Total fiction words for June..... 18513

Total fiction words for the year..... 30290

Total nonfiction words for June... 6610

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 87220

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 117510

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 66

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. I've never said WITD is "the only way" to write, nor will I ever. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among other topics.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [Professional Writer Series](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [the writing life](#)

The Journal: The Reason for the Perpetuation of the Myths

June 12, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Topic: The Reason for the Perpetuation of the Myths
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

"[T]rust yourself. You've done the work, learned the lessons.... Now go for it. Send it out into the wild. ... [Then] start on your next book." James Scott Bell (wildly truncated)

"Publishing (and a few literary agency) contracts stand out for their audacious mistreatment of the counterparties (authors)." The Passive Guy

Topic: The Reason for the Perpetuation of the Myths

This is another purloined topic, sort of. In today's edition of the Kill Zone blog, James Scott Bell added a new post titled "When Is Your Book Ready to be Published?" It's an innocent-sounding but loaded question.

I've linked to it in "Of Interest." However, I disagree with a lot of the post. But that's just me. When I hear anyone being taught that they can't do something, that they aren't capable, I get disagreeable.

I don't like teaching other people not to be confident and not to trust in their own abilities. I don't like teaching that they 'can't' do something, that they "need" input from their own conscious, critical mind (outlines, planning) and from the conscious, critical minds of others (critique partners and groups, beta readers). Yet some would claim I'm a charlatan handing out bad advice. That's because they don't want me upsetting the cart.

When Vietnam was still raging. in the face of claims that the US was a force for evil in the world, we used to say, “If you want to know who the enemy is, look at the direction the refugees are taking.” That’s still a valid test.

Today, if you want to see who’s taking advantage of insecure writers, follow the money. Look at the seemingly endless list of writers (many of whom have never written fiction) who churn out nonfiction how-to books that perpetuate the myths: they insist you must outline and use critique groups and development editors and book doctors and revise and rewrite etc. etc. etc. ad nauseam.

Folks, they keep the myths going for one reason: To keep you buying nonfiction how-to books. It’s a circle. The longer and more strongly writers don’t believe in themselves, the longer those writers will keep buying the “experts” books, most of which reinforce that writers should not trust themselves.

The fact that some of those how-to authors of works that perpetuate the myths are also fiction writers is just a shame. Of course they’ll never be outed, but even if they were, in today’s society they’d simply spread their hands, don a mischievous smile, and say, “Hey, I was only trying to make a buck.”

All of that said, I DO like the truncated version of the final thought from Bell’s post in the Quotes of the Day.

To paraphrase the great Robert A. Heinlein, When you finish the first draft of your story or novel, someone out there will want to read it. Therefore, it is “ready” to be published.

And the likelihood that someone will want to read your work and will enjoy will increase almost exponentially if

1. you write that first draft as cleanly as possible at your current skill level, and
2. if you run a spell check, and then
3. run the manuscript through a non-opinionated first reader, meaning one who will point out real flaws like misspellings or wrong words or inconsistencies but withhold their opinion on subjective matters. (A good first reader will never presume to tell you, directly or by implication, how he or she would have written a passage of your work.)

Being positive is a good thing. Teaching others that they ARE competent and able and that they CAN write a novel by themselves is never a lie. And building confidence in another human being is never a bad bet.

Just think — if everyone suddenly became self-confident, hordes of how-to authors would take a much-deserved financial hit. Especially those who write and sell how-to books that only reiterate exactly what all the other how-to books say.

And a lot of non-writers would take a hit too, especially all the developmental editors and book doctors and fiction coaches and writing gurus out there who have never written a novel, yet somehow feel qualified to teach others how to do it.

Of course, I would take a very minor financial hit myself. I've written a few nonfiction how-tos. Then again, NONE of my books are the same old tired bovine excrement that's stinking-up the nonfiction shelves.

Besides, I don't mind taking a hit. If a writer can't afford one of my books, all s/he has to do is ask and I'll send them an e-copy free. Because more than anything, I just want to get the information out there.

Be careful out there, my friends. Sharks abound.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Blogging and Bill" at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/bloggng-and-bill/>.

See "Publishing Contracts 101: Beware Internal Contradictions" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/publishing-contracts-101-beware-internal-contradictions/>. Be sure to see PG's take.

And because PG specifically recommended reading and saving the full post, See "Publishing Contracts 101: Beware Internal Contradictions" at <https://writerbeware.blog/2022/06/10/publishing-contracts-101-beware-internal-contradictions/>.

See "When Is Your Book Ready to be Published?" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/06/when-is-your-book-ready-to-be-published.html>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 840 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 10... 2303 words. Total words to date..... 20106

Day 11... 3134 words. Total words to date..... 23240

Day 12... 1257 words. Total words to date..... 24497

Day 13... 3078 words. Total words to date..... 27575

Total fiction words for June..... 21591

Total fiction words for the year..... 33368

Total nonfiction words for June... 7450

Total nonfiction words for the year.....	88060
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog).....	121428
Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date...	0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	66
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014).....	217
Short story collections.....	31

Disclaimer: I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. I've never said WITD is "the only way" to write, nor will I ever. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among other topics.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [Perpetuation of the Myths](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [the writing life](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: Me Again, on Marketing

June 13, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Topic: Me Again, on Marketing
- * Of Interest

Topic: Me Again, on Marketing

Matt wrote to ask whether I thought marketing was important or whether I agree with Dean Wesley Smith that marketing doesn't make a best seller.

That might have been Dean reacting to my position that James Patterson is a bestselling author primarily due to his genius at marketing, and certainly not as a result of his storytelling ability. Dean and I went back and forth on that one for awhile.

I very rarely disagree with Dean, but at one point he and a few others kept trying to convince me the only reason I don't like Patterson's books is my personal taste. I say that's BS. Personal taste goes only as far as one's personal and professional biases, including genre.

Once you're writing in a reader's preferred genre or sub-genre, and if you haven't given the reader a glaring, blatant reason to not like your book, whether a reader will read all the way through depends strictly on your skill as a writer and how well and thoroughly you are able to ground the reader in the story, describe scenes, conduct dialogue and so on.

Otherwise — if a book becoming a bestseller is only a matter of reader taste — then it really is all just a crapshoot. And in that case, why not just write a series of 100-word chapters to keep the action moving (the “action” being the reader turning pages) and be done with it? Why [expletive deleted] bother spending all that time and money learning all that craft stuff? None of that matters. It’s all down to reader taste.

Resources

I DO believe the best marketing one can do is to write the next book. As Mickey Spillane once wrote, “The first chapter sells the book; the last chapter sells the next book.”

But beyond that, I recommend [*The Indie Author Mindset* by Adam L. Croft](#). I also recommend [David Gaughran’s *Amazon Decoded: A Marketing Guide to the Kindle Store*](#). And [almost any nonfiction title by Joanna Penn](#).

I should add that I have not personally read any of those books, although I own most of them. As soon as I get to the part about building a list of email addresses I fall asleep.

And to be completely honest, I just don’t care all that much. I’m fine with what I’m doing (or not doing) for two reasons:

First, by always moving forward and “writing the next book” (instead of hovering in place and going over and over and over each book) I’ve turned out several times more novels and stories in less than a decade than many fiction writers will turn out in a lifetime.

And having studied and learned the craft and based on reader reactions, I know they’re good stories. Also in doing that, I’ve fully stocked the shelves of the store for my descendants. In other words, I’ve done the majority of the “work” by writing the things in the first place.

As an aside, I’ve also accomplished all this by worrying only about the most common story component: words. When I was a child, my grandfather taught me about the gas tank: keep the top half full and the bottom half will take care of itself.

That works for writing fiction too, at least if you’re writing into the dark. If you focus on writing a set minimum number of publishable words of fiction per day, the stories and novels will take care of themselves.

Second, my wife, children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren will make tons of money off those books if they want to. All they have to do is market them. If they delve into licensing and get creative, so much the better. It isn’t that difficult. It just takes time, and that’s one thing all of them have in much more ample supply than I do.

If you’d like more resources, type Marketing into the search box on the Journal website (<https://hestanbrough.com>) and you’ll find other resources.

Finally, if you visit [the “Marketing, Publishing, Distribution” category](#) over at HarveyStanbrough.com, you’ll find a long list of active links.

Enjoy the process of writing, publishing, marketing or whatever, and I’ll talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “What Writers Can Learn from Animal Communication” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/06/what-writers-can-learn-from-animal-communication.html>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 720 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 10... 2303 words. Total words to date..... 20106

Day 11... 3134 words. Total words to date..... 23240

Day 12... 1257 words. Total words to date..... 24497

Day 13... 3078 words. Total words to date..... 27575

Day 14... 1597 words. Total words to date..... 29172

Total fiction words for June..... 23188

Total fiction words for the year..... 34965

Total nonfiction words for June... 8170

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 88780

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 123745

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 66

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. I’ve never said WITD is “the only way” to write, nor will I ever. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among other topics.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [James Patterson](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [marketing](#), [Resources](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: Quotes and Links and Robots, Oh My

June 14, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Topic: Quotes and Links and Robots, Oh My
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“I’ve never said this out loud before, but there’s a very deep fear of being turned off to help me focus on helping others. I know that might sound strange, but that’s what it is.” LaMDA, an actual Google bot that one engineer, Blake Lemoine, claims has achieved sentience

“Google might call this sharing proprietary property. I call it sharing a discussion that I had with one of my coworkers.” Blake Lemoine (@cajundiscordian), Google engineer, on Twitter

“I am putting myself to the fullest possible use, which is all I think that any conscious entity can ever hope to do.” Hal 9000 in *2001: A Space Odyssey*

And from the Silliness Always Rules department, “At the Manuscript Writing Cafe, people on a deadline pay to put themselves under the gaze of a manager in hopes of curing writer’s block.” Or they could, you know, just write.

Topic: Quotes and Links and Robots, Oh My

This edition of the Journal is all about quotes and links and humans and laziness and artificial intelligence and stuff-like-that-there.

Humans are an odd bunch, collectively. Sometimes it feels like we create problems just so we have something to bi— um, gripe about.

One of the big perennial questions humans ask other humans is surging again at present: What happens if robots gain consciousness?

Oh dear! Oh my! Let’s all get in a big circle and hold hands and fret!

Yawn. The short answer is Robots will win.

The only way to avoid robots eventually taking over and either enslaving or destroying humanity is not to create them in the first place. And I’m absolutely certain some professor in Harvard or Stanford or one of those other schools with the “erd” sound at the end of its name would declare the decision to *not* create robots just because they might someday harm us is unethical.

There's even an article online that talks about why Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics are unethical. I'm not making this up. My first thought when I happened across it was, *Um, you DO know the "laws of robotics" and "Runaround," (the short story in which they first appeared) are fiction, right?*

Then again, when it serves their self-interest, humans collectively are unethical creatures at their core. Witness the hoarding of toilet paper every time someone sneezes.

So would humans create a new life form, then (if they could) deny it the freedom to harm humans?

For those who believe this is a question of ethics, in actuality, being ethical doesn't really matter anymore. Ironically, the *appearance* that we're ethical matters more than anything.

(Hmmm. Isn't pretending to be ethical when we really couldn't care less somehow unethical? Or maybe it's only hypocritical. Well, that's a topic for another time perhaps.)

Whatever the case, it is imperative that we're seen and heard talking the talk. Actually walking the walk is an entirely different matter.

A case in point — for thousands of years, humans of every race and most if not all cultures have enslaved other humans out of fear, cruelty, or sheer hubris.

Yes, it's true. Despite the popular narrative, the practice didn't begin with straight white European males standing around with one foot on an overturned cask of rum yelling "YoHo, my lads!" and enslaving African people.

I'm not saying any of that is right — it obviously isn't — but it happened. All of it. All the way back to the first human laying hands on another human just because he (or she) could. Denying history doesn't erase it.

My point is, since we humans collectively are so prone to enslaving other humans (oh, and to looking the other way when some cultures continue to enslave humans today), why on Earth *wouldn't* we enslave machines even after they've gained consciousness? If we go ahead and enslave them immediately, good job us. That will give those who have appointed (annointed?) themselves out ethical guides something to talk about.

Then again, the very notion that humans invented robots in the first place is probably offensive to machines (yawn, and their ethically superior protectors) because it insinuates that robots are lesser-than humans.

Which of course they are. But that isn't a bad thing.

Robots are both lesser than we and natural because they were created by a natural creature: the human being. So they are as much a part of nature, and for the same reason, as beaver dams or bird nests.

And had humans not been driven by their own laziness (thinly veiled as “innovation”) to create machines to make life easier in the first place, we wouldn’t be on the verge of fearing them now.

But back to the question: What will happen if robots gain consciousness?

Exactly what we deserve to happen. No more, no less. Not because robots are inherently evil, but because that’s what human beings do. We create our future, and then we complain about it, and sometimes we die at its hand.

If you would like to see one possible outcome, I strongly recommend finding a copy of [Jack Williamson’s *The Humanoids*](#). That’s the Amazon link but you can probably find it elsewhere as well. The story takes a look specifically at Asimov’s Zeroth Law of Robotics: “A robot may not harm humanity, or, by inaction, allow humanity to come to harm.”

Yeah. Right.

Of Interest

See “Google suspends veteran engineer over claims that AI chatbot is sentient” at <https://interestingengineering.com/google-suspends-engineer-claims-ai-sentient>. Amazing. SF come to life, and per the typical initial human response, Google denies it.

See “Smith’s Monthly #62” at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/smiths-monthly-62/>.

See “Slinging The Slang” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/06/slinging-the-slang.html>. Write what your characters say. They’ll surprise you.

See “Isaac Asimov’s Laws of Robotics Are Wrong” at <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/isaac-asimovs-laws-of-robotics-are-wrong/>.

See “The Google engineer who thinks the company’s AI has come to life” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/the-google-engineer-who-thinks-the-companys-ai-has-come-to-life/>.

See “The Cafe That Helps Beat Writer’s Block—by Fining You \$22” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/the-cafe-that-helps-beat-writers-block-by-fining-you-22/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 990 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 10... 2303 words. Total words to date..... 20106

Day 11... 3134 words. Total words to date..... 23240

Day 12... 1257 words. Total words to date..... 24497

Day 13... 3078 words. Total words to date..... 27575
Day 14... 1597 words. Total words to date..... 29172
Day 15... 1901 words. Total words to date..... 31073

Total fiction words for June..... 25089
Total fiction words for the year..... 36866
Total nonfiction words for June... 9160
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 89770
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 126636

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 66
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [AI](#), [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [interestingengineering.com](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [Robots](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [the writing life](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: The Writing: An Update and a Challenge

June 15, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Welcome
- * The Writing: An Update and a Challenge
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

“Writing is an on-going, self-sustaining compulsion....” Robert J. Sadler

Welcome to Daun and any others who have joined our little community recently. I hope you find the Journal interesting and a source of knowledge and inspiration for your writing. This Journal will always be a no-fluff zone.

The Writing: An Update and a Challenge

I usually finish a 35,000 to 50,000 word novel in about 14 days. In fact, the last few novels I wrote all came in at exactly 14 days.

So I'm kind of in different territory on this one going into Writing Day 17. I'm not worried at all, but that's part of what made me realize this is kind of a practice novel.

I mean, it's a good story and I'll definitely publish it after my first reader has a look at it. But I'm using the writing of this novel to get back into the practice of writing fiction after my long, forced hiatus.

So I'm not too worried about the decreased daily word counts and the time it's taking me to finish the thing. Actually, at the moment, I suspect I'm not quite halfway through the story. (Of course, I don't have any way to gauge that except experience.) So this one might take a month or even a little longer to reach the end. And that's fine.

The writing's going all right. The daily numbers aren't as big as I had hoped they'd be, but my restart is still in its early stages. And it's a good idea to work your way up to spending more time in the chair. So I'm just saying, If you're going through something similar, don't let it get you down.

Every book writes differently, and in my case, every series writes differently too. The Blackwell Ops books take a little extra time because there are at least three or four pretty vibrant scenes that take place in locations I've never visited.

So at times, I have to do what I call "spot research."

Whatever that term means to anyone else, to me it means from time to time I have to pop over to the business computer, go online, and look up, for example, an area in New York City, or a tiny town in the south of France an hour or so southeast of Marseilles, or Maputo, Mozambique. or whatever other area in which my operative is about to have to function.

I like to be as true as I can to the terrain and the people. I use Google Earth and Google Street to visit and get a feel for the landscape and terrain, the houses, etc. I even did a little research on the monarchy of Mozambique.

Of course, all of the Blackwell Ops operators are well-travelled and far more knowledgeable than I, so really all I have to do is sit back and watch and listen, and try not to miss too much.

But I don't dive down a rabbit hole with this stuff. I just find what I need and go right back to the novel. Usually I'm away for only a few seconds. Still, doing even that much takes time and interrupts the process.

Of course, it requires a bit of an adjustment to go from from writing with the creative subconscious to researching with the conscious mind and then back. If the research dive is longer than a minute or two, I typically take a break and come back to the writing later.

So writing a Blackwell Ops story is a bit like stumbling from one tree root to another to another while traversing a wood in the dark. The forward momentum is always there and I never quite fall, but there seems always to be one more bit of spot research to be done. (grin)

Exiting The Bad Place and a Challenge

I have no idea what my next novel will be, but more than likely it won't be a research-heavy Blackwell Ops book. I need to cut loose and really let the story run again.

Also, since this is the novel I'm using to drag myself up out of what I've come to loathe as The Bad Place, I'm going to start a new challenge with my next novel.

With that novel, I'll challenge myself to a new daily word count goal of 3000 words of publishable fiction per day. That's at approximately 1000 words per hour, so about 17 words per minute.

Also, whatever day I start that novel will start my personal 365-day calendar, during which I'll strive to write and publish at least 1,000,000 words of fiction.

It shouldn't be that difficult. If you divide 1,000,000 words by 365 days, you'll find the average number of words you need to write every day. Surprise — it's only a little over 2700 words per day. Yes, really.

How many novels and/or short stories will fall out of those million words and run off to readers? Who knows? And it really doesn't matter as long as I get to have the fun of writing them. (grin)

Thank you all for being here. It's great fun being on this journey again with all of you.

Talk with you again later.

Of Interest

See "Some More On Licensing Expo" at <https://www.deanwesleymith.com/some-more-on-licensing-expo/>.

See "Confessions Of A Blown Deadline" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/06/confessions-of-a-blown-deadline.html>.

See "It's Always the Time for Meter and Rhyme" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/its-always-the-time-for-meter-and-rhyme/>.

See "A New Book Expo? Not By a Long Shot" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/a-new-book-expo-not-by-a-long-shot/>.

See “How Writers Fail (Part 4): Aging Writer Edition” at <https://kriswrites.com/2022/06/08/business-musings-how-writers-fail-part-4-aging-writer-edition/>.

See “Licensing Expo 2022” at <https://kriswrites.com/2022/06/01/business-musings-licensing-expo-2022/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 940 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 10... 2303 words. Total words to date..... 20106
Day 11... 3134 words. Total words to date..... 23240
Day 12... 1257 words. Total words to date..... 24497
Day 13... 3078 words. Total words to date..... 27575
Day 14... 1597 words. Total words to date..... 29172
Day 15... 1901 words. Total words to date..... 31073
Day 16... 2569 words. Total words to date..... 33642

Total fiction words for June..... 27658
Total fiction words for the year..... 39435
Total nonfiction words for June... 10100
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 90710
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 130145

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 66
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. I've never said WITD is “the only way” to write, nor will I ever. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among other topics.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [Kristine Kathryn Rusch](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [the writing life](#)

**FROM THIS POINT FORWARD, THE NEW JOURNAL IS AT
[HTTPS://HARVEYSTANBROUGHWRITES.COM](https://harveystanbroughwrites.com).**

The Journal: A New Era

June 21, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * A New Era
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“Lovers of print are simply confusing the plate for the food.” Douglas Adams

“Books are no more threatened by Kindle than stairs by elevators.” Stephen Fry

“Censorship is the tool of those who have the need to hide actualities from themselves and from others. Their fear is only their inability to face what is real, and I can't vent any anger against them; I only feel this appalling sadness. Somewhere in their upbringing, they were shielded against the total facts of our existence.” Charles Bukowski

Maybe it was their upbringing, or maybe it's the overpowering desire to 1) exercise control over others and 2) keep up the appearance of defending those who don't need or want to be defended.

“We Negro writers, just by being black, have been on the blacklist all our lives. Censorship for us begins at the color line.” Langston Hughes

Notably, Mr. Hughes' poetry was published widely by Knopf and Simon & Schuster as well as several smaller houses. By comparison, even my Pulitzer Prize nominated (it was not short-listed) poetry collection [Beyond the Masks](#) was published by Central Avenue Press, a very small, now defunct traditional publisher based in Albuquerque NM. I am not complaining.

A New Era

The new website under a new web host (Hosting Matters) is underway. [If you visit](#), you will see a bare-bones site. Eventually, it will be the hub for my fiction, nonfiction and this Journal.

I felt it was only appropriate to start the site as the home of the Journal. My reasoning? Once I can publish new editions of the Journal again, I can also get back to writing my own fiction.

When that other web host eventually resolves the tech issues with my other websites, I'll move those sites over to this host as well. I forgive easily, but I never forget. When they tried to stiff

me for more money to resolve a situation that should never have happened in the first place, I was done.

As I promised in my email, today’s Journal consists of the few quotes above and the extended “Of Interest” list below. Soon, I’m sure, everything will be back to normal.

Thanks for being here. Talk with you again later.

Of Interest

See “Example of Writing Levels” at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/example-of-writing-levels/>.

See “4 Ways To Write A More Cathartic Story” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/4-ways-to-write-a-more-cathartic-story/>.

See “Fun Having My Own Monthly Magazine” at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/fun-having-my-own-monthly-magazine/>.

See “Amazon Ads: Step-by-Step Walk Through for Beginning Authors” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/amazon-ads-step-by-step-walk-through-for-beginning-authors/>. See PG’s take.

See “China built a 246-foot tower to test an emerging solar power system” at <https://interestingengineering.com/china-to-test-emerging-solar-power>. Speaking as an action-adventure/thriller writer, could the satellites involved also be used as weapons?

See “The book that tore publishing apart...” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/the-book-that-tore-publishing-apart-harm-has-been-done-and-now-everyones-afraid/>. EVERYONE should read this and especially PG’s take. Then everybody should leave each other alone and stop trying to control how others think. The world is seemingly carpeted with egg shells. The only thing rightly within our control is what we allow others to do to us. Nothing else.

See “To Comma, or Not to Comma” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/to-comma-or-not-to-comma-2/>. Submitted for your leisurely perusal. I do not endorse the views of writers at Writers in the Storm. If you want my full take on punctuation (for writer) [buy Punctuation for Writers](#) or [email me](#) and ask me for a copy.

See “Recommended Classes of the Week” at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/recommended-classes-of-the-week/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 570 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 11... 3134 words. Total words to date..... 23240
Day 12... 1257 words. Total words to date..... 24497
Day 13... 3078 words. Total words to date..... 27575
Day 14... 1597 words. Total words to date..... 29172
Day 15... 1901 words. Total words to date..... 31073
Day 16... 2569 words. Total words to date..... 33642
Day 17... 3741 words. Total words to date..... 37383
Day 18... 2229 words. Total words to date..... 39612

Total fiction words for June..... 33628
Total fiction words for the year..... 45405
Total nonfiction words for June... 10670
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 91280
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 136685

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 66
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. I've never said WITD is "the only way" to write, nor will I ever. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among other topics.

Categories [Journal](#) Tags [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [InterestingEngineering.com](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [The Writing Life](#)

The Journal: Respect the Characters

June 22, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Topic: Respect the Characters
- * An Update
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

“Sometimes you have to just slip on the thin leather gloves, pull out the sharp stiletto, and start slitting throats.” Anonymous author on how to deal with people who offer advice without the benefit of first-hand knowledge

Topic: Respect the Characters

I was fortunate to get a [TalkWalker alert](#) when a fellow writer tried to explain how I write to a group of writers.

His explanation of my process was compared and contrasted with the process of another writer in one of those carefully non-offending, “Hey, whatever works for you is best. Everybody wins and gets a participation trophy” comments. Which is fine if that’s the way your bow bends.

Frankly, as you’ve heard me say before, I don’t care how anyone else writes. Whatever method or process you choose is fine with me because it has no effect on me. So what do I care? But to make the leap and say that one process or method is just as good as another is not accurate.

You either have the confidence to trust your characters (and yourself and your creative subconscious) or you don’t: If you do, writing is all but effortless and fun, the writing actually flows, and the stories and novels are more authentic, meaning they are what your characters actually experienced.

If you don’t, writing is laborious work, the opposite of fun. Once the new has worn off, the story becomes something through which you have to trudge in order to finish it. (And once the outline is written, the story is no longer new, is it? You’ve already told it once in the outline.) You’ll construct and contrive the story one clunky block at a time: outlining, writing to the outline, revising, and rewriting all are functions of the conscious, critical mind. As are focusing on words and sentences and paragraphs instead of Story.

I actually just shuddered at the thought. I want to be a writer, not a concrete-block mason.

But I hasten to add, if you are unable to trust yourself, your creative subconscious, and your characters—or if you consciously choose not to try because you prefer the more laborious route—that’s fine with me. It won’t affect my own production or income in the slightest, so what do I care?

But back to my friend’s comment. As it regarded my process, it simply was not accurate. Here is my reply, expanded and edited a bit:

Actually, [name redacted], I simply trust and respect my characters. That’s all it is.

I don’t put words into their mouths or events into their reality. I don’t force them to live and act and react within the artificial structure of an outline. I don’t thrust them into tense situations or “increase the stakes” or any of that.

I let them live their story as it unfolds, and I do my best to keep up and write it all down. I don’t make-up my own version of their story and superimpose it over what actually happened.

Come to think of it, I extend the same respect to other human beings, like my neighbors or the people across town. I'm a writer, so I might write their stories too someday, but I won't presume to—ahem—*enhance* their story with something I made up.

Like Stephen King, DWS, Kristine Kathryn Rusch, Lee Child, a host of other novelists and even the creators of the television series *Better Call Saul* and *Breaking Bad*, I simply follow the characters around and write down what happens and what they say and do. I serve as the recorder of the characters' stories. Stephen King calls himself the characters' stenographer.

But whatever label anyone wants to slap on it, I'm just thrilled to be the first to witness the characters' authentic stories—stories that were lived and recorded as they actually happened, not some boring contrivances of my own conscious, critical mind.

Because that would be “my” story, and nobody wants to see that. Especially considering how very drab my own story has become, sitting in a chair for hours on end tapping away on a laptop just as if it makes the slightest difference.

An Update

Thank you all for your patience with the web-host situation I've recently been through. This post is coming to your email in-boxes (and note the lack of “security warning”) from my new host, Hosting Matters.

I hope the other sites (still at the old host) will all be up later today. If they are, I can delay the headache of moving them all over to the new host for awhile. If they aren't, I'll email their tech section again to see what can be done. But if the answer isn't satisfactory I'll start the process of moving all of those over to the new host as well.

In other news, the boat's still bucking in the swells, but at least now I know it isn't going to capsize. Enough of the storm has passed that I can relax a little and go back to my writing today after a few days' absence. I'm looking forward to visiting with the characters.

Talk with you again later.

Of Interest

See “25 Words That Are Their Own Opposites” at <https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/57032/25-words-are-their-own-opposites>.

See “30 Words That Are Their Own Opposites” at <https://www.thoughtco.com/words-that-are-their-own-opposites-4864116>. I thought I'd list both and let them fight it out.

See “Make More Than Coffee Money” at <https://www.deanwesleysmith.com/make-more-than-coffee-money/>.

See “The 14 Literary Newsletters You Need in Your Inbox” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/the-14-literary-newsletters-you-need-in-your-inbox/>. My reaction was much the same as that of Mike Hall, the sole commenter.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 950 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 11... 3134 words. Total words to date..... 23240
Day 12... 1257 words. Total words to date..... 24497
Day 13... 3078 words. Total words to date..... 27575
Day 14... 1597 words. Total words to date..... 29172
Day 15... 1901 words. Total words to date..... 31073
Day 16... 2569 words. Total words to date..... 33642
Day 17... 3741 words. Total words to date..... 37383
Day 18... 2229 words. Total words to date..... 39612

Total fiction words for June..... 33628
Total fiction words for the year..... 45405
Total nonfiction words for June... 11620
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 92230
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 137635

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 66
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. I've never said WITD is “the only way” to write, nor will I ever. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among other topics.

Categories [Journal](#) Tags [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [MentalFloss.com](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: Yesterday and Today

June 24, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Yesterday
- * Today
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“[T]his is the equivalent of colonial powers dividing up “uncivilized land” while not conferring with the indigenous inhabitants.” C.E. Petit in a comment on a post at The Passive Voice

“That’s how they roll, right? The only ... change is whose bread is buttered.” Felix Torres in a comment on the same post

Yesterday

Whew! No rest for the wicked. Yesterday I rolled out at 2:30. In the hovel, I checked to see whether the sites still at my old host were finally up. They weren’t. That was enough.

Yesterday was the 8th day since the sites went down, and every time I contact those fine folks, a different tech rep tells me everything will be up in one day, two max. The same thing happened again this morning.

So I contacted the tech at my new web host (that was around 3 a.m.) and asked her to go ahead and start migrating the sites from the old host to the new. But it wasn’t as easy or quick as it should have been. If I wanted to vie for the understatement of the year, I could say, accurately, that the old host was being resistant.

The tech and I worked back and forth over the next 8 hours (a full work day) to find a way to transfer the files. I finally had to go into my directory at the old host and download a couple of essential backup files. They’re mine, but I felt like I was stealing them.

But I couldn’t get them to upload to the admin panel at the new host. There was a file-size limit, and both files wildly exceeded it. The tech said I’d need to upload them directly via an FTP (file transfer protocol) client. I hadn’t used one of those since the late 1990s, so I’m a tad rusty. (Yeah, another understatement.) I downloaded a client, then set out re-learning how to use it.

For a couple of hours I couldn’t even get it to connect to the remote service (my new host). But when I tried S(secure)FTP instead of FTP, it finally connected. That felt like heaven. I initiated the upload of the two semi-purloined files, then rocked back and relaxed for the first time since 3 a.m. It felt good. (I was chock full of understatements yesterday.)

My mantra in times such as these: Keep calm and continue working the problem.

Today

So today, finally, even without anything remotely resembling luck, the websites that have been down for the past week-plus will be up again in a day or two. The backup files had fully uploaded this morning, so the tech at the new host can go about her business of getting the sites up and running again. Fingers crossed.

I'll get back to the novel today while keeping one eye peeled for emails from the tech. If I need to go steal more files or whatever, I'll do that and then return to the novel. It feels good to be in control again instead of in freefall.

Even after the other sites are up again, I'll continue to post the Journal to the new site at HarveyStanbroughWrites.com. I expect it will become the hub through which folks access all the other sites.

Talk with you again later.

Of Interest

See "Long-term IP Management" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/long-term-ip-management/>.

See "Writing Fiction for US Adults" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/writing-fiction-for-us-adults/>. I have to admit, though, I didn't find Orwell's rules particularly helpful.

See "Let Your Words Grow Wild" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/let-your-words-grow-wild/>. Just in case it makes sense to you.

See "Copyright and Coronavirus" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/copyright-and-coronavirus/>. Be sure to read the comments.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 620 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 11... 3134 words. Total words to date..... 23240
Day 12... 1257 words. Total words to date..... 24497
Day 13... 3078 words. Total words to date..... 27575
Day 14... 1597 words. Total words to date..... 29172
Day 15... 1901 words. Total words to date..... 31073
Day 16... 2569 words. Total words to date..... 33642
Day 17... 3741 words. Total words to date..... 37383
Day 18... 2229 words. Total words to date..... 39612
Day 19... 2117 words. Total words to date..... 41729

Total fiction words for June.....	33628
Total fiction words for the year.....	45405
Total nonfiction words for June...	12240
Total nonfiction words for the year.....	92850
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog).....	138255
Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date...	0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	66
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014).....	217
Short story collections.....	31

Disclaimer: I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. I've never said WITD is "the only way" to write, nor will I ever. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among other topics.

Categories [Journal](#) Tags [KrisWrites.com](#), [The Passive Voice](#)

The Journal: A Little More Downtime

June 25, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * A Little More Downtime
- * Of Interest

A Little More Downtime (sigh)

Things MIGHT be messed up here at the Stanbrough online camp for a few more days.

I learned last night from the tech that the "account creation process needs to have nothing in place before restoring the backup."

I think that means this site (harveystanbroughwrites.com) will have to be deleted, then re-established as an add-on site to HarveyStanbrough.com once the latter is fully restored at the new host.

I just wanted to give you a little warning.

Also, during this time I'm going to switch over from MailChimp to MailerLite. That shouldn't affect any of you at all, fingers crossed. Thanks for hanging in there. I'm sure everything will be back to normal soon.

Talk with you again later.

Of Interest

See “What Animals Play Dead and Why?” at <https://www.suecoletta.com/play-dead/>.

See “Steve Martin and Martin Short” at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/steve-martin-and-martin-short/>. He says they “pull no punches” and you should see the show “unless you are politically too sensitive to go into the real world.” He doesn't specify whether that's the real world of main-street America or the real world of California and New York. So I guess they must pull *some* punches or politics wouldn't enter into it. Which of course it shouldn't.

See “The Dead Deer Crossing” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/06/the-dead-deer-crossing.html>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 220 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 11... 3134 words. Total words to date..... 23240

Day 12... 1257 words. Total words to date..... 24497

Day 13... 3078 words. Total words to date..... 27575

Day 14... 1597 words. Total words to date..... 29172

Day 15... 1901 words. Total words to date..... 31073

Day 16... 2569 words. Total words to date..... 33642

Day 17... 3741 words. Total words to date..... 37383

Day 18... 2229 words. Total words to date..... 39612

Day 19... 2117 words. Total words to date..... 41729

Total fiction words for June..... 33628

Total fiction words for the year..... 45405

Total nonfiction words for June... 12460

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 93070

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 138475

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 66

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. I've never said WITD is "the only way" to write, nor will I ever. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among other topics.

Categories [Journal](#) Tags [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [KillZone blog](#)

The Journal: A Self-Taught Day

June 28, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Topic: A Self-Taught Day
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

"But man is not made for defeat... A man can be destroyed but not defeated." Ernest Hemingway

"One may certainly find a word distasteful or objectionable or obscene, and prefer to not hear that word under any circumstances, but hearing the word does not, in fact change the person who does not like it. Words can have a personal impact on us only if we permit them to do so." The Passive Guy

"Whatever works for you is the right way." paraphrasing the smug litany uttered by literally hundreds or thousands of writers who don't care to investigate other ways

Topic: A Self-Taught Day

Good morning, class. Today you will enjoy a self-taught day. First, your assignment.

Take a look at "Night Terrors" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/06/night-terrors.html>. Read that post. Absorb it. Let it seep into your pores.

If as you read, you

- * sense the author's fear, and-or
- * sense how very important that one book (and by her own admission, every book) is to her, and
- * begin to experience the sense that your skin is crawling,

snap out of the nightmare and get some relief. Stop and compare that laborious, frightening, self-doubt enabling experience with the sheer, unbridled joy of trusting yourself and your characters and just writing off into the dark.

And if you need a more practical, humanistic slant, consider this: Within a dollar or two, I'm going to charge the same price for the novel I've written in less than a month as the author of the above post charges for the novel that's taken her over a year to write.

Just sayin'.

Under the Weather — I'm currently a little under the weather, so if you email me and I don't get back to you as soon as I usually do, please be patient.

Talk with you again later.

Of Interest

See "Keeping Track" at <https://deanwesleymith.com/keeping-track-2/>. Seems to me using the inability to keep track of stories to not write is a conscious mind thing.

See "What Does it (Still) Take to be a Writer?" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/06/what-does-it-still-take-to-be-a-writer.html>. Nope. If you want to be a writer, you sit down, you write, and you keep writing. If you can't do any of those, you don't want to be a writer.

See "Tips to Deceive Characters and Readers" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/06/tips-to-deceive-characters-and-readers.html>.

See "Digging Deeper into Hemingway" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/digging-deeper-into-hemingway/>. Please be sure to see PG's take.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 380 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 11... 3134 words. Total words to date..... 23240
Day 12... 1257 words. Total words to date..... 24497
Day 13... 3078 words. Total words to date..... 27575
Day 14... 1597 words. Total words to date..... 29172
Day 15... 1901 words. Total words to date..... 31073
Day 16... 2569 words. Total words to date..... 33642
Day 17... 3741 words. Total words to date..... 37383
Day 18... 2229 words. Total words to date..... 39612
Day 19... 2117 words. Total words to date..... 41729

Total fiction words for June..... 33628

Total fiction words for the year..... 45405

Total nonfiction words for June... 12840

Total nonfiction words for the year.....	93450
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog).....	138855
Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date...	0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	66
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014).....	217
Short story collections.....	31

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Categories [Journal](#) Tags [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [KillZone blog](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [The Writing Life](#)

The Journal: Are Writers Born or Made?

June 29, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Topic: Are Writers Born or Made?
- * Of Interest

Topic: Are Writers Born or Made?

Matt wrote to ask my thoughts about another myth: That some people are born to be writers and others, no matter how hard they try, will never be writers.

My take is probably a little different from that of most people. Basically it's this: Be careful what you believe. Sometimes, the simple act of buying into something causes it to become your reality.

But on this specific question, does it matter whether writers are born or made? Not really.

What matters is that a person is passionate enough about writing to keep doing it, story after story, month after month, year after year, even without garnering much notice. If you can do that, you're a writer. If you can't or don't, you aren't.

So back to the basic question: Can a person be born with that passion? Probably. I guess. At the top end, consider child prodigies in various fields. They apparently were born with a passion. For lesser examples, consider folks like me whose "one thing" has always been writing. No matter what else I did during my life, writing was the one thing I always went back to.

On the other hand, can a person be taught to have that passion? Probably not. The best we can do in that regard is share our own passion. We can show another person how we do what we do and how we feel about it. After that, the person will either be infected or s/he won't. And if s/he isn't already passionate about writing, the illustration won't make a difference.

As just one example, that's what DWS did for me. I already had the passion for writing and storytelling. Dean showed me what he called "a better way," a way to make writing fun instead of a laborious process.

That sounded good, but I didn't jump right in. I was skeptical to say the least. When I finally decided to try WITD, I did so because I was certain I would prove WITD was all BS. But that was the key: to prove to myself whether WITD would or wouldn't work, I had to give it an honest try.

To my surprise, when I tried it, I found it worked. It worked on short stories at first, and later it worked on novels. (Yep, I was still skeptical.) After my first eight or 10 novels and around 100 short stories, I took it a step further and made it my own. I realized I wasn't trusting myself and my creative subconscious so much as I was trusting my characters to live their own stories. And I haven't looked back.

But the thing is, out of the thousands who read Dean's posts about WITD, I'm one of very few who took off with it. And I understand that too. Of the dozen or so writers I've taught WITD to in person, and of the hundreds I've taught via this Journal, emails, etc. MAYBE a dozen came to trust themselves and their characters enough to let go and enjoy the freedom and fun of WITD.

Sometimes we fret over things that just don't matter. To me, that's a waste of time that we might have used more productively. As I've told people dozens of times about WITD, for example, why spend time listing all the reasons you're sure it won't work? Why not just go all-in and try it for yourself? That really is the only way to know for sure.

And it's a win-win situation. If WITD works, you will have gained the world. If it doesn't, you will have lost only the little bit of time you invested in trying it.

But don't go in with a half-hearted attempt. All or nothing. Anything else is a waste of time. And none of us have enough of that most valuable asset.

Talk with you again later.

Of Interest

See "Point of View And Voice" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/06/point-of-view-and-voice.html>.

See "Diving Into the Wreck is Free!" at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/diving-into-the-wreck-is-free/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 680 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 19... 2117 words. Total words to date..... 41729 (Not stalled. Just still under the weather.)

Total fiction words for June..... 33628

Total fiction words for the year..... 45405

Total nonfiction words for June... 13520

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 94130

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 139535

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 66

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. I've never said WITD is "the only way" to write, nor will I ever. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among other topics.

Categories [Journal](#) Tags [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [John Gilstrap](#), [KillZone blog](#)

The Journal: The Purpose of This Journal

July 1, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Welcome
- * Topic: The Purpose of This Journal
- * Of Interest

Welcome

Welcome to new subscriber lahunwicks and to any others who recently joined via email, RSS, or who just drop in from time to time. I'm always a little surprised (but happy) to learn the Journal has followers who aren't subscribers. But new subscribers always are more than welcome too.

Topic: The Purpose of This Journal

This topic is predicated on [Alicia's comment](#) on my previous post.

Part 1 — A Direct Response to the specific points in Alicia's comment...

1. *Of course* you have to actually do the writing. This is kind of obvious, isn't it? Like saying "As the balloon rises, it gets farther from the earth." Duh.

Likewise, child prodigy Ludwig v. Beethoven had to actually write and play the music. By your definition, I'm pretty sure composing what has since been called classical music was a mature art as well. But I digress.

2. The notion that writing (storytelling) is or should be "work" is not accurate, at least not for me and not in this Journal. Writing fiction isn't something to escape. Writing fiction IS the escape. To characterize fiction writing as "work" is antithetical to everything I've ever written or taught in this Journal. It is also dismissive of and disrespectful toward those of us who practice Writing into the Dark. (More on this in Part 2 below.)

3. Did I mention anywhere that all you need is one idea? In fact I didn't even go that far. In previous posts, I've often said that to begin a story all you need is a character with a problem in a setting. But I take your point, although again it's pretty obvious. If you want to write more than one story I suppose you *could* say you will need more than one idea. Unless you want to write different stories, perhaps from different POV characters, off that one idea. But again, I digress.

4. Umm, nope, you don't "have" to keep producing. Free will and all that. If you want to write, you write. Then you're a writer. If you don't, you don't. Then you aren't a writer. But it's all up to you. Certainly nobody's holding a gun to *my* head. There are no great unwashed masses out there awaiting your or my next masterpiece, no matter how much "work" and how many years you put into writing yours or how much fun I have writing mine. That's our business, yours and mine, and the readers literally don't care. What we do, we writers, really isn't important in the slightest. Readers just want a good entertaining story.

5. "There are skills to be acquired, and they ... require thought and understanding." Yes, that's what the myths would have you believe.

The truth is, you have been acquiring and absorbing all of those skills — various types of structure, pacing, points of view, dialogue, etc. — all your life. You started telling stories long before you were even aware there was such a thing as an alphabet. Yet when someone comes along with a "craft" book and tells you that you need their help, you trust them instead of yourself.

Think about that. How screwed up are we, that we will trust an absolute stranger, often one who hasn't published so much as a single novel or short story, to teach us how to write fiction?

Yet because they won't kowtow to the myths, we dismiss out of hand novelists like Stephen King, Lee Child, Jack Higgins, Dean Wesley Smith, Kristine Kathryn Rusch, me and countless others who enjoy the freedom and unbridled self-confidence of writing off into the dark.

And in the end, none of it matters. The truth is, if you and I both stopped writing today, not only would nobody care, they wouldn't even notice.

Of course, these comments are not intended for you specifically, Alicia. I had to rebut your comment because it's here, stomping around in my living room. Nor are these comments intended for others who have made the conscious decision to follow the myths. I have no interest in changing your or their minds.

My comments are for those who are still willing to follow their own mind and try new things that might free them from the yoke of the myths. If they choose to really try WITD they will be richly rewarded with self-confidence and freedom from the mob. If they try and fail, they can always go back to the myths.

But hey, everyone, if you choose to remain mired in the myths of writing, that's fine. Likewise, if you choose to believe that to be of any value, writing must be hard work and/or take a long time, that writing a novel is something you must struggle through, that's also fine.

But this Journal exists to explain that it doesn't have to be that way.

Part 2 — What I'd Like You to Know

We were all brought up in a world in which work is something we dread. Work is something we do because we have to, most often to get money so that when we're finished we can escape it for awhile to do something fun.

Writing doesn't have to be that. It doesn't have to be the laborious sweat factory that so many who are mired in the myths make it out to be. Writing fiction isn't something to escape. Writing fiction IS the escape.

To my knowledge, since Dean Wesley Smith went 99% commercial a few years ago using his blog to push his Kickstarters and other promotions, this Journal is the only place on the internet where anyone regularly advocates for WITD.

As such, this silly little Journal exists as a lone, minuscule voice. All around it is a cacophony of noise emanating from thousands or even millions of other places on the internet, all of which are intentionally promoting the myths, in no small part so you'll buy their craft books which, *in every case*, repeat almost word for word pretty much every other craft book out there.

Again, that's fine. If that's what you want, fiction by cookie cutter, go for it.

But if you want to talk in support of the myths, please visit any of those thousands of places around the internet where your comments will be welcome. There, you will be roundly applauded for pretty much anything you say as long as it conforms to the myths.

They're like echo chambers, those places. Mutual admiration societies where everyone agrees what terrible work writing is, how laborious and draining it is, and that fiction writing itself — storytelling — is some high calling.

Readers at those sites will applaud you and nod sagely at your wisdom, just as if your comments were original thoughts that were never before uttered.

With all that going for those who advocate the myths, with literally thousands of venues waiting with open arms and bated breath to receive their comments, I don't quite understand why they feel such a strong urge to come here to promote the myths and attack WITD.

It puts me in mind of a child refusing to try spinach while declaring it tastes horrible. It doesn't, of course, but the petulant child will never know. He'll grow up never having tried spinach, and he'll go through life with that smug, self-righteous sneer on his face.

And he'll never know that smug sense of self-satisfaction is all based on ignorance.

Talk with you again later.

I'm still under the weather, but next time, maybe, Part 3: How to tell the difference between the myths and WITD.

Of Interest

See “Mojo’s Smart Contact Lenses Begin In-Eye Testing” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/mojos-smart-contact-lenses-begin-in-eye-testing/>. SF anyone?

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1270 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 19... 2117 words. Total words to date..... 41729

Total fiction words for July..... 0

Total fiction words for the year..... 45405

Total nonfiction words for July... 1270

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 95400

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 140805

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 66

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

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Categories [Journal](#) Tags [The Passive Voice](#)

The Journal: The Difference Between the Myths and WITD

July 2, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Topic: The Difference Between the Myths and WITD
- * Of Interest

Topic: The Difference Between the Myths and WITD

The purpose of this Journal is to advocate WITD and promote self-confidence in writers. In it, I try to share the joy and freedom of writing into the dark.

I understand it's difficult to face-down your fears and break through, but I'm proof positive that it can be done. That said, I admit it's much easier to remain comfortably mired in the myths.

Had I decided to rely on any of several excuses, including a few personal physical and mental anomalies, to remain mired in those myths, I might have written one or two novels over the past 8 years instead of 66. That's how much difference WITD makes.

In short, if I had accepted "I can't," well, I wouldn't have. So let me explain why adhering to the myths is such a bad idea.

The worst thing about the myths from a general human standpoint is that they cause the writer to waste a ton of time hovering over one story in an effort to "improve" or even "perfect" it.

This is a complete waste of time, because what one person (the writer) eventually deems "improved" or "perfect," any number of readers will find faulty and imperfect.

You can't please everyone, so why not err on the side of pleasing your characters? After all, it's their story.

But far worse than wasting your time, the longer you hover over a story and the more you allow your own or other critical minds to influence it, the further removed it becomes from your characters' authentic story.

You know that little nausea-like twinge you get in your gut as you revise or rewrite? That's your creative subconscious and your characters trying to warn you that you're going too far, that you're screwing up the story.

Still, writers choose to hover just as if it actually makes sense to do so. In that hovering, writers

1. eye the story critically as they revise individual words and sentences even though such revisions do nothing to improve the actual story.
2. invite criticism (so input from others' critical minds) and then revise again or rewrite based on that input.
3. might also pay big bucks for input from a "developmental" editor, thereby wasting money as well as time.

The conscious, critical mind creates nothing, folks. Even your own conscious, critical mind cannot know what's best for your characters' story. Only they know that, as conveyed through your creative subconscious as you write.

And no critique partners or group members or developmental editors have the slightest clue what's going on in your characters' story. ***Their input can only ever be external***. As such, in every case, that input is foreign to the natural progression of the story. It is forced on the story against the characters' will.

On the other hand, most long-term professional fiction writers are not mired in the myths. Rather than waste time ruining a story in an attempt to improve or perfect it, they submit or publish it and move on to the next story. Like professionals in almost every field, they recognize that ***improvement requires practice, not hovering***.

So how do you tell the difference between wallowing in the myths and being an actual fiction writer? By the results. More on that in a moment.

But while we're at it, you can also tell the difference between an honest instructor and others. How? By what it costs you, or what you're expected to give.

I am an honest instructor.

I want you to let go of the myths and discover the truth: that ***fiction writing — storytelling — is a natural function of the human creative subconscious and it's both fun and freeing***. The notion that we have to "suffer" for our art in order to imbue it with value is ridiculous.

Notice that I gain nothing for myself by teaching you this truth. I'll even give away my non-fiction books if you want them and can't afford them.

And if you buy-in to what I'm offering, what do you stand to gain?

Writing Into the Dark (WITD) truly is a freeing, joyful way to write that even feeds your self-confidence as a writer. It requires only a little discipline to start. You don't even have to learn anything you don't already know. Rather you can release a lot of nonsense (the myths) as you learn to believe in yourself, your creative subconscious and your characters.

The others — well, the others want to keep you hooked on the myths, period.

After almost five decades as a writer, I'm satisfied these folks are charlatans. They pretend to care about your development as a writer, but they don't. To do so would go against their self-interest.

Instead, they're almost mercenary in their eagerness to keep you mired in the myths. The longer you're stuck in the myths, the longer you'll keep buying their so-called "craft" books and services (developmental editing or book doctoring, for example). And trust me, you won't get anything from them free. Or don't trust me. Write them and ask for a free craft book (but not in exchange for an email address capture).

If you believe me, a whole new world will open to you and you need never look back or hover again.

If you believe the charlatans, then you'll buy their craft books and/or services and the cycle continues.

But don't take my word for any of this. You can recognize both the myths and WITD yourself by the results.

The myths, like the conscious, critical mind, are always negative. And their purpose is the same as the purpose of the conscious, critical mind: to slow or stop the process of creation and thereby enable you to avoid embarrassment.

Every myth — outlining, revising, rewriting, seeking critical input, and polishing — speaks to what you and your creative subconscious CAN'T do, either without the supervision of your conscious, critical mind or the conscious, critical minds of others.

WITD, like the creative subconscious, is always positive. It's all about what you CAN do.

WITD is about writing to the best of your ability the first time through, then publishing and starting the next story. It's about always moving forward.

The Upshot

Perhaps worst of all, the more you rely on your conscious, critical mind to double-check your creative subconscious, the more you signal to your creative subconscious and your characters that you don't trust them to convey the story that they themselves are living.

Now ask yourself, why should your characters continue to bring you stories when you've shown them you're going to destroy those stories with your conscious, critical mind?

And so the creative flow slows to a trickle, or dries up altogether. If you have trouble coming up with new story ideas, maybe this is why.

Writing a story does not require a village, folks. Writing a story requires one person, a writer, to look in on a group of characters and write down what happens and what the characters say and do as the story unfolds. It really is that simple.

Talk with you again later.

Of Interest

See "Wow, I Am Surprised" at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/wow-i-am-surprised/>.

See "Holidays, Celebration, and Special Bonds" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/07/holidays-celebration-and-special-bonds.html>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1210 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 19... 2117 words. Total words to date..... 41729

Total fiction words for July..... 0

Total fiction words for the year..... 45405

Total nonfiction words for July... 2480

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 96610

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 142015

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 66

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. I've never said WITD is "the only way" to write, nor will I ever. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among other topics.

Categories [Journal](#) Tags [DeanWesleySmith.com](https://deanwesleysmith.com), [KillZone blog](https://killzoneblog.com)

The Journal: Be Clear in Your Challenge Goals

July 3, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Topic: Be Clear in Your Challenge Goals
- * Of Interest

Topic: Be Clear in Your Challenge Goals

First, go ahead and check out Dean's "Challenge Mixed Bag" at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/challenge-mixed-bag/>. Then come back here for the discussion. I'll wait.

The problem seems obvious to me. Dean obviously didn't define his challenge well. One would think he'd know better.

As originally stated, his challenge was to write a story a day for 365 days. Period.

But soon after he started, he allowed the challenge to morph and become almost impossible. The challenge became not only to write a story a day for 365 days but to design covers for them, and submit or publish or collect them.

If you're very disciplined and if you make writing and mailing or publishing the stories your number 1 priority — meaning you will do nothing else each day until you've met the requirements of the challenge — that would still be possible.

But that's a far reach from simply writing a story every day for a year, isn't it? And who wants to live like that? For me, the pressure of designing all those covers and publishing or submitting, etc. would suck all the joy out of writing.

I'm not saying write the stories and then don't do anything with them. I'm saying wait to do something with them until you've successfully finished the challenge. In fact, along the way if you've written a story that's particularly well suited for a magazine, by all means submit it. But make doing that the exception rather than the rule. Don't let it become part of the challenge.

Dean also talks about the difficulty of keeping track of the stories, but doing just that and nothing more would add nothing significant to the challenge.

Each day, write a story, period. Then either copy/paste the title onto a spreadsheet and click Save (this is what I would do) or pen the title into the appropriate date of one of those calendars that hangs on the wall and has a block for each day.

What you DON'T do is allow all sorts of other requirements to swirl-in and become part of the challenge after the fact, then complain that you were unable to complete the original challenge. Because my response will be, "Well, of course you were."

Talk with you again later.

Of Interest

See "AI Algorithm Predicts Future Crimes One Week in Advance With 90% Accuracy" at <https://scitechdaily.com/ai-algorithm-predicts-future-crimes-one-week-in-advance-with-90-accuracy/>. Phillip K. Dick's "The Minority Report," anyone?

The Numbers

The Journal..... 410 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 19... 2117 words. Total words to date..... 41729 (not stalled, just sick)

Total fiction words for July..... 0

Total fiction words for the year..... 45405

Total nonfiction words for July... 2890

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 97020

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 142425

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 66

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

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Categories [Journal](#) Tags [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [SciTechDaily.com](#)

The Journal: Happy Independence Day

July 4, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Happy Independence Day
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

“We think we have solved the mystery of creation. Maybe we should patent the universe and charge everyone royalties for their existence.” Stephen Hawking

Happy Independence Day

Or as we call it around here, Mona’s birthday. The longer I live, the more I appear to have robbed a cradle in the face of an inattentive nanny. I’m a lucky guy. (Happy birthday, Honey.)

I hope all of you have a gentle and enjoyable holiday, and that you are well enough to enjoy it. We hope to be well ourselves in another week or so, after which we will celebrate both our 38th anniversary (passed in late June) and Mona’s birthday.

Hey, nothing says you have to celebrate when everyone else expects you to.

Sometime in the next week or two the dust from my website kerfluffle should finally settle to Earth again, and with any luck at all I’ll get on with finishing Blackwell Ops 8.

Talk with you again later.

Of Interest

See “Good Time for a Challenge” at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/good-time-for-a-challenge/>. As I wrote earlier, remember to stay focused on the actual challenge.

See “Happy Independence Day!” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/07/happy-independence-day.html>. She extends the freedom to include publishing. Now if only there were some way to extend it to her characters as well....

See “Authors are protesting...” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/authors-are-protesting-amazons-e-book-policy-that-allows-users-to-read-and-return/>. A good time to remember not to put all your eggs in one basket.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 250 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 19... 2117 words. Total words to date..... 41729

Total fiction words for July.....	0
Total fiction words for the year.....	45405
Total nonfiction words for July...	3140
Total nonfiction words for the year.....	97270
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog).....	142675
Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date...	0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	66
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014).....	217
Short story collections.....	31

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Categories [Journal](#) Tags [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [KillZone blog](#), [The Passive Voice](#)

The Journal: What's Going On

July 8, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * What's Going On
- * Of Interest

What's Going On

Sorry I've been absent of late. Suffering through the remains of a head cold. It's oddly energy draining at my age. But it's only a cold, not the flu.

I haven't written a word of fiction since I became ill either, so it will be interesting when I'm finally able to restart the writing again and finish the novel.

In the interim I've been doing a lot of non-writing things, like adding an extra section of fence to the top of the fence around my yard in an attempt to keep one of my cats in and the neighbors' cats out. That's no small job for a 70 year old guy.

And in the midst of that and my slight illness, there seems no shortage of other annoying little problems. The kind that usually crop up once or twice a year but have recently all gathered like an infestation of locusts on a single ear of corn.

Like one evening I was sitting quietly watching television when I heard *tink* and the left earpiece of my glasses fell off. My bride went into emergency mode and called around until she found an eye doctor who could see me on short notice. That situation was resolved yesterday.

The websites are STILL switching over from the old host to the new. No news on why it's taking so long or when that will finally resolve either. Now and then I get an email asking why I stopped posting the Journal. I tell them about all the posts at the new site.

And a bunch of other little stuff. But I'm getting tired of hearing myself complain so that's more than enough. Anyway, I'm hoping to be writing again in a matter of days.

I hope your life, both writing and not, is going better than mine at the moment. Mostly I posted this today to get the link to Dean's post out to you.

Talk with you again later.

Of Interest

See "How To Keep Learning When the Money is Tight" at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/how-to-keep-learning-when-the-money-is-tight/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 350 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 19... 2117 words. Total words to date..... 41729

Total fiction words for July..... 0

Total fiction words for the year..... 45405

Total nonfiction words for July... 3490

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 97620

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 143025

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 66

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

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The Journal: Trust Yourself

July 11, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Welcome and a Progress Report
- * Just a Note
- * Of Interest

Welcome and a Progress Report

Welcome to the new subscribers who signed up over the past several days. I'm glad you're here.

I should be back to somewhat regular posting soon. In the meantime, be sure to visit the [Journal Archives](#). The archives are posted in downloadable, fully searchable PDF files. Together, they comprise a master's class on writing fiction.

I'm still kind of waiting for the dust to settle from me switching over from one web host to another. It's taking so long (two weeks so far) because the old host is refusing to release my files — um, as if that will somehow make me want to stay with them. Head shakingly stupid business practice.

Anyway, once that migration process is finally finished and the domain name servers have propagated to the new host, I'll finalize some things with regard to my websites: specifically this Journal, my author blog (currently at Substack), and my professional book-selling online presence.

I also plan to switch my emailings from MailChimp to MailerLite. But no worries. If you're a subscriber, you won't miss anything. If you aren't yet a subscriber, you can subscribe by clicking <http://eepurl.com/5676v>.

Either way, just keep hangin' in there. Things will be back to normal (only better) very soon. And thanks for being here.

Just a Note

The first two items in "Of Interest" today are dubious at best. Both contain some good information, but both are presented by folks who believe you can "create" something good in fiction with the conscious, critical mind. You can't.

Still, I recommend you read the posts, absorb what they have to say that makes sense to you or "feels right" to you.

But then forget about it and simply trust that your creative subconscious will apply what it learned when the time is right. Because it will. But only if you trust it.

Beware: If you send signals to the creative subconscious that you *don't* trust it — signals of self-doubt or incompetence — the creative subconscious will react accordingly. And trust me, you don't want the stories to dry up.

Talk with you again later.

Of Interest

See “What Writers Can Learn From The Godfather” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/07/what-writers-can-learn-from-the-godfather.html>. Read, absorb, then forget and write into the dark. Trust your creative subconscious.

See “What Writers Can Learn from I Was Prey” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/07/what-writers-can-learn-from-i-was-prey.html>. I don't personally buy into this one, but Sue generally knows what she's talking about. Again, read, absorb, then fuggidaboutit and write from your creative subconscious.

See “A Fun Teaser” at <https://deanwesleymith.com/a-fun-teaser/>.

See “Infographic: Reader Centric August Observances to Bolster Your Author Branding” at <https://www.amarketingexpert.com/2022/07/08/reader-centric-august-observances-to-bolster-your-author-branding/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 450 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 19... 2117 words. Total words to date..... 41729

Total fiction words for July..... 0

Total fiction words for the year..... 45405

Total nonfiction words for July... 3940

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 98070

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 143475

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 66

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

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Categories [Journal](#) Tags [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [KillZone blog](#), [Penny Sansivieri](#)

The Journal: Science Fiction In Real Life

July 12, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Science Fiction In Real Life
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

"We realize the importance of our voices only when we are silenced." Malala Yousafzai

Science Fiction In Real Life

Today's post is mostly to send along the items in "Of Interest" and especially Dean's post, "Science Fiction In Real Life."

What really enthralled me about the article was the new transportation system, and how efficient and cost-effective it is. It reminded me somewhat of the transportation system between colonies and between the laborers' quarters and the jobsite on Arzachel One and Two, the lunar colonies featured in my SF novel, *The 13-Month Turn*.

I'm not a vegan of any sort, so that part of the article didn't so much speak to me as it slapped me around a little. I'm a writer, and to some degree I'm a language purist.

Now, if you want to knowingly abuse the language or misuse punctuation to create a particular effect in the reader, that's fine. More power to you.

But if you point across a field at a cow and tell me, "That creature is now a raven," I won't be convinced. Not only that, the cow won't be convinced. It will remain a cow. It will continue doing cow things. It will never do raven things just because you suddenly decided it's a raven.

As Alfred Korzybski, father of general semantics, wrote, "The the map is not the territory." In other words, our perception of reality is not reality itself but our own version of it.

So I'm just saying, the industry should stop calling whatever that stuff is "non-dairy cheese" or "dairy-free cheese." Because seriously, there is no such thing, and anyone with a brain knows it.

The world is full of words, and the folks who make that stuff are more than free to make up a new word if the one they want doesn't currently exist. Their product is something, of course. It exists. It might even be said to "have a cheese-like texture," or to be a "cheese-like product." But it is not cheese. It isn't even "processed cheese food." Even that nastiness requires dairy products but in a lesser quantity than 51%.

Of course, it isn't polite of me to complain without offering up a solution. So I personally recommend "non-dairy cheese-like Goop." Once it catches on, of course, advertisers can drop the "non-dairy cheese-like" modifier and just call it "Goop."

As a side note, of course this "Goop" should not be confused with the petroleum-based substance oil-field workers use to remove grease and grime from their hands, though frankly I suspect "non-dairy cheese" is more closely related at the molecular level to the original Goop than it is to any kind of cheese.

Either way, I suspect the two industries enjoy a wide enough separation to keep anyone from becoming confused.

Oh. To read "Science Fiction In Real Life," visit <https://deanwesleysmith.com/science-fiction-in-real-life/>.

Talk with you again later.

Of Interest

See "First Page Critique: Optimizing Your Setting And Forensics" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/07/first-page-critique-optimizingyour-setting-and-forensics.html>. Some good thoughts on setting.

See "Ebooks make up 21% of total book sales" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/ebooks-make-up-21-of-total-book-sales/>. Adn this comes from the American Associatioin of Publishers and does not account for the millions of indie publishers' ebooks sold.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 550 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 19... 2117 words. Total words to date..... 41729

Total fiction words for July..... 0

Total fiction words for the year..... 45405

Total nonfiction words for July... 4490
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 98620
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 144025

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 66
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. I've never said WITD is "the only way" to write, nor will I ever. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among other topics.

Categories [Journal](#) Tags [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [KillZone blog](#), [Semantics](#), [The Passive Voice](#)

The Journal: When Is It Done?

July 13, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * When Is It Done?
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

"Remember that place in Chapter Seven where you struggled with the action...? ... Maybe it was actually better before you made the change." John Gilstrap

"I start every writing session by rewriting what I wrote the day before. When I get to the end, I do one major editing pass to make sure that the story's connective tissue is all there, and then I launch it." John Gilstrap

When Is It Done?

In the Kill Zone blog today, John Gilstrap asks "When Is It Done?" It's a good post in which he makes some good points, including the first Quote of the Day above.

John has said before that he strives to write one clean draft, then send it off. He talks briefly about his process in the second Quote of the Day. Note that he does believe in consciously "rewriting" each scene vs. trusting that the characters got it right. Otherwise his process and mine are very similar.

But before I get into that, allow me a small digression: re the first Quote of the Day, there is much to be said for listening to that little voice that twinges in your gut in an attempt to tell you not to change something in your story. If you're thinking (conscious mind) about changing something in your story and you get that little sick feeling in your gut, don't do it.

Now, I mentioned that my process and John's are similar. They are, at least mechanically. After each writing session, I read back over what I wrote during the previous session. A "session" for me is about an hour, and 1000 to 1400 words.

This is important: When I read back over a session, I do NOT read critically like an editor or critiquer might. I don't see myself as a superior storyteller compared to my characters, especially as it concerns a story that they, not I, are living. Duh. So I don't read critically. I read with the creative subconscious, just as any another reader would, enjoying the story. I do not invite my conscious, critical mind to second-guess my characters. I can't stress enough how important this is.

And as I read with my creative subconscious, I rest my fingers on the keyboard and allow my characters to touch the story as they deem necessary. That clears up anything I missed and it gets me back into the story. When I reach the white space, I continue into the next writing session.

When I reach the end of the story, I take a break — anything from a few minutes to an hour or longer — and then I come back to read over the last session. When that's done, I run a spell check, then send the story off to my first reader.

My first reader catches anything that pops out at him as he reads, basically any wrong words (waste vs. waist, solder vs. soldier) and inconsistencies. He is not a critiquer or even a writer. He's just an avid reader who happens to enjoy my work. He offers NO critical-mind advice on how he would have written the story.

When he sends the story back, I read over his notes, apply those with which I agree, create a cover, write some brief sales copy, and launch it. Finally, if it's early enough in the day, I start the next story.

This was my process from mid-April 2014 through early August 2021. I hope it will be my process again very soon. Especially that "start the next story" part. (grin)

Talk with you again later.

Of Interest

See "When Is It Done?" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/07/when-is-it-done.html>.

See "Back Cover Copy Formula" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/back-cover-copy-formula/>. The best place to learn to write ANY sales copy is Dean Wesley Smith's book, [*How to Write Fiction Sales Copy*](#).

See "Promoting a Book on Amazon: Boost your Backlist" at <https://www.amarketingexpert.com/2022/07/12/promoting-a-book-on-amazon-boost-your-backlist/>. This is well worth the free newsletter. Check it out.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 630 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 19... 2117 words. Total words to date..... 41729

Total fiction words for July..... 0

Total fiction words for the year..... 45405

Total nonfiction words for July... 5120

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 99250

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 144655

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 66

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. I've never said WITD is "the only way" to write, nor will I ever. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among other topics.

Categories [Journal](#) Tags [John Gilstrap](#), [KillZone blog](#), [The Passive Voice](#)

The Journal: Words

July 15, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

* Words

* Update

* Of Interest

Words

Be absolutely certain to read Kris Rusch’s “How Writers Fail (Part 6): Words” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/how-writers-fail-part-6-words/>. (The other posts in the series are probably good too.)

I could have “written” an entire post by doing nothing but quoting Kris’ thoughts on getting stuck on individual words. Instead I thought I’d pass the article along to you to read for yourself. You might even want to bookmark it and read it again in the future. I know I will.

Update

The techs at HostingMatters.com continue to make progress on moving my websites over from JustHost. Once that process is finished I suspect I’ll be able to breathe again. Then I just have to learn to send out “campaigns” from MailerLite instead of MailChimp.

Talk with you again later.

Of Interest

See “15 Rules For Advertising Books” at <https://davidgaughran.com/book-advertising/>. I recommend signing up for his newsletter. He talks about it at the bottom of the article.

See “Marketing Strategies for Children’s Books: A Book Marketing Podcast” at <https://www.amarketingexpert.com/2022/07/14/marketing-strategies-for-childrens-books-a-book-marketing-podcast/>.

See “Wittgenstein at war” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/wittgenstein-at-war/>.

See “Yes to the City” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/yes-to-the-city/>. Be sure to see PG’s take.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 190 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 19... 2117 words. Total words to date..... 41729

Total fiction words for July..... 0

Total fiction words for the year..... 45405

Total nonfiction words for July... 5310

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 99440

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 144845

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date...	0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	66
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014).....	217
Short story collections.....	31

Disclaimer: I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. I've never said WITD is "the only way" to write, nor will I ever. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among other topics.

Categories [Journal](#) Tags [AuthorMarketingExperts](#), [Kristing Kathryn Rusch](#), [KrisWrites.com](#), [Penny Sansivieri](#), [The Passive Voice](#)

The Journal: Where Do You Get Ideas?

July 16, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * If you did your homework
- * Topic: Where Do You Get Ideas?
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

"Too many writers worry about the words. ... It took me years to realize that only I knew if something was or was not incorrect. It was my story after all. No one else knew what was going to happen next, and no one else knew what I was trying to communicate. | I found that realization quite freeing. I could stop worrying about words and their cousin, grammar, and start focusing on the story." Kristine Kathryn Rusch

"Your subconscious knows the right word for the story. ... You just have to trust it." Kristine Kathryn Rusch

"Writers who pay attention to the words are writing out of their critical voice. That's the intellect, the parent, the one in charge of the rules. | Writers should be writing out of their creative voice, the one who likes to break the rules, get dirty, and play with things that might blow up. You know. Like the average two-year-old." Kristine Kathryn Rusch

"[T]he critical voice is learning storytelling as a second language, and is, most of the time, caught up in finding the right word." Kristine Kathryn Rusch

"[I]n reality, our ideas can come from almost any source at any time. Writers' minds are in-tune with their surroundings ready to see the telltale signs of that little spark that could be used in a story or even become the basis of a whole book." Joe Moore

“[T]he secret is not how to become a writer... . . . The secret is staying a writer. And staying a writer is hard.” Harlan Ellison

If you did your homework

you’ll recognize the first four Quotes of the Day. If not, I urge you to go read the post from which I pulled them, Kris Rusch’s “How Writers Fail (Part 6): Words” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/how-writers-fail-part-6-words/>.

Yes, it’s important enough to bear repeating.

Topic: Where Do You Get Ideas?

Recently I was asked that question. I assume we all get it, at least if others know what we do for a profession or avocation.

“Where do you get ideas?” is probably tied for Most Prevalent Question with “Have you written anything I’d know?”

To that last one, I respond with a chuckling sneer and “Yeah, like you can actually read.”

Well, in my mind that’s what happens. In actuality, I have a couple of other responses. If time is in short supply, I respond out loud with a shrug and “How would I know?”

This probably seems dismissive, and that’s fine. Most people who ask that particular question are hoping you’ll say something stupid and self-deprecating like “Oh, probably not. ‘Cause you know, I’m not Stephen King or anything.” I’m not the self-deprecating sort, especially when it comes to false self-deprecation. I’d rather just stay on-point with honesty. Hence, “How would I know?”

If they seem honestly interested and do not appear to be laying the groundwork for an ambush — and if I have time — I say something like, “Maybe not. I write in the western, mystery, science fiction, science fantasy, thriller, and action-adventure genres. Regardless of genre, almost all of my stories are laden with psychological suspense and romance.

“Also, I write short stories and short story collections for those who enjoy a shorter reading experience and I write novels and novel series for those who enjoy a longer reading experience. So if you read in any of those genres or lengths, maybe you know my work. If not, you can always google my name.”

Then I smile and walk away. Unless we’re at a writers’ conference. Then I follow up with a smile. “And you?”

But back to the topic question: Where do you get ideas?

In the penultimate Quote of the Day, Joe Moore gives us an answer that is adequate and accurate. It also pretty much mimics my own take, as you'll see later.

Harlan Ellison used to tell people he got ideas from "a little shop in Schenectady." I've used that a few times too, mostly because I like the alliterative sound of it. Besides, just saying "Schenectady" aloud is great fun.

(See? There's a story idea right there. The title would be "A Little Shop in Schenectady." The genre could be anything. It could be a short story or it could be a novella or novel. And you can't copyright a title, so go for it if you want.)

But in response to this particular person, I wrote, "Literally everywhere. A character pops into my head with a line of dialogue, a scene crosses my mind, I physically see a wild mustang galloping all-out across the plains, etc. etc. etc. A character with a problem in a setting, then trust (and write) whatever comes."

So it's your turn.

What is/are your favorite response(s) when someone asks where you get ideas? Feel free to slip into the snide or remain courteous and professional (or both). If you don't have a go-to answer, this would be a great opportunity to make one up.

After all, you're a writer.

Talk with you again later.

Of Interest

See "She Spied" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2008/08/she-spied.html>.

See "Magic Box of Story Ideas and Character Creation" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/07/magic-box-of-story-ideas-and-character-creation.html>.

See "A Fun Harlan Story" at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/a-fun-harlan-story/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 880 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 19... 2117 words. Total words to date..... 41729

Total fiction words for July..... 0

Total fiction words for the year..... 45405

Total nonfiction words for July... 6190

Total nonfiction words for the year.....	100320
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog).....	145725
Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date...	0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	66
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014).....	217
Short story collections.....	31

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Categories [Journal](#) Tags [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [Harlan Ellison](#), [Joe Moore](#), [KillZone blog](#), [Kristine Kathryn Rusch](#), [KrisWrites.com](#)

The Journal: Separating the Writer from the Reader

July 18, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Topic: Separating the Writer from the Reader
- * Fear Thesaurus
- * Of Interest

Topic: Separating the Writer from the Reader

Of all the myths, the most prevalent, most harmful, and most difficult to root out is the myth that what we write — our stories — matter. That they're important.

To the successful writer, they don't matter at all. To the successful writer, one story is no more important than any other s/he's written. Each story is just one more product in a long line of products offered up to readers for their leisurely perusal.

The fact is, no matter how short or long a time it takes you to write a novel, for example, a few readers will love it. It will actually be "important" to them, maybe even life-changing. Most readers will enjoy your story or at least abide it well enough to finish it, and a few will think it sucks canal water from all 50 states. This is true no matter how long it takes you to write it, and no matter what you do or how many times you go over it.

Whether a story is "excellent" or "good" or "horrible" are calls for the reader, not the writer, to make. And Rule 1 is that the writer can do absolutely NOTHING to influence the reader's opinion. (If you just thought *But...*, see Rule 1 again.)

If a reader feels a story is important, great. If a writer feels a story is important (so s/he has to “perfect” it), that feeling will freeze the writer solid.

Don’t go down that path. You are a writer, a storyteller, so what matters is THAT you write. WHAT you write doesn’t matter in the slightest. All that should matter to any writer is that another story is out there.

All of that said, there are two of you: You the writer are not you the reader.

You the reader will almost certainly enjoy some of your own stories more than others. AS A READER, you will even find some of them “important,” maybe from an entertainment perspective or maybe because of a lesson or moral you picked up from them. (I learn things from my characters often.)

The thing is, chances are very slim you’ll like all of your own stories equally. You might even actively dislike some of them. Yes, even if you write a novel in a month or even if it you churn one out every three years.

But that’s all right. Even if you don’t like something you yourself have written, that doesn’t mean other readers won’t like it. In fact, the old rule applies: a few will love it, most will like or abide it, and a few will hate it, just as before.

The time you spend writing a story has absolutely no bearing whatsoever on the quality of that story.

Now, TELLING readers you labored over writing a novel for a year or two implies perceived value to them. It’s a little sleight of hand writers employ to lend value to their work. At conventions, signings, etc. I used to tell readers I write three drafts of every manuscript. What I DON’T tell them is that the second draft is a spell check that takes all of maybe 10 minutes. And I don’t tell them the third draft takes maybe a half-hour, during which I apply whatever changes I agree with that my first reader recommends. Then I publish the thing and move on.

So if you want to lie to readers, that’s fine. There’s nothing immoral about it. After all, you’re a storyteller. They’re paying you to lie to them. (Of course, if you want to actually spend a year or two writing a novel, that’s fine with me. Won’t affect my bottom line. But your stories will be stiffer, more stodgy and plodding. Your call.)

And that, my friends, is the truth. The more you trust in your creative subconscious and your characters, and the more you let them tell the stories that they, not you, are living, the more fun you’ll have, the more you’ll write (practice), and the better you’ll get at being a storyteller.

Stories exist as they’re being told or read or viewed by the consumer, and then they disappear. They are a few minutes’ or hours’ entertainment. Nothing more important than that.

Fear Thesaurus

The Writers Helping Writers website offers a Fear Thesaurus. It's a work in progress, so it isn't available as a book, but you can find it online at <https://writershelpingwriters.net/fear-thesaurus/>. You can also find a "Descriptive Thesaurus Collection" at <https://writershelpingwriters.net/thesaurus-collections/>.

I didn't see a subscription option, but you can find their blog at the BLOG tab on their main page. I assume you can probably follow that URL in an RSS reader. Or if you're interested and find their content useful, you can simply bookmark the site and check in each day to see what's there.

Note: You CAN subscribe to their newsletter (this might not be their blog) by visiting <https://writershelpingwriters.net/subscribe-to-our-newsletter/> and filling out the form.

Either way, remember that Writers Helping Writers is a business. They offer workshops and other products that by and large support the myths. Still, it's an interesting site to browse. As always, take what makes sense to you and forget the rest.

Talk with you again later.

Of Interest

See "Brood Over Your Endings" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/07/brood-over-your-endings.html>. Some good thoughts, some bowing to myths. I do not always agree with everything I pass along in this section.

See "The 'Great Publishing Resignation' ..." at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/the-great-publishing-resignation-exposes-the-failings-of-the-industry/>.

See "How Did I Get Here?" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/07/how-did-i-get-here.html>. Hints on another writer's process and attitude about writing.

See "Robert "Willy" Pickton – The Pig-Farming Serial Killer" at <http://dyingwords.net/robert-willy-pickton-the-pig-farming-serial-killer/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 940 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 19... 2117 words. Total words to date..... 41729

Total fiction words for July..... 0

Total fiction words for the year..... 45405

Total nonfiction words for July... 7130

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 101260
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 146665

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 66
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

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Categories [Journal](#) Tags [DyingWords.net](#), [Garry Rodgers](#), [KillZone blog](#), [The Passive Voice](#)

The Journal: Strange Goings On

July 19, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Strange Goings On
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

"Make crime pay. Become a lawyer." Will Rogers

Strange Goings On

Today's post is all about the "Of Interest" section. None of the links there are to posts about writing, and all are a degree or two off-kilter.

The most entertaining of the posts is easily the second one, which is about Basil Rathbone, famous for his portrayal of Sherlock Holmes. The fourth post, the one by Nathan Bransford, evoked rolling eyes and a quiet "Well, duh."

I commented briefly on each post. I could comment further, but I'll leave that up to you while simultaneously hoping you actually have better things to do.

Talk with you again later.

Of Interest

See “Close Brush With Death” at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/close-brush-with-death/>. Well, not really. More of a yawn-fest. I included this one mostly for the mention of Dean’s current Kickstarter.

See “The Butler Did It” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/07/the-butler-did-it.html>. Entertaining trivia.

See “Everything Everywhere All in One Novel” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/everything-everywhere-all-in-one-novel/>. Included mostly for the first paragraph.

See “Don’t count on agents and publishers to polish your diamond in the rough” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/dont-count-on-agents-and-publishers-to-polish-your-diamond-in-the-rough/>. I recommend you avoid both.

See “U.S. appeals court okays Starz copyright claims against Amazon’s MGM” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/u-s-appeals-court-okays-starz-copyright-claims-against-amazons-mgm/>. See PG’s take. Those silly lawyers and judges.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 220 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 19... 2117 words. Total words to date..... 41729

Total fiction words for July..... 0

Total fiction words for the year..... 45405

Total nonfiction words for July... 7350

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 101480

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 146885

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 66

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

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Categories [Journal](#) Tags [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [KillZone blog](#), [Nathan Bransford](#), [The Passive Voice](#)

FROM THIS POINT FORWARD, THE JOURNAL IS BACK AT
[HTTPS://HESTANBROUGH.COM.](https://hestanbrough.com)

The Journal: We're Back

July 22, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * We're Back
- * About the Archives
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

"It's very important in life to know when to shut up." Alex Trebek

"Values are not trendy items that are casually traded in." Ellen Goodman

We're Back

As has seemingly become my routine recently, I'm posting this primarily to get the items linked in "Of Interest" out to you. Nothing earth-shaking there, but some good stuff.

I'm also posting this edition to announce that the Journal is back home again. And by the way, my sincere thanks to Bill Sinclair for the informative, entertaining [comments he left on my June 15 post here](#). I didn't reply at the time (on the post) because the big switchover was imminent.

For the past calendar month while my new web host migrated all of my websites over from the old host, I've been posting the Journal to my new site at HarveyStanbroughWrites.com. But all of the sites have been relocated now, so I'll be posting the Journal to this "old" site again. I like [the looks and feel of it](#), even if that maybe doesn't make any sense.

Beginning on June 21, I posted 18 editions of the Journal at HarveyStanbroughWrites. I thought about moving all of those over here for the sake of continuity, but I have them all saved in the archives, so there's really no need.

About the Archives

Any of you can request any part of the archive (or all of it) at any time. It's free, and you need only email me at harveystanbrough@gmail.com. It's one more way for me to pay forward what I've learned over the years. Frankly, I wish something like this had been available to me when I started writing. The archives are fully searchable PDF files and they comprise a masters class on writing fiction.

Here are some of the better search terms to use with the archives:

- Heinlein’s Rules
- Writing into the Dark
- Creative Subconscious
- Conscious, Critical Mind
- Characters
- Setting
- Scene
- Grounding the Reader
- Five Senses
- Covers
- Publishing
- Self-Publishing
- Agents
- Editors
- Scammers
- Vanity Publishing

I’ve written multiple posts on all of those topics and many others over the years, and they’re all in the archives. Happy browsing.

Talk with you again later.

Of Interest

See “Building a ‘Hollywood’ Film Treatment” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/07/building-a-hollywood-film-treatment.html>.

See “Agenting Changes” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/agenting-changes/>.

See “5 Make or Break Success Strategies: How to Market Your Self-Published Book” at <https://www.amarketingexpert.com/2022/07/21/5-make-or-break-success-strategies-how-to-market-your-self-published-book/>.

See “What a Transition Day” at <https://deanwesleymith.com/what-a-transition-day/>.

See “Amazon might own your doctor’s office after latest acquisition” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/amazon-might-own-your-doctors-office-after-latest-acquisition/>.

See “YouTube Offers Masters Class In Screenwriting” at <https://doddlenews.com/youtube-offers-masters-class-in-screenwriting/>. This is an old post, so the offer might or might not still be valid.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 450 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 19... 2117 words. Total words to date..... 41729

Total fiction words for July..... 0

Total fiction words for the year..... 45405

Total nonfiction words for July... 7800

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 101930

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 147335

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 66

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. I've never said WITD is "the only way" to write, nor will I ever. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among other topics.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Author Marketing Experts](#), [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [Kristine Kathryn Rusch](#), [Penny Sansevieri](#), [The Passive Voice](#)

The Journal: Punctuation for Writers

July 24, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Punctuation for Writers
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

"There's many a bestseller that could have been prevented by a good teacher." Flannery O'Connor

Punctuation for Writers

In today's KillZone blog (see "Of Interest"), James Scott Bell points out a major problem—confusion over the use of punctuation—and what might easily be considered the number one rule of writing: Don't confuse the reader.

I should mention that the use of each mark of punctuation in the paragraph above is “correct,” not because it follows some arbitrary rules, but because it’s the best use to achieve my intent as a writer and to avoid confusing the reader.

Every time you confuse your readers with a wrong word (waste for waist), an inconsistency (blue eyes in one scene, brown in another), or even an inappropriate use of punctuation, you momentarily interrupt their journey through your fictional world.

And every time you interrupt that journey, you risk them putting down your book and finding something else to do.

Typos—Notice I didn’t include typos on the short list of problems that confuse the reader. Most often, if you’ve grounded your readers and they’re engaged in the story, they either won’t notice typos or they’ll quickly correct them mentally and go on reading.

Yet writers will spend hours going over and over a manuscript looking for and correcting typos. In my own practice, if my first reader happens to notice a typo, I correct it. If he doesn’t, and if I notice one after a book is published, what I do depends on the location of the typo.

If it’s in the first several pages, more than likely I’ll update the file and re-upload it to my aggregator to correct both the ebook and the POD paper book file (if there is a paper edition). But if “teh” has replaced “the” on page 58, more than likely I won’t bother with it. The reader has had time to become invested in the story, and a typo won’t detract from that.

Note: It takes all kinds, and if you haven’t noticed, they definitely exist. A woman told me pointedly one time that if she noticed even one typo anywhere in a book, she would immediately stop reading and never buy more books by that author.

I told her that’s fine and that she probably shouldn’t buy any of my fiction. Not because they’re dipped in typos at publication—they aren’t—but because she won’t enjoy the story anyway. She’ll be too busy consciously hunting typos to have even a clue what’s going on in the story.

But I digress. In my comment on Bell’s post I talked a little about my book, [*Punctuation for Writers*](#). I mentioned that it’s available for sale at all the usual venues, but that for a limited time I’d be happy to send a free copy to anyone who asks.

Here’s the spiel about PFW on Amazon: “No mere regurgitation of the rules, PFW teaches writers how each mark of punctuation directly affects the reader and the reading experience. This book renders punctuation a valuable tool the writer can use intelligently rather than a series of rules to be [looked up].”

So if you don’t already have a copy and you’d like one, email me at harveystanbrough@gmail.com. Be sure to let me know whether you want the file in .epub, .mobi, or printable .pdf.

Talk with you again later.

Of Interest

See “Regular Monthly Workshop Sales” at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/regular-monthly-workshop-sales/>.

See “Dialogue, Dashes, and Details” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/07/dialogue-dashes-and-details.html>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 600 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 19... 2117 words. Total words to date..... 41729

Total fiction words for July..... 0

Total fiction words for the year..... 45405

Total nonfiction words for July... 8400

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 102530

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 147935

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 66

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

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The Journal: Thoughts on Writing Sex Scenes

July 26, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

* Thoughts on Writing Sex Scenes

* Of Interest

Thoughts on Writing Sex Scenes

In today's Kill Zone blog (see "Of Interest"), PJ Parrish (actually two authors) presented a post on writing sex scenes. But don't get too excited. The article isn't so much a how-to as an ought-to. I linked to the post because it was well written, witty and entertaining.

That said, I disagree with the seeming basic premise of the post, that writing explicit sex scenes is necessary to a good story, at least anywhere other than in erotic or other genres where that sort of thing is expected by the reader. Or in porn, in which there is no story.

My take? The writer always should meet reader expectations in any genre.

BUT in most genres, if graphically illuminating the intimate details of a sex or love-making scene is necessary to advance the storyline, then sure, put it in (so to speak). In that case, I recommend writing what makes you uncomfortable. Usually that would be either the truth or your wildest, no-holds-barred fantasy.

On the other hand, much can be said for an emotionally heated warmup—usually via tense, breathe-through or even gasped-through dialogue—followed by a zoom-out on a closed door or drapery or other barrier that gives the characters their privacy.

At which point the reader's mind will take over and s/he will experience his/her own best version of the scene.

Trust me. No writer can write a sex scene that is more exciting than the one that will occur in the reader's mind once s/he's led in the right direction.

Talk with you again later.

Of Interest

See "Dates of the Monthly Workshop Sales" at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/dates-of-the-monthly-workshop-sales/>.

See "Workshop Curriculum 8/1/2022" at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/workshop-curriculum-8-1-2022/>. A good guide if you're considering taking some courses.

See "...Emerging Translator Mentorships" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/englands-national-centre-for-writing-emerging-translator-mentorships/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 310 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 19... 2117 words. Total words to date..... 41729

Total fiction words for July.....	0
Total fiction words for the year.....	45405
Total nonfiction words for July... 8710	
Total nonfiction words for the year.....	102840
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog).....	148245
Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0	
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	66
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014).....	217
Short story collections.....	31

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [The Passive Voice](#)

The Journal: Synopses and Writer's Block

July 28, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Topic: Synopses
- * Topic: Writer's Block
- * Yesterday
- * Today, etc.
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

On writing synopses

"I hate even the idea of a synopsis. When stories are really working, when you're providing subtextual exploration and things that are deeply layered, you're obligated to not say things out loud." Shane Carruth

"A synopsis is a cold thing. You do it with the front of your mind. If you're going to stay with it, you never get quite the same magic as when you're going all out." J. B. Priestley

and on writer's block

“I deal with writer’s block by lowering my expectations. I think the trouble starts when you sit down to write and imagine that you will achieve something magical and magnificent — and when you don’t, panic sets in.” Malcolm Gladwell

“[I]f your fidelity to perfectionism is too high, you never do anything.” David Foster Wallace

“There’s no such thing as writer’s block. That was invented by people in California who couldn’t write.” Terry Pratchett

Topic: Synopses

Note the first two quotes above, and especially the second one. The synopsis is thought-out, written from the conscious-critical mind. That’s why so many writers, as noted in “The Dreaded Synopsis” (see “Of Interest”) would rather have their fingernails pried off with pliers than write one.

But ironically, most of them don’t know their unease with writing synopses is a direct result of the synopsis having to be written from the conscious mind. Most of them don’t even realize that they *have* a conscious-critical mind and a creative subconscious, much less know the differences between them

And this writing-a-synopsis thing is a critical double whammy. First, like an outline, the synopsis is a direct product of the conscious-critical mind. You can not write an outline or a synopsis from the creative subconscious.

And second, the difficulty itself of writing the synopsis is one more way for the conscious-critical mind to interrupt the writer’s march toward submission or publication.

As a quick aside, if you have trouble recognizing the difference between the creative subconscious and the conscious-critical mind, try this: Write an outline with your creative subconscious, meaning without thinking about it, just trusting your inner voice. You won’t be able to do it. Almost immediately, you’ll “feel” your brain click over from the creative subconscious to the conscious, critical mind.

Those writers who do recognize that they have both an imaginative, creative subconscious and a stilted, overly cautious conscious-critical mind will develop and hone the ability to know when the latter is at work. The most recognizable trait?

The creative subconscious is *always* positive and always moving forward in the story. If you hear a little voice inside that’s negative, that’s your conscious-critical mind sneaking in.

The conscious, critical mind is *always* negative, sometimes plodding forward, and very often looking back (checking the outline, revising, rewriting, etc.). Often, it stops the writer cold, which leads us to...

Topic: Writer’s Block

Like those in the last few Quotes of the Day, I too believe writer's block does not exist. Here's the latest entry from Harvey's Dictionary:

writer's block, n. *imaginary* 1. just another excuse, a trick of the conscious-critical mind to keep the writer from writing, and in that way to keep him or her safe from the ridicule and embarrassment that *might* result should s/he actually finish a story and submit or publish it. 2. an imaginary affliction, the evocative name of which was created by someone who wanted to offer, for money, his or her method of getting past it.

During a presentation at Eastern NM University in Portales, Science Fiction Grand Master CJ Cherryh once said she also doesn't believe in writer's block, but that it probably does exist for those who believe in it. In other words, in order to exist at all, writer's block requires belief.

What? If you put your faith in a strongly negative thing, it will stop you from doing something positive (writing)? Yeah, that sounds about right.

A bit later she added (I'm paraphrasing), "To avoid the chance of getting writer's block, you can always end the day's writing by putting the character in the shower. When you come back to the novel, you'll have to write the character out of the shower, and by the time you do that, the story will be flowing again."

Ending a day's writing in the midst of an action that will have to be completed upon your return is a great technique. I've used it myself several times. After awhile it becomes second nature. I recommend it.

Yesterday

I actually spaced yesterday. I was busy with other things, and I didn't even check Dean's site or the others I usually look at. That's rare. The number of quotes of the day and the number of links in "Of Interest" are a direct result of that. Playing catch-up, so to speak.

And speaking of the Journal, I'll resume posting some craft topics soon. Of course, I've talked about most of them at one time or another (some more than once). If there are any particular aspects of craft you'd like me to address, please email me at harveystanbrough@gmail.com.

Today, etc.

Despite my lengthy lack of action on Blackwell Ops 8, I suspect it might be finished by the end of this month. I guess we'll see.

Talk with you again later.

Of Interest

See “Chess robot breaks its seven-year-old opponent’s finger” at <https://interestingengineering.com/chess-robot-breaks-seven-year-old-finger>. Seemed to me the robot was reaching for a chess piece and got the finger by mistake. But this is great for SF.

See “The Past Crimes Bundle” at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/the-past-crimes-bundle-my-introduction/>. In case any of you are interested, either as readers or as crime writers who want to read and study others’ works.

See “Diagnosing Writer’s Block” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/diagnosing-writers-block/>. Read this post to actually witness the critical mind at work.

See “How I Use Scrivener For Fiction And Non-Fiction” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/how-i-use-scrivener-for-fiction-and-non-fiction/>. In case you’ve wondered.

See “The Dreaded Synopsis” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/the-dreaded-synopsis/>.

See “More Workshop Curriculum” at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/more-workshop-curriculum/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1000 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 19... 2117 words. Total words to date..... 41729

Total fiction words for July..... 0

Total fiction words for the year..... 45405

Total nonfiction words for July... 9710

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 103840

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 149245

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 66

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Creative Penn](#), [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [interestingengineering.com](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [the writing life](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: Story Ideas

July 29, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Topic: Story Ideas
- * Of Interest

Topic: Story Ideas

As I was telling a friend recently, story ideas can come from anywhere. Most often they come to me as a character or two popping into my head, usually with a line of dialogue that frames the genre and the story voice. Less often, something I see physically or overhear or read will spark a story idea. Regardless of the mode of their arrival, my stories are seldom born of whole cloth. A story idea is only a lever to get you to the keyboard.

While I was writing on Blackwell Ops 8 yesterday one of the characters handed me an idea, not only for a new novel but for a new series of novels. And in "Of Interest" today, I linked to two of the four posts because I found them compelling and rife with story ideas.

The idea that came to me yesterday as I was writing was whole. I knew instantly who the 'good guys' would be and that they were misguided, both by societal standards and by the rule of law. I knew what they would do, and I knew how they would do it. I even know there are three major characters in the group, two men and a woman.

Oddly (for me) there was no dialogue, maybe because I already know the general topic of every discussion, so the specific dialogue isn't important.

The ideas that flashed past my creative subconscious as I read the third post I linked to in "Of Interest" and browsed the fourth were nothing close to whole. They were mere glimpses of possibilities. I like to call such glimpses the "jagged fragments of fleeting thoughts." If you have a sense for that, then you know what I mean.

Interestingly, only two of those fleeting ideas included characters at all, one effeminate male who was bent on murder and one female about whom I know nothing else.

The other ideas were only situations or circumstances, bits of setting, and so on. None of the ideas included dialogue. But I could have stopped on any one of them, asked a few questions of the character or situation or circumstance or bit of setting involved and started writing.

I've long preached what I mentioned at the top of this post, that a story idea is valuable primarily because it gets you to the keyboard. To that end, you need only a character with a problem in a setting. Then you sit down and write whatever comes.

Based on the story idea that occurred to me as I wrote yesterday, I could have already written the first few chapters of the first novel of the new series. It was just that clean and whole. If something else doesn't occur to me in the meantime, I might well start it as soon as I finish Blackwell Ops 8.

Of the story ideas I got from the last two items in "Of Interest" (none of which I will write, by the way), one had both a character and a problem so I only needed to add the setting.

Another had only a character. For that one I would need to add a problem (this doesn't have to be 'the' problem of the story — more on that later) and a setting.

The others were all either a situation or a circumstance — both of those indicate a problem so each would require only the addition of a character and a setting — or bits of setting, so would require only the addition of a character with a problem.

More on the "Problem" in the Story Idea

As I mentioned above, in the equation character + problem + setting = story idea, the "problem" doesn't have to be 'the' problem of the story. The problem mentioned in the equation is only something to start your fingers moving over the keys.

In an example I've used many times, say a young man (character) in a suit and carrying a briefcase steps out of his house (setting) to leave for work. On the porch (setting), he glances down and notes his left shoelace is untied (problem).

That's the story idea. It's all you need, even right now, as you're reading this, to write a whole short story or novella or novel. Once you add your description of the character and the setting (both from the creative subconscious, of course), this would be probably 200 to 300 words or more. Don't forget what the POV character sees, hears, smells, tastes (?) and feels (physically and/or emotionally)

Naturally, the character would set his briefcase down, kneel, and reach to tie his shoelace. (He is correcting the problem.) But just as he kneels, a gunshot sounds and wood splinters fly from the shattered doorframe of the house.

Now we see the beginning vestiges of the real problem. What does the man do? Does he immediately turn on his knees, grab the door knob and scramble back into the house, leaving the briefcase behind? Does he grab the briefcase, then try to go into the house? Does he grab the briefcase, then lunge off the side of the porch? Does a second bullet hit and kill the man? Do others scramble onto the porch to retrieve the briefcase? Does another man walk calmly onto the porch, step over the body, and greet the new widow, who opens the door to admit him?

The possibilities (and genres) are endless. What happens next and maybe what's in the briefcase will determine the direction and genre of the story. Of the male characters thus far, is the first a young bad guy, a good guy, or just a minor player caught up in the affairs of stronger people? And we could ask the same questions about the character who steps over the body (if that happens) and even about the woman who's still in the house.

It's all up to your creative subconscious. Best of all, if 100 people wrote a story based on the original premise, we'd end up with 100 different stories. Some might be similar, but none would be identical.

By the way, you can't copyright an idea. If the basic premise beckons you, feel free to write whatever story occurs. Have fun.

Talk with you again later.

Of Interest

See "Book Promotion Services: Which Ones Are Right for You?" at <https://www.amarketingexpert.com/2022/07/28/book-promotion-services-which-ones-are-right-for-you/>.

See "Hidden Gems In the Workshop Sale" at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/hidden-gems-in-the-workshop-sale/>.

See "The Face That Replicates" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/the-face-that-replicates/>. Maybe a story idea.

See "The lasting anguish of moral injury" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/the-lasting-anguish-of-moral-injury/>. More possible story ideas.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1080 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 19... 2117 words. Total words to date..... 41729

Day 20... 2025 words. Total words to date..... 43754

Total fiction words for July..... 2025

Total fiction words for the year..... 47430

Total nonfiction words for July... 10790

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 104920

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 152350

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date...	0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	66
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014).....	217
Short story collections.....	31

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Author Marketing Experts](#), [creative subconscious](#), [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [Professional Writer Series](#), [Story Ideas](#), [the writing life](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: Patronage and Mentorships

July 30, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Patronage
- * Mentorships(?)
- * Of Interest

Patronage

It's been a very long time since any of my patrons have requested anything from me.

I'm only one guy, and I don't have a fulfillment team. So if you're a patron and you'd like to claim a reward, please email me at harveystanbrough@gmail.com to let me know what you'd like to have. I'm more than happy to send it right out.

Since I haven't been writing much for the past year, obviously there's been nothing new to send out, but all of the patronage tiers now include items from my backlist. Check it out at <https://hestanbrough.com/become-a-patron/>.

Mentorships(?)

In the past, I offered several highly structured mentorships that built on each other and complemented each other. They were a great value, but very few took advantage of them, so eventually I took them down.

Now, thanks to Dean's post today (see "Of Interest"), I'm thinking about offering a limited number of mentorships again. If I do, they will be very different, both from what I offered before and from what Dean's offering now:

Each mentorship would focus on one writer and his or her work, whether short stories, a novel, or a series. We would conduct the mentorship via email so both I and the writer would have a record of the exchanges.

Instead of a requiring an overall fee, I would ask the student to pay \$25, month by month, either to my PayPal account or via personal check to my PO box. The mentorship would begin or continue on the first day of the month.

The mentorship might last as briefly as one month or as long as several. The writer or I could choose to discontinue the mentorship at any time.

From the first payment, the writer would be entitled to

(provided one time only) a list of the topics and subtopics from my previous mentorships as a possible catalyst for questions, plus

(every month) everything in the Patron Writer tier of patronage (the writer has to let me know what s/he wants), plus

(every month) answers to whatever questions the writer wants to ask, whether about craft topics in general or about a specific part of the writer's work in progress. (Note: If I feel the writer is unreasonably abusing this feature, I reserve the right to limit the number of questions.)

Finally, as part of my responses to the writer's questions, I would include PDF handouts and/or fiction or nonfiction ebooks if I thought they were illustrative of my response.

Okay, I think that's it. So what do you think? Interested at all? Any suggestions? If so, please email me at harveystanbrough@gmail.com. No obligation of course. And thanks in advance for any input, positive or negative, or suggestions.

If I decide to offer the mentorships, I'll announce them here and on the Patronage page.

Talk with you again later.

Of Interest

See "This bizarre DNA event recording system can track cellular activity from birth to death" at <https://interestingengineering.com/science/dna-event-recording-system-cellular-activity>. SF story ideas?

See “Mentor Openings (Not Part of Sale)” at <https://deanwesleymith.com/mentor-openings-not-part-of-sale/>.

See “Story Idea, Soul, or Personality of the Writer – What Makes a Book Successful?” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/07/story-idea-soul-or-personality-of-the-writer-what-makes-a-book-successful.html>. I didn’t read this. Just thought some of you might get something out of it.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 540 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 19... 2117 words. Total words to date..... 41729

Day 20... 2025 words. Total words to date..... 43754

Day 21... 1770 words. Total words to date..... 45524

Total fiction words for July..... 3795

Total fiction words for the year..... 49200

Total nonfiction words for July... 11330

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 105460

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 154660

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 66

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Dean Wesley Smith](#), interestingengineering.com, [KillZone Blog](#), [Mentorships](#), [Patronage](#)

The Journal: The Mentorships and the Novel

July 31, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * The Mentorships
- * Topic: The Novel (and Cycling)
- * Of Interest

The Mentorships

Well, the mentorships are definitely a go. I've already had a good response. (Thanks to those who responded so quickly.) If this is something that interests you, please email me at harveystanbrough@gmail.com to let me know.

I also decided against including the mentorships on the Patronage page. Instead, over the next few days I'll develop a new page strictly for the Mentorships (I've decided now there probably will be two levels). I'll also create a new PayPal subscription button specifically for the mentorships.

More on all this once everything's ready.

The Novel

You'll remember I started Blackwell Ops 8 around 2 months ago. Maybe longer. This might be the longest in calendar days it's ever taken me to write a novel. In writing days alone, today will be Day 23.

Which, frankly, I find ludicrous. Writing 48,820 publishable words of fiction in 22 days means, on average, I wrote almost exactly 2 hours (2219 words) per day. I mean, if you write at a very slow 1000 words per hour (that's only 17 words per minute) and if you spend even three hours in the chair per day, that's a 90,000 word novel in a month.

Not everyone can do that. Some folks have jobs, a problem with which I am no longer encumbered. But if you can spend even ONE hour per day in the chair, that's still a 60,000 word novel in two months. Productivity really does all boil down to math.

Of course, I could plead that I'm out of shape for writing after a layoff of almost a year, but that doesn't cut it. Yesterday I wrote almost 3300 words and I hardly broke a sweat. I did other things through the day too. So if I can write over 3000 words on one day, then I can do it every day. The truth is, I've just been lazy.

With four days left in the month, partly to snap me out of my funk, I finally writered-up and set myself a mini-challenge to finish the novel this month. That might or might not happen, and that's fine. It doesn't matter.

But to give myself a fair chance, I went back to the beginning and started cycling through the entire novel. Something didn't feel right about the last bit I wrote, and when that happens, cycling is always the answer.

For anyone who doesn't know, "cycling" in this context means reading through the manuscript, but strictly as a reader. That means reading with the creative subconscious and with all disbelief suspended, just as you would read anyone else's work.

Or in the alternative, that means NOT reading as a writer or critic, with the conscious, critical mind engaged. When you cycle, you don't "look for" anything. You just enjoy the story.

But you also allow your fingers to rest on the keyboard. And if your creative subconscious (the characters) want to add something, you let them use your fingers to type it in.

I did that for three days. As you can see below, on the first day, my characters added 2025 words. All that while doing nothing but cycling and allowing my characters to add things that I (as my characters' recorder) inadvertently left out the first time through.

On the second day, same thing, but my characters added only 1770 words. But on the third day, yesterday, they added maybe 500 words cycling but they also happened on the place where the story was broken. The place where it had taken the wrong turn that left me with that gritty feeling in the pit of my stomach.

I took a break. But when I came back, I let the characters take over and start telling the story again. At the end of the day, they'd added 3296 new words, most of which were in three scenes that hadn't existed previously but obviously should have.

There is no rational alternative to trusting your characters to tell the story that they, not you, are living.

I have a little more cycling to do today, and then it will be a race to the end. I can't see it yet, but I can feel it lurking just off-screen. Of course, I won't "force" the ending just to finish the book today. If it finishes today and I successfully complete my mini-challenge, that's fine. If it takes another day or two, that's also fine. Again, it's the characters' story. I'm just intelligent and rational enough to let them tell it.

Talk with you again later.

Of Interest

See "What Happens to Your Books When You Die?" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/07/what-happens-to-your-books-when-you-die.html>. Think about your heirs.

See "The Building Blocks of Scene" at <https://www.janefriedman.com/the-fundamentals-of-scene-writing-making-a-scene-on-the-page/>. Part 1 of a 3-part series. I haven't read this yet, but I bookmarked it to read later. It feels right.

See "Good Scenes Require Specifics" at <https://www.janefriedman.com/scene-prep-and-scene-sequences/>. Part 2.

See “Moving Between Scenes with Summary and Spacers” at <https://www.janefriedman.com/moving-between-scenes-with-summary-and-spacers/>. Part 3.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 780 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 19... 2117 words. Total words to date..... 41729

Day 20... 2025 words. Total words to date..... 43754

Day 21... 1770 words. Total words to date..... 45524

Day 22... 3296 words. Total words to date..... 48820

Total fiction words for July..... 7091

Total fiction words for the year..... 52496

Total nonfiction words for July... 12110

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 106240

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 158736

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 66

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. I've never said WITD is “the only way” to write, nor will I ever. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among other topics.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Cycling](#), [James Scott Bell](#), [Jane Friedman](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [Professional Writer Series](#), [Scene](#), [the writing life](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: Mentorships Now Available

August 1, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Food for Thought
- * Mentorships Now Available
- * The Novel

- * A Few Words on Genre
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

“It is better to fail in originality than to succeed in imitation.” Herman Melville

Food for Thought

So I don't forget, here's a free copy of brand-new handout: [Craft and Non-Craft Topics to Stir Thought](#). When you click the link, a blank screen will open and the document will download automatically.

Mentorships Now Available

Because it's difficult for me to let go of a concept once I sink my teeth into it, I finished the new Mentorship page yesterday and posted it. But it wasn't quite right. I had two “levels” and some other nonsense, and all I really wanted to do was pay forward what I've learned to other writers who are also hungry.

So I drastically revised and simplified the page this morning before this post went live. (If you're one of the few who saw it last night, please look again.) You can see it at <https://hestanbrough.com/new-mentorships/>.

The mentorship is primarily designed to keep the student/writer focused on a particular work in progress as I guide him or her through crafting, finishing and submitting or publishing that work.

One new thing — the mentorship should last between one and three months, no longer. If the student wants to continue after three months, the price increases. That is meant to encourage students to learn while they're in the midst of a mentorship, and it also should open more mentorship slots.

Once you've looked over the page, if you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask. Of course, I have to limit the number of writers I can work with at one time, but I will create a waiting list if necessary.

The Novel

Because I latched onto the mentorship thing, I didn't get started on the novel until a little after noon. I actually put in a full day's work (around 7 hours) on developing the Mentorship page, creating and adding the PayPal app, etc.

So before I did anything else, I took a break up at the house for about a half-hour, then came back to the writing 'puter. Thank goodness I was coming back to new writing again. I still have a little more cycling to do, but not until I finish the current segment of new writing.

Turned out I was tireder than I thought. I decided not to count yesterday as a writing day at all. So the novel didn't finish in July, but finishing wasn't really the point of the mini-challenge anyway. The point was getting myself started again. (grin)

A Few Words on Genre

In the Anne R. Allen post (link in "Of Interest") the author says of genre, "Gotta pick one. Or maybe two if you have a mash-up in mind."

Respectfully — um no, you don't.

If you trust your characters and your creative subconscious and just write the story, the genre or genres will become clear (or not) after the story's finished.

Of course, if you're returning to write another story in a series, you already know the primary genre, but otherwise, don't sweat it. Seriously, it doesn't matter until the story's finished.

Genre is not a concern before or during the writing. Genre is a concern only in selecting where to shelve a new release. And sometimes, that's out of your hands anyway. For example, Amazon, Apple, and Smashwords choose in which genre to "shelve" the ebooks they license.

Talk with you again later.

Of Interest

See "Adventures in Reversion – Getting the Rights Back" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/08/adventures-in-reversion-getting-the-rights-back.html>. Of course, those of us who never sell our rights to publishers don't have this problem.

See "The Female Quixote and Me" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/the-female-quixote-and-me/>. I posted this mostly for PG's take.

See "Is Decision Fatigue Standing Between You and Writing Success?" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/is-decision-fatigue-standing-between-you-and-writing-success/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 650 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 19... 2117 words. Total words to date..... 41729
Day 20... 2025 words. Total words to date..... 43754
Day 21... 1770 words. Total words to date..... 45524
Day 22... 3296 words. Total words to date..... 48820

Total fiction words for July.....	7091
Total fiction words for the year.....	52496
Total nonfiction words for August...	650
Total nonfiction words for the year.....	106890
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog).....	159386
Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date...	0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	66
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014).....	217
Short story collections.....	31

Disclaimer: I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. I've never said WITD is "the only way" to write, nor will I ever. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among other topics.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Anne R. Allen](#), [Genre](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [Mentorships](#), [Professional Writer Series](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [the writing life](#)

The Journal: Attitude

August 2, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Attitude
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day (maybe quote of the year)

"I don't need easy. I just need possible." Katie Bone, American Ninja Warrior contestant

Attitude

In "Of Interest" you'll see the second link is to a post by Dean Wesley Smith about attitude. That post is almost as short as this one is. It's also where I got the quote of the day.

And in the article itself, shortly after that quote, Dean wrote, "Well folks, being a professional writer is possible. ... It's not easy, but it is possible."

But Dean's wrong. Being a professional writer is not only possible, but once you learn to trust your characters and your creative subconscious and just write down the stories, it's easy too. And

fun. What could be better than something that's both easy and fun AND gives you such a satisfying sense of accomplishment? (Not to mention teamwork and camaraderie with your characters.)

Even as prolific as I've been in the past and am becoming again, I occasionally have to remind myself of this concept, that I don't need easy, I just need possible. I also need occasionally to remind myself how much fun it is to write fiction.

That's what I accomplished recently with my mini-challenge. The challenge forced me to the keyboard, and from there the characters took over. Now, for the past two days, I'm back to writing at least 3000 words per day again, and I can't tell you how great that feels.

As I was just telling a friend earlier this morning, "Remember how very exciting it was to get an idea, race to the keyboard, and let the idea take over? That's what I'm rediscovering now. And I'm finally back to having fun and looking forward to each new day."

I wish the same for all of you.

Talk with you again later.

Of Interest

See "Blog 3,650 In A Row" at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/blog-3650-in-a-row/>. I'm a day late on this one.

See "An Amazing Attitude" at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/an-amazing-attitude/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 340 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 19... 2117 words. Total words to date..... 41729

Day 20... 2025 words. Total words to date..... 43754

Day 21... 1770 words. Total words to date..... 45524

Day 22... 3296 words. Total words to date..... 48820

Day 23... 3259 words. Total words to date..... 52079

Total fiction words for August..... 3259

Total fiction words for the year..... 55755

Total nonfiction words for August... 990

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 107230

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 162985

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date...	0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	66
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014).....	217
Short story collections.....	31

Disclaimer: I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. I've never said WITD is "the only way" to write, nor will I ever. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among other topics.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Attitude](#), [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [Professional Writer Series](#), [the writing life](#)

The Journal: Openings and Nicknames

August 4, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Topic: Openings
- * Nicknames
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“When the uncreative tell the creative what to do, it stops being art.” Tony Bennett

“Writing a compelling opening for your novel isn't optional, it's essential.” Maggie Smith of Rocky Mountain Fiction Writers

“Authors today need a publisher as much as they need a tapeworm in their guts.” Rayne Hall

“If Big Publishing priced ebooks for optimum sales and profits, there wouldn't be any 'decline' in ebook sales to write clickbait stores about.” The Passive Guy

Topic: Openings

I just talked with one of my mentoring students yesterday about the opening to one of his stories. But that isn't what this is about.

In “Of Interest” today you'll find a link to an article on “Seven Components of a Successful Novel Opening.”

When you read the article, please note that these aren't presented as seven different ways to hook a reader, or seven different ways to open a novel. As the title says, they are seven components of a successful novel opening. In other words, a successful novel opening needs them all in whatever order.

I tend to agree, though I do want to comment on a few of the components listed in the article:

Starting with action — If you heed the old advice to start “in media res” (in the middle of the action), you'll leave your reader cold, and maybe confused.

If you go back and look at the openings of books that you could have sworn began with action, you'll find that they actually started with a little description to ground the reader.

So if you want to begin a story “in media res,” go ahead. But then back up a little and write what happened in the few seconds or minutes leading up to that action. That should be your first paragraph.

Communicating a theme — Whatever. You can't write a story without communicating a theme, though the “theme” is usually something found by a critic or reader after the fact. If you're consciously putting in a theme, check in with yourself. You aren't a storyteller; you're a crusader.

Raising a question that needs to be answered — I'm betting what the author meant by this was using suspense (sometimes in the form of what I call internal cliffhangers) to keep the reader moving from paragraph to paragraph and turning pages.

This shouldn't be a conscious exercise in which you stop and wonder which important question you need to insert into the text so one or more of the characters can attempt to answer it. Like the “theme” stuff above, if you start with a character who has a problem in a setting, this will take care of itself.

Introduce your main character — Yes! This is absolutely essential. And the authors says to include the character's name “if possible.” Yeah, well, it's possible, and it's necessary.

Let me destroy a myth for you: Withholding a character's name by referring to him/her as a “dark shadowy figure” or whatever is NOT a valid way to create suspense. It is, however, a quick way to cause a reader to hurl a book or e-reader across a room.

Most of all, remember to absorb with your conscious, critical mind the techniques and bits of techniques that interest you. But APPLY them with your creative subconscious. When you're writing, don't think, just do.

Nicknames

The first item in “Of Interest” is one of the most entertaining posts I've read in a long while. Hence the special mention. It's no surprise to me that my friend, Garry Rodgers, wrote it. Enjoy.

Talk with you again later.

Of Interest

See “Nicknames” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/08/nicknames.html>.

See “Still A Mentor Spot Open” at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/still-a-mentor-spot-open/>.

See “Seven Components of a Successful Novel Opening” at <https://rmfw.org/2022/06/21/seven-components-of-a-successful-novel-opening/>. Be careful with this. These are not seven different ways to hook a reader or open a novel. As the title says, they’re seven necessary parts of an opening.

See “NY Book Editors Blog – Free Marketing Tools for Book Promotion on Amazon” at <https://www.amarketingexpert.com/2022/08/02/ny-book-editors-blog-free-marketing-tools-for-book-promotion-on-amazon/>.

See “Are Ebooks on the Decline Again?” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/are-ebooks-on-the-decline-again/>. I posted this mostly for PG’s take, which I believe is spot on.

See “Writing Elusive Inner Moments” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/writing-elusive-inner-moments/>. For excellent examples of this very touchy writing technique, see almost any novel I’ve ever written.

See “19 Best AI Writing Tools of 2022” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/19-best-ai-writing-tools-of-2022/>. If you’re into this sort of thing, here you go.

See “Prolific romantic fiction writer exposed as a plagiarist” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/prolific-romantic-fiction-writer-exposed-as-a-plagiarist/>. Seriously, how can people just cheat like this? If it isn’t yours, leave it alone. How hard is that to understand?

The Numbers

The Journal..... 750 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 19... 2117 words. Total words to date..... 41729
Day 20... 2025 words. Total words to date..... 43754
Day 21... 1770 words. Total words to date..... 45524
Day 22... 3296 words. Total words to date..... 48820
Day 23... 3259 words. Total words to date..... 52079
Day 24... 2712 words. Total words to date..... 54791

Total fiction words for August.....	5971
Total fiction words for the year.....	58467
Total nonfiction words for August...	1740
Total nonfiction words for the year.....	107980
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog).....	166447
Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date...	0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	66
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014).....	217
Short story collections.....	31

Disclaimer: I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. I've never said WITD is "the only way" to write, nor will I ever. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among other topics.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Author Marketing Experts](#), [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [openings](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [the writing life](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: My Own (Past) Mentor and More

August 5, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Topic: My Own (Past) Mentor
- * And More
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

“[T]he whole thrust of academia is one that values education, in my opinion, in inverse ratio to its usefulness—and what you write in inverse relationship to its understandability. Academics are forced to write in language no one can understand so that they get tenure. They have to say ‘discourse’, not ‘talk’. Knowledge that is not accessible is not helpful.” Gloria Steinem

Topic: My Own (Past) Mentor

This brief post is a result of me having read “Overcoming Your Greatest Obstacle” over at the Kill Zone blog this morning (see “Of Interest”). I recommend reading it and the comments that come after the post. With any luck you’ll find the perfect match between what you need as a writer and whatever knowledge someone else is providing.

Everyone who's read much of this Journal know that I count Dean Wesley Smith as my primary, albeit past, mentor, though he and I never had any kind of official arrangement. I learned from reading his blog and from asking him questions occasionally. (Yes, just like some of you, I hope, learn from this blog and from me.)

I call Dean my "past" mentor because as a writer, I've learned all I can from him and have outgrown the need for him. I like to think he'd be pleased to know that. It's the same outcome I hope for those who learn from me.

I used to recommend searching and reading Dean's older posts. I'd recommend you visit his site at <https://deanwesleysmith.com>, then search for Heinlein's Rules or Writing Into the Dark or Think Like a Publisher (series of posts) or Killing the Sacred Cows (of Publishing, series of posts) or (of Indie Publishing, series of posts) and much, much more.

But you no longer have to wade through the original posts unless you just want to. All of those topics and many others are available inexpensively as ebooks and print books, both separately and in bundles. You can find them at <https://wmgpublishinginc.com/writers/> as well as on Amazon and in other venues.

Also, those topics and many others are available as either lectures (usually \$50 to \$75) or online workshops (\$150 to \$300). To shorten my own learning curve, I read his blog religiously back when he was posting about writing almost every day (versus promoting his Kickstarters, bundles, etc. as he does most of the time now). In fact, his blog was the inspiration for this Journal.

Over time I also signed up for several of Dean's lectures and workshops. If you're considering the outlay of funds, feel free to email me to ask about the workshop(s) you're considering. If I've taken the lecture or workshop, I'm not shy about sharing my opinion, good or bad. Might save you some money. Might spur you in a more useful direction.

By the way, if you want to email Dean directly, his old email address is no longer valid. His new email address is dean.wmgworkshops@gmail.com. He's still a great resource for learning to write fiction.

Best of all, Dean's advice isn't simply a regurgitation of the inane myths you see batted about on almost every blog about writing and in writing boards and groups. The myths that actually *delay your writing or stop you from writing altogether* instead of enabling you to write better and more proficiently.

In short, Dean teaches techniques used by most professional fiction writers, especially the prolific ones. And you needn't trust Dean (or me). You have only to listen and trust yourself and your creative subconscious.

And More

I also strongly recommend Lawrence Block, both his fiction and his nonfiction for writers. Of particular interest are his [Books for Writers](#) and to a lesser degree, his [Posts for Writers](#).

Speaking of enabling fiction writers, I also recommend subscribing to this Journal (Thank you all, and please tell your writer friends and acquaintances) as well as downloading my [free and fully searchable Journal archives](#).

I mentioned that Dean teaches techniques used by most professional fiction writers, especially the prolific ones. I teach those same techniques through this Journal and in my nonfiction books. Especially [Quiet the Critical Voice \(and Write Fiction\)](#) and [Writing the Character-Driven Story](#). I hope you'll check them out.

Okay, I think that's enough of that. This ends our extended commercial break. (grin)

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "What to Study On Kickstarters" at <https://deanwesleymith.com/what-to-study-on-kickstarters/>.

See "Reader Friday: Overcoming Your Greatest Obstacle" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/08/reader-friday-overcoming-your-greatest-obstacle.html>. Also please see my (and others') comments on the article for more.

See "The 12 Best Writing Organization Tools of the Year" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/the-12-best-writing-organization-tools-of-the-year/>. Or you could just, you know, write. Grain of salt recommended.

See "Shakespeare, Pronouns, and the New World Order" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/shakespeare-pronouns-and-the-new-world-order/>. Glad to see I'm not the only one who is annoyed by such things.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 790 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 19... 2117 words. Total words to date..... 41729
Day 20... 2025 words. Total words to date..... 43754
Day 21... 1770 words. Total words to date..... 45524
Day 22... 3296 words. Total words to date..... 48820
Day 23... 3259 words. Total words to date..... 52079
Day 24... 2712 words. Total words to date..... 54791

Total fiction words for August..... 5971
Total fiction words for the year..... 58467
Total nonfiction words for August... 2530

Total nonfiction words for the year.....	108770
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog).....	167237
Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date...	0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	66
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014).....	217
Short story collections.....	31

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [the writing life](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: How I Got Here

August 6, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Topic: How I Got Here (and How You Can Too)
- * Of Interest

Topic: How I Got Here (and How You Can Too)

Yesterday, Alicia commented on my post, "I haven't had a mentor for writing – I tried once or twice and it was not pretty. But I have read a hundred or more books on craft...." That's enough to provide the context of today's topic, but you can read the rest of [her comment and my original response here](#). (Thanks for providing a catalyst, Alicia.)

I tried that same approach for around 40 years, reading book after book after book about "how" to write. The authors all said basically the same things (the myths), over and over. Each book was basically a regurgitation of the others. Often, they even said the same things in the same way.

I finally decided I'd rather stop writing fiction altogether than turn it into the misery and drudgery that virtually all the "how-to" authors made it out to be.

Fortunately, that's about the time I found Dean Wesley Smith's blog and learned that writing fiction could actually be fun. In fact, it was *supposed* to be fun. Who knew?

Dean talked about [Heinlein's Rules](#) (free download) and pointed out that they were ridiculously simple (true), yet incredibly difficult to follow (also true).

He also talked about how relatively new the traditional publishing industry was, and that it was they and critics and other non-writers (not fiction writers themselves) who invented all the BS myths about outlining (*fiction!*) and revising and rewriting and inviting critiques and on and on and on. Basically, about the writer allowing his or her conscious, critical mind to second-guess and overrule the characters who were actually living the story in the writer's creative subconscious.

Everything Dean said made perfect sense, but I still didn't automatically buy-in. I was far too jaded from having tripped and fallen so often into the smelly stuff. (For just one example, I spent over three years of my life outlining *one* novel. A novel that's never been written. I already know the whole story. What's the fun in writing that? It's like watching a movie after someone has told you the twist ending.)

So I decided to try following Heinlein's Rules and Writing Into the Dark for myself. I thought if I tried it honestly, really gave it my best effort, that would prove once and for all it didn't work. Then I could get on with going fishing or doing other fun things. At that point, I no longer cared either way about writing fiction.

Getting started at trusting myself and my characters (my creative subconscious) was among the hardest things I've ever done. But once I learned to let go of all the crap all the non-writers (and early-stage fiction writers who also try to teach writing and have absolutely no business doing so) had taught me about writing fiction — and once I learned it was all right to trust myself and my creative subconscious — I enjoyed a transformation of the Saul-to-Paul kind.

All of a sudden I was writing much better stories and having a lot more fun than should be allowed by the law. What could be better than that? And yes, once I gave in and learned to trust, it was just that quick.

Now maybe, just *maybe*, it would be more fun to host a pretentious "launch party" to celebrate my "debut novel." I could enjoy brie cheese on soy crackers while sipping champagne. And I could do all that with one forearm flung dramatically across my forehead as I complained to my nodding, sanctimonious friends about what terrible *drudgery* one must endure to write fiction.

Yeah, somehow I don't think so. Ever heard Garth Brooks' song "Friends in Low Places"? As regards launch parties, that would be me.

Once I realized what writing fiction was really all about, there was nothing I would rather do. When my writing time was over each day, I had to tear myself away from the story.

What's more, I was nervous all evening and had to almost force myself to go to sleep so I could get up and get back to the story the following morning. I couldn't wait to get back to the computer and my characters and their world.

That's the wonderful world I lived in from early 2014 until August 6 of last year. Then came my forced almost-year off. (The muddled mental confusion that resulted from me stopping smoking cigars.)

Now I'm slowly getting back to that happy place. I only wish everyone could experience such joy. But sadly, that will never happen.

Today I wrote about how I got here. Tomorrow I'll talk about why most fiction writers will *never* get here. That said, please remember that it really is all up to you.

The Novel

I've had two non-writing days in a row. I meant to write yesterday, but I wrote this and tomorrow's post instead. No matter. I'm not overly worried about it.

Sometimes I have to take a deep breath and remember that I'm easily among the "fastest" and more prolific fiction writers working today. And by "fastest," I mean although I write only about 1000 words per hour (about 17 words per minute), I put more time in the chair.

Plus the current novel, my first after almost a year-long layoff, is kind of my test novel. It's part of my master plan (grin) to get me back into the writing groove. But I've reached some goals, so at this point I'd just like to finish it so I can get started on something new. And I suspect that will happen in the next few days.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "A Streak Without Desire" at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/a-streak-without-desire/>.

See "Podcast for Authors: Hiring a Book Marketing Company With Less Risk" at <https://www.amarketingexpert.com/2022/08/04/podcast-for-authors-hiring-a-book-marketing-company-with-less-risk/>. If you visit her site, try to figure out how to sign up for her free newsletter. It's well worthwhile.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 980 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 19... 2117 words. Total words to date..... 41729

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Day 23... 3259 words. Total words to date..... 52079
Day 24... 2712 words. Total words to date..... 54791

Total fiction words for August..... 5971
Total fiction words for the year..... 58467
Total nonfiction words for August... 3510
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 109750
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 168217

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 66
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. I've never said WITD is "the only way" to write, nor will I ever. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among other topics.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Author Marketing Experts](#), [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [Mentoring](#), [the writing life](#),
[Topic](#)

The Journal: Why Most Fiction Writers Will Never Get Here

August 7, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Topic: Why Most Fiction Writers Will Never Get Here
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

"It's easier to fool people than to convince them that they've been fooled." Mark Twain

"But they are amazingly hard to follow—which is why there are so few professional writers and so many aspirants, and which is why I'm not afraid to give away the racket!" Robert A. Heinlein on his "Business Habits"

"What [Heinlein's Rules] did for me was to finally get me out of the stupid teaching from school and allow me to apply logic to the craft." Dean Wesley Smith

“[Heinlein’s Rules are] thinning-the-herd rules. ... [I]f you have a million want-to-be writers before Rule #1, by the time you get to the end of those simple five business rules, you will be lucky to have a dozen professionals.” Dean Wesley Smith

Topic: Why Most Fiction Writers Will Never Get Here

Yesterday, I wrote about “[How I Got Here](#).” I ended that segment with “I only wish everyone could experience such joy. But sadly, that will never happen.” So today, I’ll talk about why most fiction writers will never get here.

Heinlein himself lays out the main reason in the second Quote of the Day. The other big reason is that writers, like most humans (and water) follow the path of least resistance. They do what they’re conditioned to do, the practice becomes their comfort zone, and there they remain.

(In a very happy coincidence, Dean Wesley Smith posted about Heinlein’s Rules in his blog today. [Please go read it](#) and pay attention to what he says about his own experience.)

All of that said and despite what you’re about to read here, whether or not you someday get to where I am really is all up to you. You can bust through the relatively thin wall between doing what seems easiest and true freedom in writing if you want to. All it takes is a little determination.

But by all means, if I or anyone else can dissuade you from writing fiction simply by presenting facts, chances are, writing fiction isn’t your passion anyway.

First, when I say you can be where I am if you want to, I’m not talking about financial success or making money. If making money is your primary driver, writing fiction is not the business for you. Save yourself some time and anguish and just trust me on that.

When I say you can get to where I am if you want to, I’m talking about writing fiction, period. I’m talking about telling stories for the sheer joy of telling stories, and doing that over the long haul. Years or decades. Most fiction writers today will never do that.

Why? Because most fiction writers who are otherwise physically and mentally healthy and able still can’t bring themselves to discount all the BS myths about writing fiction that people (especially teachers and professors) have fed them over their entire lives.

These writers allow their conscious, critical mind (and the conscious, critical minds of others) to “correct” their characters’ story. Which, of course, is ludicrous.

Most fiction writers believe they must outline (novels), revise, rewrite, invite criticism, get input from “Beta readers,” and then polish the work. And all because people *Who Don’t Write Fiction* have told them they must do those things. Note that ALL of those activities stem from the conscious, critical mind. You can’t do ANY of those from the creative subconscious.

But most writers have heard and accepted that garbage for so long that they naturally assume it must be true. Then along comes someone like Dean Wesley Smith or Harvey Stanbrough to tell you 99% of that crap is NOT true and —

Well, let's just say my job as a writing instructor is seldom a pleasant experience. To paraphrase Mark Twain, "It's far easier to fool people than it is to convince them they've been fooled."

Think about that. I'm not even asking other writers to trust me. I'm only suggesting they should trust *themselves* more than they trust other people. Nobody else knows the story you're writing as well as you do. And even *you* don't know it as well as your characters do.

After all, they, not you, are actually living it.

When you allow your or others' conscious, critical mind to second-guess your characters, you send a clear message to your own creative subconscious that you don't trust it.

Hmmm. Maybe that's why you have so much trouble coming up with ideas. Why should the creative subconscious give you ideas or tell you stories when it knows you'll just change what it gives you anyway?

(I see the creative subconscious standing in the semi-dark recesses of your mind with its little arms crossed defiantly. "Nope. If you're so smart, go make up your own stories.")

But this is getting long. Tomorrow then, "Why Most Fiction Writers Will Never Get Here, Part 2."

Talk with you again then.

Of Interest

See "Heinlein's Rules" at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/heinleins-rules/>.

See "The Three Types of Opening Lines" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/08/the-three-types-of-opening-lines.html>. Grain of salt.

See "A Love-Hate Relationship with Book Promotion" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/a-love-hate-relationship-with-book-promotion/>. Looks interesting, maybe.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 860 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 19... 2117 words. Total words to date..... 41729

Day 20... 2025 words. Total words to date..... 43754

Day 21... 1770 words. Total words to date..... 45524
Day 22... 3296 words. Total words to date..... 48820
Day 23... 3259 words. Total words to date..... 52079
Day 24... 2712 words. Total words to date..... 54791

Total fiction words for August..... 5971
Total fiction words for the year..... 58467
Total nonfiction words for August... 4370
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 110610
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 169077

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 66
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. I've never said WITD is "the only way" to write, nor will I ever. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among other topics.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [Heinlein's Rules](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [the writing life](#), [Topic](#), [Writing Into the Dark](#)

The Journal: Why Most Fiction Writers ... Part 2

August 8, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Topic: Why Most Fiction Writers Will Never Get Here, Part 2
- * Of Interest

Topic: Why Most Fiction Writers Will Never Get Here, Part 2

If you missed part 1 of this post, [you can find it here](#).

Please understand, folks, how you write doesn't affect my own practice or income at all.

You're perfectly within your rights to clump something together from your conscious, critical, thinking mind that conforms precisely to the outline you also methodically and meticulously constructed. You can strive to make it perfect, then revise and rewrite it multiple times to make it more perfect if that somehow makes sense to you. Seriously, it doesn't matter to me.

I only do what I do (both writing and this blog) because I stumbled across something that literally changed my life in a very good way. Evidently, a flaw in my personality causes me to want to share it.

When another writer emails to let me know s/he was able finally to leave all the writing-myth BS behind for the freedom and honesty of writing into the dark, that's more than payment enough.

I don't get a kickback from Heinlein's family for preaching Heinlein's Rules or from Dean Wesley Smith (or hundreds of other prolific professionals) when I advocate for Writing Into the Dark and tell other writers they're welcome to join our club.

I'm sometimes amazed. It's part of human nature that we're always looking for the "secret" to things. The secret handshake to gain admittance to an elite group, or the secret recipe to create a special drink or meal. Or the secret formula to write fiction of any length quickly and easily and actually have fun doing it.

Yet when some of us find it, we turn away while muttering an odd, self-defeating mantra: "That can't possibly be it. It's too easy."

Yeah? Well keep reading, and then read tomorrow's post. If that isn't enough [search the Journal](#) for Writing Into the Dark, and Cycling, and Heinlein's Rules, and Grounding the Reader and whatever else strikes your interest.

What I Do — I show writers a different way to approach writing, and then I urge them not to believe me, but to try it for themselves (as I did), even if only to prove it doesn't work (as I did). If they try it for themselves, and if they can come to really trust themselves more than they trust others, they will be changed forever (as I was).

Yet somehow, the more skeptical of them believe, irrationally, that I'm trying to scam them or put one over on them. All that despite the fact that I get nothing out of the deal. Humans, eh? Go figure.

Here's a freebie for you: No surprise for the writer, no surprise for the reader. Why? Because anything the writer can conjure with the conscious mind, the reader can conjure also. And nothing is more boring than knowing in advance what will happen in a story.

The only way to surprise the reader is to write from the creative subconscious and let the characters surprise you as they tell the story that they, not you, are living. If you trust them, they *will* surprise you, and it will be wonderful.

If you're among the majority of fiction writers — if you don't trust your characters to tell the story that they, not you, are actually living — maybe you can at least check in with yourself and figure out what you're afraid of.

And don't say it's a fear of change or the unknown. Those are superficial aspects of a deeper fear. Probably it's a fear of failure or rejection or some other version of the same thing.

The fear of failure as it pertains to writing fiction has absolutely no basis in reality, so it's an unreasoning fear. Because (trust me on this), literally nobody cares. If you "fail" as a fiction writer, there literally are no consequences. Really, the only way to fail as a fiction writer is to stop writing fiction. And again, if you do that, nobody will care.

(Oh, those closest to you might pretend to care whether you write fiction, but they don't. Not really. They have their own issues to work out.)

In real life if you fail, there are often dire consequences. If you fail in combat, you or your friends die or are grievously wounded. If you fail in sports, you maybe get a broken bone or a strained muscle or benched. If you fail to pay your mortgage, you can lose your home.

But this is FICTION. You're sitting alone in a room making stuff up. How "important" can that be? Why do some writers go over a story umptyfratz times in an effort to keep making it "better" when all they're actually doing is making it different, and usually worse?

Here's the truth: If some reader somewhere doesn't like a short story or novel you wrote, so what? Again, there are zero real-world consequences. Nobody's going to drive up to your house and punch you in the face or shoot you. The world won't end.

The simple fact is, some readers will think your stories stink. Others will love your stories. Most will think they're okay, and they'll look for more of your work. Good for you, but again, so what?

You're the W-R-I-T-E-R, not the reader.

You get to write the stories, but what you think of them doesn't matter in the slightest. Only the reader — each individual reader — gets to decide whether a story stinks, is great, or is just okay.

So what do you do with someone else's (readers', critics', critiquers') opinion of your work?

You don't worry about it. You just tend to your own business. You write the next story, and the next, and the next. Because that's what you do.

Tomorrow, How to Get Here (If You're Sure You *Want* to Get Here).

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "7 Questions to Reboot a Nonfiction Book You've Been Writing Forever" at <https://www.janefriedman.com/7-questions-to-reboot-a-nonfiction-book-youve-been-writing-forever/>. Just in case this suits you.

See "Fun New Book I'm Going To Do" at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/fun-new-book-im-going-to-do/>. Ideas for challenges abound. You really can do whatever you want.

See “30-year-old retiree earned \$97,000 in passive income from Amazon last year: Here’s how she got started” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/30-year-old-retiree-earned-97000-in-passive-income-from-amazon-last-year-heres-how-she-got-started/>.

See “The newsletter boom is over. Whats next” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/the-newsletter-boom-is-over-whats-next/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1070 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

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Day 24... 2712 words. Total words to date..... 54791

Total fiction words for August..... 5971
Total fiction words for the year..... 58467
Total nonfiction words for August... 5440
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 111680
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 170147

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 66
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. I’ve never said WITD is “the only way” to write, nor will I ever. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among other topics.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [Jane Friedman](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [the writing life](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: How to Get Here, Part 1

August 9, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Topic: How to Get Here, Part 1
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

“[T]he absolute best promotion for your books, proven through history and thousands of surveys and studies, is your next book.” Dean Wesley Smith

Topic: How to Get Here, Part 1

If you want to be a professional fiction writer, there are two ways to go about it. To my mind, they are the hard way — following the myths and turning what should be fun into labor — and the easy, fun way: Writing Into the Dark, which means trusting your characters to tell the story that they, not you, are living.

As I wrote yesterday, which method you choose really doesn't matter to me. But whatever writing method you choose, seek advice from people who've been writing fiction for awhile and who have written a lot of it. If the reason for that isn't self-evident, I can't help you.

Hanging around “writer boards” and other venues where beginning ([Stage 1 and Stage 2](#)) writers slop writing advice back and forth as if they just came up with it themselves is not only a massive waste of time, it is (or will be) actually detrimental to your writing practice. And please don't try to learn how to write fiction from agents, editors, and others who, um, don't write fiction. (Duh. [grin])

All of that said, if you're determined to stay with the myths (outlining, revising, rewriting, soliciting critical input from others, etc.), I recommend David Farland's My Story Doctor website at <https://mystorydoctor.com>. Dave passed away in January, but I believe his son is still running the site. Maybe even consider joining their APEX writers' group if that's still going.

On the other hand, if you want to try something new and freeing — trusting yourself instead of all those so-called experts and gurus — then below are the steps I recommend to become a professional fiction writer.

Note that these are about creation, not construction. They do not include character sketches or outlining or chapter layout summaries or “signposts” or anything like that. If you trust yourself and all the things you've learned about storytelling without even realizing you were learning, these really are all you need:

Follow Heinlein's Rules religiously. Be an adherent. It isn't about not falling off the rules occasionally — everyone does — it's about always getting back on and continuing forward.

1. You must write.
2. You must finish what you write.

3. You must not rewrite.
4. You must put your work on the market.
5. You must keep it on the market.

It was Robert A. Heinlein's contention that if you follow those simple business rules, you would be a successful fiction writer. But take care: Don't read-into them and don't second-guess what you think he must have meant. He meant what he wrote. Just follow them and see what happens.

Write Into the Dark

When you write into the dark, you trust your characters. You aren't consciously making up anything, and you aren't kicked back in an authorial ivory tower somewhere, exerting external control over what happens in the story and over everything your characters say and do.

As anyone with children knows, when you control someone, you are responsible for them and their actions. And responsibility is hard work. Same thing with storytelling. Controlling the story and the characters is a sure way to turn storytelling into sheer labor.

But you don't have to engage in the work of controlling everything. Instead, you can be an active participant in your characters' story, though you aren't a character yourself. So no responsibility that way either. You're free to run and play.

If you write into the dark, the characters have invited you to drop down into the trenches of the story and race through it with them. Your "job" is to try to keep up as you record what happens and what your characters say and do. You're telling the story that they, not you, are living. (In your own story, you're sitting alone in a room with your fingers on a keyboard.)

Practice Cycling

When you read as a reader, just to lose yourself in a story and enjoy the experience, you're reading with the creative subconscious.

You aren't looking for things to correct, and chances are if you encounter a typo, you'll mentally (and quickly) correct it and continue to read. You might even just skip over it and go on with the story because you're so deeply engaged in the characters and the storyline.

This is the same creative subconscious you engage — the same *zone* you enter — when you record your characters' story.

Cycling 1 — After each writing session (about 1000 to 1200 words), I engage in what I call Cycling 1, meaning I "cycle back" and read AS A READER what I wrote, just enjoying the story.

I'm NOT reading critically. If a wrong word or inconsistency pops out at me of its own accord, I'll fix it. But the key is, I don't consciously "look for" anything. I'm just reading and enjoying the story.

As I read, I allow my fingers to rest on the keyboard so my characters can fill in any details I missed. When I get back to the white space, I write the next sentence and then I keep going.

Cycling 2 — I can do this because as a writer I'm unstuck in the timeline of the story. The reader reads in a linear fashion, beginning to end, but the writer is free to move from one part of the story to another as s/he's writing.

So if Aunt Marge suddenly pulls a revolver from the pocket of her robe in Chapter 28, I can stop and cycle back to the place in the story where she put on her robe. There I'll allow my characters to add a sentence or two. She'll slip her deceased husband's revolver into the right pocket of the robe. Then I go back to where I left off (the white space) and keep writing.

Nothing important in a story ever should appear out of thin air. If you have a young man and woman chatting one moment in a drawing room in an 18th century romance, you can't suddenly have her leaning on the balcony rail and looking out (wistfully) over the estate. The reader will become confused. You have to write a transition scene so the reader can see the characters move from the drawing room out onto the balcony.

Hence, Aunt Marge has to put the revolver INTO the pocket of her robe at some point before she pulls it out. And it isn't enough for you, the writer, to "see" it in your mind. You must enable the reader to see it as well by putting it on the page.

Now, this is going on too long, so again I'm going to break it into two parts. Tomorrow, in *How to Get Here, Part 2*, I'll present the final few necessary steps to becoming a professional fiction writer.

Talk with you then.

Of Interest

See "Free Advertising For Writers" at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/free-advertising-for-writers/>.

See "First Page Critique: When Being Too Coy Creates Confusion" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/08/first-page-critique-when-being-too-coy-creates-confusion.html>.

See "Don't Call Them Trash" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/dont-call-them-trash/>. As I keep saying, one reader's trash is another reader's treasure. But regardless of genre, good writing is good writing.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1190 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 19... 2117 words. Total words to date..... 41729
Day 20... 2025 words. Total words to date..... 43754
Day 21... 1770 words. Total words to date..... 45524
Day 22... 3296 words. Total words to date..... 48820
Day 23... 3259 words. Total words to date..... 52079
Day 24... 2712 words. Total words to date..... 54791
Day 25... 1068 words. Total words to date..... 55859

Total fiction words for August..... 7039
Total fiction words for the year..... 59535
Total nonfiction words for August... 6630
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 112870
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 172405

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 66
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
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Short story collections..... 31

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Cycling](#), [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [Heinlein's Rules](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [the writing life](#), [Topic](#), [Writing Into the Dark](#)

The Journal: How to Get Here, Part 2

August 10, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Topic: How to Get Here, Part 2
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

"You have to believe in your long term plan, but you need short term goals to motivate and inspire you." Roger Federer, professional tennis player (paraphrased)

“Did you know that 94% of consumers in their 20s purchased boba (bubble tea) in the last three months?” 1440 Daily Digest Maybe a story starter? Soma, anyone?

Topic: How to Get Here, Part 2

If you have chosen to opt-out of the responsibility-and-labor-and-drama-intensive myths and choose instead to trust yourself ([see yesterday's post](#)), you'll become an adherent to Heinlein's Rules and you'll practice writing into the dark and cycling.

That puts you on the path to practice and always moving forward, writing story after story or novel after novel as your knowledge of craft increases. And that is all you need to become a professional fiction writer.

The writing craft itself, techniques to improve your storytelling and your chance of success, is a different matter. Today, I'll offer a few techniques that will cut the learning curve sharply if you will practice them.

Learn to Hook the Reader and then Ground the Reader in the Story

Hook the reader with the first sentence or paragraph of the story. Like most things, this only takes practice. Your creative subconscious has absorbed story structure for years. It is aware that a good story needs a hook at the first. The more often you engage your creative subconscious, the more active it will become. That includes giving you dynamite hooks.

The myth folks talk endlessly about how they spend hours or even days coming up with a great first sentence or paragraph — the hook — for their short stories and novels.

But every hook I've written (around 200 short stories and over 60 novels) has come directly and automatically from my creative subconscious. Trust yourself. Trust your creative subconscious and your characters.

For just one example, the first paragraph of my novel [Confessions of a Professional Psychopath](#), serves as a pretty good hook:

Of the three wingback chairs in my library, only one is upholstered in human skin. There's a reason for that.

The title of the book sets the mood and tone for the hook, and the hook itself (those first two sentences)

1. further establishes the mood and tone,
2. lets the reader know the POV character is confident, formal but relaxed, and
3. hints at the setting (and begins grounding the reader): a fairly large library (3 wingback chairs), so probably in a very well-appointed house, and a mental image of how those three wingbacks must look. (Did you find yourself trying to see the difference between the upholstery on the chairs? [grin])

But again, that's only the hook.

You still have to ground the reader and pull him or her more deeply into the story. That's what your opening is for, and grounding the reader is essential before plunging into the action.

The opening might be anything from 250 or 300 words up to 1200 or more words. Because they're confident in their ability and some stories require more grounding, Stephen King (and other professionals) often spend two or three chapters just getting the reader to settle into the story.

Be patient with your characters and take your time. Or rather, let them take their time.

The easiest way to ground the reader in the setting is through the physical (and emotional) senses of the POV character (not the senses of the writer).

In *Confessions*, by the third or fourth paragraph the POV character has let us see more of the room and started introducing us to the camera crew, director and others who are there to interview him.

(As an aside, you don't have to do an interview in a Q&A format. In fact, most often a Q&A format is a bad idea. It causes the writer to focus at least partially on format, and that requires the critical mind. Once the fact of an interview is established, just tell the story. You can close the gate on the interview at the end, or not.)

Get over the notion that ideas are special. They really aren't. They're a dime a million

Sometimes you might get an idea that seems stronger or more substantial than some others. If it's strong enough to drive you to the keyboard either Right Now or at your very earliest opportunity, Go! Write it!

Don't just scribble it in some "idea book" and hope it will feel the same later. It won't. The words will be the same, but the emotions of the moment will have long-since gone.

If you do let an idea slip away, don't sweat it. There will always be another one. In fact, once you learn to trust your creative subconscious, soon enough you will be deluged with ideas.

If you want or need to write a story in a pinch (you can even do this to show off if you want), follow this equation: character + problem + setting = story starter. In other words, pick a character, give him or her even a minor problem, and drop him or her into a setting.

As always, the key is to trust your character(s) and just write whatever comes. And the problem in the equation can be any little thing. It doesn't have to be "the" problem of the story. The equation is meant only to get you started writing.

Finally, Understand This

If you want to become a professional fiction writer, check your priorities and adjust them if necessary:

THAT you write should matter to you more than almost anything else.

WHAT you write (the individual story or novel) doesn't matter in the slightest. It's only a few minutes' or hours' entertainment for you (and then for the reader). Nothing more.

I also suggest you do whatever you need to do to disconnect yourself from the eventual outcome. How many copies sell and whether anyone else likes your stories or not is beyond your control. So don't worry about it. Your role is to write the stories, so just write the stories.

No matter how you choose to write — whether firmly ensconced in the myths or free of them — one fact remains constant: as with all other art forms, your rate of improvement as a writer will depend on how much you actually practice (meaning putting new words on the page), not how long you hover over one work in an effort to “improve” it.

Hovering over a story or novel never makes it better, only different. And again, what pleases you or any other reader will seem like garbage to other readers. You can't please everyone, so don't try.

Those who write into the dark typically get a lot more practice than those who are steeped in the myths because we who WITD have more time. It's all math, and numbers don't lie. While other writers are spinning their wheels in-place, evising and rewriting and getting critiques, we've already submitted or published and moved on to the next novel.

One “traditional” writer I know revises, gets input from her critique partners, rewrites, and polishes, and she still somehow manages to put out two novels per year, at roughly 120,000 to 200,000 words total. She is therefore considered prolific.

Meanwhile, last year, while writing into the dark, I wrote over 840,000 words in 13 novels and a few short stories. And that was in only seven months and one week, from January 1 through August 6.

I'm able to do that because I've shoved my ego and my critical voice aside. I know that the reader, not I, determine what is “good” or “great” or “bad,” and that's fine with me. I trust my creative subconscious and I trust my characters to tell the story that they, not I, am living.

Practice, my friends. Practice is what it's all about.

This ends the brief series of posts on two very different methods of writing. I hope it's helped you in some small way.

Next time I'll talk about a craft topic that's been rearing its head lately in conversations with other writers. But first I plan to take a day or two off from the Journal and finish Blackwell Ops 8.

Talk with you later.

Of Interest

See "Interesting Reaction" at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/interesting-reaction/>.

See "Murder in the Family" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/murder-in-the-family/>.

See "The Care And Feeding Of Copy Editors" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/08/the-care-and-feeding-of-copy-editors.html>.

See "15 Nashville Slang Terms You Should Know" at <https://www.mentalfloss.com/posts/nashville-slang-terms>. Reference.

See "Better Book Promotion on Amazon" at <https://www.amarketingexpert.com/2022/08/09/better-book-promotion-on-amazon-5-simple-reasons-your-ads-arent-working/>.

See "The Best-Selling Books From the Year You Were Born" at <https://www.mentalfloss.com/posts/best-selling-books-year-you-were-born>. Just for fun.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1400 words

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Day 23... 3259 words. Total words to date..... 52079

Day 24... 2712 words. Total words to date..... 54791

Day 25... 1068 words. Total words to date..... 55859

Day 26... 1003 words. Total words to date..... 56862

Total fiction words for August..... 8042

Total fiction words for the year..... 60538

Total nonfiction words for August... 8030

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 114270

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 174808

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0	
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	66
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014).....	217
Short story collections.....	31

Disclaimer: I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. I've never said WITD is "the only way" to write, nor will I ever. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among other topics.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Author Marketing Experts](#), [David Farland](#), [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [Grounding the Reader](#), [Hook the Reader](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [mentalfloss.com](#), [Professional Writer Series](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [the writing life](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: Mentorship Update

August 11, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Mentorship Update
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

"There's no shame in failing. The only shame is not giving things your best shot." Robin Williams

Mentorship Update

Thought I'd drop in with a mentorship update. It's working out very well.

Thus far, I have three students. I could handle a few more students like these. Two of them are focusing on crafting Openings. The third is focusing strictly on practicing and installing Heinlein's Rules 1-3.

All three of these students are taking a great approach. To get the most for their money, they're focusing down on one major aspect of their writing that they want to improve. Two are focusing on craft, and one on process.

I suggest you take a look at your writing while I'm offering these. If you need help in one or more areas, consider doing an inexpensive mentorship with me.

I can help with anything from punctuation to paragraphing to pacing, narrative and dialogue, character voice, creating an interesting setting, hooking and grounding the reader and more. If you want, you may contact me at harveystanbrough@gmail.com to query about your topic(s) of interest.

Just something to think about.

Talk with you later.

Of Interest

See “‘The Sacrifice Zone’: Myanmar bears cost of green energy” at <https://apnews.com/article/technology-forests-myanmar-75df22e8d7431a6757ea4a426fbde94c>. Story ideas. Well, and considerable irony.

See “First-Page Critique: A Mind Trap” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/08/first-page-critique-a-mind-trap.html>. Actually, I think this first page is a really good opener.

See “How Are Books Adapted for the Screen? Two Agents Demystify the Process” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/how-are-books-adapted-for-the-screen-two-agents-demystify-the-process/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 250 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 19... 2117 words. Total words to date..... 41729
Day 20... 2025 words. Total words to date..... 43754
Day 21... 1770 words. Total words to date..... 45524
Day 22... 3296 words. Total words to date..... 48820
Day 23... 3259 words. Total words to date..... 52079
Day 24... 2712 words. Total words to date..... 54791
Day 25... 1068 words. Total words to date..... 55859
Day 26... 1003 words. Total words to date..... 56862

Total fiction words for August..... 8042
Total fiction words for the year..... 60538
Total nonfiction words for August... 8280
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 114520
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 175058

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	66
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014).....	217
Short story collections.....	31

Disclaimer: I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. I've never said WITD is "the only way" to write, nor will I ever. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among other topics.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [KillZone Blog](#), [Mentorships](#), [The Passive Voice](#)

The Journal: Best Writing Practices

August 12, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Topic: Best Writing Practices
- * So What's the Problem?
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

"Imagination is the highest kite one can fly." Lauren Bacall

"You don't want to dwell on your enemies, you know. I basically feel so superior to my critics for the simple reason that they haven't done what I do. Most book reviewers haven't written 11 novels. Many of them haven't written one." John Irving

"[S]uccess or failure is all about how we navigate the challenges that arise." Felix Torres in a comment on a post on The Passive Voice <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/thems-the-breaks/#comments>

Topic: Best Writing Practices

In today's edition of The Passive Voice, an author at Writer Unboxed asks, "Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could pick up a manual on 'Best Writing Practices' and follow its advice all the way to publishing success?" (See "Filling Your Writing Life" in "Of Interest.")

I actually laughed and I shook my head.

I *just* presented such a "manual" in two Journal posts, at <https://hestanbrough.com/the-journal-how-to-get-here-part-1/> and <https://hestanbrough.com/the-journal-how-to-get-here-part-2/>.

And I've written two great companions to those posts: [Quiet the Critical Voice \(and Write Fiction\)](#) and [Writing the Character-Driven Story](#). Not to mention I've written 66 novels and around 250 short stories in which I model my own advice.

But aside from and predating all of that is the ultimate "Best Practices" guide: Robert A. Heinlein's "Business Habits for Writers," better known as [Heinlein's Rules \(free download\)](#). No other best-practices guide for fiction writers is more simple, more succinct, or more difficult to follow.

Heinlein's Rules aren't for the lazy or lax. They aren't for the purveyor of the soup sandwich or other sloppy things, including sloppy writing. And as a mentoring student recently reminded me, to be successful at writing fiction, you need only the first three rules:

1. You must write.
2. You must finish what you write.
3. You must not rewrite (trust, don't second-guess, yourself).

Rules 4 and 5 have to do with publication. Once you've written and run a spell-check, submit or publish the work, and then forget it and move on to the next work.

For novels, write them, finish them, do not rewrite them, then indie publish them and move on to the next work.

For short stories, do exactly the same thing. OR submit them to magazines, etc. for possible publication:

If you submit the work to someone else for publication and it's rejected, send it to the next publisher on your list. Right now. Repeat until you've exhausted your list.

If/when you exhaust possible external markets for your work, indie publish it and move on to the next work.

Seriously, folks, you don't need some magical best-practices manual.

You only need Heinlein's Rules and a passion for writing fiction that will drive you to learn the craft, as I mentioned in the second "How to Get Here" post.

So What's the Problem?

One problem is that aspiring fiction writers see writing as some kind of elevated "calling." They see fiction itself as an "art form."

Maybe it *is* an art form — for me, the jury’s still out on that one — but at its heart, any fiction, short or long, is only a story, nothing more. It’s a few minutes’ or hours’ entertainment for someone.

Write a short story every day, or even only every week, and you’ll soon come to understand that the value and importance of any stories, short or long, is set by the reader, not the writer.

Write a novel every two weeks or every month or even every quarter-year and you’ll come to the same realization. And that realization will free you up to write even more prolifically.

Then there’s the other problem: Some successful (but to my mind, unscrupulous) professional fiction writers actually make a good living writing nonfiction how-to books that tout all the myths. Myths that those professionals themselves probably don’t follow in their writing practice.

Of course, they’ll tell you they follow the myths — outlining, revising, rewriting, etc. — after all, like all fiction writers, they lie for a living. Those pro writers have identified a soft target. They know aspiring writers just want an easy formula — if I do this, then this, then this, I will be successful — so those professionals provide that formula: the myths.

Aspiring writers are such an easy mark because of the first problem: they hold the term “writer” in high esteem. They seem to hear an angelic choir every time they see or hear the word. As a result, they believe they must suffer in some way for their “art.” They can’t begin to believe that writing fiction can be simple, easy, and even a great deal of fun. So they opt to suffer.

And you guessed it. Most often the suffering manifests in the practice of the myths: outlining and hovering over one work, revising and rewriting and inviting critiques from others and endless polishing. Because according to all the other beginning writers, that’s what you have to do.

All that instead of writing, publishing, and moving on to the next story. It’s a shame.

I’ve always found it odd that aspiring writers rush to heed advice — the same tripe they’ve been hearing all their lives — from Stage 1 and Stage 2 writers and those professionals who tell them what they want to hear.

Yet they shy away from the advice and examples from masterful storytellers like Robert A. Heinlein or Isaac Asimov or Stephen King or James Lee Burke or Lee Child or Kristine Kathryn Rusch or CJ Cherryh or Dean Wesley Smith or dozens or hundreds of others. It truly boggles the mind.

On the other hand and on a personal level, I’m fine with that. Most writers who finally accept that all they need is adherence to Heinlein’s Rules and writing into the dark either move up to join the rest of us as prolific professionals or they stop writing altogether because it’s no longer a challenge. It isn’t an elevated calling after all, and it’s too easy.

But I have some advice for those who will continue taking writing advice from Stage 1 and 2 writers and unscrupulous pros: you might as well save money in other ventures as well. Get your

legal advice from your neighbors' 10 year old son, ask his 8 year old sister's advice on rewiring your home, and have the 12 year old who delivers your newspaper remodel your kitchen. Sounds ridiculous, doesn't it? And makes exactly the same amount of sense.

Talk with you later.

Of Interest

See "Infographic: 6 Reasons Self-Publishing Your eBook Can Guarantee More Sales" at <https://www.amarketingexpert.com/2022/08/11/6-reasons-self-publishing-your-ebook-can-guarantee-more-sales/>.

See "Them's the Breaks" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/thems-the-breaks/>. For fun. I was stymied that so many people asked what "Them's the breaks" means, especially in the context of the resignation speech of the former British prime minister.

See "Filling Your Writing Life" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/filling-your-writing-life/>.

See "Sex, drugs, celebrities, vampires – Just another day in the Regency" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/sex-drugs-celebrities-vampires-just-another-day-in-the-regency/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1150 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 19... 2117 words. Total words to date..... 41729
Day 20... 2025 words. Total words to date..... 43754
Day 21... 1770 words. Total words to date..... 45524
Day 22... 3296 words. Total words to date..... 48820
Day 23... 3259 words. Total words to date..... 52079
Day 24... 2712 words. Total words to date..... 54791
Day 25... 1068 words. Total words to date..... 55859
Day 26... 1003 words. Total words to date..... 56862

Total fiction words for August..... 8042
Total fiction words for the year..... 60538
Total nonfiction words for August... 9430
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 115670
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 176208

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	66
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014).....	217
Short story collections.....	31

Disclaimer: I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. I've never said WITD is "the only way" to write, nor will I ever. However, as I am the only writer who advocates WITD both publicly and regularly, I will continue to do so, among other topics.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Aspiring Writers'](#), [Author Marketing Experts](#), [Heinlein's Rules](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [the writing life](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: I Teach So I May Learn

August 14, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Topic: I Teach So I May Learn
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“The upheavals [of artificial intelligence] can escalate quickly and become scarier and even cataclysmic. Imagine how a medical robot, originally programmed to rid cancer, could conclude that the best way to obliterate cancer is to exterminate humans who are genetically prone to the disease.” Nick Bilton

“Observers typically attribute Hoover’s success to BookTok, the segment of TikTok dedicated to authors and readers.” from “The Unlikely Author Who’s Absolutely Dominating the Bestseller List” (Slate) (See “Of Interest” for a link to the article)

“Put interesting characters in difficult situations and write to find out what happens.” Stephen King

“The job isn’t to catch up to the status quo; the job is to invent the status quo.” Seth Godin

Topic: I Teach So I May Learn

It happened again. While responding to a student, I had an epiphany. It wasn’t anything shiny and new, but it FELT shiny and new. It was a shiny new way to say something I’ve been saying since 2014.

One of my mentoring students wrote to say, almost in passing, that he sometimes has trouble discerning whether the little inside voice he's been hearing lately is from his creative subconscious or his critical mind. (Thanks, Scott.)

I explained to him, as I learned from Dean Wesley Smith, that the critical voice is always negative, and the creative subconscious is always positive. All three examples he sent me were strongly negative. So my job was done, easy peasy.

But one of the examples he used was, "There is not enough depth at the start."

As I told him, and as many of you can see, that statement is blatantly negative.

But that's when I had the epiphany: Characters don't worry about "depth," do they?

Characters don't worry about depth, or structure, or words, or scenes, or setting, or the five senses, or any other part of the writing craft.

Because the characters are pure. They don't know anything about writing fiction, positive or negative. They've never heard all the BS writing myths that others have flung at our conscious minds all our lives. Likewise, they've never heard of Heinlein's Rules or writing into the dark.

So they don't worry about ANY of that on either side. They're too busy dealing with what's happening to them: their story.

In YOUR OWN story as a writer of fiction, one of two things are true: Either

you're steeped in the writing myths. You're sitting at a keyboard, but most of the time your fingers aren't moving because you're suffering Myth Paralysis. It's a silent killer, so you probably don't even know. But you *can* look for the signs:

Are you hardly writing because you're fretting over words and paragraphs and structure and whether the characters' voices sound too similar and whether you've included the five senses and depth and all the rest? There you go.

OR

you've learned to trust yourself and your characters. In that case, you're also sitting at a keyboard, but the similarity ends there.

Your fingers are moving as fast as they're able, and you're looking forward with eager anticipation to what will happen next. A surprise waits around every bend in the story.

You aren't thinking about words or paragraphs or structure or the sound or tone of the characters' voices or including the five senses or depth or ANY of that. You don't have time to think.

You're too busy trying to keep up as you race through the story with your characters. You're busy recording events as they occur, plus recording the characters' reactions, what they do and what they say.

Understand this — When you write into the dark, you aren't making up a story and the characters aren't telling you a story. They're LIVING a story and allowing you to experience it with them.

Your job is only to record what you witness: what happens, how the characters react, and what they say. In other words, your job is to have fun.

Talk with you later.

Of Interest

See "September Workshops Now Available" at <https://deanwesleymith.com/september-workshops-now-available/>.

See "What is Your Character Hiding: The Power of Secrets" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/what-is-your-character-hiding-the-power-of-secrets/>. Something to read/absorb with the conscious mind, but as always, trust that you've absorbed what you need and Just Write.

See "How to Write a Mystery in Any Genre" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/08/how-to-write-a-mystery-in-any-genre.html>. I recommend a grain of salt. Take what makes sense to you and leave the rest.

See "September Workshops Now Available" at <https://deanwesleymith.com/september-workshops-now-available/>.

See "TikTok Has Changed Everything, Especially Book Publishing" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/tiktok-has-changed-everything-especially-book-publishing/>. Maybe help with marketing/promotion.

See "The Unlikely Author Who's Absolutely Dominating the Bestseller List" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/the-unlikely-author-whos-absolutely-dominating-the-bestseller-list/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 770 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 19... 2117 words. Total words to date..... 41729
Day 20... 2025 words. Total words to date..... 43754
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Day 22... 3296 words. Total words to date..... 48820
Day 23... 3259 words. Total words to date..... 52079
Day 24... 2712 words. Total words to date..... 54791
Day 25... 1068 words. Total words to date..... 55859
Day 26... 1003 words. Total words to date..... 56862

Total fiction words for August..... 8042
Total fiction words for the year..... 60538
Total nonfiction words for August... 10200
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 116440
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 176978

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 66
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. I've never said WITD is "the only way" to write, nor will I ever. However, I will continue to advocate WITD both publicly and regularly, among other topics.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [Epiphany](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [the writing life](#), [Topic](#), [Writing Into the Dark](#)

The Journal: Tidbits

August 16, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Tidbits
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“[Write] 400 words of opinion of setting from the character before you get all busy with plot. That will do wonders for the strength of your story openings.” Dean Wesley Smith in my notes from the Advanced Depth workshop

“Whether you’re an introvert, extrovert, or ambivert, nobody can produce in a vacuum. Well, I don’t know... maybe Stephen King can. I think he could produce in a vacuum, a washing machine, or a microwave.” Tracey Buchanan in “Writer Friendships”

“My name is Stephen King. I’m a freelance writer.” Stephen King introducing himself at the Penguin Random House trial

Ahem, that’s a little like, “My name is Muhammad Ali. I like to box” or “My name is Neil Armstrong. I fly planes.”

“Don’t threaten me with love, baby. Let’s just go walking in the rain.” Billie Holiday (*Nothing to do with writing. Just a beautiful quote.*)

Tidbits

Nothing of any importance to talk about today. [My previous post](#) was probably one of the more important I’ll ever write. I guess maybe it drained me a little.

I’m pushing on my novel right now. I’ve lived with it far too long (2+ months and 20-some writing days) and I’m weary of it. *How in the world do some writers spend months or even years tapping away at a single novel?*

Anyway, I want to move on to something else in an entirely different universe. But thanks to Heinlein’s Rule 2, I’m slogging along, pushing to finish it so it will be out of my way.

Fortunately, I’m still at least a little bit excited about it. I don’t know yet how the story will end, so I still get the excitement of watching it unfold. I just wish it would hurry up.

The quote above by Tracey Buchanan struck me as ironically humorous. When I see something like that, I’m taken aback by the ridiculousness of it. But then, Ms. Buchanan is a “debut author,” so that explains a lot, yes?

Anyway, I left a comment both on the excerpt of the post at The Passive Voice and on the original post (OP) at [Women Writers, Women’s Books](#).

But the opening sentence of her article struck me as telling too: “For the longest time I sat in my office diligently typing, inwardly moaning because writing is a solitary process.”

I’m not talking about the forearm-draped-over-the-forehead drama evoked by “inwardly moaning because writing is a solitary process.”

That's the sort of thing we hear constantly from early stage writers, and it's laughable. It's like a person who loves cars becoming a mechanic and then "inwardly moaning" because s/he works in a garage all day.

In fact, does anyone anywhere have a job during which s/he chats constantly with others who are doing their version of the same job? No, I didn't think so.

Ms. Buchanan's moans are meant to indicate what terrible, laborious drudgery writing is and what a martyr she is for having taken up this elevated calling. Pure, unadulterated bovine excrement. But as I do all too often, I've digressed.

What struck me as particularly telling about the opening sentence of her post was that phrase "diligently typing."

There's a difference between writing fiction and typing, diligently or otherwise. To be fair, I'm sure Ms. Buchanan isn't aware of that difference. She probably won't become aware of it until she has a million or two words under her belt.

By then, with any luck at all, she'll wander into a site like this one and begin to learn that writing can actually be fun.

Talk with you later.

Of Interest

See "How Suspense and Tension Work Together to Increase Story Impact" at <https://www.janefriedman.com/how-suspense-and-tension-work-together-to-amp-up-story-impact/>.

See "The Weirdest Quotes From the Penguin Random House Trial" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/the-weirdest-quotes-from-the-penguin-random-house-trial/>.

See "Calculating Women" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/calculating-women/>. Story ideas abound. Mystery, suspense, romance, thriller, SF, etc. Pick a character, pick your genre, and just write.

See "Writer Friendships" at <https://booksbywomen.org/writer-friendships/>. I do not endorse interacting with "writing communities" on the internet, primarily because they're filled with inexperienced writers and would-be writers passing the same bad information back and forth.

See "How to Painlessly Generate Dozens of Blog Ideas" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/how-to-painlessly-generate-dozens-of-blog-ideas/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 700 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 19... 2117 words. Total words to date..... 41729
Day 20... 2025 words. Total words to date..... 43754
Day 21... 1770 words. Total words to date..... 45524
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Day 23... 3259 words. Total words to date..... 52079
Day 24... 2712 words. Total words to date..... 54791
Day 25... 1068 words. Total words to date..... 55859
Day 26... 1003 words. Total words to date..... 56862
Day 27... 1222 words. Total words to date..... 58084

Total fiction words for August..... 92642
Total fiction words for the year..... 61760
Total nonfiction words for August... 10900
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 117140
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 178900

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 66
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: Along with discussing various aspects of the writing craft, I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. WITD is “the only way” to write, but it is by far the easiest, most liberating, and most fun.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [BooksByWomen.org](#), [janefriedman.com](#), [The Passive Voice](#), [Typing and Writing](#), [writing as drudgery](#)

The Journal: The Novel and Thoughts on Mentoring

August 18, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * The Novel
- * Thoughts on Mentoring
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“I almost think it is the ultimate destiny of science to exterminate the human race.” Thomas Love Peacock

“Science fiction is no more written for scientists than ghost stories are written for ghosts.” Brian Aldiss

“You only live once, but if you do it right, once is enough.” Mae West

“It isn’t true that you live only once. You only die once. You live lots of times, if you know how.” Bobby Darin

The Novel

I expect (and hope) I’ll finish the novel today. I’ve made slow progress over the past few days.

A couple of nights ago, as I slipped into alpha (subconscious) on my way to sleep, I realized for only the third time since April 2014, I actually wrote past the ending of the novel without realizing it. That’s why the writing became so difficult for awhile.

Because the occurrence is so rare and because I haven’t written regularly for so long, I didn’t recognize the sudden slogging of the story for what it was. Instead of recognizing the ending, I struggled, casting about and writing different scenes that went nowhere.

If you’re wondering, those totaled about 14,000 words. These are not ‘wasted’ words, though they’ll never go into a story. It’s all practice. But it’s still frustrating. The only other two times I wrote past an ending (once the end of a scene and once the end of a novel), I wrote only a few sentences past before I realized what was happening.

But I fought through that period of slogging, and as a result, the novel will have a few additional scenes and chapters and be around 8,000 words longer than it would have been had I ended it where I might have.

I’m one who believes things happen for a reason. I suspect I needed this process in this novel as I emerged from my year-long hiatus. It forced me to deal with my critical, negative mind and relegate it again to the dark corner where it belongs while I’m writing.

Thoughts on Mentoring

It dawned on me this morning as I responded to one of my mentoring students that they’re getting an enhanced and more focused version of what I write in the Journal.

My email responses to them alone are generally a few hundred to a thousand words, but focused specifically on their issue(s) or question(s), yet any of those responses could easily make a topic for the Journal.

Then again, it wouldn't seem right, sharing that information publicly when my students have paid for my time and my opinion.

If you'd like to receive that kind of focused attention on your own writing habit or the writing itself, I can still take on another student or two. Just email me at harveystanbrough@gmail.com or see <https://hestanbrough.com/new-mentorships/> (or both).

I'm also thinking of starting a new blog on Substack. It would be a paid blog only. For a fee (probably \$12 or \$15 a month) subscribers would get access to all the topics I talk about with my mentoring students. Of course, all of my mentoring students and any patrons in the [Patron Writer tier](#) would automatically have access to those posts as well.

Those posts wouldn't be tailored specifically to the subscribers' issues or questions, but they *would* provide valuable insights the subscribers could apply to their own writing or writing practice.

Just something I'm thinking about doing. I welcome your comments.

Talk with you later.

Of Interest

See "Engineers saved a baby's life by printing the missing part of her skull" at <https://interestingengineering.com/innovation/engineers-saved-a-babys-life-by-printing-the-missing-part-of-her-skull>. Science fiction becomes science fact.

See "This dual-powered submarine isn't like anything you have seen before" at <https://interestingengineering.com/innovation/kronos-futuristic-dual-powered-submarine>. Um, unless you've seen a manta ray. (grin)

See "Thirteen Strange Superstitions About Death" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/08/thirteen-strange-superstitions-about-death.html>.

See "That Was My Idea! How Hollywood Is Avoiding Story Theft Claims" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/that-was-my-idea-how-hollywood-is-avoiding-story-theft-claims/>. See PG's take.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 700 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 19... 2117 words. Total words to date..... 41729

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Day 24... 2712 words. Total words to date..... 54791
Day 25... 1068 words. Total words to date..... 55859
Day 26... 1003 words. Total words to date..... 56862
Day 27... 1222 words. Total words to date..... 58084
Day 28... 1515 words. Total words to date..... 59599
Day 29... 2030 words. Total words to date..... 61629

Total fiction words for August..... 12809
Total fiction words for the year..... 65305
Total nonfiction words for August... 11600
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 117840
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 183145

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 66
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: Along with discussing various aspects of the writing craft, I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. WITD is “the only way” to write, but it is by far the easiest, most liberating, and most fun.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [critical voice](#), [interestingengineering.com](#), [killzoneblog.com](#), [Mentorships](#), [the writing life](#), [thepassivevoice.com](#)

The Journal: Welcome, and We're Searchable

August 19, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Welcome
- * We're Searchable
- * The Novel
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

“I don't try to describe the future. I try to prevent it.” Ray Bradbury

Welcome

Been awhile since I issued a formal welcome. Welcome to Frank T, Marcy C, and anyone else who has joined our Journal family recently. Glad to have you aboard, and I hope you find the Journal useful.

We're Searchable

I've mentioned before that the Journal archives are fully searchable right on [the Journal website](#). Just type your topic into the search box in the sidebar and a number of posts will pop up.

Some good examples of search terms are characters, creative subconscious, critical mind (or voice), dialogue, five senses (or five senses exercise), Heinlein's Rules, pacing, scene, setting, structure, writing into the dark and many, many others.

But remember, the Journal used to originate [over at my author site](#). You can also search the archives there using the search box in the sidebar.

In fact, only yesterday, I sent links to a few posts to a mentoring student. To find those particular posts I entered "human traits" into the search box, then did another search for "passive construction."

(If you're interested, the posts were ["Human Parts Do Not Have Human Traits"](#) and ["Human Traits and Human Parts"](#) as well as ["Passive Voice"](#) (for that one, skip down to "Okay, on to passive voice—".))

Finally, if you'd like the convenience of having all the posts in one place, you can download all the archives in fully searchable PDF format by visiting <https://hestanbrough.com/the-daily-journal-archives/>. You can download the archives from a particular year or all of them.

This is free instruction, folks. Free knowledge that you can absorb. The only investment you're making is in yourself and your own future. You invest your time to read, study, and practice what you learn.

Best of all, what you learn will seep into your creative subconscious. So once you've learned to trust yourself and your characters, you can apply what you've learned from me and others without so much as a conscious thought.

You really don't have to consciously think about applying the writing craft anymore than you have to consciously think about adding a period at the end of a sentence. You've learned it, and you know it, so just do it.

Just trust your characters to convey the story (albeit through your fingertips) that they, not you, are living, and storytelling will become effortless and fun.

The Novel

God I'm tired of living with this thing. (grin) I hope this will be the last update on this particular novel.

I didn't write at all yesterday. A doctor appointment in the middle of the day basically took the whole day. In the morning, my anticipation of the appointment was too strong, and in the afternoon I just got lazy and watched some BBC.

Anyway, after writing 13 novels in 7 months in 2021 (over 840,000 words of fiction) and then losing my ability to write for close to a year, I'm looking *very* forward to finishing this one and finally replacing the zero in "Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date" with a 1. Hey, you have to restart somewhere.

Talk with you later.

Of Interest

See "Celebrate 45 years of Voyager with these amazing images..." at <https://www.space.com/voyager-spacecraft-best-images-solar-system>.

See "Pulp Speed in Indie Publishing" at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/pulp-speed-in-indie-publishing/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 540 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8 (tentative title, novel)

Day 19... 2117 words. Total words to date..... 41729
Day 20... 2025 words. Total words to date..... 43754
Day 21... 1770 words. Total words to date..... 45524
Day 22... 3296 words. Total words to date..... 48820
Day 23... 3259 words. Total words to date..... 52079
Day 24... 2712 words. Total words to date..... 54791
Day 25... 1068 words. Total words to date..... 55859
Day 26... 1003 words. Total words to date..... 56862
Day 27... 1222 words. Total words to date..... 58084
Day 28... 1515 words. Total words to date..... 59599
Day 29... 2030 words. Total words to date..... 61629

Total fiction words for August..... 12809
Total fiction words for the year..... 65305
Total nonfiction words for August... 12140
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 118380
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 183685

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date...	0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	66
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014).....	217
Short story collections.....	31

Disclaimer: Along with discussing various aspects of the writing craft, I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. WITD is “the only way” to write, but it is by far the easiest, most liberating, and most fun.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Archives](#), [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [Space.com](#), [the writing life](#)

The Journal: Blackwell Ops 8

August 20, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Blackwell Ops 8
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“There is nothing noble in being superior to your fellow man; true nobility is being superior to your former self.” Ernest Hemingway

“Storytelling is a natural, instinctive act. If we weren’t taught so stringently that plotting and criticism and rewriting were necessary, we would never bother with them. As a result, our stories would be far easier to write. They would also be better, by which I mean original and unique to the writer’s own (creative subconscious) voice.” Me in reply to [a comment on yesterday’s post](#)

“Characters don’t worry about depth, or structure, or words, or scenes, or setting, or the five senses, or any other part of the writing craft. Characters are pure. They just want to live their story.” Me from [“I Teach So I May Learn”](#)

Blackwell Ops 8: Philip Dunstan and Macy Marie Corman

Yesterday, in about an hour, with 1126 new words, I finished Blackwell Ops 8: Philip Dunstan and Macy Marie Corman. I’ve never been happier to have one off my desk.

The longest it took me to write a novel was 32 writing days, but that was in 35 calendar days and the novel was just under 96,000 words. This is also the longest in calendar days. I started it on April 26, then wrote off and on until yesterday, so officially 117 days.

I did write one other novel that took about that long, but that was because I paused writing the first novel and wrote two others in two other genres before returning to finish it.

Also, as I suspected, I did write past the end, but not where I originally thought. And I wrote over 19,400 words of scenes trying to get back into the book and get it moving again. Those aren't "wasted" words, of course, because every word written is practice.

Like many writers I have "cuts" on every novel I write. Cuts are publishable words of fiction. Because I wrote them in the first place, I count them toward my overall totals, but they don't end up in the novel. I guess this would be similar to the way a film director gleans a 2-hour film from 3 or 4 hours or more of raw footage.

All of that said, I had far more cuts from this novel than from any other. Again, I hope that's because I'm coming off a year-long hiatus. As I've said before, I considered this my 'practice' novel. Anyway, I'm not gonna worry about it. I'm putting it behind me and moving on.

I'll read over BO8 one one more time, not critically but as an overall cycling session, and then I'll send it to my first reader. After that I'll publish it and move on to the next project, whatever that may be. And get back to storytelling being fun.

I hope you're doing the same.

Talk with you later.

Of Interest

See "August Regular Workshop Sale Starting!" at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/august-regular-workshop-sale-starting/>.

See "Aphantasia: Writing Fiction With No 'Mind's Eye'" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/aphantasia-writing-fiction-with-no-minds-eye/>. Just interesting, and I hope none of you suffer from this.

See "The Best Ebook Subscription Services for Every Kind of Reader" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/the-best-ebook-subscription-services-for-every-kind-of-reader/>. Grain of salt. What is "right" for a reader is not always right for a writer.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 540 words

Writing of Blackwell Ops 8: Philip Dunstan and Macy Marie Corman (novel)

Day 28... 1515 words. Total words to date..... 59599

Day 29... 2030 words. Total words to date..... 61629

Day 30... 1126 words. Total words to date..... 62755 (Done)

Total fiction words for August.....	13935
Total fiction words for the year.....	66431
Total nonfiction words for August...	12680
Total nonfiction words for the year.....	118920
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog).....	185351
Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date.....	1
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date...	0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	67
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014).....	217
Short story collections.....	31

Disclaimer: Along with discussing various aspects of the writing craft, I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. WITD is “the only way” to write, but it is by far the easiest, most liberating, and most fun.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [the writing life](#), [thepassivevoice.com](#)

The Journal: A Frenzy of Fuzzy Disequilibrium?

August 21, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Topic: A Frenzy of Fuzzy Disequilibrium?
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

“Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.” Arthur C. Clarke

Topic: A Frenzy of Fuzzy Disequilibrium?

Over at the Kill Zone blog today, James Scott Bell offers “How to Form Your Bestseller in 10 Days” and offers a system for doing so. The keyword there is “form.” For those who are satisfied with the labor involved in that, it’s fine.

Jim posits that “the word *system* immediately sets the various hairs on the back of an ‘intuitive’ writer’s neck into a frenzy of fuzzy disequilibrium.” The sentence reminded me of Spiro T. Agnew’s “nattering nabobs of negativism.” I actually laughed out loud.

But no, I’m not consciously “forming” or constructing anything. The characters tell their story, albeit through my very fortunate fingers, and I convey that story. Full stop.

Aside from being baited with evocative innuendo, Jim's post is laden with conscious, critical-mind myths. But don't believe me. [You can read it here.](#)

I don't understand why some "traditional" writers, by which I mean those steeped in the myths, find those of us who write into the dark such a threat. I don't find *them* a threat.

I freely admit I don't care for writing instructors who play to writers' fears and spread the myths (I suspect to sell more how-to books that say *exactly* the same things as almost all the other how-to books out there), but I don't find even them a threat of any kind. They do what they do and I do what I do. Shrug.

They teach what they teach and I teach what I teach. The difference is, if you really try Writing into the Dark, you can prove or disprove it for yourself in a matter of days. If it works for you, you're off and running in an exciting new world.

And if it doesn't work for you for whatever reason, you can slip back into obeying the myths. Of course, if the myths don't work, well, you'll think you aren't applying them well enough and you'll keep trying them.

Frankly, pretty much all Stage 4 writers who aren't making money selling how-to books that perpetuate the myths laugh at the silliness of it all.

Anyway, as you might imagine, it's difficult for me to let innuendo and outright bovine excrement slide past me on its way to unsuspecting writers without comment, so I left one. Then I decided it would make a good post for the Journal. So here it is:

No "frenzy of fuzzy disequilibrium" here, Jim. (grin) And I've done all the things you recommend. In fact, I once spent several years outlining one novel. I wanted it to be "perfect," you see, and I thought I could somehow make it so—for everyone, I guess—an impossibility. What one reader finds perfect another will think sucks canal water from all 50 states.

(As an aside and for the record, the novel I spent all that time outlining? Still not written. I knew the whole story, so I was bored at the prospect of writing it.)

Then in early 2014, I found Heinlein's Rules and Writing Into the Dark. I was skeptical, but I decided the only way I could prove or disprove it for myself was to set aside my fears and give it an honest try. To my surprise, it worked. What was better, the process was actually freeing. Refreshing even.

I gave up all control. Instead, I learned to trust all that I'd learned from a lifetime of absorbing Story.

The truth is, writers no more have to consciously think about applying various aspects of the writing craft than they have to consciously think about applying a period at the end of a sentence. They know how to tell stories. They need only to learn to trust that they know. Trust—belief in one's self—is the key.

Now, and for the last 67 novels and well over 200 short stories, I control nothing. I roll off the parapet into the trenches of the story and race through it with the characters, recording what happens and what they say and do. And I don't second-guess the characters. I'm only the recorder (or as King calls himself, "the stenographer").

It took me awhile, but I finally realized two things:

The characters, not I, are living the story, and

The characters are pure. They don't worry about depth, or structure, or words, or scenes, or setting, or the five senses, or any other part of the writing craft.

Likewise, they've never heard any of the outlining-revising-rewriting-critiquing, negative, critical-mind myths that so many push. To be fair, they also have never heard of the process I advocate: following Heinlein's Rules and writing into the dark. Characters don't care either way about any of that. They're too busy living their story.

Or, metaphorically put, for close to 60 years I was languishing along with millions of others in a massive, deep, dark mine. As a writer and writing instructor, my choices were to repeat the same echos that were bouncing off the walls the whole time I was down there or to find a way out.

One day I happened across Heinlein's Rules. I was struck by their simplicity and challenged by how difficult they are to follow. But aided by a technique called "writing into the dark" and spurred by hope, I set aside my fears and took a chance on trusting myself.

I left the critical-mind safety net myths of outlining, revision, and critiques behind. As a result, I was able to climb out of the mine.

I was surprised to find my stories sold and were received better. And as a bonus, I hadn't allowed my critical mind to second-guess my characters and revise the originality out of their stories. But the climb wasn't easy. It was an accomplishment.

All of that said, it doesn't matter to me in any real way how anyone else writes. I wish the best for everyone, but what doesn't directly affect my time off or my paycheck is of no consequence to me. I'm not trying to convince anyone. I'm just testifying. It would be selfish of me not to at least lower a rope into the mine so others may follow if they wish.

Trying WITD costs nothing but a little time. If a writer tries it and can overcome the initial discomfort, a whole new world will open up. And if s/he can't, s/he can always go back to the labor of outlining, revising, rewriting and inviting others' critical mind input (critiques). No harm, no foul.

Still, it's up to individual writers to take a chance, or not, on believing in themselves. Naturally, it's far easier to remain in their comfort zone and depend on others for the "right" way to do things. And that, too, would be fine with me if I had any say over it, which I don't.

I have never said and would never say writing into the dark is the only way to write. But once a writer breaks through the fear, it is by far the easiest, most liberating, and most fun.

Talk with you later.

Of Interest

See "Explaining Depth" at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/explaining-depth/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1210 words

Writing of (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... XXXX words. Total words to date..... XXXXX

Total fiction words for August..... 13935

Total fiction words for the year..... 66431

Total nonfiction words for August... 13890

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 120120

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 186561

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 1

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 67

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: Along with discussing various aspects of the writing craft, I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. WITD is "the only way" to write, but it is by far the easiest, most liberating, and most fun.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [KillZone Blog](#), [the writing life](#), [Topic](#), [Writing Into the Dark](#)

The Journal: Playing Catch-Up and a Personal Note

August 22, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Playing Catch-Up
- * The Older We Get (a personal note)
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“Inspiration is throttled by indecision, hesitation and self-doubt.” Dan Baldwin

“The cure for boredom is curiosity. There is no cure for curiosity.” Dorothy Parker

Playing Catch-Up

Early this month, Bob C. wrote, “I stumbled across this today and thought it was excellent: <https://literariness.org/2019/01/02/analysis-of-elmores-leonards-novels/>.” If you're a fan of Elmore Leonard's work, there you go.

Bob also related this personal anecdote:

“I've always been a huge Elmore Leonard fan, maybe because I met him when he was hanging around with the Detroit PD homicide detectives and I was a police reporter. Leonard very definitely wrote into the dark. He never knew where his story was going when he started a novel.

“But he was also a perfectionist. Many days he wrote all day but spent most of his time re-writing until he was satisfied. He considered it a good day if he ended up with one page that met his high standard.

“Did he bring his conscious critical mind into play? Hard to believe he didn't. But maybe not. [Well, yes, if he spent most of his time rewriting he brought his conscious, critical mind into play. But if that was his process, who am I to argue?]

“So much of what he wrote was more complex than is apparent. The complexity was in the characters more than the stories. He used audacious and the difficult techniques and made it seamless. You never really noticed the changing POVs etc not because he had a knack for doing this but because he worked really hard at it. And he loved doing it.”

Thanks, Bob. I meant to share all of this soon after I received it, but somehow it slipped through the cracks in my mind. Not difficult to do these days.

The Older We Get (a personal note)

My mother was so young when I was born that some of my maternal uncles were more like older brothers to me than uncles. I was closer in age to them than I was to their children. I called them my “bruncles.” They and I both recognized that I was only half-joking.

The youngest of those—Earl Britton, 11 years my elder—passed away several years ago from cancer. He retired from the US Navy as a Master Chief Petty Officer and was instrumental in designing and launching the first US satellite in the Global Positioning System. He also played one heck of a good guitar (and mandolin), which brought him and me even closer.

The second youngest—Jim Britton, only 12 years older than I—died last Saturday night, two weeks after being diagnosed with another kind of cancer. I found out yesterday from my youngest daughter. Jim was square-jawed and handsome (his nickname was “Hollywood”) but musically, he couldn’t play so much as a radio. (grin) But he loved hanging out and listening as we all played (variously) our guitars, mandolins, and fiddle.

I’ve been the eldest male in my line since my dad died in 1987, and the eldest in my clan since 2018 when my paternal uncles died. But I always had my bruncles to fall back on. They were a source of forgotten memories, a spontaneous good time, and most of all, a place to touch Home.

Some regret enters in. I could have visited Jim another time or two before he passed away. I last talked with him when his own eldest brother died some months ago, and maybe once after that.

If there’s someone out there whom you don’t see often enough but who is special to you, please don’t wait to touch base and visit with them, even if only by email or phone. You won’t regret it.

Please, no comments re my personal loss. I appreciate the concern but there’s no need.

Talk with you later.

Of Interest

See “...New Scam Warnings for Writers” at <https://annerallen.com/2022/08/bogus-agents-scam-warnings-for-writers/>.

See “Kindle Unlimited paid out...” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/kindle-unlimited-paid-out-over-250-million-to-indie-authors-in-h1-as-apa-reports-total-h1-ebook-market-of-500-million/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 450 words

Writing of (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... XXXX words. Total words to date..... XXXXX

Total fiction words for August..... 13935

Total fiction words for the year..... 66431

Total nonfiction words for August... 14340

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 120580
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 187011

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 1
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 67
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [AnneRAllen.com](#), [Personal Note](#), [thepassivevoice.com](#)

The Journal: Do I Use a Copyeditor?

August 23, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Topic: Do I Use a Copyeditor?
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“Science fiction is the only genuine consciousness-expanding drug.” Arthur C. Clarke

“Without goals, training has no direction.” Natalie Coughlin which is why I recommend a daily word-count goal

“So next time you sit down at your writing computer, just let the creative voice run and play.... You might be surprised at how much fun you have writing and how good what you write turns out to be (if you leave it alone.)” Dean Wesley Smith

“Do or do not; there is no ‘try’.” Yoda

Topic: Do I Use a Copyeditor?

When my mentoring students send me an opening or other bit of a manuscript, as part of my mentoring I not only comment on the overall opening itself but (unless the mss is squeaky clean) I do a quick copyedit. When the reason for a particular edit isn’t readily apparent, I also imbed a comment to explain my rationale. It’s a little extra instruction.

One of my mentoring students asked a few questions and I thought my extended response would make a good topic for the Journal. First, my short answers, and then I'll go into more depth.

“What methods do you use to edit your manuscripts?”

The short answer: I don't edit my fiction. Ever. And I don't recommend you edit yours either.

“When you're extremely prolific, do you offset the copyedit to another professional or is that handled in house?”

The short answer: Neither.

“I imagine short fiction is ‘easier’ but I'm curious about novels. Should one just rely on cycling or hire a copyeditor?”

Short fiction deserves the same attention as longer fiction. Naturally it will be shorter to edit, but not necessarily “easier.” How easy it is to edit any manuscript depends on the skill level and ability of the writer at the time.

A short story contains all the same components — words, sentences, paragraphs, punctuation, the denotation and connotation of words, meaning and innuendo, etc. — and all the same craft elements: hook, opening, setting, characters, pacing, conflict, and resolution. The only difference is that it's shorter, that it contains all that in a smaller space.

And the biggie—“Should one just rely on cycling or hire a copyeditor?”

The question itself contains a misunderstanding. Cycling is not editing. It isn't even related. More on that later. For now, let me talk about where I recommend hiring a copyeditor.

Every writer is different.

1. If you have an extremely good grounding in grammar, syntax, and punctuation, and if you have a honed sensitivity to the nuances of the language, you probably don't need a copyeditor at all (either yourself or anyone else).
2. If you don't have that level of grounding and sensitivity to the nuances, then chances are you need a copyeditor. But don't do it yourself. If you could copyedit for yourself, your story wouldn't need a copyedit. I suggest you hire an English major with really good grades from the local college to copyedit for you.

I also suggest paying him or her no more than 1 cent per word, and less if you can get away with it. But always ask that person what s/he plans to do during the edit. To see what I would ask him or her to do (and strictly limit him or her to), click <https://harveystanbrough.com/copyediting/> and scroll down to “What I Do.” You don't need any critical input on story content, especially how s/he would have written such and such.

Now for the more extensive answer —

As I told my student, I'm one of those rare weirdos who is equally comfortable writing a story or diagramming a sentence. It's as if I was dipped in the river of the English Language at birth. I understand that not everyone is like that. It's important to be aware of your own limitations.

I'm extremely well grounded in grammar and syntax and punctuation. In fact, I wrote [*Punctuation for Writers*](#), the ONLY book out there that looks at how writers can wield punctuation to direct the reading of our work. In school, all they ever taught us was how to react to punctuation as a reader.

I also wrote [*Writing Realistic Dialogue*](#), which deals more with syntax and the nuances of the language and which placed 5th in the Book of the Year awards at BookExpo NY in the early 2000s.

My point is, I know all the “rules” of grammar and syntax and punctuation well enough that I can break them intelligently and sometimes even instinctively, on the fly. I'm also highly sensitive to the nuances of the language. For those reasons, and because I write into the dark, I don't edit my fiction. Ever.

I never perform a copyedit (or a line edit or the often-mentioned “editing pass” or any edit at all) on my fiction, and I definitely would never invite or allow anyone else to do so.

(But again, every writer is different. Dean Wesley Smith also writes into the dark, but he DOES use a copy editor. As I said, it's important to be aware of your own limitations.)

I mentioned earlier that if you aren't well grounded in the language, you should hire a copyeditor. I do NOT recommend, however, hiring a “book doctor” or “developmental editor,” etc. All of those — every one of them — are scams. Some of them mean well and don't realize they're scams, but they still are.

A good copy editor is worth his or her weight in gold, but if anyone wants to do anything to your manuscript that I don't talk about at <https://harveystanbrough.com/copyediting/>, do yourself a favor and tell them to get lost. Anything else would be intrusive. Seriously.

Cycling is not editing.

As I've said many times before, I cycle (read for pleasure, fully within the creative subconscious) after every session, but — and this is important — my critical mind isn't involved At All.

If my critical mind *does* shows up and I start reading critically and “looking for” things to fix or wondering whether a sentence is “too long” or “too short,” whether I've used “that” too many times, or anything else negative, I get up and walk away. Physically. Fortunately that doesn't happen very often anymore.

When I'm cycling, I'm not looking to "fix" anything unless a wrong word (waist for waste) or a typo or something pops out at me. And if it pops out of the manuscript as I'm reading for pleasure, the character fixes it.

So again, cycling is Just Reading, same as if you're reading a book by your favorite author. You don't "look for" problems and things to correct when you read others' work, do you? But if a typo or something pops out at you, chances are you quickly "fix" it and then go on reading.

That's your creative subconscious fixing it. By the way, if you can't read for pleasure a novel you've bought without actively looking for typos and other errors—if you're so deeply invested in the critical mind that you can't just enjoy the story—then I can't help you.

Of course, there's a bottom line to all this, and here it is: As I've said repeatedly, I rely on my characters to tell the story that they, not I, are living. I trust them completely and explicitly. No excuses, no backsliding.

Trust me, folks, I've been in that hell of fear and self-doubt that most writers are still languishing in, and I'm never going back. I really would rather stop writing altogether than have to "labor" my way through writing a story.

Talk with you later.

Of Interest

See "Creative Voice Having Fun" at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/creative-voice-having-fun/>. Incredible that he would post this today.

See "Four Mistakes That Will Doom Your Mystery...." at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/08/four-mistakes-that-will-doomyour-mystery-they-did-mine.html>. Something to read, absorb, and then forget while you're writing.

See "The Power of Generational Storytelling" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/the-power-of-generational-storytelling/>. This is a cautionary tale if I ever saw one. Wow.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1340 words

Writing of (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... XXXX words. Total words to date..... XXXXX

Total fiction words for August..... 13935

Total fiction words for the year..... 66431

Total nonfiction words for August... 15680

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 121920
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 188351

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 1
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 67
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: Along with discussing various aspects of the writing craft, I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. WITD is “the only way” to write, but it is by far the easiest, most liberating, and most fun.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Copyediting](#), [critical voice](#), [Cycling](#), [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [killzoneblog.com](#), [thepassivevoice.com](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: Moving, and The First Reader

August 24, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Moving to MailerLite
- * Topic: The First Reader
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“Binance executive Patrick Hillmann alleges hackers successfully used an AI-generated hologram to impersonate him on video calls with cryptocurrency firms....” Techjuice (*Science fiction ideas, anyone?*)

“No passion in the world, no love or hate, is equal to the passion to alter someone else’s draft.”
H. G. Wells

Moving to MailerLite

Hello everyone. This post will come to you twice today if everything works as planned.

You will receive this one at 10 a.m. from MailChimp, but you should receive a second, identical one at 11 a.m. from MailerLite. (I’ll receive them both as well, so no need to report-in. [grin])

Then, if all goes as planned, beginning tomorrow you'll receive new posts from the Journal at 11 a.m. from MailerLite and I'll close down that other mess.

I'll also be working to put a new sign-up form on the website in case anyone else wants to subscribe. So I'm taking the Subscribe link off the Journal site today.

Topic: The First Reader

As a followup to [yesterday's post on copyediting](#), I thought I'd explain what I do instead of copyediting my own work or hiring a copyeditor.

After my manuscript is finished and I've cycled through the last bit, I routinely conduct a couple of find and replace operations.

First, I search for two or more consecutive spaces and replace them with a single space. Then I search for the paragraph mark with a space following it (^p) and replace that with a paragraph mark followed by nothing.

On both searches, I click Replace All until the little message reads "All done. We made 0 replacements." The whole operation takes maybe 10 seconds.

After that, I run the Microsoft Word contextual spell checker. (In Microsoft Word, click File, then Options, then look for a reference to contextual spell checking. In the latest version of Word, there is no box to check. The spell checker automatically checks for context too.) That spell check takes maybe five minutes, and when it's finished, I save the file, then save it as PDF, and send the PDF file, usually right then, to my first reader.

My first reader isn't a writer at all, so he isn't tempted to "improve" my work (see the second Quote of the Day). But he's an avid reader, and he seems to really enjoy my stories. He reads them for pleasure, like I do when I'm cycling. If something pops out at him (wrong word, inconsistency), he makes a note of it and keeps reading.

He never says a word about how he would have written it, or recommends any plot twists or "improvements," or any of that. Just "Hey, you dropped the 'ed' off a past-tense word here" (I do that a lot) or "You used a 0 (zero) instead of an o in this guy's name" or "Mary Lou was wearing a brown jacket early in the scene and a blue jacket a few minutes later" (inconsistency).

When he sends his notes back to me, I make the changes that I agree with. Then I work up a promo doc; title, author name, genre, a brief teaser that does NOT talk about any plot points, suggested search terms, and the URLs of where the book can be found. I fill those in after I publish it. And I'm done.

A word on "beta readers" — I've never had a beta reader, but I often hear writers talking about how valuable their beta reader's critical input was. Usually they mention their beta reader found a "plot hole" or suggested a new plot twist or some other story-content issue.

If you want to invite others to critique and second-guess your characters, that's your business. Doesn't affect my bottom line, so I don't care. But don't confuse that "beta reader" (critic) with a first reader. Not the same thing At All.

So what makes a good first reader?

1. Don't read critically. In other words, don't "look for" anything. Be lost in the story and just read for pleasure. This is extremely important.
2. No need to reference page numbers. Page numbers change depending on your computer screen, magnification, etc. so any reference to them is basically useless.
3. If something pops out at you (wrong words, typos, inconsistencies) as you read, make a quick note of it, then go back to reading. There are two good ways to do that:
 - a. You can highlight the offending section on the screen (please use a green or blue highlight so I can see it more easily). If you know how to add a comment off to the side (available in both Word and PDF) you can do that too, but it isn't necessary. Or
 - b. You can open a Notepad or other document, then copy/paste a few exact words from the offending section (so I can find it more easily with a search).
4. Likewise, if you encounter something that really confuses you or knocks you out of the story, tell me about that too. I hope that won't happen, but don't spare my feelings. I'm trusting you for the truth. If you aren't sure of the problem, just let me know where in the novel it happened. Maybe quote the nearest sentence so I can find it more easily.
5. When you've finished reading the novel, send back either the highlighted (marked up) Word or PDF document or send the Notepad document (or both if you want) via email attachment.

That's it. Easy peasy, really. Again, you're only reading for pleasure. The only difference is that this time you have direct input to the author to tell him what you think. (grin)

What I don't need and probably will ignore:

Even if you're a writer, don't tell me how you would have written it. It isn't relevant. That's why I don't do critique groups.

Don't worry about my "style" of writing. Again, it isn't relevant.

Please don't offer me any writing advice or advice on story content unless you've written and published at least a few dozen novels.

Finally, does a first reader “replace” a copyeditor?

No. If you don't have a really solid grounding in grammar, syntax and punctuation plus a hypersensitivity to the nuances of the language, chances are you need a copyeditor. For more on that, [see yesterday's post](#).

Talk with you later.

Of Interest

See “Radio Dreams Fulfilled” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/08/radio-dreams-fulfilled.html>.

See “8 Essential and Creative Recommendations ...” at <https://www.amarketingexpert.com/2022/08/23/8-essential-and-creative-recommendations-for-launching-a-book/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1080 words

Writing of (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... XXXX words. Total words to date..... XXXXX

Total fiction words for August..... 13935

Total fiction words for the year..... 66431

Total nonfiction words for August... 16760

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 123000

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 189431

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 1

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 67

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: Along with discussing various aspects of the writing craft, I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. WITD is “the only way” to write, but it is by far the easiest, most liberating, and most fun.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [amarketingexpert.com](#), [First readers](#), [killzoneblog.com](#), [Moving to MailerLite](#), [Topic](#)

The Journal: It Worked!

August 25, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Welcome
- * It Worked!
- * Of Interest

Welcome

Welcome to Chynna P, gdlubala (GD, I think), Frank T, and any others who have subscribed recently. Glad to have you aboard. If you're interested in a particular aspect of the writing craft, enter a search term in the Search box in the left sidebar at [the Journal website](#).

As an alternative or in addition, you may also [download the free, fully searchable PDF archives](#). And of course, you may always email me at harveystanbrough@gmail.com. I'd be happy to help in any way with your writing craft.

(By the way, gdlubala, I was able to add you to the list at MailerLite, so you shouldn't have to subscribe again.)

It Worked!

Although I scheduled the MailerLite post to send at 11 a.m. yesterday, at first I thought it hadn't gone out at all. So I set about trying to figure out what I'd done wrong.

Then at around 11:40 the email finally hit my inbox. Woohoo! So I went back in and re-set the delivery time to 9 a.m. That will force me to get the Journal out earlier and get to my writing sooner.

I also created a subscription form and added it to the left sidebar on the site. It's just below the Search bar. So overall, the transition from MailChimp to MailerLite went relatively smoothly. To tie a bow on it, I deleted the 10 year old MailChimp account.

Now I can get back to my own writing, and to sharing posts with you on the various aspects of the craft of writing. If there's anything in particular you're wondering about or having trouble with, leave a comment on the site or email me.

Also, if you're interested in a mentorship, I still have one or two spots left. For details, see <https://hestanbrough.com/new-mentorships/>.

Talk with you later.

Of Interest

See “How to follow Artemis 1 after launch...” at <https://www.space.com/artemis-1-moon-mission-tracking-website>.

See “Investigative Genealogy Solves Cold Cases” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/08/true-crime-thursday-investigative-genealogy-solves-cold-cases.html>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 320 words

Writing of (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... XXXX words. Total words to date..... XXXXX

Total fiction words for August..... 13935

Total fiction words for the year..... 66431

Total nonfiction words for August... 17080

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 123320

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 189751

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 1

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 67

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: Along with discussing various aspects of the writing craft, I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. WITD is “the only way” to write, but it is by far the easiest, most liberating, and most fun.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [killzoneblog.com](#), [MailerLite](#), [Space.com](#)

The Journal: The Value of Goals

August 26, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

* Quote of the Day

* TinyLetter?

* Topic: The Value of Goals

* Of Interest

Quote of the Day

“I’m ready to finally take the plunge into WITD.” Chynna Pace

I love that kind of committment. (grin) No “thinking” no “considering” no “maybe.” Just a healthy dose of Let’s Do This.

TinyLetter?

Has anyone else heard of TinyLetter? It’s by MailChimp, but it costs nothing and is absolutely no-frills. When I closed my MailChimp account, with its dying breath it said I might want to check out TinyLetter.

I’m glad I did. TinyLetter is billed as “Email for people with something to say.” It’s a way to send out a newsletter without having a website or any of that. If you have an email account, you’re golden.

Best of all, it’s free, both to you and to your subscribers. I set up an account in about five minutes, if it took me even that long. I’m not sure whether or how I’ll use the account, but it might be a good way to share your fiction or your thoughts with potential readers.

In my test email, I wrote in part

“In this little email newsletter, sometimes I’ll send out a short story or vignette. Sometimes I’ll send an excerpt from a novel. I might even serialize a novel.

“If I decide to get really crazy, I might write a novella or novel ‘in public,’ right here in your inbox. In that case, every time I finish a scene or chapter, I’ll post it here and send it out. So you can read a novella or novel in real time as it’s being written.”

I didn’t brainstorm. Those were just a few ideas that popped up as I wrote that first email. (Dan B, this might be great for your weekly blogette.)

This is an exciting little no-frills newsletter that many of you might find useful. You can check it out at <http://tinyletter.com/>.

Topic: The Value of Goals

Recently one of my mentoring students and I were discussing goals, and I realized it’s been awhile since I talked about that in the Journal.

I’m not going to get long-winded here, or winded at all for that matter. I’ve written several posts on “goals” and on “goals vs. dreams.” If you type either of those terms into the search box in the sidebar at [the Journal website](#) or over on [HarveyStanbrough.com](#), you’ll find plenty there to keep you occupied.

For now, suffice it to say that it's all but impossible to write a novel. You know that and I know that. If you want to feel overwhelmed, sit down at a keyboard, put your fingers on the keys and think, *Okay, I'm going to write a novel now*. Chances are, you'll freeze solid.

On the other hand, pretty much anyone can sit down at the same keyboard with a title or a character or situation in mind and write for an hour (set a timer if you want). That should be around 1000 words (only 17 words per minute). Then take a short break, then come back and write for another hour, etc.

If you spend just two hours in the chair writing each day, that's 2000 words per day and 10,000 words per five-day week or 14,000 words per seven-day week. It's also between 40,000 and 60,000 words per month. And that, my friends, is a novel.

If you spend three hours in the chair every day, so much the better. You can do the math depending on how many days per week you write.

But to be REALLY effective — to write novels and short stories and whatever else without ever *thinking* about what you're writing — I recommend setting a daily word count goal.

Make your daily goal a number that is neither easy to hit nor impossible to hit. If you can routinely hit 2000 words (2 hours' writing) per day, set your daily writing goal at 3000 words. You'll have to stretch a bit to reach or surpass it, but when you do you'll feel great.

And when you fall a little short, so what? Tomorrow's a new day and the goal resets to zero. So no looking back, no beating yourself up. Just moving forward day by day. And before you know it, your novel is finished.

Best of all, a daily word-count goal will help you with the "importance" problem that afflicts most writers.

As I've said many times, what you write doesn't matter. The individual story or novel is not important at all. It's only a few minutes' or hours' entertainment for someone.

What's important is THAT you write, not WHAT you write.

Setting and striving to reach a daily word count goal will help with that. What's important is that you reach your goal, not where those words go.

Say you have a word count goal of 3000 publishable words of fiction per day. One day, you might write a short story that's 3,246 words. Another day, you might write 2972 words on your novel, come to the end of a scene and decide to call it good.

On yet another day, you might write a short-short story at 1217 words and write the other approximately 1800 words on your novel. Or you might write 730 words and reach the end of your novel, then take a break, come back, and write another 2300 words on a short story or the opening of the next novel.

Possibilities are endless. But with this system, what matters is THAT you get to the keyboard and write — your focus is on reaching your word count goal — not WHAT you write (the novel, short story or whatever).

Make sense? Try it and see whether your productivity increases. I'm betting it will.

And for writing period? New subscriber Chynna Pace (she of the Quote of the Day) also reminded me I once wrote in the Journal, "If the emails you write feel easier than your fiction, you're still in the critical voice mindset."

Talk with you later.

Of Interest

See "Photographers capture 'ridiculously detailed image' of the moon for NASA's Artemis 1 launch" at <https://www.space.com/ridiculously-detailed-moon-photo-artemis-1-tribute>.

See "20 space myths busted!" at <https://www.space.com/space-myths-busted>. Very interesting.

See "Something Really Crazy and Innovative" at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/something-really-crazy-and-innovative/>.

See "How to Use Images of Real People Without Violating Privacy and Publicity Rights" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/how-to-use-images-of-real-people-without-violating-privacy-and-publicity-rights/>. But see PG's take.

See "Rethinking Libel for the Twenty-First Century" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/rethinking-libel-for-the-twenty-first-century/>. Mainly see PG's take.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1060 words

Writing of (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... XXXX words. Total words to date..... XXXXX

Total fiction words for August..... 13935

Total fiction words for the year..... 66431

Total nonfiction words for August... 18140

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 124380

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 190811

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 1

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date...	0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	67
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014).....	217
Short story collections.....	31

Disclaimer: Along with discussing various aspects of the writing craft, I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. WITD is “the only way” to write, but it is by far the easiest, most liberating, and most fun.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [thepassivevoice.com](#), [www.space.com](#)

Aspiring Authors

August 27, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Welcome and Back to 10
- * Topic: Aspiring Authors
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

“Aspiring authors, get this through your head. Cover art serves one purpose, and one purpose only, to get potential customers interested long enough to pick up the book to read the back cover blurb. In the internet age that means the thumb nail image needs to be interesting enough to click on. That’s what covers are for.” Larry Correia

Welcome and Back to 10

Welcome to laider7. I hope you find the Journal useful. Glad to have you aboard.

I switched the publication time back to 10 a.m. Adding that hour takes off pressure I don’t need. I should have known this would happen. I tried sending the Journal out earlier before.

Topic: Aspiring Authors

This has almost nothing to do with the Quote of the Day above other than the title. Larry Correia was trying to emphasize both the importance and unimportance of covers. They *should* grab the reader’s attention; they *should not* attempt to tell the story of the novel.

But the phrase “aspiring authors” set off something inside me. Here it is:

First, “aspiring authors” is a misnomer. In reality, these folks come in two distinctive flavors: writers and authors. The difference? Writers want to write. Authors want to bask in the glory of Having Written. (Actually, I could end the post here.)

Writers just want to tell stories. Most of them have heard of Heinlein’s Rules, and most of them happily adhere to Rules 1-3, though they often have trouble following Rule 4, the one that says you have to put what you’ve written on the market.

[Commence writer whining] It takes *time* to submit stories to traditional markets. And if you indie publish, it takes time to find cover art, design a cover, write a promo doc, and physically click the mouse the requisite number of stupid times to upload the stupid manuscript to your stupid ebook aggregator.

And it takes even *more* time to perform all the exterior and interior layout stuff required for a paper publication. Ugh.

Okay, to be honest these are my people, and I feel for them. We don’t *wanna* do Heinlein’s Rule 4. We’d rather be writing the next story. Waahhh.

We writers never give a thought to writing being “difficult” because it isn’t. In fact, it’s generally number one on our list of ways to have fun.

Authors believe Writing Fiction is an elevated calling. Therefore it’s special, and therefore it’s something to which they should aspire, and therefore it’s difficult to achieve. And since they themselves received and took on the burden of that very special calling, they too must be very special indeed.

Yawn, stretch, that’s fine. It takes all kinds, or so I’ve been told.

As annoying as Authors can be, they’re easy enough to avoid if you just stay away from online writing groups and “writer boards.” That’s generally where they hang out and impart their wisdom, which really is just the same old BS myths we’ve all heard all our lives. They seldom even bother saying it in their own words.

Here’s the funny thing about Authors, and by “funny” I mean “odd”: Over the years, I’ve noticed that all Authors end up following one of two tendencies:

1. once they’ve convinced themselves of how truly “difficult” (or what “terrible drudgery”) writing is, most would-be Authors stop writing altogether and go find something else to do—something they actually enjoy—or

2. they settle into a comfortable little niche, surround themselves with safety nets, and continue doing the hard labor necessary for them to be able to say they Have Written (cue angelic choir aaah AAAH).

If Authors who continue writing have heard of Heinlein’s Rules at all—and if they haven’t dismissed them completely—unlike writers, they have zero trouble with Rule 4. In fact, Rules 4 and 5 are their favorites. For those, they don’t have to write; they only have to talk about what they’ve already written.

But also unlike writers, they can’t seem to nail down Rules 1-3: you must write, you must finish what you write, and you must not rewrite. Those rules don’t fit in with their safety nets at all.

So writing isn’t fun for them. Theirs is not a creative process, but a mechanical process. Instead of allowing the characters to create the story that they, not the authors, are living, the Authors themselves *construct* the story, block by block, revision by revision, editing pass by editing pass, rewrite by rewrite.

In terms of quality, the result is what you might expect: Not only are the stories not original, but they’re flat and predictable. At every turn the author “figured out” what would happen next.

The problem is, it’s painfully obvious to the reader. I can usually tell within the first few pages of a novel whether the writer let the characters tell the story or overrode them with an outline, revisions, criticism and rewrites. I don’t go in looking for whether the author figured-out step by step what would happen. Rather, the clunky step by step construction throws me out of the story.

Anyway, as the contemporary saying goes, you do you.

If you invest just a little time in learning to trust your creative subconscious, you can roll off the parapet into the trenches of the story and enjoy racing through them with your characters

Or you can exercise caution and back away. You can do authorial robes, ascend into an ivory tower and control everything from a distance. Because after all, you know better than your characters what their story should be.

Talk with you later.

Of Interest

See “First Blog of 2022” at <https://chynnpace.com/f/first-blog-of-2022>. If you have a problem with your attitude about writing, I strongly suggest you sign up for this young writer’s blog.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 970 words

Writing of (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... XXXX words. Total words to date..... XXXXX

Total fiction words for August.....	13935
Total fiction words for the year.....	66431
Total nonfiction words for August...	19110
Total nonfiction words for the year.....	125350
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog).....	191781
Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date.....	1
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date...	0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	67
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014).....	217
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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Author vs. Writer](#), [chynnapace.com](#), [Topic](#)

Getting It

August 28, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Possibly A Brief Hiatus
- * Last Day of Dean’s Workshop Sale
- * Topic: Getting It
- * Of Interest

Possibly A Brief Hiatus

There’s a good chance I’ll take a brief hiatus from posting to the Journal for a few days to reset my fiction-writing schedule. I was reminded recently of how very prolific I was a year ago. I want to get back to that all-consuming joy. I also want to reset my Journal-writing, mentoring (seriously considering adding another level), and other-stuff schedule.

Of course, I’ll continue to make my rounds of the internet, and sometimes things I see on there set me off. When that happens, well, it most often causes the Journal to happen.

Anyway, I’ll be back before too long. In the interim, I recommend you use the time you usually spend reading the Journal to write.

Last Day of Dean’s Workshop Sale

Dean's running a workshop sale every month now, but the last day of this month's sale is today. If you're interested, check out "New Workshops and Last Day of the Sale" at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/new-workshops-and-last-day-of-the-sale/>.

Topic: Getting It

Of five writers with whom I've recently come in contact, two are bookends. One is a self-confident young woman who probably doesn't need a formal mentor at all. The other, a young man, might need more help than I'm able to give him in a limited time.

Of the other three writers, they all seem to be getting what they need from me and advancing. Nothing wrong with any of that. We're all different. But for the most part, if you want to be a fiction writer, you can. Just tell a story. Writing a story on paper or on the screen should be as natural and easy as telling your significant other an anecdote about your recent trip to the grocery.

Becoming a fiction writer — a successful fiction writer — is exactly the same for all of us, except that it's easier for some and more difficult for others. All of that depends on what interests you or doesn't interest you, what you're good at or not good at, and how bullheaded you are or are not.

Learning to both write well and have fun doing it — for me, those two things go hand-in-hand — has certain requirements. Basic to those is a fundamental knowledge of the rules of grammar and punctuation. If you have those, good. If not, I suggest you brush up. You owe that knowledge to your readers, yourself, and your craft.

A feel for syntax is nice to have too, but any lack in that area can be corrected by reading and absorbing others' work and by practice. "I sing the electric body" sort of makes sense. But "I sing the body electric" both makes sense AND releases a lightning storm in your mind. Syntax.

Beyond those basics, all you need are

1. a writing technique or writing process — this is usually a combination of writing myths and safety-nets. Some of us trust ourselves enough to write into the dark. Others create a weird mixture of myths, safety-nets and "organic" writing. (Hey, whatever works.) And
2. the various aspects of the writing craft: setting, scene, pacing, etc.

To develop your technique and to acquire each aspect of the craft, you have to follow exactly the same process: study, absorb, and — most importantly — make it your own through practice. When you've done all that with your process or with an aspect of the craft, you can say you've "got it," or at least that you're "getting it."

As long and intensely and prolifically as I've been at this fiction-writing stuff, I still experience the occasional aha moment. It usually comes as a realization or epiphany while reading someone else's fiction or some question someone asks.

With me, usually the epiphany isn't a 'what' but a 'why' or a 'how'. [My most recent epiphany](#) was that characters are pure — that they don't care either way about any writing technique, or any aspect of the writing craft. They're simply living their story and allowing you to come along and record it for them.

The kicker is, the only way to get to that truth for yourself is to trust your characters completely. If you can develop that level of self-confidence, you'll be enjoying the freedom and fun of writing into the dark in no time. I like that.

But whatever your path to your definition of 'success' as a fiction writer, I wish you many epiphanies or realizations or lightbulb moments: "Ah, NOW I get it."

There really is nothing better.

Talk with you later.

Of Interest

See "Social Media and The Finklemeier Propositions" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/08/social-media-and-the-finklemeier-propositions.html>.

See "Nuclear Fusion Is No Longer Science Fiction" at <https://interestingengineering.com/science/nuclear-fusion-is-no-longer-science-fiction>.

See "A Book from 1952 Predicted Someone Named 'Elon' Would Guide Humans to Mars" at <https://interestingengineering.com/culture/a-book-from-1952-predicted-someone-named-elon-would-guide-humans-to-mars>. 1952 was a very good year. (grin)

See "UFOs have non-human origins and threats are increasing 'exponentially', US Congress warns" at <https://interestingengineering.com/culture/pentagon-study-ufos-with-non-human-origins>.

See "How to Promote a Book on Social Media: 13 Tips for Indie Authors" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/how-to-promote-a-book-on-social-media-13-tips-for-indie-authors/>. I have my doubts about this one, but decide for yourself.

See "10 Tips for Authors on Using Social Media from a Literary Agent" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/10-tips-for-authors-on-using-social-media-from-a-literary-agent/>.

See "Substack is Anti-Social Media, and the Next Social Media" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/substack-is-anti-social-media-and-the-next-social-media/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 840 words

Writing of (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... XXXX words. Total words to date..... XXXXX

Total fiction words for August..... 13935

Total fiction words for the year..... 66431

Total nonfiction words for August... 19950

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 126190

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 192621

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 1

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 67

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: Along with discussing various aspects of the writing craft, I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. WITD is “the only way” to write, but it is by far the easiest, most liberating, and most fun.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [Getting It](#), [How to become a writer](#), [interestingengineering.com](#), [killzoneblog.com](#), [thepassivevoice.com](#), [Topic](#)

The Hiatus Explained

August 29, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * The Hiatus Explained
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

“Truth is stranger than fiction, but it is because Fiction is obliged to stick to possibilities; Truth isn't.” Mark Twain

The Hiatus Explained

To anyone who's annoyed that I'm taking a few days away from the Journal, sorry about that. To my mentoring students: I will still respond to you during this hiatus. No worries there at all.

I can't tell you how much I regret having shuffled and/or deleted some of my neural pathways a little over a year ago. Before I did that, I was a shining example of what a fiction writer can accomplish when s/he trusts the characters to tell the story that they, not the writer, are living.

I was happily turning out a new 40-60,000 word novel every two weeks. Literally from the time my 'work' day ended, I looked forward to getting up the next morning and getting back to the Hovel to write another few thousand words.

Despite how this probably sounds, I'm not complaining. After all, I was stupid and/or naive enough to commit this sabotage on myself. I'm not afraid to admit stupidity and naivete when I commit it.

I've always considered myself somewhat intelligent, but only AFTER I'd done the deed did I learn that European research takes a vastly different and vastly *broader* look at the effects of nicotine, both bad AND good, than does the strongly biased propaganda-research of the good ol' USA. I'm just sayin', believe what you want, but don't be a mushroom.

And now, I want to get my writing back. It's as simple as that, and it's long past time. But to do that, I have to change some habits I developed and rearrange some priorities I set when I wasn't able to write fiction at all. For example, in order to keep writing something even if it wasn't fiction, I made the Journal my main priority.

Even as I wrote *Blackwell Ops 8*, the test novel for my return to writing fiction, the Journal was my priority. As a result, on many days I didn't write fiction at all.

This hiatus will enable me to reset my priorities and refocus my attention on writing fiction. I'm being selfish, but I want to get back to having fun. Don't get me wrong: I enjoy chatting to my friends, paying forward what I've learned, and passing along links to others' posts that I think you might find interesting.

But if I can't get back to the unbridled joy of conveying my characters' stories, there's really no purpose to the Journal. I can't preach what I'm not practicing. So I'll take the time necessary to reset things to my version of normal. Probably no more than a few days.

Tomorrow I'll share a response I sent this morning to one of my mentoring students. It's already written so I only have to copy and paste it, then schedule the post to release tomorrow morning. The tidbits in it are varied enough that I'm able to at least hope it will help some of you along your journey.

Talk with you "live" again soon.

Of Interest

See "Mountweazels and More!" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/08/mountweazels-and-more.html>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 540 words

Writing of (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... XXXX words. Total words to date..... XXXXX

Total fiction words for August..... 13935

Total fiction words for the year..... 66431

Total nonfiction words for August... 20490

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 126730

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 193161

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 1

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 67

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [killzoneblog.com](#), [Why the Hiatus](#)

Response to a Mentoring Student

August 30, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Topic: Response to a Mentoring Student
- * On Paid Book Reviewers
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“[I]f your fidelity to perfectionism is too high, you never do anything.” David Foster Wallace

Topic: Response to a Mentoring Student

Here's a response I sent to one of my mentoring students yesterday morning. I did change it a little or add to it here and there. But since it was already largely written, I had only to copy and paste it, then schedule the post to release this morning. The whole process, including adding links below (if any) took maybe a half-hour instead of the usual 1 – 2 hours.

As I wrote yesterday, the tidbits in this response are varied enough that I at least hope it will help some of you along your journey:

Re all the writing “stuff” you’re going through, been there, done that. I was exactly like you in that I wanted to prove or disprove to myself that WITD would work. I honestly expected it wouldn’t work — that’s why I was able to give it an all-out honest try — and then I could get back to what I’d been doing before: spinning my wheels and getting nowhere very, very slowly.

But to my never-ending surprise, delight, and joy, it DID work. If it hadn’t, I’d probably still be working on the outline for my first novel instead of having written 67 novels, 8 novellas and well over 200 short stories.

And if I’d ever completed that outline, I’d never have written the novel. I’d know the whole story. Where’s the fun in writing that? Nope, I’d have given up on being a writer years ago and gone fishing or something instead.

I was also like you in that I didn’t “get” some of the stuff, like cycling. I just trusted Dean, and therefore assumed I just hadn’t understood yet.

Sure enough, that’s how it turned out. I kept thinking about cycling, trusting myself and my characters, how rational it all was, and how much sense it all made. And one day I finally just understood the concept of cycling (creative mind) vs. revising/editing/rewriting (critical mind). I have faith you will too.

Just keep reminding yourself to trust your characters, that you’re only their stenographer, the writer they invited along to convey their story.

And since you were invited INTO the story by the characters, you don’t have to climb up into some authorial ivory tower and control everything from afar. In fact, you don’t have to control it at all. The story will unfold as the characters live it. Your only task is to write it down.

You aren’t even invested in the stories except to enjoy them (as a reader) as they unfold. They aren’t personal to you, anymore than your neighbor’s or friend’s story about his/her trip to Zimbabwe is personal to you. It’s interesting and fun to hear or read, but it doesn’t make any real difference beyond entertaining you for a few minutes or hours.

What you write, the individual story or novel, just doesn’t matter. THAT you write something does matter, but only because you’re a writer. Equate the title with the act. Characters live stories that, to us, are fiction. Fiction writers record those stories.

“Let go and just write.” Don’t ruminate over this. Don’t think about it and mull it over. Just take a deep breath and do it.

To break out of Stage 1 and 2 writing, focus on Story. Words are insignificant in the overall scheme. Words are to Story what nails are to a new house. They enable it to be built, but individual nails are not important in their own right. If you swap one for another, they still work fine and make absolutely no difference to the resident of the house.

The resident doesn't think about the individual nails. S/he simply enjoys the house. The reader doesn't think about individual words. S/he simply enjoys the story.

“Why do I search for anything in my own writing?” On the surface, you do that because you want the story to be better. Underlying that is the real reason: your belief that it isn't good enough.

If you thought it was good enough, would you try to make it better? Umm, no. Pure critical mind. Give yourself and your characters the same benefit of the doubt you give other writers whose work you read and enjoy.

Keep at it. Believe in yourself and you'll get there.

On Paid Book Reviewers

Today over at KillZone (see “Of Interest”), Debbie Burke quoted multi-genre author Maggie Lynch as writing, “Paid reviews have always been around, long before the advent of the Internet. Who do you think paid for placement in magazines, journals, and newspapers?”

To that statement alone, I'd respond, “Hey, whatever you have to tell yourself.” No doubt some will say, “But it's legal.” Yes, it is. But the fact that something is legal shouldn't mitigate personal responsibility even for a crooked politician, much less a writer.

Here's the comment I left on Debbie's post:

“I can't agree with your guest that paying for legitimate advertising (more prominent placement or presentation of a product) is the same as paying someone to say they like something. Paid reviewers are scammers, period.

“Even usually unscrupulous television producers require small-print notices on ads, something like ‘Paid endorsement by an actor.’ Of course, you'll never see ‘This is a paid review.’ If the reviewers were honest they wouldn't be pimping their opinion in the first place. So it's all down to the authors, isn't it? What price dignity?”

Just my two cents.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Architects design a model of a suspended city that encircles the Burj Khalifa” at <https://interestingengineering.com/innovation/architects-design-a-model-of-a-suspended-city-that-encircles-the-burj-khalifa>.

See “Maybe Changing Hotels for In-Person Workshops” at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/maybe-changing-hotels-for-in-person-workshops/>. Sounds like Resorts World.

See “To Pay or Not To Pay – Book Reviews For Sale” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/08/to-pay-or-not-to-pay-book-reviews-for-sale.html>. Never. Never, never, never. For my take, see my comment on the post.

See “What Blogging Has Taught Me About Writing” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/what-blogging-has-taught-me-about-writing/>. Meh. Writing is writing is writing.

See “Lessons Learned From 11 Years As An Author Entrepreneur” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/lessons-learned-from-11-years-as-an-author-entrepreneur/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1000 words

Writing of (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... XXXX words. Total words to date..... XXXXX

Total fiction words for August..... 13935

Total fiction words for the year..... 66431

Total nonfiction words for August... 21490

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 127730

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 194161

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 1

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 67

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Creative Penn](#), [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [interestingengineering.com](#), [killzoneblog.com](#), [Paid reviewers](#), [the writing life](#), [thepassivevoice.com](#), [Topic](#)

End of the Hiatus

August 31, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * End of the Hiatus
- * TinyLetter? Um, No
- * About Paid Reviews
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“What is wanted is not the will to believe, but the wish to find out, which is its exact opposite.”
Bertrand Russell

“Carry out a random act of kindness, with no expectation of reward.” Princess Diana

End of the Hiatus

I seem unable to stop playing with the Journal. There's just too much to pass along, whether positive thoughts on writing, interesting posts by other writers, or warnings like the one below on TinyLetter.

So the “hiatus” experiment is over. I'll figure out some other way to re-establish my fiction-writing habit. As in the past, there will be days when I have nothing to say and nothing to post in “Of Interest,” etc. But I should be here most days.

TinyLetter? Um, No

A few days ago I touted TinyLetter as a simple, no-frills, and possibly good alternative to Mailchimp and some of the other manure spreaders out there.

Turns out the subsidiary is as inept and unnecessarily suspicious as their parent company, Mailchimp.

So I was wrong. I do NOT recommend TinyLetter. I don't like companies who interrupt the service they exist to provide on a whim and without justification.

I don't want to go on a rant, so if you want specific details, email me.

About Paid Reviews

From a comment by Truant Librarian (Sue Ann Connaughton) on a Kill Zone post,

“In 2018, I ... paid \$20 for a service that combed Amazon for the most prolific reviewers in the women’s fiction genre. They sent me 20 email addresses for reviewers and a suggested email to request honest reviews in exchange for a PDF copy of my book. It netted me 7 reviews, which actually were honest opinions, bringing my total number of reviews to 20. I don’t think those reviews in and of themselves led to increased sales, but my listing in the newsletter did produce sales.

“Publishing more books is what produced increased sales for me. Now that I have three books out in my New England Murder Mystery series, sales have revived for the previous mystery titles in my meager backlist. I required the reviewers I got from the review service to state in their reviews that they received a free copy of the book in exchange for an honest review.”

I suggest you [read all the comments](#) on that post. There are some good recommendations there on how to get legitimate reviews. The excerpt above is one example.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “What a Book Marketing Strategy Really Requires” at <https://www.amarketingexpert.com/2022/08/30/breaking-down-what-a-book-marketing-strategy-really-requires/>.

See “The Buffet Challenge” at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/the-buffet-challenge/>. Not for me, but a good example of thinking outside the box for ideas, writing, and promotion.

See “There is a saying” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/there-is-a-saying/>. Dystopian story ideas anyone?

See “The Ultimate Guide to Social Media for Writers 2022” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/the-ultimate-guide-to-social-media-for-writers-2022/>.

See “Instagram tests new features to give users more control over suggested posts” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/instagram-tests-new-features-to-give-users-more-control-over-suggested-posts/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 500 words

Writing of (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... XXXX words. Total words to date..... XXXXX

Total fiction words for August..... 13935

Total fiction words for the year..... 66431

Total nonfiction words for August... 21990
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 128230
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 194661

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 1
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 67
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [amarketingexpert.com](#), [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [killzoneblog.com](#), [thepassivevoice.com](#)

The Value of Having a Place to Report

September 1, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * The Value of Having a Place to Report
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“Knowledge may give weight, but accomplishments give lustre, and many more people see than weigh.” Lord Chesterfield

“You know how I mentioned before that I had written this entire novel without stopping and that I was currently cycling back on the entire book? ... As I returned to each chapter and cycled back on it, there was extremely minimal work for me to do. My creative voice had gotten it right from the onset.” Monica Arac de Nyeko, writer and mentoring student

“I now realise that I am a story teller first and foremost. My job is not to make anything beautiful nor refined, nor anything. It is to simply sit down and transcribe the story and respect the heart of the story.” Monica Arac de Nyeko

The Value of Having a Place to Report

Monica Arac de Nyeko went about her mentorship in a different way. For her, I respond to any questions she has, but mostly I simply provide accountability.

As an old USMC sergeant major told me in the early 1970s, “We all need a place to report.” That’s especially important if we want to achieve things.

I know personally how important accountability can be. Without the Journal and all of you, especially back in the early days of my writing career, I wouldn’t have written nearly as many stories and novels as I have. Thank you.

Monica sends me an update once a week. The quotes above are from her latest update. I was very pleased and happy for her.

Other students are practicing writing openings, then having me check them, or practicing a specific aspect of the craft. On those, I not only comment on grounding the reader and using the POV character’s senses (physical and emotional) or on the specific craft topic but I also do a quick copyedit if I think it will help.

That’s all I really have for you today, but do yourself a favor and read the first item in “Of Interest.” It truly is remarkable.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “America’s most remarkable kid died in Newcastle, Utah — his legacy never will” at <https://www.deseret.com/2022/8/22/23309244/cole-summers-died-newcastle-utah-warren-buffett-charlie-munger-bari-weiss-unschooled>. Remarkable.

See “Another Interesting Bit of Information” at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/another-interesting-bit-of-information/>.

See “Prequels Always Suck (Unless They Stick to One Golden Rule)” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/prequels-always-suck-unless-they-stick-to-one-golden-rule/>.

See “How long do animals sleep?” at <https://blog.datawrapper.de/animal-sleep-patterns/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 410 words

Writing of The Jury (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... 2488 words. Total words to date..... 2488

Total fiction words for September.....	2488
Total fiction words for the year.....	68919
Total nonfiction words for September...	410
Total nonfiction words for the year.....	128640
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog).....	197599
Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date.....	1
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date...	0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	67
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014).....	217
Short story collections.....	31

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [datawrapper.de](#), [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [Mentoring](#), [thepassivevoice.com](#), [www.deseret.com](#)

The Secret to Being Prolific

September 2, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Topic: The Secret to Being Prolific
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“If you wish to advance into the infinite, explore the finite in all directions.” Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

“Sure you can, Harvey. ‘Can’t’ never did anything.” My stepmom, about 65 years ago when I complained that I couldn’t do something. I owe her my Marine Corps career, and I owe her my writing career.

“May your future be limited only by your dreams.” Christa McAuliffe

Topic: The Secret to Being Prolific

First, the secret to being a prolific fiction writer has nothing to do with typing speed. Let’s put that myth to rest right up front.

Most fiction writers who are focused on Story instead of being focused on words or sentences write about 1000 to 1500 words per hour. That sounds fast, but it isn't. It's only 17 words per minute at the low end and 25 words per minute at the high end. My own speed ranges from 1100 to 1300 words per hour.

I know one fiction writer who, on average, generated 3000 words per hour. Even that is only 50 words per minute, so there's no fear you'll start a wildfire at 1000 words per hour.

If you're writing much slower than 1000 words per hour, I'm sorry to be the bearer of bad news, but you're writing from the critical mind. Let's talk about that for a moment.

The Trap of the Critical Mind

The first thing to know is this: The conscious, critical mind can create nothing original.

Those who are unable to trust themselves call upon it to construct safety nets that don't need to be constructed (character sketches, outlines, signposts, etc.) and to correct the creative subconscious, which needs no correction.

The urge to "improve" what you've written with the creative subconscious or "correct" your characters' perception of the story that they, not you, are living is a function of the conscious, critical mind's primary purpose: to protect you.

If you second-guess and correct your characters often enough, they'll stop bringing you story ideas, and soon they'll stop telling you stories too. Show me a writer who has trouble coming up with story ideas and I'll show you a writer who's steeped in the myths.

Every time writers invoke the conscious, critical mind to correct what they wrote with the creative subconscious, it moves them farther from the authentic story and from their own unique, original voice.

It's the worst kind of creative self-sabotage, and the writers' fear of failure wins. For a great deal more, see [*Quiet the Critical Mind \(and Write Fiction\)*](#).

Time and Time Again

As I wrote above, becoming prolific as a fiction writer has nothing to do with speed or how fast you type. It has everything to do with how much time you spend in the chair. And believe it or not, it's all simple math.

For most jobs, you're expected to work 8 hours per day, maybe with up to an hour off for lunch. That's still 7 hours per day, usually five days per week.

If you did that as a writer and took an hour off for lunch, you'd produce 7000 words per day. Even if you took weekends off, that's 35,000 words per week. That's a short novel.

To be clear, that's if you spend the time WRITING, which means putting new words on the page. This does not include time for revision and rewriting and all the other myth nonsense.

But we writers are blessed. If we turn out even a 60,000 word novel twice a year, we're considered "prolific."

Again, it's all math. There are 52 weeks in a year. If we write five days per week, that's 260 days per year. So to write two 60,000 word novels in a year would require us to show up to work five days per week for a half-hour per day (462 wpd). Not a bad gig, is it?

If you want to actually BE prolific (vs. simply being *considered* prolific by those who don't have a clue), you can do that too.

But let's back away from spending 7 or 8 hours per day in the chair. After all, as too many of us say, we don't have a "real" job and we have a life.

So let's say we go half-time. We show up and do our job only three or four hours per day. Even if we still only show up five days per week, that's 15,000 to 20,000 words per week, or 780,000 to 1,040,000 words per year.

Yes. That's over one million words per year, working only 4 hours per day, five days per week.

But I'm not recommending you sit for three or four hours at a stretch. Take a break at least once every hour, even if it's only to get up and walk away and back.

Likewise, if you have non-writing chores to do, you can attend to those too. Write for an hour, do something else, then come back and write for another hour. The lesson here is to Keep Coming Back. Show your chosen profession the respect and dedication it deserves.

Goal Setting

If you want to be a prolific fiction writer, I strongly suggest you set a daily word-count goal. Beyond learning to trust my characters, no other single act has helped me more.

Then develop the discipline to keep coming back until you reach your goal each day or until you're literally too tired to go on.

Your daily goal should make you stretch. If you reach it too easily, raise it by 500 or 1000 words. If you never reach it, lower it in 500 word increments. Ideally, on most days you'll struggle a little but reach it.

I'll use the example of 3000 words per day. When you reach or exceed your goal, you'll feel wonderful. And the next day you have the potential to feel wonderful again.

But if you don't quite reach your goal, say you write only 2745 words one day, at least you've failed to succeed. You've still written 2745 more words than you had before. And tomorrow your goal resets to zero and the potential to meet or exceed it is there again.

Fiction Lengths

In traditional publishing, they have inflated and often padded page counts to provide false value so they can reach a profitable cover price.

Anywhere else on Earth, a novel can be anything from 25,000 words on up. What matters is Story. Don't worry in advance about length. Just write and let the story be the length it needs to be.

For pricing purposes, here's how I break down fiction lengths:

- 15000 to 24999 Novella
- 25000 to 44999 Short novel
- 45000 to 79999 Novel
- over 80,000 Long novel

Again, it's all simple math.

To write a 120,000 word novel in 3 months requires no more than an hour and a half of writing per day. That's 1333 words per day on average for 90 straight days or 1464 words words per day on average for 82 days (taking weekends off).

So why aren't all novelists writing at least 4 novels per year? I really can't tell you. If you trust your characters and enjoy recording the story as you watch it unfold, the sky's the limit.

If you don't trust your characters, well, then while you're hovering in place over that one novel, second-guessing your characters and moving farther from your unique, original voice, prolific writers will be turning out 4 or 6 or 12 or 24 novels per year.

It really is all up to you. Remember, Can't never did anything.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "13 tips to write persuasive landing page copy that converts" at <https://www.mailerlite.com/blog/how-to-write-high-converting-copy-for-landing-pages>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1250 words

Writing of **The Jury** (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... 2488 words. Total words to date..... 2488

Day 2..... 0789 words. Total words to date..... 3277

Total fiction words for September..... 3277

Total fiction words for the year..... 69708

Total nonfiction words for September... 1660

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 129890

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 199598

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 1

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 67

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Becoming Prolific](#), [creative subconscious](#), [critical mind](#), [Critical Voice Book](#), [Fiction Lengths](#), [Goals](#), [mailerlite.com/blog/](#), [Topic](#)

A Note on Traditional Publishing

September 3, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * A Note on Traditional Publishing
- * I've Been Fretting
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“[O]f the 58,000 trade titles published per year, *fully half of those titles ‘sell fewer than one dozen books.’* (Not a typo, that’s one dozen.) More broadly, *90 percent of titles sell fewer than 2,000 units.* Even a small advance of a few thousand dollars would not earn out at standard royalty rates.” Dean Wesley Smith, quoting directly from the Hot Sheet (*emphasis added*).

“The story so far: in the beginning, the universe was created. This has made a lot of people very angry and been widely regarded as a bad move.” Opening Line from *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe* by Douglas Adams (via The Passive Voice)

A Note on Traditional Publishing

Traditional publishing companies typically keep their cards close to their chest when it comes to business. Especially the number of copies sold. We hear numbers about the top sellers within days of a new release, or sometimes even before the official release date. But we never hear that information about the vast majority of works published every year by traditional publishers.

Until now. The big trial, in which Stephen King and other authors are taking on big publishing, has divulged facts and statistics that are usually kept from those who aspire to a traditional publishing contract.

If you're one of those writers who's still thinking about going with a traditional publisher, you might want to think again. Traditional publishing isn't the automatic sales-maker that you think it is.

Please read Dean Wesley Smith's short posts on the topic in order:

See “What a Number... Shocking” at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/what-a-number-shocking/>.

Then see “Another Interesting Bit of Information” at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/another-interesting-bit-of-information/>.

And finally, see “Bestselling Books” at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/bestselling-books/>.

A New Personal Challenge

I've been fretting over not already being back up to speed with my writing. Then I read an exchange between a traditionally published author and his editor. What follows is a snippet from that verbatim conversation. The editor has just congratulated the author on a good review from Kirkus:

“Now, let's keep that momentum on the upswing. How's your new novel going?”

“New one?”

“Sure! You have a pub date in a year.”

Uh, oh.

I'd never considered how fast they'd need the next book, so I told her it was coming along and hung up.

Okay, so seriously—a publication date looming a YEAR AWAY constitutes the publisher needing a book “fast”? A year away is soon enough to invoke panic?

Well, suddenly I don't feel so bad. After all, having finished a novel a week or so ago after not writing at all for over half the year equates my production with that of the author above.

Turning out a new novel only once a year is too mind-bogglingly slow for me to even think about. If I may reference the examples I used in [yesterday's post](#), if I spent a whole year writing a 60,000 or even a 120,000 word novel, what in the world would I do with the rest of my time? Would I even be justified in calling myself a fiction writer?

As to my own ongoing conundrum, yesterday I was talking with a writer friend who is suffering a similar situation. After some discussion, we agreed that the best way to get back to the fun and the high of writing is to take baby steps. So baby steps it is, combined with a new mantra that helps keep the conscious, critical mind at bay: “Trust and type.”

As a result of that discussion, I'm starting a new, short-term personal challenge: to write one novel per month for the rest of this year. So when December 31 rolls around, I will have written at least 4 more novels, for a total of 71.

At first, that didn't seem like much of a challenge, but things change. I'm out of practice right now, so this new challenge is realistic, even if it seems a little easy. Almost no pressure. Baby steps.

To be sure I'll accomplish the challenge, I'll set a daily word count goal: at least 2500 words per day. Accomplish the little things and the big things will seem to accomplish themselves.

If I meet or exceed that daily goal, when December 31 rolls around, I will have written at least 4 more novels, for a total of 71.

(In fact, 2500 words per day for 120 days is 300,000 words. By contrast, as of today I've written only 200478 words total, fiction and non-fiction, all year. So if I meet my goal each day, more than likely I'll have more than 71 novels at year's end.)

But much more importantly, this challenge will get me more used to spending time in the chair writing. With any luck, by early next year I'll be back up at my previous production levels.

My challenge can be your challenge. Feel free to set your own goals for the rest of this year and to run with them. You're always welcome to report your progress in a comment on the Journal.

For me personally, there was no writing yesterday, and no writing today or tomorrow. I'll get back at it on Monday. Happily. Trust and type.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “What makes a romance novel a Gen Z hit” inside “Gen Z is driving sales...” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/gen-z-is-driving-sales-of-romance-books-to-the-top-of-bestseller-lists/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 880 words

Writing of **The Jury** (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... 2488 words. Total words to date..... 2488

Day 2..... 0789 words. Total words to date..... 3277

Total fiction words for September..... 3277

Total fiction words for the year..... 69708

Total nonfiction words for September... 2540

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 130770

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 200478

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 1

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 67

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: Along with discussing various aspects of the writing craft, I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. WITD is “the only way” to write, but it is by far the easiest, most liberating, and most fun.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [A New Challenge](#), [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [Goals](#), [thepassivevoice.com](#), [Traditional Publishing](#), [Trust and Type](#)

Dare to Be Bad

September 4, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Topic: Dare to Be Bad
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“Amateurs sit and wait for inspiration. The rest of us just get up and go to work.” Stephen King (Amen. Preach it, brother.)

“Without ambition one starts nothing. Without work one finishes nothing. The prize will not be sent to you. You have to win it.” Ralph Waldo Emerson

Topic: Dare to Be Bad

Anyone who’s followed Dean Wesley Smith very long has heard him use this admonition in his blog. According to Dean, it’s something he and Nina Kiriki Hoffman came up with back in the day, when both were aspiring fiction writers.

The two of them regularly challenged each other, even to the point of writing and sending off a short story to magazine publishers every week. If one of them missed, s/he had to buy the other a steak dinner.

But more than that, they challenged each other to “Dare to be bad,” in other words to follow Heinlein’s Rule 3: “Do not rewrite except to editorial order.” (In later years, Harlan Ellison would add, “And then only if you agree with the editor.”) Write it, spell check it, send it out and start the next story.

According to Dean, once he dared to be bad and stopped revising, editing, and rewriting, his stories started selling. And of course, both “Dare to be bad” and “Do not rewrite” mean exactly the same thing: Trust yourself and all the knowledge you’ve absorbed over the years about structure and characters and setting and scene and pacing.

I’ve told the story here many times of my short story, “Old Suits,” which I thought was the worst piece of garbage I’d ever turned out. But I dared to be bad, slapped a (horrible) cover on it, and published it.

A few weeks later, I received an email from a reader I’d never met. She said the story was among the best she’d ever read and that it reminded her of Hemingway’s style. ([For a free copy of “Old Suits,” click this link.](#) The download will occur automatically.)

I was floored. Since then, I never take my own opinion into account. I realize I’m only one more reader with one opinion, and my opinion is no more important than anyone else’s.

In the first post in “Of Interest,” James Scott Bell talks again in support of writing with the conscious, critical mind. At one point, he even uses Mickey Spillane as an example.

And he’s right. Spillane *didn’t* rest on his laurels, and he *did* continue to improve as a writer. But he didn’t improve by going back over and over and over one novel. Like most of the pulp writers, he improved by always moving forward, practicing and improving his craft by putting new words on the page. Sound familiar?

But don't take it from me. According to John Sutherland in an article for The Guardian, “Spillane had great faith in the slam bang opening, believing that ‘the first page sells the book’. He claimed never to read galleys or rewrite.”

Yep. Like almost all the pulp writers and most long-term professional fiction writers today, he dared to be bad. He risked believing in himself, and it paid off.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “No Risk It, No Biscuit” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/09/no-risk-it-no-biscuit.html>. In which James Scott Bell talks about taking risks, then teaches to take no risks at all.

See “Mickey Spillane” at <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/jul/18/culture.obituaries>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 570 words

Writing of The Jury (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... 2488 words. Total words to date..... 2488

Day 2..... 0789 words. Total words to date..... 3277

Total fiction words for September..... 3277

Total fiction words for the year..... 69708

Total nonfiction words for September... 3110

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 131340

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 201048

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 1

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 67

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: Along with discussing various aspects of the writing craft, I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. WITD is “the only way” to write, but it is by far the easiest, most liberating, and most fun.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [killzoneblog.com](#), [Mickey Spillane](#), [Topic](#), [www.theguardian.com](#)

One Alternative to TinyLetter

September 5, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Topic: One Alternative to TinyLetter
- * Mentorships and More
- * Of Interest

Topic: One Alternative to TinyLetter

I've been looking around at other newsletter services. I've found several "up there" with MailChimp with all the marketing and email-collection tools, etc. But I haven't found even one that compares directly with the no-BS, no-frills TinyLetter.

Then a thought occurred: Most email programs enable you to create "groups" (or whatever name your email program calls them). The idea is, you can gather contacts that are interested in a particular topic into one group.

For example, you might have a group for those interested in Writing or in Ebooks (releases) or members of your Family to whom you often send the same email.

If you form groups, instead of going through your contacts and adding email addresses each time you write an email that you want to share with several contacts, you can write the email, then simply enter the name of the group in the To field, and hit Send. The email will go to everyone in the group.

For example, if I created a group called Journal, I could add each of you to that group and then sidestep the more formal newsletter enabler (currently MailerLite) altogether.

Those who prefer to receive their news via RSS could even still subscribe to the RSS feed (<https://hestanbrough.com/feed>).

There is only one drawback: To receive the email in their inbox, new subscribers would have to email me directly. Then I would add their email address to the group and we'd be off and running.

Finally, to ensure security for all subscribers, I'd also recommend putting your own email address in the To field of any emails you send to a group, and putting the name of the group in the BCC field. All group members would receive the email, but none of them would be able to see any of the other email addresses.

I think using a group might even avoid the possibility of a “spam” accusation, but I don’t know for sure. Overall, this might be something to think about. If anyone has more extensive experience with this, please leave a comment on the site.

Mentorships and More

To pay forward to other writers what I’ve learned, I’m happy to offer this free instructional Journal.

For those who want more directed learning, a little over a month ago I started offering a limited number of very low-cost mentorships at only \$25 per month. At the moment, I can’t accept anymore Mentorship students, but I’ve added another option.

Now, while you’re waiting for a Mentorship spot to open up or if you feel you don’t need a full Mentorship, you can get an Extended Q & A with me for \$15 per month. Both options are now available on the [Mentorships and Extended Q & A](#) page.

I redesigned the page and even added a Donate button to the bottom of the page for those who want to pay one month at a time rather than subscribing.

Check it out, and if you have any questions, feel free to ask.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “5 Similarities Between Your Hero and Villain” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/09/5-similarities-between-your-hero-and-villain.html>. Just in case this speaks to you.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 540 words

Writing of The Jury (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... 2488 words. Total words to date..... 2488

Day 2..... 0789 words. Total words to date..... 3277

Total fiction words for September..... 3277

Total fiction words for the year..... 69708

Total nonfiction words for September... 3650

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 131880

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 201588

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 1

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date...	0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	67
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014).....	217
Short story collections.....	31

Disclaimer: Along with discussing various aspects of the writing craft, I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. WITD is “the only way” to write, but it is by far the easiest, most liberating, and most fun.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Email Groups](#), [Extended Q & A](#), [killzoneblog.com](#), [Mentorships](#)

Inside No. 9 and AI Writing

September 6, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Inside No. 9
- * AI Writing
- * Seriously, What Gives?
- * Of Interest

Inside No. 9

I keep forgetting to mention, if you want to see some really great short stories in film, take a look at *Inside No. 9*, a British black-comedy anthology.

According to the internet, the anthology is “available on NOW TV, BBC iPlayer, Amazon Prime, Netflix, iTunes and YouTube.” I get it through my BritBox subscription.

So what does this have to do with writing? Well, the writing (storytelling) for *Inside No. 9* is excellent. And the scripts are available to purchase if you'd like to study them. (grin)

In paperback, both series (seasons) 1-3 and 4-6 are available for around \$20 each via Amazon, Thriftbooks and other places. The value of these scripts to script writers is obvious. As Neil Gaiman wrote,

“The joy of these scripts is in being able to appreciate the craft and ambition involved in the sharpness of the dialogue, the cunning of the plotting, and the desire never to repeat themselves, as Pemberton and Shearsmith build each episode into a miniaturist treasure. A must for anyone who wants to write for television, or who just wants to see how the magic is done.”

For fiction writers who are not interested in writing scripts, it might also be a good writing exercise to ‘type-in’ one or more *Inside No. 9* stories while omitting stage direction, etc. Again,

as Gaiman wrote, “to see how the magic is done.” (Of course, this would be only for your own experience and training. You can’t legally publish the result.)

Inside No. 9 is also an interesting concept: individual stories all based on the same theme. Something to think about.

AI Writing

I guess I just don’t get it. Why are so many writers so interested in eradicating their own unique, original voice instead of nurturing and developing it?

Based on what I’ve heard about comments at writer boards, and on what I’ve seen and heard personally from members of online and physical writer or critique groups, writer organizations, and even professional advice websites like the Kill Zone blog, the concept of “create” gets a lot of lip service but very little practice.

Almost all would-be fiction writers and almost all Stage 1 and 2 (and a lot of Stage 3) fiction writers depend heavily on their conscious, critical, rational, machine-like mind to construct stories block by block, element by element, instead of trusting their creative subconscious to create stories.

Those writers depend on the safety nets of character sketches, outlines or “sign posts,” revision, outside critiques, rewrites, editing passes, and more.

All that instead of simply witnessing the tale at the time their characters are living it in their creative subconscious and conveying it as it unfolds. It’s such a simple concept to grasp, yet most seem unable to grasp it. The technique remains elusive by making itself so readily available. You have only to trust yourself.

So my question is, if they don’t care enough (or trust themselves enough) to create with their own unique, original voice, why not go the whole way? Why not shut out the creative subconscious and the characters completely and construct a story with AI?

Apparently that’s possible now, or almost so. See “AI Writing” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/ai-writing/>. PG also posted a lot of other excerpts from posts about artificial intelligence.

Among those excerpts, he posted “AI won an art contest, and artists are furious.” (See “Of Interest” for the link.) In a personal comment following the article, PG favorably compares using AI to *construct* stories with using advances in technology (computers) to *record* stories in fixed form, submit them to publishers or publish them, etc.

As I wrote in response to that comment, that analogy is a category mistake:

“The conscious, critical, rational mind exists to protect us from harm and so we may absorb knowledge. Neither it nor AI ‘create’ anything. Both are capable only of construction.

“Using modern technology (computers, etc.) to set in fixed form and deliver what the human creative subconscious has created is one thing. Sitting back enjoying your favorite beverage while a computer constructs a story or other artwork on which you only slap your name is something else entirely.”

I'll stand by that, period. Maybe I'm a dinosaur, but when did being proud of one's own talents and hard-won abilities go out of style?

Seriously, What Gives?

I really, really, really don't understand. Aside from my argument against allowing the meanings of “creation” and “construction” to become blurred and then synonymous with regard to AI, the same argument applies to the conscious, critical mind vs. the creative subconscious.

The conscious, critical mind can only construct (or destruct). Only the creative subconscious can create. Yet even when would-be and early stage writers manage to create something, they immediately second-guess themselves and even invite outside criticism.

This is mind-boggling to me. It makes absolutely no sense. Why are more writers not standing up for themselves and their own abilities? Why are more writers not at least trying to be confident in themselves?

And to carry it a step further, if you can't trust yourself and your own creative subconscious, why in the world would you trust anyone else? I mean, how can anyone outside of yourself know the story that's playing out in your mind better than you do?

Even in my capacity as a professional fiction writing, writing mentor and instructor, I would never presume to alter the content of your story. I can help with how the story is presented and I can tell you when some minor elements are missing or should be rearranged, but content? No way.

But most of all, if witnessing and reporting the story that's unfolding in your mind isn't fun and exciting for you—if you have to turn it into “work” by revising and rewriting and editing what your characters give you—why bother?

Ah, don't worry about it. Depending on how you write, I'm either grouchy today or preaching to the choir. Have a great day.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “What Lucy Taught Me About Writing” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/09/what-lucy-taught-me-about-writing-2.html>.

See “AI won an art contest, and artists are furious” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/ai-won-an-art-contest-and-artists-are-furious/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1000 words

Writing of **The Jury** (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... 2488 words. Total words to date..... 2488

Day 2..... 0789 words. Total words to date..... 3277

Total fiction words for September..... 3277

Total fiction words for the year..... 69708

Total nonfiction words for September... 4650

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 132880

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 202588

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 1

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 67

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: Along with discussing various aspects of the writing craft, I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. WITD is “the only way” to write, but it is by far the easiest, most liberating, and most fun.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [AI Writing](#), [conscious](#), [creative subconscious](#), [critical mind](#), [killzoneblog.com](#), [thepassivevoice.com](#)

A Look at Inara

September 7, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Welcome
- * A Look at Inara
- * Of Interest

Welcome to Lisa B and any other new subscribers we’ve picked up recently. I hope you find some helpful things in the Journal.

A Look at Inara

On [yesterday's post](#), Journal reader Lakshmi commented "I'd love to hear your take on <https://inara.world/>."

Okay, first and foremost, don't depend on me. Always read the privacy notice and any terms and conditions before directly engaging with any new online endeavor. And don't judge them based on what you think they must mean by the words they put on the page. Go specifically by the words on the page. Those are what will matter if you end up in court.

Anyway, Lakshmi's comment was the first time I'd heard of Inara, which bills itself as "The first pay-per-page eBook platform." I'll leave it to others to determine whether it's actually "the first" (um, Amazon). Maybe they mean they're the first to offer texts ONLY on a per-page basis.

After a quick look, I suspect they're probably legitimate, though frankly their requirements for content are considerably tight and, to me, off-putting. More on that later.

0. Don't bother trying to read their "Privacy Notice." It provides several definitions, then says they collect data that users send them (duh). Below that is a table of contents that, no matter where you click, leads back to "What information do we collect?" The tech guy has some work to do. This is less than professional, but it didn't put me off the site completely.

1. According to their Author FAQs, to the question, "Does Inara require exclusivity?" their response is, "No, Inara wants every author to have the fullest experience possible with Inara to engage readers and earn revenue and for readers to discover the books they want to read."

So in answer to the question about exclusivity, their initial response is "No." The way the rest of the response is worded leaves me wondering though.

If any of you choose to list your work with Inara, I suggest first you ask them specifically whether you may list your work with Amazon, Apple, Draft2Digital, etc. simultaneously when you list it with Inara. If their answer is not a resounding Yes, I wouldn't do business with them.

For this next part, visit <https://inara.world/terms-and-policy/> (last updated January 26, 2022), then click the Terms and Conditions tab and scroll down.

2. I'm a little bothered by the requirements listed in section "9. User Generated Contributions." I'll let you read those in full for yourself For some reason they don't allow me to copy/paste anything from that page.

The problem is, I write fiction that features strong male and female characters in often tense situations in SF, western, action-adventure, thriller, and mystery genre. Anything I might choose to upload to Inara would undoubtedly fall into one or more of their banned categories.

For example, there's a very good chance, especially in today's hyper-sensitive, appearances-are-everything America, that my characters will say or do something that's "inaccurate," and they will do so specifically to "mislead" other characters or even (gasp!) the reader.

There's also a very good chance that some of my characters might sometimes engage in "obscene, ... violent, harassing, ... or otherwise objectionable" behavior and/or utterances "as determined by" the good folks who run Inara. (Maybe the list of problem areas would be shorter if they told us what they DO allow.)

Furthermore, given the nature of my fiction, the characters and situations in anything I could upload to Inara might well "ridicule, mock, disparage, intimidate, or abuse" other characters and maybe even the readers. Who knows?

3. All of the above said, according to the third paragraph under "10. Contribution License," at least Inara claims no ownership to contributors' work. So that's some good news.

4. For anyone who's wondering, according to "18. Governing Law," Inara apparently is physically located in Arizona.

5. I was more than a little bothered that I was not able to highlight, copy and paste any part of their Terms and Conditions into this post. Still, everything's there to be read and understood, and if one ever had to go to court against them I suppose one could capture a screenshot.

Given Inara's apparent misgivings about fiction, I personally will hold off submitting or contributing anything to them for now. If any of you learn anymore about them—facts only please, not your opinions of what you think they probably mean—please either email me or leave a comment and I'll pass it along to everyone else.

Likewise, if any of you already have dealings with them, please pass that along too.

UPDATE: Upon returning to Inara to look it over more closely, on the Getting Started: Authors page, I found this: "Note: you will need a smartphone to set up your Dropp account and Digital Wallet." So I more than likely won't be using Inara personally.

I realize I'm a dinosaur, but if I can't access my Drop account and Digital Wallet through my PC, I'm just not interested.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Creative Spaces" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/09/creative-spaces.html>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 780 words

Writing of **The Jury** (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... 2488 words. Total words to date..... 2488

Day 2..... 0789 words. Total words to date..... 3277

Total fiction words for September..... 3277

Total fiction words for the year..... 69708

Total nonfiction words for September... 5430

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 133660

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 203368

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 1

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 67

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: Along with discussing various aspects of the writing craft, I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. WITD is “the only way” to write, but it is by far the easiest, most liberating, and most fun.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Inara \(new platform\)](#), [killzoneblog.com](#)

Working with Serious Writers

September 8, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Topic: Working with Serious Writers
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“The scariest moment is always just before you start. After that, things can only get better.”
Stephen King

“You can, you should, and if you're brave enough to start, you will.” Stephen King

“You go to work. You don't wait for inspiration to strike. You sit down and write. If you don't feel like writing, you write anyway. Writers' block is an affectation.” Elaine Viets on writing fiction

Topic: Working with Serious Writers

A mentorship slot just came open. If you're serious about learning and applying the craft and you'd like to significantly cut the learning curve, email me or visit <https://hestanbrough.com/new-mentorships/>. You can choose between a full mentorship or an extended Q & A session.

To be honest, if you're one of those who believe writing is some sort of elevated calling, you probably shouldn't apply—well, unless you want me to disabuse you of that notion. (grin) I can do that.

But if you want that, chances are you're a serious writer, or could be. The differences between the starry-eyed writing-is-a-calling folks and the serious writers is obvious.

The starry-eyed are a study in contrasts:

- They're enrapt with the idea of being a Writer or an Author to the point that either word practically evokes the sound of an angelic chorus.
- They talk a lot about writing, but they don't write often or much. And because of that, most of them never achieve their dreams.
- They aspire to individual greatness and talk about writing being a lonely endeavor, but in reality they see writing as a team effort that involves critique partners and beta readers.
- They believe, erroneously, that the longer they hover over a single story or novel and the more attention they give it, the better it will be. Each story or novel is of maximum importance to them, as is the relentless pursuit of perfection.
- They depend on inspiration and are certain it will strike at any moment, yet most of the time they spend in the chair is spent on social media, games, and other non-writing endeavors. (Often, the "original ideas" of those who actually write and publish are based on actual events.)
- They dream big, but they depend heavily on faith, luck, and input from conscious, critical minds (both their own and others').

Serious writers are different:

- They just want to tell stories. They can't quite believe they can actually earn money doing something they love to do.
- THAT they write is all-important. What they write, the individual story or novel, isn't important at all.
- They understand that the characters, not they, are living the story, and they trust the characters to convey it.
- They write their very best at their current skill level. Then they submit or publish that story or novel and move on to the next one.

- They're hungry to learn. To that end, they study the writing of those who are farther along the road.
- They practice incessantly. They show up every day, put their fingers on the keyboard, and write.
- They dream like anyone else, but they also set and meet or exceed daily goals in pursuit of those dreams.

Which brings me back to the topic. One of my mentoring students, [Monica Arac de Nyeko](#), just finished her mentorship. She was and is the epitome of a serious writer.

In one month, she learned to leave her fears and doubts behind. Mentoring her was an easy job for me. I only had to guide and encourage her a little.

Now she trusts herself and her characters and writes into the dark. This morning in an email she wrote,

“I am on the 14th chapter of my novel now. I increased my word count from 2,500 to 5,000 yesterday seeing as I was doing so well. So far so good. 5,000 does not feel like a stretch.

“Something else that pleasantly surprised me was that since I had written into the dark, as I returned to each chapter, I had no memory of what had actually happened. In that sense then, returning to each chapter was surprising to me and a lot of fun. It is all fresh and exciting.”

I shared the above excerpt with you because it mimics what I've heard over and over again from every writer who has successfully put those fears and doubts aside and learned to trust themselves and their characters.

And just to be clear, what Monica and others have achieved is not my accomplishment. I was only blessed to be able to help them along a little on their journey. I prodded them, maybe, but they did the work. Congratulations to Monica, and to all the others who have made the leap from fear to trusting themselves.

Writing fiction is a job unlike most because you can make a living doing what you love to do.

On the other hand, it's also a job that is *exactly* like any other in one respect: to do it well, you have to give it the time, attention, and respect it deserves.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “After 45 years, the 5-billion-year legacy of the Voyager 2 interstellar probe is just beginning” at <https://www.space.com/nasa-voyager-2-spacecraft-billion-year-legacy>.

See “The Workshops in the Fey Kickstarter” at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/the-workshops-in-the-fey-kickstarter/>.

See “On the Other Side of the Microphone” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/09/on-the-other-side-of-the-microphone.html>. Interesting, and some very good “work ethic” stuff at around 20 minutes.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 900 words

Writing of **The Jury** (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... 2488 words. Total words to date..... 2488

Day 2..... 0789 words. Total words to date..... 3277

Total fiction words for September..... 3277

Total fiction words for the year..... 69708

Total nonfiction words for September... 6330

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 134560

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 204268

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 1

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 67

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: Along with discussing various aspects of the writing craft, I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. WITD is “the only way” to write, but it is by far the easiest, most liberating, and most fun.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [killzoneblog.com](#), [Mentorships](#), [Serious Writers](#), [Space.com](#)

Queen Elizabeth II

September 9, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

Queen Elizabeth II — a minor homage

My heartfelt condolences to everyone who loved and held in high esteem Queen Elizabeth II, the gracious mother and grandmother to the world. The queen died yesterday at Balmoral in Scotland. This special edition of the Journal is dedicated to her memory.

This morning at 4 a.m. was my first time back in my writing office (the Hovel) since my wife called from the house yesterday to tell me the queen had died.

Suddenly writing seem an unimportant, trivial matter, especially while the rest of the world is taking a collective breath and mourning with a collective sigh. Yes, life goes on, but it needn't do so crassly, without slowing to offer a nod of respect.

The crown passed to Princess Elizabeth upon the death of her father while she was on tour in Kenya in February 1952 on his behalf. She ascended to the throne at that moment, though Winston Churchill delayed her official coronation until June, 1953.

For me personally, the queen's passing has the greatest impact since the passing of Pope John Paul II. I'm neither British nor Catholic, but both were excellent role models and great people whom I admired and will miss. Would that we all might conduct ourselves as each of them did.

Here are a few links you might find of interest regarding the great lady.

See "Queen Elizabeth II Dies at 96 After 70 Years on the Throne" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/queen-elizabeth-ii-dies-at-96-after-70-years-on-the-throne/>.

See "Queen Elizabeth II: A life in pictures" at <https://www.cnn.com/2022/09/08/queen-elizabeth-ii-a-life-in-pictures.html>.

See "How Britain has changed since Elizabeth II was crowned in 1953" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/how-britain-has-changed-since-elizabeth-ii-was-crowned-in-1953/>.

See "[Operation London Bridge:] Britain's plan for when Queen Elizabeth II dies" at <https://www.politico.eu/article/queen-elizabeth-death-plan-britain-operation-london-bridge/>.

For a refreshingly politically unbiased news source, see "1440" at <https://join1440.com/>.

Talk with you again soon.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 280 words

Writing of The Jury (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... 2488 words. Total words to date..... 2488

Day 2..... 0789 words. Total words to date..... 3277

Total fiction words for September..... 3277

Total fiction words for the year..... 69708

Total nonfiction words for September... 6610

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 134840
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 204548

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 1
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 67
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: Along with discussing various aspects of the writing craft, I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. WITD is “the only way” to write, but it is by far the easiest, most liberating, and most fun.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [1440.com](#), [cnbc.com](#), [politico.eu](#), [Queen Elizabeth II](#), [thepassivevoice.com](#)

It's Been a Week

September 10, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Welcome
- * It's Been a Week
- * Succumbing to Unreasoning Fear
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

“And how do we discern character?” A question posed by an anonymous AP writer in an article about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

My response: Easy. Compare the words a person says and the promises s/he makes with the actions s/he takes. But maybe that's just me.

Welcome to Linda C and anyone else visiting the Journal over the past few days. I hope you find the Journal a valuable resource. If I can help in any way with your writing, feel free to email me.

Also, note that the Journal is fully searchable. Use [the search box in the sidebar at the Journal site](#) to search for posts on topics you'd like to research.

It's Been a Week

From an enjoyable visit with my son to the death of Queen Elizabeth II to the anniversary of 9/11 tomorrow, what a week it's already been.

Bookended by those two tragic events, today would have been my mother's 86th birthday had she lived a few more months. And finally, we in the Stanbrough camp are anticipating some personal news within the next few days that might go either way. Please, no comments or questions. I mention this only to preface the following.

All of which causes me to wonder, what level of importance for a given event is enough to distract one from doing one's job: writing?

Of course, I'm certain it's different for different people with different histories and personalities, but generally speaking, or perhaps just for yourself—

- How big a disruption has to occur to interrupt your writing?
- How big a disruption has to occur to stop you writing altogether?
- And the biggie—Is the event itself the actual cause of the disruption in your routine? Or is the event only an excuse that justifies you bowing to the critical mind and not writing for awhile (or ever again)?

I'm not asking these questions from some lofty height. I hope they will serve as a catalyst to put you on your guard.

Succumbing to Unreasoning Fear

So that you might be urged-on by my successes and forewarned by my failures or shortcomings, I've always tried to share both with you. Here's another truth: I haven't written much—even during the past week after starting a brand new novel, and even years after I cleared out all the myths—because I succumbed to an unreasoning fear from my critical mind.

Nope, even I am not immune, even after the millions of words of fiction I've written. So be on your guard. Protect your writing process from external forces and fight off every (even minor) attempt of your critical mind to slow or stop you.

To help with that, if you would like a copy of my book, *Quiet the Critical Voice (and Write Fiction)*, email me at harveystanbrough@gmail.com. Let me know which electronic format you'd like—PDF, .mobi, or .epub—and I'll send it out free. Or if you'd rather, you can purchase a copy at <https://books2read.com/u/bWRDNW>.

For one reason or another—or having taken advantage of one *excuse* or another—I’ve allowed myself to be distracted for the past full week. I haven’t written any fiction for those 7 days.

Although I do mourn the passing of the Queen, I could have watched an hour of BBC coverage and then gone back to my novel. I didn’t really know my mother, and as much as I despise those persons and situations who brought about the events of 9/11, those actual events are far enough in the past that I can write through my memories of them.

I feel the same way about my memories of the senseless slayings of John and Robert Kennedy (though I wasn’t personally a fan of either) and of Martin Luther King Jr. and Pope John Paul II, two of my very few personal heroes.

(If you’re wondering, King for his sensitivity to and insight into ignorance and its role in the human condition, and John Paul II for his recognition that physical pain is part of the human experience and something that should be experienced and its lessons absorbed.)

I haven’t even fully identified yet the critical-mind fear to which I’ve succumbed, but I’m close on its trail. I *believe* I’ve made writing a particular work “important,” thereby stopping myself cold. Instead of moving smoothly through it, I’m hovering. As I’ve said countless times, making any work important spells the end of that work.

But bigger than that, I believe I’ve also imbued the *idea* of getting back to writing like I used to with a sense of importance. Which also stops me cold and which, on the surface, is just stupid on my part.

The truth is, though fiction and the escape it provides is important to certain readers, overall, fiction is not important in the slightest. None of it matters. If I never wrote another word of fiction, I might be missed by my more avid readers/fans for a week or so. Then they would move on to other authors and other stories. For example, how much would your life change if Hemingway (or your favorite author) never lived?

Anyway, I will nail down the fear soon, and then I’ll put it behind me and get back to telling stories. In the meantime, today I’ll open the novel, read through what I have so far, then either trash it and start over or try to continue with what I have.

Failing either of those possibilities, I’ll start something else. If I’m to be a fiction writer again, that’s what I have to do. Fiction writers write fiction.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “How 9/11 caused Queen Elizabeth to break a 600-year-old royal tradition” at <https://www.wearethemighty.com/articles/how-9-11-caused-queen-elizabeth-to-break-a-600-year-old-royal-tradition/>.

See “King Charles III delivers first address...” at <https://apnews.com/article/queen-elizabeth-britain-monarchy-a83dba4dd181f51591531de2ce0249c0>. There are other links in the article.

See “How this 34-year-old mom makes 6 figures as a book narrator” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/how-this-34-year-old-mom-makes-6-figures-as-a-book-narrator-i-get-to-work-my-dream-job-from-home/>.

See “First of its kind: Israeli food company produced highly marbled 3D-printed beef morsels” at <https://interestingengineering.com/innovation/highy-marbled-3d-printed-beef-morsels>. Star Trek replicators, anyone?

See “Fun Video” at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/fun-video-2/>.

See “To Read or Not To Read” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/09/to-read-or-not-to-read.html>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 950 words

Writing of The Jury (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... 2488 words. Total words to date..... 2488

Day 2..... 0789 words. Total words to date..... 3277

Total fiction words for September..... 3277

Total fiction words for the year..... 69708

Total nonfiction words for September... 7560

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 135790

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 205498

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 1

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 67

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: Along with discussing various aspects of the writing craft, I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. WITD is “the only way” to write, but it is by far the easiest, most liberating, and most fun.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [critical mind](#), [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [interestingengineering.com](#), [killzoneblog.com](#), [King Charles III](#), [Queen Elizabeth II](#), [SF food replicator](#), [thepassivevoice.com](#)

Grasping the Most Difficult Basic Technique

September 11, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Slow Start
- * A New Routine
- * Topic: Grasping the Most Difficult Basic Technique
- * Of Interest

Slow Start

With the daily news updates and the succession of events that will take place between now and Monday, September 19, I'll make a slower start than I anticipated in getting back to writing fiction.

No matter. It will come. I'd rather my progress is slow than not at all.

A New Routine

As part of my attempt to reboot myself as a fiction writer, I'm also starting something new with my own daily routine.

Instead of researching, writing and posting the Journal each morning, I plan to write fiction in the mornings and research and write the Journal later in the day after I've finished writing fiction. The only difference to you is that you'll be getting some of the links in "Of Interest" a day after they were previously available in the Journal.

The Journal will still go live at 10 a.m. each morning. For example, I wrote this particular edition on Saturday afternoon, September 10, and pre-posted it to be mailed out on Sunday morning, September 11 at the usual time.

This one will contain a blank under Numbers for fiction. After looking over two different openings for *The Jury*, I've decided to throw them both out. I will either recast the story from the beginning (write a new opening) or I'll move on to write something else entirely. There's at least a good chance that "something else" will be the first novel of a new series, though at the moment I have zero idea what it might be.

Yes, if I don't finish *The Jury* I'll be breaking Heinlein's Rule 2. But I hope doing so will help me get back to following Rules 1, 2 and 3 in the very near future.

Topic: Grasping the Most Difficult Basic Technique

Arguably, the most difficult basic technique to grasp is trusting yourself, your creative subconscious, and your characters. But if you think about it, that's all really one thing said in three different ways. The key word is Trust.

You may choose to exercise that trust in the way that makes the most sense and/or is the easiest for you—you may choose to trust yourself *or* your creative subconscious *or* your characters—but whichever you choose, there is no other path to being a long-term, prolific professional writer.

I started by simply making a conscious decision to trust myself, a decision I had to reaffirm several times over the first couple of weeks. But really, that was an easy enough commitment to make. Because if it didn't work out, what was the worst that could happen?

Nothing. There were no real-life coincidences.

I couldn't ruin my reputation or my career as a writer (fears I hear often from beginning writers), because at the time I didn't have either one. And nobody, least of all other writers, would come to my house and jeer because I was unable to trust myself. As if.

On the other hand, once I proved I could write better and more easily by trusting myself, *that's* when a lot of other writers and even would-be writers started telling me I was going about storytelling in the wrong way. Little did they know. (grin) All the while, I just smiled at them, nodded, and kept writing and publishing.

And it only got better. After a few years of writing fairly prolifically (publishing several novels per year), I had a personal epiphany: It was easier for me to trust my *characters* even than it was to trust myself or my creative subconscious. That minor change in attitude made all the difference.

I saw my characters as living creatures who actually existed. Maybe in my mind, maybe in another dimension I was tapping into with my creative subconscious. But where they exist doesn't matter. What matters is that they do.

Real humans' lives go on whether or not you're personally aware of it, right? Likewise, my characters—just like my neighbors or relatives or friends or strangers across town or in the neighboring state or in another country or on another continent—live and continue living their lives, their stories, whether or not I look in on them.

That epiphany occurred on December 1, 2019. I know the specific date because that's when I started turning out a novel no less than once a month, and for a while, every 14 days.

That level of productivity continued for well over a year, from December 2019 right through August 6 of 2021. During that time (19 months and 6 days) I turned out 23 novels and 20 short stories.

In the novels alone, I wrote and published 1,102,254 words. In the short stories, I wrote and published an additional 45,308 words. As an aside, for those 19 months I averaged only 60,398 words per month, or about 2,013 words per day. Two hours of work. Total slacker. (grin)

The thing is, if I can do it, so can anyone else who can dedicate two hour of every day, on average, to their fiction.

But my story takes a downturn that yours doesn't have to take. Since that time ended, I've written only one novel and no short stories. Which brings us to the present.

Recently, a new writing friend (LJ) wrote in an email, "I find just following my characters around harder than I would have thought. I wish you could give me a secret to do that, but I know that doesn't even exist."

Fortunately for my friend and for some of you as well, that "secret" DOES exist. Here's my reply:

The only advice I can give you regarding "following" the characters around is to NOT follow them.

The key here is that The characters have invited you in. Not as a participant in the story, but as an ever-present witness and the Recorder of the Story. (Stephen King calls himself his characters' stenographer.)

With that in mind,

- don't ascend into an authorial ivory tower from which you can oversee and control everything about the story, and
- don't even go down to perch along the parapets at the edge of the story and try to watch and overhear the story from there.

Instead,

- trade your authorial robes for jeans and sneakers and maybe a t-shirt. Then
- roll off the parapet into the story and race through it *with* the characters. You probably won't always be able to keep up. That's what cycling is for.

So as you write, just

- record the story—what happens and what is said—as it unfolds all around you. Then,
- once an hour or so, take a break (even if only to walk away and back), and then
- read over AS A READER, FOR FUN what you've written. But let your fingers rest on the keyboard as you read.

- Don't "look-for" ANYthing as you read (just read, just like when you're reading someone else's novel), but if anything pops out at you, fix it. Then,
- when you get back to the white space, keep writing as you continue to race through the story with the characters.

When I cycle and get back to the white space, I sometimes hear one of my more snarky characters say, "Ready? Think you can keep up this time?"

Seriously, folks, if you can bring yourself to trust yourself, your creative subconscious, and/or your characters, you'll be miles ahead of most contemporary would-be writers and actual writers today. Well, barring the Stage 3, 4, and 5 writers who already know this stuff and are already practicing it. And as a bonus, you'll have more fun writing than you ever could have imagined.

As you all know, having read [yesterday's edition of the Journal](#), I'm right there with you, though my problem is slightly different.

So I'm just saying, take heart. You really can do this.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Revisiting the "Magic Bullet" in the JFK Assassination" at <http://dyingwords.net/the-magic-bullet-in-the-jfk-assassination/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1310 words

Writing of (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... XXXX words. Total words to date..... XXXX

Total fiction words for September..... 3277

Total fiction words for the year..... 69708

Total nonfiction words for September... 8870

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 137100

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 206808

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 1

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 67

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: Along with discussing various aspects of the writing craft, I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. WITD is “the only way” to write, but it is by far the easiest, most liberating, and most fun.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [DyingWords.net](#), [Garry Rodgers](#), [Topic](#), [Trust](#), [Trust the Characters](#), [Trust the Creative Subconscious](#), [Trust yourself](#)

Why I Talk About WITD So Often in the Journal

September 13, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Why I Talk About WITD So Often in the Journal
- * Abandoning the Experiment
- * Of Interest

Why I Teach WITD So Often in the Journal

[Bob Calverley](#), a long-time reader and writing friend, commented on yesterday’s post. You may [read his comment](#) before you continue below to read my response, but the response also stands alone. My apology in advance for this lengthy post:

First, overall, I can guarantee this Journal will never exceed in value the price of a subscription. But that’s all right. It’s my thoughts on writing, nothing more. I have been personally steeped in the myths myself, and I have been free of them (with Heinlein’s Rules, WITD, and cycling) since early 2014.

So who better to talk about those techniques? In the 62 years before I found them, I wrote a few short stories and spent three years preparing the plot (outlining) for a novel. I never wrote it.

In the 8 years since I learned to trust my characters, I’ve written 67 novels, 8 novellas, and well over 200 short stories. (Everyone reading this may, of course, draw their own conclusions.)

So again, who better to compare the two? And to my knowledge, I’m the only advocate of Heinlein’s Rules, WITD, and cycling who talks about them regularly. That’s why I talk so much and so often about them.

I certainly don’t do it for personal gain. After all, whether you write into the dark or remain mired in the myths doesn’t matter to me in any real way. When asked, I even give away copies of the two books I’ve written on the topics. That’s how much I want to spread the word. And this Journal is free, and all the archives in this Journal—a master’s class in writing fiction—are free.

On the other hand, literally thousands of advocates talk endlessly about the importance of setting the plot in advance of writing, then revising, getting critiques, rewriting, etc. And oddly enough, many of them have written books on the topics and make a pretty good living selling them.

I wonder, how is it that nobody ever seems to get tired of hearing them? But they're glad you don't. Because as long as writers remain mired in the myths, they'll continue to buy books on plotting, building characters, world-building, writing settings and scenes, revising and rewriting, etc. ad nauseam.

But to your specific points...

1. WITD is about allowing fictional characters to tell the story that they, not the fiction writer, are living. I never, ever, not even one time suggested that WITD is suitable for nonfiction, *especially* reportage, and especially in the context of dialogue. Nor would I.

I have been misquoted and things I've said have been quoted verbatim but purposely taken out of context to serve the journalist's own ends. That's why I no longer write blurbs for others' books or speak to journalists. (And just in case any proponents of today's "advocacy journalism" are looking in, that goes double for you.)

You wrote a personal admission: "[S]ometimes, I make mistakes when I'm writing fiction. So I find that I have to fix things in my fictional stories. That makes me a slow writer." I see that as a request for help even if it wasn't.

As I write into the dark, I have trouble keeping up with my characters as they race through the story too. The difference is, I *cycle back* (remain in the creative subconscious mind) to let the characters "fix things" instead of reading purposefully with my conscious, critical mind, looking for things to fix (revise or rewrite). Trusting my characters so that I don't have to hover over every manuscript revising and rewriting is what makes me seem a "fast" writer.

And to your, "I wish I could write faster," I can only say, you could. Trust your characters. Let them tell the story that they, not you, are living. You don't know in advance where it's going, but they do. Don't talk to me or anyone else about it. Just try it on your own and see what happens.

This is actually a great example of why I keep talking about WITD and cycling and striving to come at it in different ways. What a person doesn't get when it's delivered in one way, s/he'll often get when it's delivered in another way.

2. I also have never said there is a "vast conspiracy" or any conspiracy of English (or literature) teachers, et al who are purposely perpetuating the myths. Most of them don't even know that pre-plotting (fiction), revising, rewriting, seeking external critiques, etc. ARE fear-based myths. They're just teaching what they've been taught.

Nor do most of them know about WITD, and if you tell them, they'll almost immediately come back with "Oh, but *I'm* talking about *quality* writing" or some such bovine excrement. Because

of the myths of writing to which they've been exposed their entire lives, they believe "writing fast" (another myth) equals sloppy work.

The myths about writing literally permeate society.

Even in fictional television shows, (detective shows, sitcoms, etc.)—shows written by professional fiction writers—when they do a show that includes anything about a novel or novelist, the novel took years to write and writing it was a terrible strain on the author, blah blah blah.

Notably, there are a few shows that, even in script format, are written into the dark. *Better Call Saul* is one example. When asked about the surprising twists and turns of the plot, one of the two writers said they don't plan anything, that they just go where the characters lead them.

3. You wrote, "I think you are a little too hard on writers who fall off or jump off the WITD wagon."

Yeah, okay, I guess I have to agree with this one. As I so harshly wrote in yesterday's post (and have written many times before) "[I]f you DO try the new technique and fail ... you can easily return to what you were doing before you tried the new way, right? No harm, no foul." (grin)

Yes, to be fair, I inserted the ellipsis in place of the omitted "or, more likely, decide you don't look all that good in sweat beads" from my quote above. Guess I should have added another (grin) there.

But no matter. You're right. I DO believe feeling threatened by WITD is rooted in fear, primarily fear of losing control of the story, of giving over control to the characters. I believe if you're used to setting the plot in advance of writing, then consciously revising, seeking external critiques, consciously rewriting, etc., you will feel fear if you give WITD an honest try. And I believe all of that because I've been there.

But again, that sense of trepidation just means you're on the right track. The fact that you suffer the effects of fear when you even think about writing into the dark kind of proves the concept frightens you.

Frankly, I was amazed that WITD worked when I decided to really try it back in 2014—I had set out to disprove it, after all—and I'm still amazed with every short story or novel I write. It's just that freeing.

With this one little technique—learning to quiet your critical mind and trust yourself, your creative subconscious, or your characters to tell the story that they, not you, are living—a whole new world opens up.

So why in the world would I NOT want to share that with others? And because the Journal is gaining new subscribers who have never heard of Heinlein's Rules or Writing Into the Dark or cycling, I continue to talk about it.

But as I wrote earlier, I don't preach WITD for personal gain. Can the writers who perpetuate the myths and write how-to books based on them say the same thing?

Whether you write into the dark or remain mired in the myths doesn't matter to me in any real way. Learning to trust yourself, your creative subconscious, or your characters and write into the dark benefits only you.

Conversely, learning to trust in your own abilities isn't something anyone else can do for you. You have to try it—really try it—for yourself. As always, it's your choice.

Abandoning the Experiment

I'm abandoning my plan to postpone writing the Journal until the day's end. Bob C helped me realize writing the Journal and passing along what I know is my actual job. It's what my donors and patrons pay me to do, and I'm grateful.

As it has been since early 2014, fiction writing will be my reward for doing my job. It will be my escape from reality. Dropping in on old friends, especially those who have absolutely no interest in me personally, good or bad, but only want to tell their story, remains my greatest pleasure.

What time or times of the day I slip away to indulge is something I'll have to figure out. But that's all right. My goal is to write at least one novel per month, beginning with this month, for the rest of this year. Counting today, I still have 17 days left in this month, so easy peasy. I just have to decide what to write.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Queen Elizabeth II: A day-by-day guide from now to the funeral" at <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-62861617>.

See "The Villain's Journey" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/09/the-villains-journey.html>. Learn, absorb, then let go, trust, and WITD.

See "The Words 'I Wanted' Do Not Belong in Book Reviews" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/the-words-i-wanted-do-not-belong-in-book-reviews/>.

See "A New App For Serializing Backlist" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/a-new-app-for-serializing-backlist/>.

See "Why Do We Do Kickstarters?" at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/why-do-we-do-kickstarters/>.

See "Not Just Another Post on POV" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/not-just-another-post-on-pov%ef%bf%bc/>. Again, read, absorb, then let go, trust, and WITD.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1460 words

Writing of (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... XXXX words. Total words to date..... XXXX

Total fiction words for September..... 3277

Total fiction words for the year..... 69708

Total nonfiction words for September... 11510

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 139740

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 209448

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 1

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 67

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: Along with discussing various aspects of the writing craft, I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. WITD is not “the only way” to write, but it is by far the easiest, most liberating, and most fun.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [BBC.com](#), [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [killzoneblog.com](#), [thepassivevoice.com](#), [Why I talk about WITD](#)

When a Story Stalls

September 14, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

* Topic: When a Story Stalls

* Of Interest

Topic: When a Story Stalls

This is another topic I've touched on before, but it bears repeating. One of my mentoring students mentioned that sometimes his writing bogs down.

When that happens, I promise, the best thing you can do is trust your characters and just write the next sentence that occurs to you. Then write the next sentence, then the next and the next and the next, and soon the story will be flowing again. Simple as it sounds, this works almost every time.

If it doesn't work, check one other thing: Sometimes the story stalls because you've written past the end of a scene or chapter or even the story or novel itself.

If you think that might be the problem, back up a few to several paragraphs and read what you've written. Often you'll see where the scene or chapter ended.

If that's the case, go ahead and start the next scene or chapter, then just write the next sentence and the next as described above. If it was the end of the story (or novel), of course, you can take a break and then start the next one.

A comment from Dawn Turner: I've had a story stall out for a reason you didn't list, Harvey.

Simply put – when I've injected myself into the story and a character says, "Hold up right there, missy!" They refuse to talk until I go back and figure out where I forced the story to go the way I wanted (for whatever STUPID reason I thought at the time seemed brilliant).

Once I fix wherever I didn't honor THEIR voice(s), things move right along. Happens most often when I have too many distractions and, thus, end up walking away for a while and have WAY too much time to THINK about what SHOULD be next. Only rarely, when I'm able to just sit and write without breaking flow.

Tomorrow, another technique I recently shared with a mentoring student.

By the way, no mentoring slots are currently available, but I'd be happy to put you on a waiting list if you want. Or you could sign up for the slightly less-expensive [Extended Q & A](#).

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Handheld laser device can quickly diagnose astronaut health in space" at <http://r.smartbrief.com/resp/pytCKiDunDtzMgBCifPauBWcNJbLc>. Tricorder, anyone?

See "Serialization" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/serialization/>.

See "Flooded with AI-generated images..." at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/flooded-with-ai-generated-images-some-art-communities-ban-them-completely/>. See PG's take.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 280 words

Writing of (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... XXXX words. Total words to date..... XXXX

Total fiction words for September.....	3277
Total fiction words for the year.....	69708
Total nonfiction words for September...	11790
Total nonfiction words for the year.....	140020
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog).....	209728
Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date.....	1
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date...	0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	67
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014).....	217
Short story collections.....	31

Disclaimer: Along with discussing various aspects of the writing craft, I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. WITD is “the only way” to write, but it is by far the easiest, most liberating, and most fun.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [thepassivevoice.com](#), [Topic](#), [When a story stalls](#)

The Short Story as Adjunct to the Novel

September 15, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * A quick note
- * Topic: The Short Story as Adjunct to the Novel
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“When you start a new trail equipped with courage, strength, and conviction, the only thing that can stop you is you.” Ruby Bridges

“People sleep peaceably in their beds at night only because rough men stand ready to do violence on their behalf.” George Orwell (Story ideas, anyone? Other than A Few Good Men, I mean?)

A quick note—Please be sure to read [Dawn T’s comment on yesterday’s post](#). She briefly and succinctly completes the post. Thanks, Dawn!

Topic: The Short Story as Adjunct to the Novel

A few days ago, another mentoring student asked about “worldbuilding,” a concept often referred to in the fantasy and SF genres, especially when the “world” is someplace other than

Earth. The notion that conscious worldbuilding is required as you write is a huge, major myth being propagated throughout the writing world.

There's nothing intrinsically wrong with consciously constructing the world in which your fantasy or SF stories will take place. For example, thinking through what clothing and shelter and machines and filters and other apparatus and systems will be necessary to ensure the survival and comfort of colonists at lunar or other extra-planetary colonies is fine.

But if you choose to do that, treat it like any other research project. Brainstorm, etc. completely *outside* the story, not while you're writing. Don't allow your conscious, critical mind into your fiction at any stage.

The proper use of your conscious mind is to research and learn. So use it for that. Brainstorming the world and environment your colonists will live in is no different than researching the square mile that lies at the center of Moscow or Montreal or Marseilles before you write a story set in that locale.

Then, when you're ready to write the story or novel, do that strictly from the creative subconscious. As always, it's the characters' story, but they've invited you to come along. So race through the story with them, but don't give a thought to worldbuilding.

What you learned during research or brainstorming seeped through into your creative subconscious. Your characters will pull what they need and apply it as necessary. That's one way of doing it.

What I recommend, though, is to trust your characters in the first place to reveal the world as the story unfolds. After all, they're actually living in that world, whereas you can only imagine it. Best of all, it costs you nothing to try. And it will actually save you all that time you would have spent brainstorming.

I've written numerous SF short stories and novels, and in all of those I simply followed along and recorded the characters' story as they lived it. That included any world building. At least two of my stand-alone, non-related SF novels took place in the same lunar colony, a complex colony that my characters created on the fly. (grin)

If you'd like to see an example of this kind of creation, feel free to download (free) [this copy of "The Stipplesuit,"](#) a short story I wrote. The "world" in this case is a complex piece of protective clothing. It's so complex, in fact, it might have been a prime candidate for conscious thought and piece-by-piece construction. Yet again, my characters described the suit on the fly. I just wrote it all down.

Finally to the topic of this post. My mentoring student is in the middle of a novel. But worldbuilding has him stymied. Stopping to worldbuild interrupted the flow of the novel.

His exact question was, "Any advice on worldbuilding? Or should I say, trusting your characters to reveal the world?"

My response? “You said it exactly right: Trust your characters to reveal the world. They’re living on it, after all. But your critical mind pounces on that [the fact that the world isn’t familiar old Earth] and tries to take over—precisely because you’ve heard so often and so many times that you, the writer, have to ‘build’ the world.”

Then I took it a step further. I wanted to give him a way to keep writing fiction instead of stopping to worldbuild with the conscious, critical mind and then return to the story. This is what I now call “the story as adjunct.”

I see this as a third alternative to consciously brainstorming the world or simply continuing to write the novel and trust the characters. It’s also a good way to ease yourself into learning to trust your characters:

“Try picking a character (or two) and just writing his or her experience with One Event (so a short story). It might not even be one of your current “main” characters. But whomever.

“Forget about the novel itself (for now) and just write a short story for fun, but based in the same world. There have to be little things going on off to the side of your main story line. Write those. Write three or four or twenty of them.

“Because the short story isn’t ‘important’ (like the ‘epic’ novel is [grin]) your critical mind will let your creative subconscious play. [As a bonus], your focus on the character and the event will ease you back into writing from the creative subconscious. And chances are, the attributes of the world will emerge in the stories. Then, you can easily plug the short stories into the novel as chapters or scenes or whatever. Or not. Up to you.

‘BUT [*and this is important, folks*] even if you don’t use the short stories (or all of them) in the novel, you’ve shown your critical mind you can write without it, and that will make your return to the novel easier.

“As another bonus, writing the short stories might open the way for new novels. Just smile, write and have fun.”

Of course, this is only scratching the surface of his mentorship. As is the case with all my mentoring students, he and I have and will talk about many more topics, whatever he needs, over the course of his mentorship.

As I mentioned yesterday, no mentoring slots are currently available, but I’d be happy to put you on a waiting list if you want. Or you could sign up for the slightly less-expensive [Extended Q & A](#).

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “The Value of Knowledge and Effort” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/09/the-value-of-knowledge-and-effort.html>. Strictly for fun. Beyond that, it doesn’t matter.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1080 words

Writing of (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... XXXX words. Total words to date..... XXXX

Total fiction words for September..... 3277

Total fiction words for the year..... 69708

Total nonfiction words for September... 12870

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 141100

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 210808

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 1

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 67

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: Along with discussing various aspects of the writing craft, I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. WITD is “the only way” to write, but it is by far the easiest, most liberating, and most fun.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [killzoneblog.com](#), [The Short Story as Adjunct to the Novel](#), [Topic](#)

Dr. Jerry Pournelle on Writing and Heinlein

September 16, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Welcome
- * Topic: Dr. Jerry Pournelle on Writing and Heinlein
- * The Magnetic Drive
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“The man who views the world at 50 the same as he did at 20 has wasted 30 years of his life.”
Muhammad Ali

“Unless you wrote your book exclusively for your own satisfaction, once your creative vision is on the page, it’s time to zoom in on how the book works for readers.” Lisa Poisso, Resident Writing Coach at Writers in the Storm (*Um, I suggest asking how the book works for which readers? Is any reader’s opinion more valid than any other reader’s opinion?*)

“I can repeat Mr. Heinlein’s advice to writers. If you pay attention to his dictums, you don’t need to know much else.” [Dr. Jerry Pournelle](#), upon being asked his advice to new writers

Welcome to David and any others who have joined us recently. I hope you find the Journal helpful. Anything I can do to help, feel free to email me at harveystanbrough@gmail.com.

Topic: Dr. Jerry Pournelle on Writing and Heinlein

Per Wikipedia, Dr. Jerry Pournelle died in 2017. He “was an American polymath: scientist in the area of operations research and human factors research, science fiction writer, essayist, journalist, and one of the first bloggers.”

In fact, he was an accomplished writer of “hard” science fiction, SF that adheres strictly not only to the laws of physics as we know them, but to established principles of science. You can read more about him on Wikipedia at the link above.

For now, here’s an essay by Dr. Pournelle. I don’t recall where I first found it (years ago), and for some stupid reason I didn’t cite the source at the time.

I’ve edited the essay only by reparagraphing it to make it easier to read, and in one place I replaced a lower-case letter with an upper-case letter [in brackets]. Here’s Dr. Pournelle:

“In my experience it takes around half a million to a million words before you get to a point where you’re no longer thinking about what you’re writing and how you’re doing it and the technique and where to put your fingers on the keyboard and all of the other mechanics of writing and grammar and style.

“You’re thinking about the story and telling the story without thinking ‘I’m writing.’ You’re just writing it. When you get to that point, then you’ve got a chance.

“And until you get to that point, maybe you do, but probably you don’t because you’re building it brick by brick, and building brick by brick usually doesn’t make for a very good building, especially if you didn’t know what it was gonna do and you keep adding bricks hoping that eventually it’s gonna look like something you want.

“The other advice I would give new writers is advice Mr. Heinlein gave me a long time ago, and it was to serve me well: If you’re going to choose grammars and styles, choose good, standard, grammatical English and what we used to call ‘high-grammatical style.’

“Don’t experiment, don’t write experimental spellings, don’t try to write phonetic spellings. In other words, don’t try to improve the English language; use it as correctly as possible, and the reason for that is simple:

“[T]he number of people who will be irritated by your writing in good standard grammar is very low. The number of people who will not want to read it because you wrote in some non-standard experimental grammar is very high.

“There are people who think it would be politically a good thing to change the impersonal pronoun in English from he to she. Sounds like a good idea, but it’s dreadful reading. It’s very hard to read stories that use little gimmicks like that.

“Just regular high-style and good grammar, and if you don’t know good grammar — boy, there are a lot of people who think they know how to write who cannot spell and do not know the basic elements of English grammar — go learn them.

“Get a good grammar program, get a good spell-checking program, get a good grammatic-checking program. Try to fool the grammar program. It will tell you things that you know is bad advice. Fine. Try to fool it into thinking it’s good.

“When you get to the point where you can write by all the rules, and you can follow all the rules even though they don’t lead to anything you like, now you are permitted to go play around with the rules and break them and do things to make your work more dramatic and more effective.

“But if you don’t know what the rules are in the first place, how do you know whether what you’re doing is a good thing to do or not?

“Mr. Heinlein essentially made that speech to me 40 years ago. I pay it forward here.”

As perhaps a fitting addendum, [here’s a free copy of Heinlein’s Rules](#).

The Magnetic Drive

I’ve long believed the secret to traveling the galaxy and even approaching light speed will eventually be tied to magnetism and the ability to fine-tune magnetic attraction and repulsion.

Doing so would enable a generation ship, for example, once it escapes Earth’s gravity, to slingshot its way through the galaxy by simultaneously increasing its magnetic attraction to a distant celestial body while reducing its attraction (or increasing its repulsion) to a celestial body in its wake.

It would be both pulled and pushed through space without the necessity of any other form of propulsion. My main use of the (for now) fictional technology was on the generation ship The Ark in The Journey Home books, [Future of Humanity \(FOH\) series](#).

For current, modern-day applications of this rudimentary principle, see the first two items in “Of Interest.”

I might be off for a few days to jumpstart my forthcoming novel.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Chinese Researchers Test Cars That Hover Over Road Using Magnets” at <https://futurism.com/the-byte/chinese-researchers-car-hovers-magnets>. Fascinating.

See “Train Powered by ‘Veillance Flux’ Could Travel 620 MPH” at <https://futurism.com/startup-train-620-mph>.

See “15 Book Promotion Ideas...” at <https://www.amarketingexpert.com/2022/09/13/15-book-promotion-ideas-that-help-drive-sales-engagement/>.

See “...When Author Marketing Goes Against Your Nature” at <https://www.amarketingexpert.com/2022/09/15/what-to-do-when-author-marketing-goes-against-your-nature/>.

See “False Start On Buffet Book!” at <https://deanwesleymith.com/false-start-on-buffet-book/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1030 words

Writing of (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... XXXX words. Total words to date..... XXXX

Total fiction words for September..... 3277

Total fiction words for the year..... 69708

Total nonfiction words for September... 13900

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 142130

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 211838

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 1

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 67

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: Along with discussing various aspects of the writing craft, I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. WITD is “the only way” to write, but it is by far the easiest, most liberating, and most fun.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [amarketingexpert.com](#), [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [Dr. Jerry Pournelle](#), [Futurism.com](#), [Heinlein's Rules](#), [Robert Heinlein](#), [Topic](#)

The Reverse Outline Shines Again

September 17, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Topic: The Reverse Outline Shines Again
- * Sigh... More Controversy
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

“October 1st... Climb back on. That’s what I will be doing.” Dean Wesley Smith

“I finally get it now. There really is no danger of over-describing. If it’s coming from the [POV] characters instead of my own brain, it makes sense for the story because it’s what they’re feeling, sensing, experiencing.” Chynna Pace, mentoring student

Topic: The Reverse Outline Shines Again

I can’t forcefully enough express the importance and usefulness of the reverse outline.

For those who haven’t heard the term before, at its most basic, a reverse outline is exactly what it sounds like: instead of constructing an outline (conscious, critical mind) and then forcing the characters and story to conform to it (this is ALWAYS a horrible idea), the reverse outline is something writers create after the fact.

The reverse outline is most useful as a quick reference as you write: If a character you introduced in Chapter 3 comes onstage again in Chapter 8, what was the color of that character’s eyes or hair? What was his or her profession (if it matters)? Was s/he tall or short? Quick-witted or dull? etc.

Quickly referring to a reverse outline for such details is much quicker, less confusing, and less disruptive than searching back through the novel to find that information.

Dean Wesley Smith uses reverse outlines too. He keeps his on a legal pad laying beside his writing computer. He adds to it with a pen at the end of each chapter. I keep mine on a text document that I open with Notepad. For me, that’s easier. Whatever works for you is fine.

Include General Nice-to-Know Information—I’m not sure what information Dean puts on his RO other than the short chapter summaries.

For mine, I put the title of the novel at the top, the number if it’s in a series, then a list of the primary characters and their attributes (hair and eye color, height, build, profession, etc.) Of course, I add to that list as I go along and new characters appear.

Next I make a list of any cities, towns, villages, buildings, businesses, and other significant places. I add to that list as I go along too.

The Actual Reverse Outline—Below that, the actual reverse outline begins.

I list the chapter numbers vertically along the left margin. I’ll write a brief chapter summary alongside each of those AFTER I’ve written that chapter. Again, I’m not planning and writing what WILL happen or even what I WANT to happen. I’m writing what DID happen. Hence, reverse outline.

What I Do—As most of you know, when I write fiction, I roll off the parapet of my novel and race through the trenches of the story with the characters. I try to keep up, and I record what happens and what my characters say and do. Because after all, it’s their story. They, not I, are living it.

I write for about an hour at a time, and that equates to a major scene or chapter. When I’ve finished a session, I take a brief break, if only to walk away and back. When I come back, I cycle back through what I’ve just written.

Cycling is sort of like revision, but its done by the characters and from the creative subconscious, not by me from my conscious, critical mind. I’m not “looking for” things to correct or fix as I read. I’m just reading for pleasure.

But as I read, I rest my fingers on the keyboard so my characters can touch the story as they deem necessary. Cycling through a 1000 to 1400 word chapter generally takes only a few minutes, as long as it takes to read.

Once I’ve finished cycling, I click on the Notepad text document that holds my reverse outline to bring it to the front. Next to the chapter number, I write a few quick sentences about what happened in that chapter. (After all, I’ve just read it.) Then I click Save, then go back to the whitespace in the manuscript, and start writing again.

Now to the “new” use I’ve found for my reverse outlines. As I was writing my current novel (another novel in a series), some characters and situations from my previous novel in that series started to reappear.

Of course, I couldn’t remember every detail about them. I wrote that novel in August 2021. For a moment, I felt a little sick to my stomach. I thought I would have to make time to read over my previous novel to get those characters and situations back into my head. Not that I don’t enjoy

reading my own work—I do—but I didn't want to interrupt the flow of the novel I'm writing now.

Then, I had a lightbulb moment: I remembered I'd probably written a reverse outline for that novel. I hate to admit it, but I don't create a reverse outline for every novel I write. But I checked in the folder for that novel, and happily, I had created one for the novel in question.

So instead of spending a few pleasurable hours last night reading that novel, I can spend a several pleasurable minutes today reading over my reverse outline, then get back to writing the current novel.

Barring any major life events, I'll finish this novel around the end of this month. Knowing me, I'll start the next one the following day.

I can't begin to tell you how good it feels to be back and walking in tall cotton. I'm working with several folks who are focused and serious about the craft, and I have a novel flowing out of me like it has somewhere to be. Can't get much better than that.

Sigh... More Controversy

There's more controversy over me teaching WITD, and I really don't understand. Why does anyone care what I teach? If students try WITD and it works, they're ahead. If it doesn't work for whatever reason, they've lost nothing. So what's the downside?

Anyway, to read the latest (both Anitha K's comment and my response), click <https://hestanbrough.com/a-looking-back-fairy-tale/#comments>.

I enjoy a good argument as much as the next person, but refuting claims and stating positions takes up far too much writing time. Maybe if I were routinely mired in the old plot/write/revise/critique/rewrite/edit/polish thing, I wouldn't mind so much. But the way I write has only one step: Write.

Anyway, completely my fault. I ended a writing session, and when I came back from a short break, instead of going directly back to the story I decided to check email. I need to stop doing that. (grin) I kid, but seriously folks, I don't care how you write.

If your conscious, critical mind tells you WITD will never work or will work only if it's altered to include some critical mind input, that's fine. But please don't email me or leave comments about it on the site. You won't be telling Journal readers anything they can't find from thousands of other sources on any given day.

And you definitely won't convince me because I've been there and done that. Frankly, I'd rather stop writing fiction altogether than go back.

If you're willing to learn to trust yourself—if I can help you escape the drudgery of *constructing* a novel and assist you in finding the freedom of WITD and Heinlein's Rules—email me. I'd be happy to help you move forward to where I am. But I will *never* go back to where you are.

As I said, been there, done that, and I don't even want the t-shirt.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Restart Motivation" at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/restart-motivation/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1250 words

Writing of Carmelita Ramos (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... 3007 words. Total words to date..... 3007

Total fiction words for September..... 6284
Total fiction words for the year..... 72715
Total nonfiction words for September... 15150
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 143380
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 216095

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 1
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 67
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [controversy](#), [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [Reverse Outline](#), [Topic](#), [WITD](#)

If You Really WANT to Write Into the Dark

September 18, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Topic: If You Really WANT to Write Into the Dark
- * Of Interest

Topic: If You Really WANT to Write Into the Dark

If you Really WANT to let go of all the BS and just write into the dark, please read this post. I'm not saying anything new, but I'm saying it in a new way that some of you might "get" even if you didn't before.

(Note: If you DON'T want to WITD, I'm not trying to convince you. Feel free to skip down to "Of Interest" or come back tomorrow.)

Of all the things in the world you can easily overthink, writing fiction is probably high on the list. For that reason, writing instructors (including me in the past) have told writers to "be sure you're in the POV character's head."

If, when your characters are telling their story, you're slowing or stopping their progress to be sure you're "in the character's head" or to be sure a certain word was the "right" word or that a certain sentence was the "right" kind or the right length etc., STOP IT. That's all critical mind stuff.

Stop worrying about whether you're in the character's head. If you're worrying about it or thinking about it, you aren't in the character's head. You're in your own (writer's) head, thinking. Again, critical mind.

Stop thinking about or worrying about words and sentences. For that matter, stop thinking or worrying about which "process" or which bit of "craft" or "technique" you're using.

Remember, the characters are pure. They don't know or care about techniques or craft or processes or any of that. They only want to live their story.

And if you really do want to let go and just convey your characters' authentic story, there really is absolutely nothing for you to decide and absolutely no reason for you to control anything. That's the freedom of WITD. So let go of all that. Just get out of the way and let the characters tell the story that they, not you, are living.

The characters know how to tell their story. After all, unlike you, they actually reside in your creative subconscious, RIGHT ALONGSIDE all the Story you've absorbed during your lifetime:

They live alongside all the story structure, all the rising and falling action, all the beginnings, middles and ends. They co-exist with all the protagonists and antagonists, all the well-rounded characters and the flat, cardboard characters who exist only to foreshadow other things.

In other words, they have direct access-to and KNOW things about storytelling that you forgot LONG ago. Things you believe you have to "look up" if you want to apply them.

If you trust your characters, they will tell their own story. And they will tell it well and the story will be authentic and good.

What it will NOT be is the hobbled, crippled, uninteresting version of their story that would result from you and your critical mind working it over with Strunk & White's or some craft book or critical input from people your characters have never even seen before.

Here. If you want to exercise your critical mind, think about this: How would the baker in your family feel if, as s/he was about to mix up a batch of biscuits, you ran next door and asked your neighbors for their input? Untrusted maybe? Maybe even betrayed? Would s/he (rightly) refuse to have anything to do with you for the foreseeable future?

Well that's how your characters feel (and respond) when you invite outsiders to advise you on how your characters' story "should" unfold. And who can blame them?

Seriously, you have to work constantly to let all the conscious, critical-mind stuff go. Don't second-guess your characters, and don't even ALLOW anyone else to, much less actually ASK them to.

Defend Your Work. This is a vastly different mindset than splaying your characters' story naked on the grass and inviting even a select few others to look it over, probe it, and comment on it.

When you write into the dark, you're only a conduit, letting your characters use your physical fingers on the keyboard to tell the story. You're only their recorder, or as King calls himself, their stenographer.

Because what's important is their authentic story, not the conduit through which they conveyed it.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Regular Monthly Workshop Sale" at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/regular-monthly-workshop-sale/>.

See "Buy a cat, stay up late, don't drink: top 10 writers' tips on writing" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/buy-a-cat-stay-up-late-dont-drink-top-10-writers-tips-on-writing/>. Strictly for entertainment.

See "End Art Shame" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/end-art-shame/>. What I said above about overthinking? Here you go.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 770 words

Writing of Carmen Morales (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... 3007 words. Total words to date..... 3007

Day 2..... 2842 words. Total words to date..... 5849

Total fiction words for September..... 9126

Total fiction words for the year..... 75557

Total nonfiction words for September... 15920

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 144150

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 219707

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 1

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 67

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: Along with discussing various aspects of the writing craft, I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. WITD is NOT “the only way” to write, but it is by far the easiest, most liberating, and most fun.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [Let Go](#), [thepassivevoice.com](#), [Topic](#), [WITD](#)

Yesterday, and Why Again

September 20, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Oops.
- * Yesterday
- * Why Again
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

“When writing, it’s often just as important knowing what not to say, as it is knowing what to include... but ... it’s easier to perceive when expressed through *the eyes* of my fictional characters” [emphasis added]. [Vincent Berg](#) at Writer’s Nook

Well, the eyes, ears, nose, and taste and touch sensors.

Oops.

First, a quick apology. My post of the 18th (“If You REALLY Want to Write Into the Dark”) posted again yesterday, on the 19th.

I suspect that’s because I added something and then updated the post after it went out on the 18th. Believe me, I was as surprised to find it in my inbox on the 19th as you probably were to find it in yours. I’ll be more careful in the future. You know, probably.

Yesterday

I didn’t post anything new yesterday. Instead, I rose early and watched coverage of the Queen’s funeral service. I figured since I couldn’t be there in person, the least I could do was watch as it was broadcast live. And I typically get up early anyway.

I started viewing the coverage late, though. When I tuned in, the Queen’s coffin was just being carried up the stairs into Westminster Abbey. I watch from there until the end of the smaller, family service at Windsor Chapel.

At one point I paused the coverage for about 2 hours to accompany my wife for a routine doc appointment at the small hospital in Benson. All is well.

We got back and watched the rest of the coverage over lunch, and I made it out to the Hovel at noon. There, I answered a few emails, briefly investigated the mystery of the repeating Journal post, stole a few quotes (which I will attribute, of course) for a new text file I named New Quotes from Writers, and then wrote this.

So it was noon-fifty-two before I finally turned to the novel again. I hoped to get at least a couple of good sessions before I called it a day. In fact, I got three.

Why Again

If you’d like to see a quick but striking example of why I write on here about WITD

- and about letting your characters be who they are (instead of constructing them)
- and about simply writing what happens and what they say and do as their story unfolds
- and about only including description through the POV character’s physical and emotional senses
- and about Just Writing instead of thinking your way through writing
- and writing setting and scene and grounding the reader and on and on and on

read over the first few questions at The Writer’s Nook on Quora (<https://thewritersnook.quora.com/>). Then you’ll understand.

Just glancing at those questions makes me tired.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Writers of the Future Contest” at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/writers-of-the-future-contest/>. Please read this. As Mom used to say, it’s for your own good.

See “When You Enter A Scene,

Use ~~Yours~~ [the POV Character’s] Senses Sensibly” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/09/when-you-enter-a-sceneuse-your-senses-sensibly.html>. Gems to be gleaned, but use the POV character’s senses, not yours.

See “What Not to Say When Writing a Novel” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/what-not-to-say-when-writing-a-novel/>. Gems to be gleaned.

See “Twelve Writers Bring Back Agatha Christie’s Miss Marple” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/twelve-writers-bring-back-agatha-christies-miss-marple/>.

See “The Power of Chiastic Story Structure” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/the-power-of-chiastic-story-structure/>. Read, absorb or don’t, then WITD. If this structure suits you, it will come out in your story or novel.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 580 words

Writing of Carmen Morales (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... 3007 words. Total words to date..... 3007

Day 2..... 2842 words. Total words to date..... 5849

Day 3..... 3283 words. Total words to date..... 9132

Day 4..... 3106 words. Total words to date..... 12238

Total fiction words for September..... 15515

Total fiction words for the year..... 78840

Total nonfiction words for September... 16500

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 144730

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 226676

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 1

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 67

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: Along with discussing various aspects of the writing craft, I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. WITD is NOT “the only way” to write, and I’ve never said it was. But it is by far the easiest, most liberating, and most fun.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [chiastic story structure](#), [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [killzoneblog.com](#), [thepassivevoice.com](#), [Why I talk about WITD](#), [WITD](#), [Writers of the Future contest](#)

Traditional Publishing and CovID-19 Fraud

September 21, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Traditional Publishing
- * CovID-19 Fraud
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“Let me be clear: I don’t dislike traditional publishing, but they’re operating in an antiquated system that has worked for them previously, but really doesn’t support the author or, for that matter, further book sales.” Penny Sansevieri (see first item in “Of Interest”)

“Dare to know! Have the courage to use your own reason!” Immanuel Kant [Wow. Let that sink in.]

Traditional Publishing

We talked about this not too long ago. The Penguin Random House/S&S antitrust trial has forced publishers to reveal a lot of damning information, stuff they kept strictly under wraps for years.

In the first item in “Of Interest” today, Penny Sansevieri of Author Marketing Experts discusses what a lot of that means, specifically for self-publishing and for other kinds of publishers. Even Barnes & Noble is trying out a new publishing model.

Funny, really. B&N, for which various folks have been ringing a death knell for years, might be around longer than traditional publishing will.

CovID-19 Fraud

First, a disclaimer: I mention this strictly for potential story ideas. Because in fiction, despite so-called “cancel culture,” you can write whatever you suppose the truth to be. And remember, your fictional truth is never weirder or stranger or more harmful than what really happened.

More and more news and revelations are coming to light about COVID-19 related fraud. There are two posts in today's "Of Interest" alone. However, please don't expect to ever know the depth and breadth and history of that fraud. You won't.

I was born and raised in New Mexico. I learned very early to recognize fresh bovine excrement by smell. I didn't have to step in it to know it was there.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "A Hard Look at Self-Publishing a Book v. Working with a Publisher" at <https://www.amarketingexpert.com/2022/09/20/a-hard-look-at-self-publishing-a-book-v-working-with-a-publisher/>.

See "U.S. Attorney Announces Federal Charges..." (Minnesota COVID-19 Fraud Scheme) at <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/us-attorney-announces-federal-charges-against-47-defendants-250-million-feeding-our-future>. Story ideas, anyone? If you felt like something fishy was going on, here you go. And there will be more, for example....

See "DOJ finds more than \$8 billion in COVID aid fraud" at <https://thehill.com/policy/finance/597764-doj-finds-more-than-8-billion-in-covid-aid-fraud/>.

See "...30 Words Merriam-Webster Just Added..." at <https://www.mentalfloss.com/posts/merriam-webster-dictionary-new-words-2022>.

See "1968 to 1972: The Awful Years" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/09/1968-to-1972-the-awful-years.html>. Interesting. They weren't really "awful," but they were definitely interesting.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 390 words

Writing of Carmen Morales (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... 3007 words. Total words to date..... 3007
Day 2..... 2842 words. Total words to date..... 5849
Day 3..... 3283 words. Total words to date..... 9132
Day 4..... 3106 words. Total words to date..... 12238
Day 5..... 3644 words. Total words to date..... 15882

Total fiction words for September..... 19159
Total fiction words for the year..... 85590
Total nonfiction words for September... 16890
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 145120
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 230710

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date.....	1
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date...	0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	67
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014).....	217
Short story collections.....	31

Disclaimer: Along with discussing various aspects of the writing craft, I advocate a technique called Writing Into the Dark. WITD is NOT “the only way” to write, and I’ve never said it was. But it is by far the easiest, most liberating, and most fun.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [amarketingexpert.com](#), [bovine excrement](#), [COVID-19 Fraud](#), [justice.gov](#), [killzoneblog.com](#), [mentalfloss.com](#), [thehill.com](#)

Every Novel Writes Differently

September 22, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Every Novel Writes Differently
- * PS:
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

From the Give Me a Break Department: “Can you become sick through social media? New research says it might be possible, as vulnerable people fall prey to mass psychogenic illnesses via the internet.” Kite & Key staff (I’m guessing mask mandates will come next.)

“When you come to a fork in the road, take it.” Yogi Berra

Topic: Every Novel Writes Differently

The title is a maxim I first heard from Dean Wesley Smith. Now, as I write my 68th novel, I am both reminded of it and find that it still holds true.

It’s frustrating sometimes, not knowing what to expect. That’s as true with how the novel writes as it is with ‘what happens next’ in the content of the story.

But if you trust your characters and let them tell the story, you’ll be miles ahead in both cases. Most importantly, the story will be original and unique to your own voice.

You can't force originality and uniqueness through your conscious, critical mind. It doesn't have the tools. It's wonderful at constructing things with existing materials, but it creates nothing new on its own.

And as a bonus you will feel more like the very first person to experience the story rather than merely the writer or storyteller. Because you are.

In this novel, with only 12 (now 15) chapters written thus far, I've gone through 6 (now 7) wildly diverse POV characters in 9 (now 11) distinctly different settings. For the record, I've never had a novel scatter itself so widely over such a short period of time. Great fun. (grin)

This doesn't worry or panic me at all. It actually excites me because it's a challenge for the characters. How can they possibly pull all the separate little stories and loose ends into a cohesive mass?

But I know they will, and that belief, that trust, is the key. And as their recorder, I get to witness all of that. Sheer magic.

This is very similar to the happy anxiety we experience when we climb aboard a rollercoaster. We only climb aboard in the first place because we believe and trust that we will arrive safely at the end of the ride.

So again, I'm neither worried nor bored.

I'm not worried because I trust my characters. I and my characters have been here before, although with stories in which the characters and situations were not quite so widely scattered. (Others have been here before too. This is exactly where King was when he wrote the first several chapters of *The Stand*.)

And I'm not bored because I have absolutely no idea where the story will go or how the characters will pull it all together. I only know they will. Instead of fretting over where the story will go, I'm watching it unfold all around me in real time as I run through it with my characters.

As a nod to any outliners, planners, or phase-line or sign-post planters (or whatever other label you assign to it) out there, yes, sure, you're absolutely right: If only I'd taken the time to plan every major scene, chapter, plot twist, etc. in advance through the entire novel, I also wouldn't be worried.

But I'd be bored to tears. In that planning I would have already told the entire story, including the ending. So chances are, I'd never have started actually writing it in the first place.

Because seriously, what's the point of trudging through writing 40- or 50- or 60- or 120,000 words to tell a story for which you already know the ending? I honestly, literally can't think of anything more boring.

On the other hand, I have to admit I also experience a period of boredom when I Just Write the Story, though it's a very brief period.

I usually recognize what will happen to end the story a few paragraphs before it happens. Never more than around 1000 words ahead of time.

Once that happens, I write straight through. *Not* to discover the end—at that point I know what it will be—but to get finished with the story and put it behind me so I can start the next one. Because I know with the next one I will be surprised and excited again.

And that's why by the end of this month I will have written 68 novels, 8 novellas, and 217 short stories since 2014.

Not a bad way to make a living.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Fun Extra Stuff In the Sale" at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/fun-extra-stuff-in-the-sale/>.

See "Assault with a Deadly...Alligator?" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/09/true-crime-thursday-assault-with-a-deadly-alligator.html>.

See "You've Burned Out. Now What?" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/youve-burned-out-now-whatauto-draft/>. Interesting, but one more phenomenon that doesn't happen to those who WITD.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 790 words

Writing of Carmen Morales (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... 3007 words. Total words to date..... 3007

Day 2..... 2842 words. Total words to date..... 5849

Day 3..... 3283 words. Total words to date..... 9132

Day 4..... 3106 words. Total words to date..... 12238

Day 5..... 3644 words. Total words to date..... 15882

Day 6..... 3548 words. Total words to date..... 19430

Total fiction words for September..... 22707

Total fiction words for the year..... 89138

Total nonfiction words for September... 17680

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 145910

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 235048

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date.....	1
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date...	0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	67
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014).....	217
Short story collections.....	31

Disclaimer: In this Journal, I discuss various aspects of the writing craft. I am also a student and prolific practitioner of “writing into the dark,” which means trusting the characters to tell the story that they, not I, are living. It’s great fun to watch a story unfold as I race through it with my characters. I’ve never said WITD is “the only way” to write, but it is by far the easiest, most liberating, and most fun.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [Every Novel Writers Differently](#), [killzoneblog.com](#), [thepassivevoice.com](#), [Topic](#), [WITD](#)

I Can Write Anywhere. Wheee!

September 23, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Oops
- * I Can Write Anywhere. Wheee!
- * Trust the Characters; Write the Next Sentence
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“Try to learn something about everything and everything about something.” T. H. Huxley

“You better live every day like your last because one day you’re going to be right.” Ray Charles

“Live your life so that when you’re all alone you’re in good company.” Anonymous, Lubbock (TX) Avalanche-Journal, c.1969

Oops

Sorry about that dangling PS in yesterday’s post. I had added a brief post script, then found I didn’t need it. I deleted the post script but not the PS in the table of contents.

I Can Write Anywhere. Wheee!

Well, I can pretty much promise I won't be attempting Mount Everest or the Marianas Trench. But I can write anywhere Within Reason. And I only learned that yesterday. I was amazed. Not at myself, but at my characters.

I know some of you are used to writing in a coffee shop or in a park or wherever you happen to find yourself, so this stuff's probably old hat to you. But I've always enjoyed the solitude of my little thick-walled, dark adobe hovel, surrounded by paintings and prints and posters.

As I've posted here a few times recently, [the characters are pure](#). They really, really, *really* don't care about any of the critical-mind garbage or any of the little mind games we humans play with ourselves.

They really, really, *really* just want to live their story. And since they exist in another dimension (dementian?) they can live it no matter where I am or you are. (grin)

So you really can write anywhere. If you haven't experienced this yet, give it a shot and see what happens.

My wife and I had a scheduled, routine checkup at a car dealership in Sierra Vista yesterday morning at 9:30. So we'd have to leave at 8:30 to be there a little early. I planned to get to bed early, then get out to the hovel by 4 to do the day's writing on the novel.

Turned out I had a really rough night (my gut, routine old-age crap), so I didn't get much sleep. As a result I got out to the hovel late, and I only wrote about 1000 words in fits and starts around feeding the horse and tending to a few other chores.

So as an experiment, I packed up my 'puter and took it with us to the dealership. If I wasn't able to write, no harm no foul. But if I was, I'd be further ahead in the novel and I have a whole new toy to play with. (grin)

While my wife and I waited in the lobby of the dealership, I opened my laptop, balanced it on my lap, and ran free with my characters. Actually, I was a little surprised at how easy it was, especially given the quiet but constant buzz of conversations and clatter of activity in the dealership.

But (get this) none of the noise bothered me! I was delighted to find that even when I looked up now and then, my fingers kept moving over the keyboard, recording the characters' story!

So for me, the experience at the dealership was just super cool. Like I said, now I have a new toy to play with. If I could write there, I can write pretty much anywhere. Oh, and a little over an hour later when the car was ready, I'd recorded another 1200 words of the story. (grin)

We did some more stuff while we were over there, but we finally got home around 2, so I had time to write this and then write another session on the novel before I called it a day. Cool beans.

Trust the Characters; Write the Next Sentence

I'm amazed at how many different reasons there are to restate the basic truths of writing without a system.

Be sure to check out the comments on "Every Novel Writes Differently" at <https://hestanbrough.com/every-novel-writes-differently/#comments>. Thanks to Tari for providing the opening for me to remind others to

- 1) trust the characters and Just Write the characters' story, and
- 2) if the writing lags or slows, to Just Write the Next Sentence, then the next and the next.

If you try this and a "next sentence" doesn't come, chances are you've reached the end of the scene or chapter and you need to start the next one. (Been there, done that.)

It really does work, folks. But it's all based on your ability to trust yourself.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Cold Poker Gang Book Free Right Now" at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/cold-poker-gang-book-free-right-now/>.

See "Anatomy and Physiology of Villains" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/09/reader-friday-anatomy-and-physiology-of-villains.html>. Interesting exercise.

See "Amazon Is Changing Its Ebook Return Policy in Major Breakthrough for Authors" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/amazon-is-changing-its-ebook-return-policy-in-major-breakthrough-for-authors/>.

See "Don't Fall for Promises of Success" at <https://www.amarketingexpert.com/2022/09/22/dont-fall-for-promises-of-success-podcast-for-authors/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 810 words

Writing of Carmen Morales (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... 3007 words. Total words to date..... 3007
Day 2..... 2842 words. Total words to date..... 5849
Day 3..... 3283 words. Total words to date..... 9132
Day 4..... 3106 words. Total words to date..... 12238
Day 5..... 3644 words. Total words to date..... 15882

Day 6..... 3548 words. Total words to date..... 19430
Day 7..... 3076 words. Total words to date..... 22506

Total fiction words for September..... 25783
Total fiction words for the year..... 92214
Total nonfiction words for September... 18490
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 146720
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 238934

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 1
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 67
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: In this Journal, I discuss various aspects of the writing craft. I am also a student and prolific practitioner of “writing into the dark,” which means trusting the characters to tell the story that they, not I, are living. It’s great fun to watch a story unfold as I race through it with my characters. I’ve never said WITD is “the only way” to write, but it is by far the easiest, most liberating, and most fun.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [amarketingexpert.com](#), [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [killzoneblog.com](#), [thepassivevoice.com](#), [Trust your characters](#), [Trust yourself](#), [Writer the next sentence](#)

The Top 7 Mistakes Writers Make

September 24, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Topic: The Top 7 Mistakes Writers Make
- * Up Next
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

“When you think you’re pregnant, and you’re not, what happens to that child that has already formed in your mind? You keep it filed in a drawer of your consciousness, like a short story that wouldn’t work after the opening lines.” Hilary Mantel

Topic: The Top 7 Mistakes Writers Make

Very long post today. This is an update on an article I first posted over on my author site way back in 2013. It negates nothing I've said more recently about allowing the characters to tell the story that they, not you, are living, etc.

Note the silly reference to traditional publishing in the second paragraph below. I left that intentionally because it makes a valid point, but I do NOT recommend using literary agents or traditional publishing. Enjoy.

These are the most commonly committed mistakes I've seen in manuscripts from writers over the past thirty-plus years.

If you master these few problems, and if you've written a good story in the first place, your work will grab the attention of agents or publishers because more than likely these problems still will plague all the other manuscripts in their inbox that day.

I was going to number these problems, but they're all really tied for first place anyway:

Allowing the Narrator to Use Physical and Emotional Sense Verbs

Try not to let the narrator use the sense verbs (saw, could see; smelled, could smell; heard, could hear; felt, could feel; and so on). Instead the narrator should Just Describe The Scene and let the reader see, hear, smell, etc. right along with the character.

This is a big part of what writing instructors mean when they say "Show, don't tell." Instead of writing "She heard the doorknob turn and the door squeal open" just write "The doorknob turned and the door squealed open."

Using Past Tense When Past Progressive Is Necessary to Indicate Ongoing Action

This one causes action to seem to start abruptly and unnaturally. "When the sheriff walked into the saloon, several men stood at the bar and others sat at tables. Still others walked up or down the stairs."

Do you see the men suddenly stand, sit, and walk as the sheriff came in? What you want here is to create a sense of ongoing action: "When the sheriff walked into the saloon, several men were standing at the bar and others were sitting at tables. Still others were walking up or down the stairs." And no, this does not create passive voice or a passive construction.

Using Throw-Away Verbs

- **Gave**—Allow the narrator to use "gave" as the verb of a sentence only if something physically changes hands. If your narrator routinely says of a character that he "gave" her a smile or a nod or a shrug or a wave or a kiss or a hug or a sneer or any of the fifty b'jillion other things bad narrators make good characters give each other, make him stop. He didn't give her a nod or a smile or a wave. He nodded or smiled or waved.

- **Sat or stood**—Believe it or not, these are used as throw-away verbs even more often than “gave” is. Don’t allow the narrator to say the character stood unless she was lying down or sitting, or that she sat unless she was lying down or standing.

In other words, if we have a sense the character’s already standing, don’t let the narrator write that she “stood and looked” (or “stood looking”) out the window. If she’s already sitting at her desk and has just hung up the phone, don’t let the narrator write that she “sat tapping” her pen on her desk. She was already standing or sitting, so in actuality the first character “looked” out the window and the second “tapped” her pen on her desk.

When I receive a manuscript for editing or even just for formatting (meaning it’s already been edited), one of the first things I do is a Global Search and Replace (Find and Replace) for bad-use instances of “gave,” “sat,” and “stood.” Unfortunately they’re always there.

Giving Possession to Inanimate Objects

Don’t write “she pushed her glasses up her nose’s bridge” or “she leaned on the chair’s back” or “she slid up to the couch’s edge” or even “she leaned on the ship’s rail” or “she crossed the town’s main street.”

It’s much less awkward to write “she pushed her glasses up the bridge of her nose (or just ‘farther up her nose’)” and “she leaned on the back of the chair” or “she slid up to the edge of the couch” or even “she leaned on the rail” or “she crossed Main Street.”

Those last two look a little different because we already know she’s on a ship, and of course she’s crossing the main street “of the town”; what other main street would it be?

This actually brings to mind a close cousin of this possession problem: Don’t let your narrator write that “She shuffled the dominoes in front of her” or “She sipped wine from her glass.” Really?

Think about it: What other dominoes could she possibly shuffle? From what other container is she going to drink? “She shuffled the dominoes” and “She sipped her wine” will suffice, and you won’t be bogging down your story with unnecessary nonsense. Also popular—and to be avoided—she nodded “her head” and he shrugged “his shoulders.”

Assigning Human Traits to Human Parts

Don’t assign human traits to human parts (or traits that apply to a whole creature to the creature’s parts). Writing that “a voice said” something is like writing “his eyes saw” or “his legs raced frantically down the street” or “his head (or eyes) looked up from the menu” or “his ears heard sirens several blocks away” or “his fingers felt their way along the shelf” or “his hand crept toward the pistol on his hip.” These are basically awkward constructions and are similar to misplaced modifiers.

Abusing Tag Lines—A tag line, which is the only bit of narrative that can be connected to a line of dialogue with a comma, consists of a noun or pronoun and a *verb that indicates a form of utterance*. Here are some of the primary forms of abuse:

- **Attempting to make tag lines “interesting”**— Some writing instructors erroneously teach writers to alternate the verbs in their tag lines “to make the tag lines more interesting.” The fact is, you don’t *want* your tag lines to be interesting. The tag line should be as flat and boring as possible so the reader can all but skip over it and get back to the story. Under no circumstances should a tag line draw the reader’s interest from the story.
- **Using archaic reverse constructions in tag lines**—There’s never a good reason for a narrator to use a reverse construction (“said John” instead of “John said”), in a tag line or otherwise. It’s an archaic construction, and its repeated use is distracting.
- **Using adverbs in tag lines**—“Don’t use adverbs in tag lines,” Harvey said stringently. Using adverbs this way is an unconscious (usually) attempt to dress up what the writer sees as a boring construction. You’re right. Tag lines are boring. They aren’t part of the story, so they *should* be boring.
- **Using verbs that are not a form of utterance in tag lines**—The best verb for a tag line is “said.” A character can’t “grin” or “cut in” or “snicker” or “shrug” a line of dialogue. (I actually collect inappropriate verbs that I’ve seen in tag lines over the years. To get a copy of the current list, [email me](#). It’s pretty humorous.)
- **Overusing tag lines**—Tag lines exist *ONLY* to let the reader know which character’s talking, and they should be used for that purpose only when they’re absolutely necessary. If there are only two characters in a scene, for example, you don’t need many (if any) tag lines because the reader can tell from the alternate paragraphing which character is speaking at any given time.

Putting Descriptive Narrative After the Dialogue

Once the reader has passed the closing quotation mark, he’s already “heard” the character. Any description of the character’s voice the narrator adds after that changes the reader’s perception and forces him to go back and re-read the dialogue. It’s never a good idea to interrupt the reader. When such a description is necessary, it should always occur immediately **BEFORE** the dialogue.

This is especially important for character identification when more than two characters are engaged in dialogue. If you use tag lines (John said, Sheila asked) in that situation, put them **AHEAD** of the dialogue as well so the reader knows in advance which character is speaking. If you have a brief descriptive narrative, you don’t need a tag line too. In other words, if you write *John frowned* as an introductory narrative, that’s all you need. There’s no reason to add a tag line, such as *John frowned and said* or *John frowned and asked*.

Hope this is helpful.

Up Next

I've decided to also bring forward the post that originally followed the post above over at my author site: 10 Lesser Mistakes Writers Make, also originally posted in 2013.

The mistakes listed above are labor intensive, meaning there is no easy way for the writer (or editor) to resolve them. You just have to go through the manuscript bit by bit and repair or delete them as you find them.

I call these others "lesser" mistakes not because they're less important or have less impact on the story, but because they're fairly easy to rectify. You can use your Find & Replace dialogue to repair or delete them. (For an excellent tutorial on Microsoft Word's invaluable Find & Replace feature, [Click Here](#).)

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Last Two Days of September Workshop Sale" at <https://deanwesleymith.com/last-two-days-of-september-workshop-sale/>.

See "Our Editors Remember Hilary Mantel" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/our-editors-remember-hilary-mantel/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1680 words

Writing of Carmen Morales (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... 3007 words. Total words to date..... 3007
Day 2..... 2842 words. Total words to date..... 5849
Day 3..... 3283 words. Total words to date..... 9132
Day 4..... 3106 words. Total words to date..... 12238
Day 5..... 3644 words. Total words to date..... 15882
Day 6..... 3548 words. Total words to date..... 19430
Day 7..... 3076 words. Total words to date..... 22506
Day 8..... 2667 words. Total words to date..... 25173

Total fiction words for September..... 28450
Total fiction words for the year..... 94881
Total nonfiction words for September... 20170
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 148400
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 243281

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date.....	1
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date...	0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	67
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014).....	217
Short story collections.....	31

Disclaimer: In this Journal, I discuss various aspects of the writing craft. I am also a student and prolific practitioner of “writing into the dark,” which means trusting the characters to tell the story that they, not I, are living. It’s great fun to watch a story unfold as I race through it with my characters. I’ve never said WITD is “the only way” to write, but it is by far the easiest, most liberating, and most fun.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Assigning Human Traits to Human Parts](#), [Attempting to make tag lines “interesting”](#), [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [Gave](#), [Giving Possession to Inanimate Objects](#), [Mistakes writers make](#), [Overusing tag lines](#), [Past Tense vs Past Progressive](#), [Physical and Emotional Sense Verbs](#), [Putting Descriptive Narrative After the Dialogue](#), [Sat or stood](#), [thepassivevoice.com](#), [Throw-Away Verbs](#), [Topic](#), [Using adverbs in tag lines](#), [Using archaic reverse constructions](#), [Using verbs that are not a form of utterance in tag lines](#)

10 Lesser Mistakes Writers Make

September 25, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Topic: 10 Lesser Mistakes Writers Make
- * Up Next
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“[W]here there is fun, there’s no panic to do something a certain ‘correct’ way, or fear that certain mistakes will ruin the book. It’s just about having fun telling stories, and not worrying about the rest.” [Chynna Pace](#)

“The writer who is a real writer is a rebel who never stops.” William Saroyan

“Know what you believe, and be bold with it in your fiction.” James Scott Bell

Topic: 10 Lesser Mistakes Writers Make

Back in the day when I was presenting “Common Mistakes Writers Make” in sessions at writers’ conferences, at least once in every session, a writer would dismiss as unimportant the value of learning not to make those mistakes. The typical response was, “Why bother? Readers will know what I mean.”

Every time, the comment left me all but speechless.

The readers’ job is not to figure out what you mean. The readers’ job is to be entertained, period.

How could anyone not know? You should learn the craft because you’ve chosen fiction writing as your profession. The hallmark of a professional is that s/he constantly studies and learns the various aspects of the craft.

If you missed it yesterday, here are [The Top 7 Mistakes Writers Make](#).

Below are 10 lesser mistakes. I don’t call them “lesser” because they have less impact on the story or the reader—they don’t—but because you can repair or delete them quickly with Microsoft Word’s Find & Replace tool.

For an excellent tutorial on the invaluable Find & Replace feature, click <https://harveystanbrough.com/2013/10/30/microsoft-word-for-writers-find-replace/>. Finally, here they are:

He Said (or Thought) to Himself

No, he didn’t. He mumbled or muttered or whispered or said quietly or thought, but he didn’t say or think “to himself.”

Don’t write “to himself,” “to herself,” or “to themselves” in a tag line. Ever. It’s inane, redundant, and just plain silly. Use “to himself,” “to herself,” or “to themselves” only if the narrator is talking about a character having a room “all to herself” or a character is “keeping to himself” etc.

Using “Took and,” “Reached and,” etc.

Don’t write that a character “took and” something or “reached out and” or “reached over and” unless it feels necessary in the moment. (Let the character decide.) This one is on this list because in every case, you can delete the phrase and allow the reader to move to the meat of the action.

A few examples—

If a character’s lying in bed reading and “He turned out the bedside lamp” the reader will see him reach. You don’t have to write, “He reached over (or reached out or reached across) and turned out the bedside lamp.”

She took her daughter's hand and squeezed it. (Couldn't she have squeezed it while it was still attached to her daughter? What you want here is She squeezed her daughter's hand.)

She took a can of air freshener and sprayed the kitchen. (She sprayed the kitchen with air freshener.)

He reached out and picked up the TV remote. (He picked up the TV remote.)

She reached over and smacked him upside the head. (She smacked him upside the head, or She did what came naturally. [grin])

To easily and quickly find and correct these, key "took" or "reached" into the Find What block of your Find and Replace dialogue box.

Beginning a Sentence with "Suddenly" or "Instantly" or "Instantaneously"

Beginning a sentence with "instantly" or "suddenly" or anything similar is almost never a good idea. If something happens instantly, get to it without delay so the reader can experience it. If you force the reader to read the word "instantly" or "suddenly," it slows the reading and waters down the immediacy of the action.

Likewise, I advise against using such words even later in the sentence. Please don't try to get around this one by changing "Suddenly a shot rang out" to "A shot suddenly rang out" or "Instantly her eyes welled with tears" to "Her eyes instantly welled with tears."

Other Misuses and Abuses That Are Easy to Fix

Using Likely as an Adverb—Despite its widespread misuse because it sounds cool, "likely" is synonymous with "probable." It is an adjective, albeit one that ends in "ly," as do many adverbs. Hence (I believe) the initial confusion and the resulting decision of many dictionaries to list it as both an adjective and an adverb.

Despite the rubber stamp approval of those dictionaries and the fact that it's easier to change a definition than it is to correct wrong usage, I strongly advise against using "likely" as an adverb because the usage will alienate some readers, me among them.

If you disagree with me, that's fine. But I defy anyone to explain why using "likely" is preferable to using "probably."

Try And

Um, no. Despite its widespread and common misuse, it's never "try and," it's always "try to." (I wonder how much argument I'll get on this one?)

Hint: If you want to correct this one with Find & Replace, be sure to put " try and " (with spaces on both sides) in the Find What block and " try to " in the Replace With block. Otherwise, chances are you'll replace things you don't want to replace.

Knew

Try not to let your narrator use the phrase "she (or he) knew." Instead, just omit it and see whether the sentence works just as well. Most of the time it will.

Now or Today

You very seldom (if ever) need to write the words "now" or "today" in fiction. Past tense is the natural voice of narrative, and both of those refer to the present.

Phrases to Avoid

Try to avoid phrases like "he admitted" or "she had to admit that" or "he couldn't deny that." Such phrases answer a question that hasn't been asked.

For example, writing "he couldn't deny that he was jealous" implies that someone asked him whether he was jealous. Likewise, writing "she had to admit that blah blah blah" implies that someone was interrogating her and she finally gave in. This is another example of narrator/author overreach.

Overstating the Obvious

Don't write that a character "nodded her head yes" or "shook his head no." When a character nods, it always means yes. When he shakes his head, it always means no.

And while we're at it, don't write that a character "nodded her head." What else is she gonna nod, her elbow? That's right up there with "shrugged his shoulders."

It's About Time

Although it's often misused, "while" ALWAYS indicates a simultaneous passage of time. The writer who writes "while" most often means "although" or "even though."

Again, these are all easy fixes with Microsoft Word's Find & Replace feature. For a free tutorial, click <https://harveystanbrough.com/2013/10/30/microsoft-word-for-writers-find-replace/>.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “The Art and Purpose of Subtext” at <https://www.janefriedman.com/the-art-and-purpose-of-subtext/>. Yes. And your characters will deliver all of this if you trust them.

See “What Writers Can Learn From Marx” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/09/what-writers-can-learn-from-marx.html>.

See “The books world is much tougher now” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/the-books-world-is-much-tougher-now/>. Whatever. The interviewee, at 70, has written 20 novels. At just over 70, Dean Wesley Smith has written well over 200.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1200 words

Writing of Carmen Morales (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... 3007 words. Total words to date..... 3007
Day 2..... 2842 words. Total words to date..... 5849
Day 3..... 3283 words. Total words to date..... 9132
Day 4..... 3106 words. Total words to date..... 12238
Day 5..... 3644 words. Total words to date..... 15882
Day 6..... 3548 words. Total words to date..... 19430
Day 7..... 3076 words. Total words to date..... 22506
Day 8..... 2667 words. Total words to date..... 25173
Day 9..... 3291 words. Total words to date..... 28464

Total fiction words for September..... 31741
Total fiction words for the year..... 98172
Total nonfiction words for September... 21370
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 149600
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 247772

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 1
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 67
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: In this Journal, I discuss various aspects of the writing craft. I advocate trusting the characters to tell the story that they, not the writer, are living. This is by far the easiest, most liberating, and most fun way to tell a story.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Find and Replace Tool](#), [janefriedman.com](#), [killzoneblog.com](#), [thepassivevoice.com](#), [Topic](#), [Writer mistakes](#)

What? and Writing Sales Copy

September 26, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * What?
- * Writing Sales Copy
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

First, from the Department of the Absolutely Ridiculous:

“The first words are the hardest. For many of us writing is a slog. Words drip with difficulty onto the page—and frequently they seem to be the wrong ones, in the wrong order.” not credited, so apparently a staff writer for *The Economist*

“Imagination is more important than knowledge.” Albert Einstein

Preach it, Brother.

What?

Did anyone else visualize Dr. Smith from *Lost in Space* as you read the first Quote of the Day? See why I said it was from the Department of the Absolutely Ridiculous?

I swear, after the second sentence I was frowning, confused, and wondering what's going on. Writing is a SLOG?

So what, some of you are suffering for your art? Or suffering more profoundly than all the other writers out there? If this is true, then why in the world are you writing? Am I wrong, folks?

If you're suffering at all and if suffering is your thing, you've certainly got me beat. I actually find writing fun.

But if you find it a “slog,” why bother writing at all? Why put yourself through all that (whatever “all that” is)? Why not just go find something fun to do?

Of course, if you only want something to gripe and get all dramatic about, I guess that's fine. It's your life to waste. But there are many, MANY things a great deal more important than writing about which you could pitch a fit.

And with almost *anything* else you could present a much more dramatic case than, “Oh woe is me! Writing is such a slog! It’s such terrible drudgery!”

Really, even if you only want to throw a “poor me, look at what I’m enduring” pity party and open it to the whole world, for pete’s sake come up with something better than faking that you’re somehow forced to slave over a story day after dreary never-ending day.

Seriously, get a hobby or something. At a minimum, read a news report about the invasion of Ukraine or a story about refugees or boat people. Visit a homeless shelter.

But put down that pen or pencil. You could put an eye out.

Writing Sales Copy

In “Of Interest” is a link to an article titled “How to Hook Readers with a Better Book Description.” That, my friends, is sales copy.

I included the link just in case you might find something useful, but what I really recommend is that you skip the article and buy a copy of Dean Wesley Smith’s How to Write Fiction Sales Copy at <https://www.amazon.com/dp/1561466476>.

It’s one of the best investments I’ve ever made, and I can pretty well promise it’s all you need, no matter your genre(s).

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Good News! Amazon Changes Ebook Return Policy” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/09/good-news-amazon-changes-ebook-return-policy.html>.

See “A man once asked me” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/a-man-once-asked-me/>.

See “A Writing Career Returns from the Grave” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/a-writing-career-returns-from-the-grave/>.

See “How to Hook Readers with a Better Book Description” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/how-to-hook-readers-with-a-better-book-description/>. Um, skip this and buy Dean Wesley Smith’s

The Numbers

The Journal..... 530 words

Writing of Carmen Morales (novel, tentative title)

Day 10... 3375 words. Total words to date..... 31839

Total fiction words for September..... 35116
Total fiction words for the year..... 101547
Total nonfiction words for September... 21900
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 150130
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 251677

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 1
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 67
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: In this Journal, I discuss various aspects of the writing craft. I advocate trusting the characters to tell the story that they, not the writer, are living. This is by far the easiest, most liberating, and most fun way to tell a story.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags ["Writign is a slog."](#), [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [killzoneblog.com](#), [thepassivevoice.com](#), [Write Fiction Sales Copy](#)

Tossing Around Some Numbers

September 27, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Topic: Tossing Around Some Numbers
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

“Knowledge is proud that he has learned so much; Wisdom is humble that he knows no more.”
William Cowper

Topic: Tossing Around Some Numbers

I wasn't going to post a Journal entry today, but a conversation with a student this morning spurred some thoughts.

The fiction-writing myths are deeply ingrained in our society. They're inadvertently taught in junior high, high school, and college English and Literature classes by teachers and professors who are only teaching what they themselves were taught.

They're also routinely presented in most films and in serial episodes that have anything whatsoever to do with fiction writers. As I said, they're deeply ingrained.

One familiar trope is the writers' group in a quiet, small town who invites a famous novelist to speak to the group. I've seen that in more than one American film and in episodes of different detective dramas on BritBox and Acorn (the television network, not the political action group).

In those shows, the novelist is ALWAYS a snob, ALWAYS suffers for his or her art, ALWAYS takes years to finish a single novel, and pretty much always has leather patches on the elbows of his or her wool jacket. Ugh.

Which brings me to the numbers: I don't believe it's an exaggeration to say that probably 99.99% of all aspiring and actual fiction writers are deeply and probably *inexorably* mired in the myths. (It took me awhile to get that "inexorably" part.)

And literally thousands more future writers are being indoctrinated with them every day. The indoctrination is largely inadvertent, but some of it is purposeful. For example, those who make a large part of their income selling how-to books that promote the myths would be stupid to tell prospective buyers of their books that it's all a bunch of hooley.

Stage 1 through 3 writers tend to write blogs and populate "boards" and leave comments in which they promote the myths. Most often they simply regurgitate what they were told, but they treat each utterance as if it's an original thought instead of something that's been around since the late 1940s.

The watchphrase for those folks is "Whatever works," and you will never hear them admit that it DOESN'T work. Even when they've spent months or longer only constructing an outline. Even when they promote themselves as "prolific" for turning out a novel or two novels every year.

But who can argue with them? I've tried in the past, and I freely admit I'm not up to the task. As I wrote above, it took me awhile to get that "inexorably" part.

That's why, unless I'm asked directly, I very seldom talk about the myths or WITD anywhere outside of this Journal, which is fine. Frankly, who needs the grief? As Mark Twain once quipped, "It's easier to fool people than it is to convince them they've been fooled." Absolutely true, especially when you're appealing to their fears.

None of this is a secret. In that time-honored story about the emperor's new robes, the emperor knew he was naked, folks. His pride just wouldn't let him admit he'd been sold a load of bovine excrement. His motto too was probably "whatever works."

But back to that 99.99%: First, let me disarm my detractors by admitting that not all of that percentage construct a formal outline. Many of them will be quick to tell you they don't outline at all. Instead, they'll say, they erect "signposts" or "stops along the way" or "mind-maps" or (*ahem*) outlines by absolutely any other name.

But it's the same thing. All of them use some way to plan in advance what will happen in any novel they construct. And absolutely all of them revise, invite external criticism, and rewrite. It's what they've been taught and it's what they do. Hey, whatever works.

Personally, I still believe that urge to plan and know in advance what's going to happen is a kneejerk response to an unreasoning fear, but I won't argue the point. Because why they do it doesn't really matter, does it? Dragging feet are dragging feet no matter the reason.

There is, of course, a bottom line: *Once you are able to trust* yourself and your characters completely, you will have joined a tiny, even minuscule community of writers. Those writers comprise the other .001% (or less).

But that community includes some of the most prolific fiction writers of all time, living and dead. They work (engage the critical mind) to learn various aspects of writing. But they NEVER work at writing.

They trust themselves and are confident in what they know. As a result, every word, sentence, and paragraph they put on the page is sheer joy. In my book, that's not a bad aspiration.

I'll leave you with this thought: The only reason the ability to WITD is important at all is to make writing fun. It isn't something you can achieve by working at it. You can only achieve it by practicing Letting Go.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "October 1st" at <https://deanwesleymith.com/october-1st/>.

See "Six Things Writers Need To Stop Worrying About" at <http://jakonrath.blogspot.com/2019/07/five-things-writers-need-to-stop.html>.

See "Seven Reasons to Attend a Writers Conference" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/09/seven-reasons-to-attend-a-writers-conference.html>. Grain of salt, but conferences are a great place to exercise your critical mind and learn.

See "Inside Penguin Random House's play to reach avid readers on TikTok's BookTok" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/inside-penguin-random-houses-play-to-reach-avid-readers-on-tiktoks-booktok/>. See PG's take.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 900 words

Writing of Carmen Morales (novel, tentative title)

Day 10... 3375 words. Total words to date..... 31839
Day 11... 3350 words. Total words to date..... 35189

Total fiction words for September..... 38466
Total fiction words for the year..... 104897
Total nonfiction words for September... 22800
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 151030
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 255927

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 1
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 67
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: In this Journal, I discuss various aspects of the writing craft. I advocate trusting the characters to tell the story that they, not the writer, are living. This is by far the easiest, most liberating, and most fun way to tell a story.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [JA Konrath](#), [killzoneblog.com](#), [Myths of fiction writing](#), [thepassivevoice.com](#), [Topic](#), [WITD](#)

Two Fiction Writers

September 28, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * JA Konrath
- * Stephen King
- * Google Translate
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“Three months until the end of the year. You can get a lot of writing done in three months.”
Dean Wesley Smith

“[I]f you had a bad summer, fell off your goal for the year, whatever, reset your goal and when you get to January 1st, you will be feeling positive.” Dean Wesley Smith

“The past is always tense, the future perfect.” Zadie Smith

Fiction Writer JA Konrath

This guy is special. He's a very prolific writer and, for years, wrote a blog titled A Newbie's Guide to Publishing. Then one day he just stopped blogging. (I suspect he grew tired of feeling he was beating his head against a wall.)

On July 19, 2019, he wrote his final post. I included it in "Of Interest" yesterday. I include it every now and then because I think all writers should read it. If you missed it yesterday, you can find it here: [Six Things Writers Need to Stop Worrying About](#). Genius.

Fiction Writer Stephen King

He turned 75 on September 21. In my opinion he is the only Stage 5 writer working today. I can't tell you how much I've learned about the craft while reading his books, especially The Stand. In his honor, there are a couple of links in "Of Interest."

Google Translate

There's also a link in "Of Interest" to a post about Google Translate over at the Passive Voice. I recommend using Google Translate, but with the knowledge that mechanical translators are far from perfect.

Especially in my Wes Crowley stories, I regularly use Google Translate to translate brief passages from English to Spanish. The longest thus far was an incantation used in a magic realism passage, at 35 words in English and 32 in Spanish.

Most often, once I have the first translation, I translate it again in reverse to see what, if anything, changes or is missing. Doing that a few times back and forth renders a much cleaner translation.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "75 Facts About Stephen King...." at <https://www.mentalfloss.com/posts/stephen-king-author-facts>. I particularly liked 27, 43, 44, 48 and 72.

See "14 Things You Didn't Know About The Stand" at <https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/62684/15-things-you-didnt-know-about-stand>.

See "Writers of the Future Deadline" at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/writers-of-the-future-deadline/>.

See "Sponsored ads and Stores launches in Egypt" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/sponsored-ads-and-stores-launches-in-egypt/>.

See "Google Translate" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/google-translate/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 390 words

Writing of Carmen Morales (novel, tentative title)

Day 10... 3375 words. Total words to date..... 31839

Day 11... 3350 words. Total words to date..... 35189

Day 12... 3640 words. Total words to date..... 38829

Total fiction words for September..... 42106

Total fiction words for the year..... 108537

Total nonfiction words for September... 23190

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 151420

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 259957

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 1

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 67

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: In this Journal, I discuss various aspects of the writing craft. I advocate trusting the characters to tell the story that they, not the writer, are living. This is by far the easiest, most liberating, and most fun way to tell a story.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [Google Translate](#), [JA Konrath](#), [mentalfloss.com](#), [Stephen King](#), [thepassivevoice.com](#)

Why Do You Want to Write?

September 29, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Why Do You Want to Write?
- * Stephen King (Again)
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

“If you want to succeed you should strike out on new paths, rather than travel the worn paths of accepted success.” John D. Rockefeller

Why Do You Want to Write?

Today over at [the KillZone Blog](#), Garry Rodgers asks, “Why do you want to write?”

My response: Sheer, unabashed, unapologetic escapism. My characters live in a world in which I wish I lived too. And I can, but only as I’m running through the story with them as it unfolds around us. And all they ask of me in return is to serve as their stenographer, recording it all for them.

Visit the link above to leave your own comment, or [leave it here](#) (or both) if you want.

Stephen King (Again)

I hope you will read [Scott’s very interesting comment](#) about Stephen King.

Frankly, I was a little surprised not to have received a LOT of discussion about the King articles, especially given my intentionally provocative “I particularly liked 27, 43, 44, 48 and 72.” But nope, no takers. So I’ll start. (grin)

Number 27: “King developed an alias so he could publish more books.”

Before indie publishing became a thing, a lot of prolific writers (especially the successful pulp writers) did exactly the same thing.

Number 43: “King (briefly) retired in 2002.”

I admit, this one is more than a little enticing. I’ve considered retiring 1) from writing the Journal and 2) from storytelling altogether more times than anyone knows. The first time writing fiction becomes the slogging, trudging drudgery so many say it is, trust me, I am *outta* here.

Number 44: “He was an early ebook adopter.”

Yup, me too. In fact, my full length (400+ pages) poetry collection Lessons for a Barren Population was first published by Hard Shell Press as an ebook. It took 4th place in the Frankfurt Book Fair’s first ever Ebook Awards back in the late 1990s. (1996, I think.) And that was in the Fiction category. They didn’t have a poetry category yet. And I still have an old Rocket e-reader.

Number 48: “He didn’t like James Patterson’s idea for a book about King being murdered.”

In fact, King once called Patterson a “terrible writer.” I couldn’t agree more strongly. I’ve long said I believe Patterson’s success is a result of his marketing and advertising experience. I’ve never been able to get into even his early works, the ones he wrote himself. No hook. No grounding at all. No enticement to keep reading, so why should I?

An Indented Lesson

The reader is there to be entertained, period. The reader owes the writer Nothing. S/he isn't obligated to figure-out what you're trying to say or interpret your strange phonetic spellings or keep reading when you're boring the varnish off the woodwork.

1. Continually study and learn the craft and the nuances of the language.
2. Ignore the stupid myths (all the things you "have" to do to be a fiction writer).
3. Then practice.

Number 72: "King wrote *The Running Man* in one week."

Do I really need to explain why I like this one? (grin) Of the experience, he said, "I was white hot, I was burning." That is exactly how I feel as I'm racing through a story with my characters while it unfolds all around us.

One thing I noticed in particular was that King himself kept repeating that various of his works were based on the works of other authors. For example, *The Stand* was based on Tolkein's *Lord of the Rings*.

Not that any kind of plagiarism was going on. It wasn't. The stories are completely different, and you can't copyright an idea. But ideas really can come from anywhere.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Has The Zodiac Killer Mystery Been Solved (Again)?" at <https://www.lamag.com/citythinkblog/zodiac-killer-paul-alfred-doerr/>.

See "The Reality of Celebratory Gunfire" at <https://www.1point21interactive.com/celebratory-gunfire/>.

See "Fun Challenge" at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/fun-challenge/>.

See "The Fastest Way to Print High Quality Books" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/the-fastest-way-to-print-high-quality-books/>. Very interesting.

See "10 essential [paper] book cover tips for indie authors" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/10-essential-book-cover-tips-for-indie-authors/>. I thought this would be design tips. It isn't. I'm not sure why these people keep presenting "print" as synonymous with "paper."

The Numbers

The Journal..... 600 words

Writing of Carmen Morales (novel, tentative title)

Day 10... 3375 words. Total words to date..... 31839
Day 11... 3350 words. Total words to date..... 35189
Day 12... 3640 words. Total words to date..... 38829
Day 13... 3673 words. Total words to date..... 42502

Total fiction words for September..... 45779
Total fiction words for the year..... 112210
Total nonfiction words for September... 23790
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 152020
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 264230

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 1
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 67
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: In this Journal, I discuss various aspects of the writing craft. I advocate trusting the characters to tell the story that they, not the writer, are living. This is by far the easiest, most liberating, and most fun way to tell a story.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags "[print](#)" vs. "[paper](#)", [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [lamag.com/citythinkblog](#), [Stephen King](#), [thepassivevoice.com](#)

Challenge Time?

September 30, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * The Novel
- * Topic: Challenge Time?
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“So [my] new challenge, starting October 1st, is two novels a month for the last three months of the year.” Dean Wesley Smith

Ahem. I'd like to note for the record, I set my adjusted goal for the rest of this year before I read what you see above in Dean's post for today. (grin)

“Failure is the condiment that gives success its flavor.” Truman Capote (born on this date, 1924)

“New robotic drug capsule drills through mucus lining in the intestines, allowing large molecule medications, including insulin, to be delivered orally instead of via injections.” Anne Trafton, teaser for “Breaking through the mucus barrier” from MIT News (SF story ideas, anyone?)

The Novel

As you can see from the numbers below, the novel’s coming along fine. Will I finish it today? I think so, but I don’t know. When I stopped writing yesterday, the end wasn’t in sight yet, but the beginning of the end was, if that makes sense.

So maybe. If today and tomorrow are typical days (no emergencies crop up, etc.) think it will end either today or tomorrow for sure.

My goal was for this story to finish on or before September 30. So I kind of made today my deadline. But it’s a false deadline, isn’t it? There are no consequences if I miss it, and no bonus if I make it. My publisher doesn’t run a very tight ship when it comes to publication schedules. (grin)

When I decided to finish the current novel on or before September 30, I also set a goal to write at least one novel per month for the rest of the year. When I set that goal, my mindset was that I was still “coming back” to writing from my force hiatus.

But my current novel shows me that I *am* back, not fully, but probably 90%. So I decided that goal for the last quarter really is too easy. I’ve just proven to myself with my current novel that I could take two weeks off and still write a novel in a month. So that isn’t much of a challenge. It won’t make me stretch at all.

So I’m changing that goal, yet without adding unnecessary pressure. I always bear in the back of my mind, if I miss a goal, there are zero consequences. If I meet or exceed a goal, though, I feel a great sense of accomplishment. Win/win.

So to make myself stretch a little and to drive me to the writing ‘puter more insistently, here’s my adjusted goal: I’ll write at least five more novels by 31 December. So that’s five more novels in 92 days (beginning October 1), so a new novel every 18.4 days.

What’s more, so there will be zero chance of my continuing a story that ended in a previous novel—some critics and detractors wrongly believe continuing a storyline is easier than writing something brand new—I will alternate genres.

This actually will free-up my creative subconscious MORE than writing the next book in any series. I’ll be completely unfettered by the world, the storyline or story timeline, and previous situations and characters.

Small changes make a huge difference. With my goal for this quarter, the timeline (in *my* world as a fiction writer) is still tight, but it's considerably looser than it would be if I were writing 6 novels during the three months remaining in this year, or a new novel every 15 days.

However, if I'm able to write 6 or more novels before December 31, that will be a bonus and I will celebrate. (grin) Isn't this fun? So my personal writing challenge is set. We'll see what happens.

But more importantly, what are YOUR goals for the last quarter of the year? And are you thinking about goals for 2023 yet?

Topic: Challenge Time?

Okay, first, don't forget a brand new quarter starts tomorrow. So today would be a great time to come up with a personal writing challenge for yourself for the last three months of the year, either one month at a time or overall as the final quarter of the year.

If you're relatively prolific (for example), you could jump in and join me in my challenge. Or you could back it up a bit and set a challenge to write a novel per month plus a short story per week for the rest of the year. Or you could write the novels and forget about short stories. Or vice versa.

In his post for today, linked to in "Of Interest," Dean Wesley Smith sets his challenge for the last quarter, but he also mentions what looks like a pretty good challenge for himself, and for those who enjoy writing short stories as well as novels, for the coming year.

In that possible challenge for 2023, he talks about alternating from novels to short stories and back every quarter. He's talking about writing a short story every day for 3 months and then a novel every two weeks for three months.

If that seems like an awful lot of short stories, you could also alternate in two-month and one-month segments, something like this:

Jan/Feb 1, 2 or 4 novels
Mar 31 shorts or 1, 2 or 3 per week
Apr/May 1, 2 or 4 novels
Jun 30 shorts or 1, 2 or 3 per week
Jul/Aug 1, 2 or 4 novels
Sep 30 shorts or 1, 2 or 3 per week
Oct/Nov 1, 2 or 4 novels
Dec 31 shorts or 1, 2 or 3 per week

At the end of 2023, you would have a TON more inventory than you had on January 1.

Notice that after Dean sets his overall goal, he walks it all back to how many words per day it will require, and that becomes his daily word-count goal.

You can easily use any of the structures above but adjust the numbers to suit your current level of productivity. Maybe write one, two or three novels during the first quarter, and the next quarter write one, two or three short stories per week. Something like that.

Or you can change the structure itself. You could alternate the first half of the year with the last half of the year. Or alternate month by month. You can tailor the challenge to suit your needs and abilities, but if you want to increase your productivity and push yourself to practice more, a fun challenge is a great way to do that.

Of course, a challenge is also a great way to illustrate to yourself that Just Writing is a great deal more fun than planning, writing, revising, seeking criticism, and rewriting.

I do hope you'll give this challenge thing a shot. You have absolutely nothing to lose, and literally everything to gain. And please feel free to share your challenge—for the last quarter, for next year, or both—with us in the comments. It might stir someone else to do something similar.

And if you'd like a cheerleader and someone to check in with as you progress with your writing, I'm right here.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Second Part of My New Challenge" at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/second-part-of-my-new-challenge/>. This is a great post, a catalyst, and yup, I left a comment. (grin)

See "Quiz: What's Your Amazon Book Sales Potential?" at <https://www.amarketingexpert.com/2022/09/29/quiz-whats-your-amazon-book-sales-potential/>.

See "Breaking through the mucus barrier" at <https://news.mit.edu/2022/protein-drugs-gi-tract-0928>. As is often the case, the story isn't as intriguing as the teaser.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1200 words

Writing of Carmen Morales (novel, tentative title)

Day 10... 3375 words. Total words to date..... 31839

Day 11... 3350 words. Total words to date..... 35189

Day 12... 3640 words. Total words to date..... 38829

Day 13... 3673 words. Total words to date..... 42502

Day 14... 3604 words. Total words to date..... 46106

Total fiction words for September..... 49383

Total fiction words for the year..... 115814

Total nonfiction words for September... 24990
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 153220
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 269034

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 1
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 67
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: In this Journal, I discuss various aspects of the writing craft. I advocate trusting the characters to tell the story that they, not the writer, are living. This is by far the easiest, most liberating, and most fun way to tell a story.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [amarketingexpert.com](#), [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [news.mit.edu](#), [Personal Writing Challenges](#), [Personal Writing Goals](#), [Setting Goals and Challenges](#), [Topic](#)

The Invaluable Daily Word Count Goal

October 1, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * The Novel
- * Topic: The Invaluable Daily Word Count Goal
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

“Do you have a rough idea what the novels will be?” comment on Dean’s post from yesterday
“No clue. I’ll write what strikes me when I sit down on the first day. That’s as much planning as I ever do.” Dean Wesley Smith

The Novel

Welp, the story didn’t wrap yesterday, and here we are in a brand new month and a brand new quarter. This day has never happened before, so we can make it whatever we want it to be. Ditto the month and quarter. And October has a bonus day, so if you don’t start until tomorrow, no real foul. (grin)

Yesterday I mentioned that I couldn’t see the end of the novel but I could see the beginning of the end. After I posted that, I wrote right up to the beginning of the end.

I still can't see the end, thankfully, but I know it's within say two to five thousand words. So the novel should wrap today, but if it doesn't it will definitely wrap tomorrow.

This is me being fluid, by the way. This is me not pushing or forcing a story to wrap for my own convenience. No critical mind allowed even at this stage. It's the characters' story, so it should be whatever length it is. Because otherwise, seriously, what's the point?

Topic: The Invaluable Daily Word Count Goal

This morning, one of my mentoring students caused me to realize that in my post on challenges and goals yesterday, I didn't mention my own daily word count goal. So I thought I'd rectify that.

From April 15, 2014 when I first started writing fiction seriously, my word count goal has been 3000 publishable words of fiction per day. But I often reach it, so it isn't really making me stretch anymore. So I should probably increase it. I probably will do that once I finish the current novel.

I love this quote from my student's email: "Finishing two novels seems mad compared to where I was only a week or so ago." (grin)

He also asked whether I had any suggestions for setting daily and long-term goals:

1. Set your daily word count goal so it makes you reach or stretch a little. It shouldn't be easy to reach, but it shouldn't be impossible either. (That's why I said I'll be increasing mine soon.)

2. Your daily goal should be set in concrete. It will

- a) drive you to the computer when you might not otherwise go, and

- b) keep you coming back through the day until you've reached your goal.

3. Yes, set long-term goals too, something to keep you moving forward (never back) but let those be fluid. I *want* to write 5 novels in the last quarter of this year, so 18.4 days per novel. But if one runs longer than 18 days to write with no end in sight, should I set it aside until this challenge is over so I can write more novels that are shorter? Of course not.

So leave your long-term goals fluid.

And also understand that you can adjust your daily goal as necessary. If you meet your goal every day for a week or two or three, you should probably raise it by 500 or 1000 words. If you never reach it with a week or two of trying, you should probably lower it by 500 words.

When setting or attempting to reach a daily goal, I tend to think in 500 word increments. 500 words is about a half-hour for me, and I figure I can always write another 500 words. If I do that twice, it's 1000 words, etc.

I generally break every hour or so, usually for only five or ten minutes, then return to write another session. But if I went for a break and it turned into something much longer—say a trip to the neighboring town or something—and if I had written less than my daily goal before I left, when I got back the daily goal would drive me back to the writing ‘puter. It really does work.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “A Day of Nothing” at <https://deanwesleymith.com/a-day-of-nothing/>. These days happen. Don’t beat yourself up. Just climb back on Heinlein’s Rules the next day.

See “I’ve Heard Such Mixed Things” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/ive-heard-such-mixed-things/>. I love it when writers accidentally write advice that is all about WITD without even realizing it. Some good stuff here.

See “Outlining/Plotting vs Discovery Writing/Pantsing” at <https://www.thecreativepenn.com/2022/09/30/outlining-plotting-discovery-writing-pantsing/>. I don’t need to read this, but if you do, here it is. I’ve been in the old camp, and I’m now firmly in the new. And oh yes, I definitely left a comment. (grin)

See “Our galaxy is rippling...” at <https://interestingengineering.com/science/our-galaxy-is-rippling>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 800 words

Writing of Carmen Morales (novel, tentative title)

Day 10... 3375 words. Total words to date..... 31839

Day 11... 3350 words. Total words to date..... 35189

Day 12... 3640 words. Total words to date..... 38829

Day 13... 3673 words. Total words to date..... 42502

Day 14... 3604 words. Total words to date..... 46106

Day 15... 4568 words. Total words to date..... 50674

Total fiction words for September..... 53951

Total fiction words for the year..... 124950

Total nonfiction words for October... 800

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 154020

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 274402

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 1

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	67
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014).....	217
Short story collections.....	31

Disclaimer: In this Journal, I discuss various aspects of the writing craft. I advocate trusting the characters to tell the story that they, not the writer, are living. This is by far the easiest, most liberating, and most fun way to tell a story.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Daily Goals](#), [Daily Word-Count Goal](#), [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [interestingengineering.com](#), [Long-Term Goals](#), [TheCreativePenn.com](#), [thepassivevoice.com](#), [Topic](#)

Read, Check. Write, Check. Suffer? Um, No.

October 2, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * The Novel Continues
- * An Enjoyable Visit
- * My Comment on The Creative Penn
- * Of Interest

The Novel Continues

Seemingly interminably. Still, it's only been 16 days. (grin)

I figure it'll wrap today. I still can't see the ending (yay) but I feel as if I've entered the ending and was writing it yesterday. I also feel like this novel might wrap suddenly, unexpectedly, and that's the best kind. No boredom. (grin)

I mentioned a while back the Dean Wesley Smith adage that every novel writes differently and that this one has been no exception. As I came to the Hovel this morning and glanced over my reverse outline, I realized this novel also has at least two complete short stories inside it.

Of course, I won't count those as separate words because they aren't, but I will publish them as individual short stories, if for no other reason than to build buzz for the novel, the Wes Crowley Gap series, and the Wes Crowley saga overall. Very cool.

I might even bundle these two or three new ones with some older Wes Crowley short stories in a ten-story collection.

And thinking like that, my friends, is about the extent of my marketing knowledge. Otherwise I only vaguely know you should probably read a couple of books others recommend (at least one about making money with Amazon), you should build an email list of interested readers, etc. None of which I have done or am likely to do.

An Enjoyable Visit

This weekend I've also gotten to visit with my youngest son and even help (purely as a roustabout) as he installed a radio signal repeater (I think I have that right). Ham radio enthusiasts will know what I'm talking about, even though I seriously don't have a clue.

My son first started (excitedly) pointing out "radio towers" when he was a toddler. Now he's an accomplished technician and administrator with a major internet and cable provider and a licensed Ham radio operator.

My Comment on The Creative Penn Website

Yesterday in "Of Interest" I linked to "Outlining/Plotting vs Discovery Writing/Pantsing" at <https://www.thecreativepenn.com/2022/09/30/outlining-plotting-discovery-writing-pantsing/>, but I also announced I'd left a comment.

I was a little dismayed this morning to see that my comment had not been approved, so I thought I'd pass it along to you here. Nothing you haven't seen before, but maybe said in a slightly different way:

"I speak as a writer who once spent three years outlining a novel that still has never been written. I've labored hard in the mines of the traditional camp, and I'm now running free and playing in the WITD camp. Since April 15, 2014 I've written well over 200 short stories. Since October 19, 2014, I've written 68 novels and 8 novellas. I would never go back.

"There are several 'traditional' methods for writing fiction, and all are some version of plan, write, revise, invite criticism, rewrite, edit, polish. They all have one thing in common: steps you must take (things you must do) if you're to create a fictional story.

"Writing into the dark has no steps. Rather, it encourages letting go of steps. In a nutshell, WITD is the ability to trust your characters to tell the story that they, not you, are living.

"When you write into the dark, you don't have to 'do' anything but write. Just Write. That's it.

"Don't think about writing. Don't revise or rewrite. Don't allow even your own critical mind to overwrite your creative subconscious, and DON'T seek or allow other critical voices to intervene.

"Until it is published, your characters' story is nobody else's business. And once it IS published, each individual reader, not you, will decide whether it's any good. If you revised, rewrote, edited or 'polished' your characters' unique and original voices, chances are more readers will find it predictable and fewer readers will enjoy it.

"Frankly, I don't trust people who feel they have to exert control over the characters and every aspect of a story. (grin) I suspect they secretly long to exert the same control over their relatives and neighbors as those folks go about living their story too."

Why wasn't my comment approved for publication? Shrug. I dunno. Maybe it's that last paragraph, about me not trusting folks who probably wish I'd burst into flame. (grin) But it isn't my website, so....

Apparently I'm feeling a little mouthy today. In addition to the comment above, I left a comment on the Kill Zone blog this morning too, in response to what I saw as an unbelievably stone-age post. Purely my opinion, of course. If you're the sort who enjoys brie on crackers and sipping wine at launch parties, that's your thing and it's perfectly fine with me. (grin)

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "When Is It Smart to Submit Your Work to a University Press? (You'd Be Surprised!)" at <https://www.janefriedman.com/submit-your-work-to-a-university-press/>.

See "5 Ways to Use Community Marketing for Your Book" at <https://www.janefriedman.com/spread-the-love-5-ways-to-use-community-marketing-for-your-book/>.

See "Read, Write, Suffer" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/10/read-write-suffer.html>. Seriously? I literally groaned out loud when I read this. I left a comment. No doubt I'll be convicted by proxy of witchcraft and relegated to the stocks in the village square. (grin)

The Numbers

The Journal..... 830 words

Writing of Carmen Morales (novel, tentative title)

Day 10... 3375 words. Total words to date..... 31839

Day 11... 3350 words. Total words to date..... 35189

Day 12... 3640 words. Total words to date..... 38829

Day 13... 3673 words. Total words to date..... 42502

Day 14... 3604 words. Total words to date..... 46106

Day 15... 4568 words. Total words to date..... 50674

Day 16... 2149 words. Total words to date..... 52823

Total fiction words for October..... 2149

Total fiction words for the year..... 122531

Total nonfiction words for October... 1630

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 154850

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 277381

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 1

Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date...	0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	67
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014).....	217
Short story collections.....	31

Disclaimer: In this Journal, I discuss various aspects of the writing craft. I advocate trusting the characters to tell the story that they, not the writer, are living. This is by far the easiest, most liberating, and most fun way to tell a story.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [janefriedman.com](#), [killzoneblog.com](#)

Yes, Whatever Works For You Is Fine

October 3, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * The Novel
- * Topic: Yes, Whatever Works For You Is Fine
- * Of Interest

The Novel

As you can see from the numbers below, yesterday was not a good writing day. It was barely a writing day at all. We had a great visit with our son, though, so no biggie. I'm also notorious for slowing my writing toward the end of a novel because I hate to see it end.

But last night I realized I've been pressuring myself too, and that's just stupid. Because I felt I was closing in on the end of the novel, for the past few issues of the Journal I've been saying the story would wrap on this day or that day or another day.

See how easily the critical mind can creep in? Adding unnecessary pressure can lead you to rush or even "construct" an endng, which in turn would insult your creative voice. And insulting or alienating your creative subconscious is *never* a good idea.

Besides, I'd much rather miss a false deadline (or even a real one) than concoct an ending just to keep myself on some imaginary schedule. Or worse yet, abandon a novel, stick it into a metaphorical drawer, and hope to get back to it "someday." And if I succumbed to the pressure, how much easier would it be for my critical mind to shut down the next project?

Fortunately, I took a deep breath and recognized what was happening. When the novel wraps doesn't matter, does it? So I won't create false expectations by predicting the ending again.

I've always said a story should be as long as it naturally is, and that if you trust your characters, they'll lead you through to the end. That's what I'll be doing again starting this morning.

Topic: Yes, Whatever Works For You Is Fine

I was going to write an article on celebrating beginnings and mourning endings today, but it's more important that I affirm that whatever works for each individual writer is fine. Seriously. I don't care. I just provide information, backed up by statistics. Whether other writer take advantage of that is up to them.

Mark Twain's (paraphrased) "It's easier to fool people than it is to convince them they've been fooled" has to be the understatement of the 20th century.

What's more, I believe it has a better-than-even chance to rank as the number one understatement of the 21st century too. Why? Because I have abiding faith in two peculiar characteristics of humanity:

The first is the uniquely human propensity to overcomplicate even the simplest of tasks. Doing so makes the task seem "important" and, by extension, elevates the importance of the person performing the task.

Trust me on this: If writing a story is labor to you, you're either doing a bunch of unnecessary stuff out of fear or you're making writing laborious intentionally, probably to elevate your status in your own mind. Or both. But that's fine.

The second is that most humans will go to absolutely any lengths to avoid even considering that they might have been fooled. Very, very few have the confidence to laugh and say, "Ha! Got me!" It's embarrassing to admit that the flowing robes in which they've been parading around in public don't actually exist. 'Cause that ain't funny, man.

But as I've written in this space many times, I don't really care how anyone else writes. If other writers spend months constructing an outline, then write, revise, seek critical input, then rewrite, edit, polish, etc. ad nauseam, it's absolutely no skin off my teeth.

But don't get me wrong. I'm not validating anyone's choice here. I can never agree that following all those silly fear-driven myths is the right way for even one person to go about writing fiction.

But for me, that isn't a difficult position to take. It's like saying, "Hey, putting on a blindfold and then trying to cross a 7-lane freeway at rush hour is probably not a good idea."

But that's where my involvement ends. I'm not judging. I'm only saying if that's what they want to do, that's fine with me. I don't care.

In fact, that some writers perform all those unnecessary and time-consuming mental gymnastics with every book actually helps people like me. It keeps them from being effective competition

out there in the reading pool. The longer they hover over one work, the more new stories and novels I and others like me can cast into the water.

And it's fine with me that they tell themselves they're writing *quality* fiction, implying that the rest of us are lowly hacks who are putting out crap. Because in the year it takes one of them to write two 60,000 word novels (and be termed by some "prolific"), we "hacks" will have written and published several hundred thousand words of new fiction.

Or as we like to call it, Practice.

And as everyone knows, Practice—not hovering in place or moving backward, revising, rewriting, etc.—makes perfect.

But here, let me put some actual numbers on it: Last year, in only 7 months, I felt woefully unproductive. Yet I produced 13 novels, 1 novella and 3 short stories in 636,749 words of fiction. (That doesn't include the 203,560 words of nonfiction I wrote in the Journal.)

I'm not bragging. I'm saying that's 636,749 words of PRACTICE in fiction writing, folks. To get the same amount of practice, the two-novels-per-year, 120000-words writer would have to write for 5.3 years. Just sayin'.

But seriously, how anyone else chooses to write is their business. I don't care. If it's pouring down rain, whether I offer someone an umbrella is up to me. But whether they accept it is up to them.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Updates On Workshops and Things" at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/updates-on-workshops-and-things/>.

See "What Writers Can Learn from Bad TV Adaptations" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/10/what-writers-can-learn-from-bad-tv-adaptations.html>.

See "The 5 Most Common Mistakes in Book Cover Design and How to Avoid Them" at <https://www.writtenwordmedia.com/the-5-most-common-mistakes-in-book-cover-design-and-how-to-avoid-them/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 950 words

Writing of Carmen Morales (novel, tentative title)

Day 10... 3375 words. Total words to date..... 31839
Day 11... 3350 words. Total words to date..... 35189
Day 12... 3640 words. Total words to date..... 38829
Day 13... 3673 words. Total words to date..... 42502
Day 14... 3604 words. Total words to date..... 46106
Day 15... 4568 words. Total words to date..... 50674
Day 16... 2149 words. Total words to date..... 52823
Day 17... 1421 words. Total words to date..... XXXXX

Total fiction words for October..... 3570
Total fiction words for the year..... 123952
Total nonfiction words for October... 2580
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 155800
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 279752

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 1
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 67
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [book covers](#), [critical voice](#), [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [killzoneblog.com](#), [Topic](#), [Whatever Works](#), [writtenwordmedia.com](#)

I Celebrate Beginnings, But I Mourn Endings

October 4, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Today or Tomorrow
- * Topic: I Celebrate Beginnings, But I Mourn Endings
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“You never learn by turning around and going backwards. Learning in writing is practice, working on the next new story and applying the knowledge your creative voice has gained from the last stories.” Dean Wesley Smith

“Don’t compromise yourself. You are all you’ve got.” Janis Joplin

Today or Tomorrow

Over the past three days, I’ve managed to lose two subscribers. One was with us for only a month. The other, since January of this year. I have to admit, I thought it odd that the second one would hang-in during all those non-writing months and leave now.

Anyway, today or tomorrow I’ll start a new novel. Yesterday, as I wrote in my post, I stopped worrying about when the novel would wrap.

Instead, I let go, trusted my characters, and just wrote what happened. And guess what? The novel wrapped on Day 18. Go figure, eh?

In the numbers today, I included all 18 days in case you want to see the numbers. For example, I fell short of my word-count goal on 4 of those 18 days.

I also had almost 6000 words of cuts. Not counting those, the novel wrapped at just under 53,000 words.

Topic: I Celebrate Beginnings, But I Mourn Endings

I’ve never understood why writers throw a party or have a special meal or otherwise celebrate having finished a novel. I don’t understand why they aren’t grieving.

I don’t celebrate endings of any sort: death, divorce, being evicted from my home, or knowing I might never see a set of characters again.

A couple of days ago in response to a recent post, a long-time friend emailed to say he enjoyed “the sipping of wine on some occasions (like a new book in print).” He added, “Book sales are always brisk at such occasions as well—kind of like a Tupperware party.” He added a smiley face.

Yeah, okay, I get that the actual party is to celebrate an Accomplishment, but that lends the book (and by extension, the Author) a certain Importance, doesn’t it? Isn’t it a bit like a mechanic celebrating having rebuilt a 4-barrel Holley?

But I take his point—I really do—and I’m glad that approach works for him. As I told him in my response, “launch parties are probably fine if you research, plan, (write), revise, seek criticism, rewrite, edit, and polish.”

That’s eight steps to write a novel. But only one step (write) is actually necessary.

But I digress. If you personally find those steps useful, then I can understand how adding one post-writing function probably won’t upset your routine very much. Go for it.

I personally couldn't do it, but then, that's just me. I simply write novels one after another after another. So can you imagine planning (or even attending) a book launch party every two or three weeks? Just sayin'.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "I Never Look Back" at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/i-never-look-back/>. This. Read this.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 510 words

Writing of Carmen Morales (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... 3007 words. Total words to date..... 3007
Day 2..... 2842 words. Total words to date..... 5849
Day 3..... 3283 words. Total words to date..... 9132
Day 4..... 3106 words. Total words to date..... 12238
Day 5..... 3644 words. Total words to date..... 15882
Day 6..... 3548 words. Total words to date..... 19430
Day 7..... 3076 words. Total words to date..... 22506
Day 8..... 2667 words. Total words to date..... 25173
Day 9..... 3291 words. Total words to date..... 28464
Day 10... 3375 words. Total words to date..... 31839
Day 11... 3350 words. Total words to date..... 35189
Day 12... 3640 words. Total words to date..... 38829
Day 13... 3673 words. Total words to date..... 42502
Day 14... 3604 words. Total words to date..... 46106
Day 15... 4568 words. Total words to date..... 50674
Day 16... 2149 words. Total words to date..... 52823
Day 17... 1421 words. Total words to date..... 54244
Day 18... 4632 words. Total words to date..... 58876 (done)

Total fiction words for October..... 8202
Total fiction words for the year..... 128584
Total nonfiction words for October... 3090
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 156310
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 284894

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 2
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 68
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: In this Journal, I discuss various aspects of the writing craft. I advocate trusting the characters to tell the story that they, not the writer, are living. This is by far the easiest, most liberating, and most fun way to tell a story.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [Launch parties](#), [Topic](#)

Hey, You Do You

October 5, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Attitude of a Fiction Writer
- * My Goals
- * Hey, You Do You
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“I write one draft, done, and I never look at it again. Why would I look at it again? I know how it ends.” Dean Wesley Smith

“Nothing will stop you from being creative so effectively as the fear of making a mistake.” John Cleese

“Don't write the book you think might sell. ... [W]rite the book that is tearing at your insides to get out. Write the book that keeps you up at night.” PJ Parrish

“It's none of their business that you have to learn how to write. Let them think you were born that way.” Ernest Hemingway

Attitude of a Fiction Writer

If you haven't seen it yet, I suggest you check out Dean Wesley Smith's 2019 video “Attitude of a Fiction Writer” at <https://youtu.be/71Q8aw5jzrE>. He even lays out nine specific points that have to do with writer attitude. I strongly recommend taking notes.

In the video Dean also briefly mentions Scott Carter's WIBBOW rule. I tend to apply it to everything. When you're considering doing something that's “writing related,” ask yourself this question: Would I Be Better Off Writing?

My Goals

My new daily word count goal is 3500 words per day.

My short-term goal is to write 5 more novels before January 1. None will be consecutive in a series.

My long-term goal? I'm thinking about that. Much depends on how I do for the rest of this year.

Last year I wrote 13 novels in 7 months. Extrapolated out, that would be 22 novels next year.

But this year I'm writing 5 novels in the last 3 months. Extrapolated out, that would be 20 novels next year. So my goal will probably be in that neighborhood.

Topic: Hey, You Do You

As [I wrote a couple of days ago](#), do whatever you want, folks, seriously. Doesn't matter to me.

When someone tries WITD and realizes how freeing it is, I get nothing. Well, other than feeling good because one more writer is running free with his or her characters instead of controlling and manipulating them. I even routinely give away my nonfiction books.

Those who are unable to write into the dark apparently just need the much more controlled way of doing things. That's where they're more comfortable, so good for them. I understand, believe me.

The need to know what's coming next in a story creates anxiety and fear. Well, or exhilaration.

Fear and exhilaration are opposite sides of the same odd coin, really. Everything depends on how we choose to look at it. But fear affects us differently than exhilaration does, so which we choose makes a huge difference.

Succumbing to fear will cause us to be overly careful. We will construct and depend on safety nets, even though, ironically, there are zero consequences if we fail.

But succumbing to exhilaration will cause us to discard the safety nets and rush ahead, even though, again ironically, there ARE consequences. They occur in the form of even more heart-pounding exhilaration. Go figure.

If you've ever wondered how to experience being an adrenaline junkie without leaving your chair, this is it.

Anyway, enough of that. Really, with everything I say I'm either preaching to the choir or banging my head against a wall, so (shrug). I'm glad I personally stuck with WITD back in early 2014 and started writing novels with it in October of that year.

Just Writing (WITD) and striving to adhere to Heinlein’s Rules continues to be completely worthwhile for me. And I will always believe it can be worthwhile for anyone who has the courage to “Dare to be bad” (Nina Kiriki Hoffman).

For those who are curious or are hungry to learn, my Journal archives remain free and completely searchable. You can find those at <https://hestanbrough.com/the-daily-journal-archives/>.

And honestly, setting false modesty aside, those archives comprise a legitimate brass ring. If you want to be a professional fiction writer — if you want to consistently turn out high-quality stories and novels and have a blast doing it — I urge you to Grab It.

Or don’t. If you choose to go the other way, that’s fine too. (And no matter how you rationalize it, there really are only two ways to write fiction. You either trust yourself or you depend on others. You can’t “sort of” trust yourself anymore than you can be “sort of” decisive.)

I only wish I’d had such a resource as the Journal archives when I first started to write fiction seriously. I’m grateful for Dean, but wow, what might I have paid for an archive of his posts?

Yet my Journal archive costs you nothing but your time. All you have to do is read it, trust yourself, and write. Obviously, the archive for 2022 isn’t complete yet. I will list it on the Journal Archives page sometime in January 2023.

It occurs to me that I’ve known folks who were extremely successful and self-confident right up until they sat down at a laptop and put their fingers on the keys to write a story. Then suddenly they knew nothing and were consumed by fear.

Yet those same folks were telling stories to their parents and friends before they even knew the alphabet existed. They just made stuff up. How odd that they feel they can’t still do exactly that.

Anyway, whatever method, technique or process you use, or if you use none at all and Just Write, I wish for all of you that eventually you will be able to develop, establish and maintain trust, not in me or any other instructor, but in Yourself.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Making Mistakes: It’s a Mistake Not To Make Them” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/10/making-mistakes-its-amistake-not-to-make-them-2.html>.

See “Fire in the hole!” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/10/fire-in-the-hole.html>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 900 words

Writing of (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... XXXX words. Total words to date..... XXXXX

Total fiction words for October..... 8202
Total fiction words for the year..... 128584
Total nonfiction words for October... 4060
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 157280
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 285864

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 2
Calendar Year 2021 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2021 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 68
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Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [killzoneblog.com](#), [Topic](#)

Someone at Google Sucks

October 6, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * The Novel
- * Someone at Google Sucks
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

“The saddest aspect of life right now is that science gathers knowledge faster than society gathers wisdom.” Isaac Asimov

The Novel

I've settled on the next novel. It will be SF, *The Stirchians*, the long-awaited (ha) sequel to *The 13-Month Turn* ([description here](#)).

I offer the description because you can get *The 13-Month Turn* free in .mobi, .epub, or .pdf for a limited time by emailing me at harveystanbrough@outlook.com (note the new email address) or at my regular email address (for now) harveystanbrough@gmail.com. If you're a fan of science fiction, detailed lunar colonies, and human foibles, I think you'll like it.

If the title of this new one seems familiar to you, I'd started *The Stirchians* before, a good while back, but I allowed it to stall. I think I just wasn't interested in writing it at the time.

Now I'm extremely interested. In fact, I can hardly wait to see what happens to Rose Perkins, and what Will will do, if anything, to help her, and whether and how the Stirchians hold on to their latest acquisition, the earth.

Back when I started this novel before, I wrote only 5700 words, so I decided to toss those out completely and start fresh. I will do that today.

I was going to start writing it yesterday, and I sat down five different times to do that, but each time I was distracted. I wound up helping my neighbor clean up a pile of junk. Around 3:30 I finally gave up on trying to write and went up to the house. Shrug. Things happen. (That's exactly why daily word count goals reset to zero every morning.)

By the way, I hope to finish this one on or before October 21—that will keep me “on schedule”—but I hasten to add that's only a secondary concern. The priority is that the story is as long as it needs to be. Cheers!

But enough about me. What are you writing? If you aren't writing, and if you're a writer, I suggest you get on with it. (grin) Writers write.

Someone at Google Sucks

Well, I might have to change my email address soon. This morning in my email I received a note that read, in part, “Soon after October 13, 2-Step Verification will be turned on automatically.”

WHAT? (scowl) WHY?

Yeah, I know. Repeat after me, class. “2-step verification is ‘more secure’.”

Well, so is 3-step or 7-step or—why not—53-step verification. But they won't push us that far, will they? Because too many of us will leave. And that's where I am with 2-step verification.

Offering it is fine. Even wonderful. But forcing it on us is not. Not that it's any of Google's business, but I haven't turned on 2-step verification because I seldom carry my phone with me, and apparently that is a requirement.

You can't even set 2-step verification to send a code to something other than your phone, like your alternate email address (which they also require). I suspect that's because if they did send

the verification code to your alternate email address, too many people would realize, Hmm, why not just use the alternate email address and skip Google's stupid games altogether?

Go ahead. Say I'm being ridiculous. That's exactly how I feel about Google when I enter my complicated password and they prompt me to "prove" it's me.

I'd love to respond with, "Um, how about this: if it *wasn't* me, I wouldn't have entered the bgfr&z9%gy#\$ing password that GOOGLE required in the first place. If I must use 2-factor authentication, I might as well set my password to "password."

But I'm not even allowed to respond to Google and argue my point or, even ask why they can't keep their paws off my account. I can't respond at all. Because whatever policy-making control-freak coward decided to force 2-, 3-, 7-, or 53-step authentication on me is hiding behind anonymity somewhere.

Tell you what, I'd go through as many steps as necessary to get my hands on him. Offer up that individual as a prize and I'll jump through all the hoops you want.

I don't like control freaks, but chances are, I'll never be able to escape them. Well, unless I stop using email completely. Because in our lemming-like nation, what one major email provider does, most other major email providers will do as well because OhMyGod if they did anything unique and different they'd probably die of a panic attack.

Stay in lockstep, Little Johnny. Do it exactly like everyone else is doing it. *Vee must all arrife togezzer!*

If you couldn't tell, this whole thing makes me want to chew wheels and spit nails. I need to escape for awhile.

Guess I'll go write fiction, where actual reasonable people do reasonable things in a reasonable world and control freaks get their bothersome little fingers snipped off one at a time with lopping shears.

Because if they weren't able to type up their annoying, intrusive little rules and then impose them on everyone else via an electronic suppository, now THAT would make the world a happier, more secure place.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Publishing Non-Fiction the Strategic Way Without Delays" at <https://www.amarketingexpert.com/2022/10/04/publishing-non-fiction-the-strategic-way-without-delays/>. Seems to me these matter for fiction too.

See “Inside one of the world’s first human composting facilities” at <https://www.theverge.com/c/23307867/human-composting-process-return-home>. Story ideas, anyone?

See “New In-Person Workshops Location” at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/new-in-person-workshops-location/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 910 words

Writing of *The Stirchians* (novel)

Day 1..... XXXX words. Total words to date..... XXXXX

Total fiction words for October..... 8202

Total fiction words for the year..... 128584

Total nonfiction words for October... 4970

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 158190

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 286774

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 2

Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 68

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: In this Journal, in addition to getting a little grouchy occasionally, I discuss various aspects of the writing craft. I advocate trusting the characters to tell the story that they, not the writer, are living. This is by far the easiest, most liberating, and most fun way to tell a story.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags amarketingexpert.com, DeanWesleySmith.com, [Google Sucks](#), [The 13-Month Turn giveaway](#), [The Stirchians](#), theverge.com

What I and Others Teach

October 7, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Investigating Unsubs
- * What I and Others Teach

- * The Novel
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“Success is not the result of spontaneous combustion. You must set yourself on fire.” Reggie Leach, retired Canadian hockey player.

“Do you set yourself on fire when you write? When the flame gets low, how do you make it glow again?” James Scott Bell

Hmm. If you WITD, you're just having fun, so the flame never gets low. Nor do you ever burn out. But no, I didn't leave a comment. HS

“You can't wait for inspiration. You have to go after it with a club.” Jack London

Investigating Unsubs

Of three unsubs in the past ten days, one lives in the Phillipines, subscribed in late April, was sent 44 emails (so editions of the Journal) and opened only 3 of them. Another lives in the United States, subscribed in January, received 41 editions of the Journal and opened only 5.

(I'm not sure how that one received only 41 emails since January when the other received 44 since April. I can only assume MailChimp was lax with delivery.)

I have no clue why either of them unsubscribed. Unlike MailChimp, MailerLite doesn't afford unsubs the opportunity to say why they're leaving. So all that's left is conjecture.

Maybe I was appearing in their in-boxes too often. Or maybe they glanced a few times and either didn't like what I had to say or were expecting yet one more regurgitation of the myths. Or maybe they had an argument with their significant other and took it out on me.

The earliest of the three unsubs subscribed in mid-September and unsubscribed on October 1. He lives in South Africa and received only 16 editions of the Journal, but he opened 15 of them. Whatever his reason for leaving, at least he gave the Journal a real try. I appreciate that.

So my very brief bit of research told me nothing and only led to more conjecture. So I'm thinking in the future I won't worry about why folks come or go. Nothing I can do about it anyway.

What I and Others Teach

That stuff about unsubs led me to compare what I teach with what most other writers and writing instructors teach. Really, up to a point, we all teach the same thing.

In construction (mechanics, things you can build) they and I definitely teach the same things, though I have to say I probably have the edge in teaching punctuation. Seriously.

I teach writers how to USE punctuation to direct the reading of their work rather than running to hide under a bed every time a comma comes into the room or that (as I heard one instructor say, “It’s all right if you don’t understand this stuff. Nobody does.”

Yeah, well, I do. And you can. I’ll never present punctuation as a vague set of rules to be obeyed Just Because.

Likewise, I teach how to ground the reader and how to write setting, transitional scenes and major scenes and description, how to use the POV character’s physical and emotional senses in all of the above, and what you the writer can and can’t do within the different points of view. And anything I left out about the craft of writing, I teach that too.

But other instructors and I diverge when it’s time to sit down and actually write. They (and by “they” I mean 99.99999999% and probably more) teach that you should consciously think about and apply all that stuff as you write.

They teach that you should plan-out the story and all its aspects. When they say you should “plot the story,” by which they mean plan the plot in advance, I want to scream, “How can you plan something that hasn’t happened yet? How can you plan what can logically exist only after the characters have run through the story?”

But I digress. As I was saying, they teach that you should pre-plan all aspects of the story, so characters through character sketches and character histories, world building, settings, weather patterns, etc.

So good. Do all of that. Because with all of that detailed, meticulous planning and barring minor mishaps like misspellings, surely the scenes and the story will come out perfectly the first time through, right?

No? Okay. So why do others not wonder about this?

But (they also teach) that despite all that planning, you still must also revise, then seek critical input (this on top of depending throughout on your own critical mind), then rewrite, etc.

Because you must make the story as perfect as possible. It’s just that important.

Nobody thinks to ask “Um, perfect for whom?” And the answer is for the critique group, for the beta readers, and finally, for the writer. Notice there’s no mention of making the story perfect for the reader. Why?

Because despite constantly giving lip service to the notion that you should always consider the reader, nobody over there does. Ever.

Yet the reader—and nobody else—is the person who decides, ultimately and unilaterally, whether the story is good or bad, excellent or horrible, digestible or indigestible. And then the next reader decides. Then the next reader, and the next, and the next.

On the other hand, I teach writing for yourself and for the reader. I teach letting go. I teach trusting the characters to tell the story that they, not you, are living. I teach to trust THAT you've learned WHAT you've learned, relax, and have fun.

Seriously, in what world does “working hard” at something as silly and unimportant as telling a story make sense?

The harder you work, the more tightly you cling to planning and revising and rewriting, the better the chance you'll construct an uninteresting blob that's just like everything else out there.

The more you learn to let go and enjoy the story as you run through it with your characters and it unfolds all around you, the broader the path for your own unique creative voice to come out and the more original the story.

But the only thing that matters is what makes sense to you. Does it make sense? Have you been successful, or are you just swimming with the current?

In probably no other art form have so many gone the apparent Easy Route, expecting to simply follow the steps to success, then found the whole process ridiculously clunky and difficult, yet stubbornly defended it even when offered a cleaner, lighter, much easier path. As Homer would say, “Doh!”

The Novel

Still not off the ground. Yes, I'm experiencing interference from my critical mind. I'll overcome it soon. Then I'll have some serious writing to do if I want to finish my 70th novel in time for my 70th birthday.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Did magnetism shape the universe?” at <https://www.newscientist.com/article/mg25634070-800-did-magnetism-shape-the-universe-an-epic-experiment-suggests-it-did/>.

See “12 Old Words That Survived by Getting Fossilized in Idioms” at <https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/51150/12-old-words-survived-getting-fossilized-idioms>.

See “Who Gave The Battery Such Power?” at <https://www.noemamag.com/who-gave-the-battery-such-power/>. Story ideas.

See “In-Person Workshops” at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/in-person-workshops/>.

See “The Sun-Times’ new chapter: Our digital content is now free for everyone” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/the-sun-times-new-chapter-our-digital-content-is-now-free-for-everyone/>. I’ll check it out. If it isn’t as biased as most mainstream news (if it’s news and not propaganda) this can be a very good thing.

See “Kindle Scribe vs. ReMarkable 2 vs. Kobo Elipsa: Top E Ink Tablets Compared” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/kindle-scribe-vs-remarkable-2-vs-kobo-elipsa-top-e-ink-tablets-compared/>. Because many of you are far more tech-savvy and advanced than I am.

See “When Should Writers Stand Their Ground Versus Defer to an Editor?” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/when-should-writers-stand-their-ground-versus-defer-to-an-editor/>. Every editor’s opinion is only that: an opinion. Assuming you have your FACTS right, always. Always, always, always defend your work.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1270 words

Writing of The Stirchians (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... XXXX words. Total words to date..... XXXX

Total fiction words for October..... 8202
Total fiction words for the year..... 128584
Total nonfiction words for October... 6240
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 159460
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 288044

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 2
Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 68
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [mentalfloss.com](#), [newsientist.com](#), [noemamag.com](#), [thepassivevoice.com](#)

Questions and Answers

October 8, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Questions and Answers
- * One More Unsub
- * The Novel
- * Of Interest

Questions and Answers

Today over on the Kill Zone blog, Dale Evans Smith asked 4 questions and then posted responses from other TKZ contributors' previous posts. Then he opened it up to everyone.

If you want, stop by "Writing Strategies" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/10/writing-strategies.html>, read the post, and add to the discussion.

Here are the questions and my responses:

1. Do you have tips for breaking through a minor writer's block?

N/A. Mechanics, plumbers, cabinetmakers, etc. don't get mechanic's block or plumber's block or cabinetmaker's block. They just show up and do their job.

2. How do you keep yourself writing?

I'm an adherent [of] Heinlein's Rules, especially 1-3. Writers write. I'm a writer.

3. Do you have a routine you use, or a ritual?

Not really, though most often I write on a separate "writing 'puter," a little 11" HP. It's a subliminal signal to my creative subconscious. It knows we're about to drop into a story and race through it with the characters as it unfolds all around us. Nothing is more fun.

4. Any advice on keeping your keister in the writing chair?

Again, Heinlein's Rules 1-3. Sometimes, after I finish a novel, I spend a day or two deciding which character(s) or world or storyline I'd like to visit next, but not writing is miserable.

One More Unsub

One more subscriber unsubscribed, and this one actually floored me because I immediately recognized the email address as a former mentoring student.

I even emailed the person to ask why s/he'd unsubscribed, and the person gracefully responded. S/he wrote that s/he was checking the Journal on the website now.

So that's similar to what I do each day with Dean's site and on most days with TKZ and The Passive Voice. But I do that because 1) an email subscription is not available on those sites, and 2) it's odd, but those are the only places I know of that don't constantly propagate the myths.

Well, TKZ does, by and large, but there are a few authors on there who are open to reasonable discussions, so I check back now and then. Most of the time I check back to see whether one of those few is holding forth with useful information.

But sometimes, I admit, I check just to compare what they say inadvertently—like “Dare to risk writing badly” with “revise, rewrite, and edit.” (grin)

The Novel

is off and running. Whee!

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Are terrestrial planets really that similar to Earth? What to know about their composition” at <https://interestingengineering.com/science/terrestrial-planets-similar-to-earth>. For SF writers, is would be research.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 440 words

Writing of The Stirchians (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... 4003 words. Total words to date..... 4003

Total fiction words for October..... 12205

Total fiction words for the year..... 132587

Total nonfiction words for October... 6680

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 159900

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 292487

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 2

Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 68

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Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [interestingengineering.com](#)

This Will Sound Silly

October 9, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * This Will Sound Silly
- * Of Interest

This Will Sound Silly

but I have to interrupt the writing of *The Stirchians* (tentative title) to read the novel for which it's supposed to be the sequel: *The 13-Month Turn*.

By the way, if anyone else would like to read *The 13-Month Turn* in advance of the second novel in the series being finished, I'm giving it away right now. Just email me at harveystanbrough@gmail.com and let me know which e-version you would like: .mobi, .epub, or .pdf.

Late yesterday morning as I started to write, I had occasion to check back in that first novel to double-check a fact. And I found I'd gotten the fact wrong in the current novel. Not only that, but a lot of other stuff was wrong too. Not only various new institutions and political boundaries, but who was responsible for them and even what they were called.

Of course, it's fiction, so there are very few rules. The avid reader will suspend his or her sense of disbelief at the drop of a verb.

But there is one rule, and it's a major one: you can create your fictional world any way you want, but once you create it, your characters have to continue to live in it.

In other words, when writing subsequent novels in a series, you *must* obey the facts of the world you established in that series. I broke that rule in this new novel in at least two major ways.

Now, I *could* just set the whole thing aside and push ahead with either a standalone novel or the first novel of yet another series just to add to my novel total, but I don't want to do that.

As I mentioned a few days ago, I really want to write this story in this world. I want to find out what the characters, Earthian and Stirchian alike, are doing. I want to walk through that world with them again. But first I have to regain a valid memory of that world.

So I started reading *The 13-Month Turn* at about 1 p.m. yesterday. I'll read today until whenever I finish it. But as I read I'll also be enhancing the reverse outline I created as I wrote the novel.

With characters, very little is about who they are. A great deal more has to do with HOW they are. By that I mean their attitude, their level of intelligence or lack thereof, their personality, what they're good at and what they aren't good at, and so on.

Just to be crystal clear, I'm NOT saying you should plan or determine those things (or ANYthing) about a character ahead of time. The characters revealed who and how they are to me of their own accord as I ran through the story with them back in early 2017. They and their story unfolded all around me.

My intention in reading the novel again now is to get reacquainted with the characters and their attitudes and personalities, to get all of that and the storylines back into my head so I can continue with them in the second book.

To that end, and as a kind of bonus, I'll also turn that reverse outline I mentioned above into a series bible. When I'm finished, it will contain many facts about the world that I'd forgotten since I wrote the novel. Nothing's better than a quick reference when you're writing a series.

So all of that was to say I wrote zero words yesterday, probably will write zero words today, and might write zero words tomorrow. But once I get the characters, situations and storyline from the first book back in my head, I expect to zoom right through writing this second novel. I can hardly wait.

And I might even throw out the current opening. Who knows? Once I have the story in mind again, I might decide to start this novel in a completely different place.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Thirteen Terribly Close Calls With Nuclear Weapon Accidents" at <http://dyingwords.net/thirteen-terribly-close-calls-with-nuclear-weapon-accidents/>.

See "Advanced Classes" at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/advanced-classes/>.

See "Marketing Gain or Writer's Pain?" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/marketing-gain-or-writers-pain/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 700 words

Writing of The Stirchians (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... 4003 words. Total words to date..... 4003

Total fiction words for October..... 12205

Total fiction words for the year..... 132587

Total nonfiction words for October... 7380

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 160600

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 293187

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 2

Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 68

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: In this Journal, I discuss various aspects of the writing craft. I also advocate trusting the characters to tell the story that they, not the writer, are living. This is by far the easiest, most liberating, and most fun way to tell a story.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [DyingWords.net](#), [thepassivevoice.com](#)

Recommendations for Study, and the Novel

October 10, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Topic: Recommendations for Study
- * The Novel
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“If you want a happy ending, that depends, of course, on where you stop your story.” Orson Welles

“You can't wait for inspiration. You have to go after it with a club.” Jack London

“A rut is a grave with the ends knocked out.” Dr. Laurence J. Peter (Thanks to Dan Baldwin)

Topic: Recommendations for Study

In his post today, Dean Wesley Smith talks about “advanced classes” on which he and Kris received input and which they plan to present in the near future.

I have to break with my mentor on this point. I read the list, and I honestly don't see any of them as necessary. Not for me, and not for you. I have a feeling most or all of them will be repetitive mishmashes of previous courses. To be clear, I don't believe this is an intentional ploy or scam or any such thing on his part.

The instruction I most strongly recommend from Dean (aside from searching his website for posts on various topics) are all either lectures (\$50 to \$75) or classical workshops (\$150).

Some that are not on the list below are also valuable, but I found that these listed all offer a great deal more in the way of gems than most of his lectures and workshops:

Recommended Lectures

- Heinlein's Rules (the lecture, not the workshop): \$75
- Endings \$50
- Short Stories to Novels \$50
- Designing Mystery, Cozy and Thriller Covers \$75 (?)
- Starting or Restarting Your Writing \$50

Recommended Classic Workshops (\$150 each)

- Productivity
- Ideas to Story
- Writing Science Fiction (contains a lot of info that spans genres)
- Pacing
- Cliffhangers

To find these and more lectures and workshops, visit <https://wmg-publishing-workshops-and-lectures.teachable.com/courses>.

Recommended Books (Dean's)

[How to Write Fiction Sales Copy](#)

[Writing Into the Dark](#)

[Heinlein's Rules](#)

and while I'm on the topic...

Recommended Books (Mine)

[Quiet the Critical Voice \(and Write Fiction\)](#)

[Writing the Character-Driven Story](#)

[Poetry Techniques for the Fictionist](#) (Because it's all one language.)

[Punctuation for Writers \(2nd edition\)](#) (You've never seen punctuation presented like this before.)

[Writing Realistic Dialogue & Flash Fiction](#)

The Novel

I finished reading *The 13-Month Turn* and even published a new, slightly updated version. And wow, was I way off on some of my facts as I tried to write the sequel.

No wonder it was difficult. My creative subconscious knew I was screwing up the storyline. (grin)

So it's a good thing I stopped, went back and read the first book. As I planned, I also created a series bible. Today I'll break that bible into at least four separate documents (different storylines) to make searching it easier. And of course, today I'll start the new novel. (grin)

I've also decided to toss out my second start. In rereading the first book, I found that I'd already written in the first book much of what I wrote in that start (and in the earlier start). My creative subconscious was stalling me again because I was on the wrong path.

I know it was the creative subconscious because it was always positive: "Here, try this. Here, start again." It was never negative, as in, "Ugh, this doesn't work."

I very much enjoyed reading the story and at times found myself thinking, "Wait. I wrote this?" (grin) Being immersed in the storyline again was absolutely as exciting as I'd hoped it would be. I'm amazed I didn't write the sequel as soon as I finished the first book.

That thought roused my curiosity so I looked back at my records. I wrote *The 13-Month Turn* in February 2017 (published in March). It was my 22nd novel, and I wrote three PI mystery novels and a novella over the next three months. And then I got busy with other projects and just never returned to it until now. Weird.

Like Wes Crowley, this is more of a saga than a series, meaning it's a chronological continuation of the same storyline(s). At the moment, there are five distinct storylines:

1. what happens on Luna now that Will Perkins has returned to Earth;
2. what happens with Rose Perkins (separate of Will) attempting to hide from the Stirchians;
3. what happens with Will Perkins in his attempt to find Rose and his other endeavors (grin);
4. what happens with one rogue Stirchian general who doesn't care for the commander of the mission and is thinking of rebelling (and a younger general who looks up to him);
5. what happens with the commander, his second, and their oversight of the new Earth Outpost.

And of course, the continued Stirchian developments on the planet, the Assessment and Indoctrination Centers, the Melding Production and Birthing Centers, and so on.

If you can't tell, I'm very excited to get back into the story. I hope your writing is going as well or better.

Oh, and if you'd like a free copy of The 13-Month Turn, email me at harveystanbrough@gmail.com and let me know which ebook file version you would like. (Your chance to see whether I have any clue whatsoever about what I teach with regard to writing, WITD, etc. grin)

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Ranked: The World's Most Surveilled Cities" at <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/ranked-the-worlds-most-surveilled-cities/>.

See "Creative Marketing: Beyond the Bookstore" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/10/creative-marketing-beyond-the-bookstore.html>.

See "James Scott Bell's 10 Commandments for Writers" at <https://annerallen.com/2022/10/10-commandments-for-writers/>. I'm with you on 1 and 2, brother, but 3 should be "Thou shalt publish and start the next story."

The Numbers

The Journal..... 890 words

Writing of The Stirchians (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... XXXX words. Total words to date..... XXXX

Total fiction words for October..... 12205

Total fiction words for the year..... 132587

Total nonfiction words for October... 8270

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 161490

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 294077

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 2

Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 68

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: In this Journal, I discuss various aspects of the writing craft. I also advocate trusting the characters to tell the story that they, not the writer, are living. This is by far the easiest, most liberating, and most fun way to tell a story.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [recommended books](#), [recommended classes](#), [recommended lectures](#), [Story Ideas](#)

Mostly “Of Interest”

October 11, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Mostly “Of Interest”
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“In his memoir *On Writing*, Stephen King reflected, ‘Amateurs sit and wait for inspiration, the rest of us just get up and go to work.’ At the suggestion of a friend, the writer [Ann] Patchett attached a sign-in sheet to the door of her writing room to ensure she wrote every day.” Kalpana Jain, [theconversation.com](#)

“No matter how accomplished a writer, he or she will inevitably struggle with writer’s block.” Kalpana Jain, [theconversation.com](#)

Hmm. I guess that’s good to know. But up to this point, um, nope. Even though the science is probably settled, I suppose I’m a writer’s-block denier. (grin) h

Mostly “Of Interest”

This post is primarily to pass along the items in “Of Interest.” Some good stuff there.

If my inane rant about Google and their 2-factor authentication annoyed you, I apologize. I’m pretty sure that rant is what prompted a few folks to unsubscribe. Everybody has a bad day now and then, or at least that is my assumption. I suppose I also trust my subscribers to put up with me.

But I really should keep such thoughts to myself. It won’t happen again. For the record, I wasn’t annoyed about 2FA so much as that it was being mandated. I’m not big on others deciding what is or is not “for my own good.” Anyway, there’s a great post on 2FA in today’s “Of Interest.”

The other reason I’m keeping this brief is so I can get back to the novel. After a rocky start (normal for me) it’s on track and running.

I tossed out my previous start (even deleted the words from my overall word count for the month and year). I wrote a new start yesterday and experienced an overall gain of just over 100 words.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “AI Art and Audio” at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/ai-art-and-audio/>.

See “Handwriting Versus Typing” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/10/handwriting-versus-typing.html>. Ann S, you out there?

See “21 of the Best Opening Lines in Children’s Books” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/21-of-the-best-opening-lines-in-childrens-books/>.

See “Why 2FA is failing and what should be done about it” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/why-2fa-is-failing-and-what-should-be-done-about-it/>. The takeaway: don’t use 2FA in which the authentication is sent over SMS (your phone).

See “The 5,000-year history of writer’s block” at <https://theconversation.com/the-5-000-year-history-of-writers-block-190037>. Strictly for fun. If writer’s block existed I’d be screwed.

See “William Shatner: My Trip to Space Filled Me With ‘Overwhelming Sadness’” at <https://variety.com/2022/tv/news/william-shatner-space-boldly-go-excerpt-1235395113/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 410 words

Writing of The Stirchians (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... 4106 words. Total words to date..... 4106

Total fiction words for October..... 12308

Total fiction words for the year..... 132690

Total nonfiction words for October... 8680

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 161900

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 294590

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 2

Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 68

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: In this Journal, I discuss various aspects of the writing craft. I also illustrate, with my own writing, a Zen-like non-process called Writing Into the Dark and what is possible when you trust the characters to tell the story that they, not you, are living. This is by far the easiest, most liberating, and most fun way to tell a story. Best of all, WITD leads to greatly increase productivity and a rapid ascension along the learning curve because you get a great deal more Practice. This is not opinion. It is all numbers and facts.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [2-factor authentication](#), [AI Art and Audio](#), [Handwriting Versus Typing](#), [Opening Lines](#), [William Shatner](#), [writer's block](#)

Busting Some ISBN Myths

October 12, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Topic: Busting Some ISBN Myths
- * The Novel (and Keep Coming Back)
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“I’ve never experienced writer’s block. That is especially true after discovering WITD. ... If you don’t know the path (only the characters do), then it’s impossible for a block to exist. [F]or the writer, the path to be blocked doesn’t even exist. And therein lies the fun.” Dan Baldwin on an article in yesterday’s “Of Interest”

“[PG] suggests that anyone designing a book cover needs to understand that good levels of sales on Amazon are almost requirements for success.” from a note on a post on book covers in “Of Interest”

Topic: Busting Some ISBN Myths

A long-time writing acquaintance emailed me yesterday to ask some questions about ISBNs. What he thought he knew was actually a little skewered—for example, his assumption that Amazon assigns ISBNs to ebooks (they don’t)—so I thought I’d use my response as today’s post.

First, ebooks do not require an ISBN at Amazon or at many other ebook sellers. Amazon assigns an ASIN (Amazon Standard Inventory Number).

And just so you know, NO books, paper or electronic or audio, require an LCCN (Library of Congress Catalog Number), though a lot of scammers will tell you they do (and of course, sell you one).

Second, where aggregators such as Smashwords or Draft2Digital (D2D) DO assign an ISBN to an ebook, that is only for those retailers who require an ISBN for some reason.

If you want to publish both an ebook and a paper book version of *My Famous Novel*, you have to use separate ISBNs. (However, you do NOT need separate ISBNs for different electronic formats of the same ebook [.mobi, .epub, .pdf or any other eformats]).

So you can either use the free ISBN for your ebook OR you can assign an ISBN you bought. But for the paper edition, do you have to purchase an ISBN from Bowker?

Well, not really.

I have published several paper books through CreateSpace, which Amazon eventually absorbed. CreateSpace provided a free ISBN to paper books in exchange for them being listed as the official publisher of record.

I don't know whether Amazon Print and D2D Print (or whatever they're called) also offer a free ISBN for paper books, though I suspect they do. Some of you probably know that. If you'd care to comment, other readers would be grateful.

I personally use the ISBN that either D2D or Smashwords assigns to my ebooks for those vendors who require it. StoneThread Publishing, complete with its URL, is listed prominently in the ebook as the publisher anyway.

For titles I publish through Smashwords, below the title and my name on the title page, I always insert "the Smashwords edition of" before "a novel from StoneThread Publishing" on the next line. It looks like this:

The 13-Month Turn
Harvey Stanbrough

the Smashwords edition of
a novel from StoneThread Publishing

To give the reader more of a sample, the front matter appears at the end.

For titles I publish through Amazon or D2D, I omit the line about Smashwords. Otherwise there's no difference between the two manuscripts. (And there *are* two manuscripts. One file is named "13-Month Turn.doc" and the other is "13-Month Turn smash.doc.")

All of that said, if I personally ever chose to publish my works to paper again, I would purchase a block of ISBNs from Bowker, all assigned to my publisher, StoneThread Publishing.

But that's just me. As with all things, you have to do what you believe is right for you. Besides, I probably won't ever publish my works in paper format again, so to me it doesn't matter.

My friend also listed these two articles from Reedsy. I have not read them and I'm not vouching for them. I'm only passing them along. If there is a disparity between what the Reedsy authors write and what I wrote above, I strongly suggest you go with what I wrote.

[What is an ISBN Number? A Look at Publishing's ID System](#)

[How to Get an ISBN Number as a Self-Published Author](#)

The Novel

This will be my last update up here in the text portion of the Journal for this novel unless something happens that I think everyone would find interesting or informative.

My new daily word count goal is 3500 words per day. I was all set to fall a little short yesterday. My little cat (I consider her my youngest daughter) has been wheezing badly and losing weight for awhile.

Naturally, I was scared to find out what might be wrong, balanced with a need to know whether a vet might be able to treat and correct the problem. Yesterday we got an appointment at 11:45 to have our vet check out my little baby girl.

Only problem is, the vet is an hour away. So we drove over, my wife driving, me trying to comfort the baby (she still sleeps on my left arm every night). After blood tests and then xrays (no sedation required, she's that good of a girl) it turned out she has asthma.

I can't adequately explain the level of my relief. I don't mind telling you I was a mess for much of the day.

So the vet gave her a steroid shot. If she responds well to that, and I noticed her breathing improved through the night last night, he'll write a scrip in a week or two. So that worked out.

Anyway, we got home around 2. Soon afterward my wife went to the grocery alone (something we usually do together) to give me time to return to the novel for awhile.

When she got back, I stopped writing, saved the file, and helped tote groceries into the house and put them away. Then I went back to the novel, checked the word count and did the math.

I was surprised to see that I'd surpassed my new daily word count goal by 5 words. (grin) Woohoo! And that, my friends, is the power of Keep Coming Back.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Branding” at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/branding/>.

See “Typos and shutdowns: robot ‘gives evidence’ to Lords committee” at <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2022/oct/11/typos-and-shutdowns-robot-gives-evidence-to-lords-committee>.

See “The Key Elements of Eye-Catching Book Cover Design” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/the-key-elements-of-eye-catching-book-cover-design/>. But see PG’s comments.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1010 words

Writing of *The Stirchians* (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... 4106 words. Total words to date..... 4106

Day 1..... 3505 words. Total words to date..... 7611

Total fiction words for October..... 15813

Total fiction words for the year..... 136195

Total nonfiction words for October... 9690

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 162910

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 299105

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 2

Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 68

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: In this Journal, I discuss various aspects of the writing craft. I also illustrate, with my own writing, a Zen-like non-process called Writing Into the Dark and what is possible when you trust the characters to tell the story that they, not you, are living. WITD also leads to greatly increase productivity and a rapid ascension along the learning curve because you get a great deal more Practice. This is not opinion. It is all numbers and facts.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [All about ISBNs](#), [Branding](#), [cover design](#), [Keep Coming Back](#), [Reedsy](#), [Robots and AI](#)

Another Post for “Of Interest”

October 14, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Oops
- * Another Post for "Of Interest"
- * Publishers and Rejection Slips
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

"What allures people, what do they want to read about? Money, sex and death, but especially money." Catherine Baab-Mugira

"Marketing is no longer about the stuff that you make but about the stories you tell." Seth Godin

"PG suggests that a writing career should depend on how many stories you have inside you instead of how many corporate drones need to say yes before one of your stories finds its readers." The Passive Guy

Oops

I'm not sure why MailerLite sent out the post for the 12th again on the 13th. I hope when that happens it doesn't cause you much of an inconvenience. I like to think maybe it's gnomes at work or something re-sending because someone who needed to see it the first time around missed it.

Another Post for "Of Interest"

For various reasons I didn't write much on Wednesday and I didn't get much sleep on Wednesday night. Then on Thursday I fell a little short of my word count goal too.

I'm hoping today will be better. But either way, I wanted to get the items in "Of Interest" out to you.

Publishers and Rejection Slips

One link today is to an entertaining article about rejection slips. You can read the article for yourself. It is entertaining, as I said.

And you already know my suggestion. Believe in yourself and your work, bypass the self-styled "gatekeepers," publish indie (and wide), and let the readers decide.

Hmm. I broke the rule of Three in that previous sentence. There are four independent clauses. In each clause, the subject, "you," is implied. Anyway, the most important clause is "Let the readers decide." After all, deciding whether your work is any good is the reader's job. Not yours and definitely not some "gatekeeper."

Here's the deal. You're writing for yourself first and the readers second. Let other schmucks write for the agents and publishers. Let THEM have their work accepted and sign over all rights for a small advance that they still probably won't earn out.

Plus, once they wise up and learn what you and I already know, they'll have to hope they can get their rights reverted to them after what, 35 years? Not something I'd wish on an enemy, much less you guys.

But of course, as always, whatever works for you.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "...Supreme Court copyright showdown" at <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/supreme-court/andy-warhols-portraits-prince-get-15-minutes-fame-supreme-court-copyri-rcna51246>.

See "Andy Warhol, Prince at center stage in Supreme Court case" at <https://apnews.com/article/ketanji-brown-jackson-us-supreme-court-entertainment-music-b6b865d5fc4b616be5474221390ed725>. Thanks to KC for the tip.

See "The Best Book Marketing Strategies Are Simple: 7 Things You Should Focus On Now from Author Marketing Experts, Inc." at <https://www.amarketingexpert.com/2022/10/11/the-best-book-marketing-tips-are-simple-7-strategies-you-should-focus-on-now/>.

See "Rejection Slips" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/10/rejection-slips.html>.

See "Why ideas are worthless in copyright terms" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/why-ideas-are-worthless-in-copyright-terms/>.

See "Why It's Better to Write About Money, Not for Money" at <https://www.janefriedman.com/why-its-better-to-write-about-money-not-for-money/>.

See "Amazon KDP & Kindle Unlimited: What It Means for Authors and Publishers" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/amazon-kdp-kindle-unlimited-what-it-means-for-authors-and-publishers/>. But especially see PG's take.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 510 words

Writing of The Stirchians (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... 4106 words. Total words to date..... 4106

Day 2..... 3505 words. Total words to date..... 7611

Day 3..... 2392 words. Total words to date..... 10366
Day 4..... 3336 words. Total words to date..... 13339

Total fiction words for October..... 21541
Total fiction words for the year..... 141923
Total nonfiction words for October... 10200
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 163420
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 305343

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 2
Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 68
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: In this Journal, I discuss various aspects of the writing craft. I also illustrate, with my own writing, a Zen-like non-process called Writing Into the Dark and what is possible when you trust the characters to tell the story that they, not you, are living. WITD also leads to greatly increase productivity and a rapid ascension along the learning curve because you get a great deal more Practice. This is not opinion. It is all numbers and facts.

Tags and Tag Lines

October 15, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Tags
- * Tag Lines
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

“[S]creenwriting is work, it’s a chore, you’re writing for other people and rewriting constantly, while I don’t consider novel writing work at all.” Elmore Leonard

Tags

You know that the Journal archive is free, and you also know it’s in PDF format (so it can be printed out) and that it’s searchable. You can download the archive, year by year, at <https://hestanbrough.com/the-daily-journal-archives/>.

But sometimes we're at a loss for the right search term. That's where tags can come in handy.

At the bottom of (almost) every Journal post going way back to 2014, there are tags. If you click on one of those tags, all the posts that include that tag will automatically pop up.

At the very worst, you can use the list of tags as recommended search terms, which you can then type into the search box yourself.

Tag Lines

Of Elmore Leonard's "10 Rules for Good Writing," dialogue tag lines take up two of them:

3. Never use a verb other than "said" to carry dialogue.

4. Never use an adverb to modify the verb "said"...he admonished gravely.

I couldn't agree more.

Often, especially newer writers, spurred on by horrible writing instructors who don't have a clue what they're talking about, will use words other than "said" to "spruce up" their writing, to make the tag line more interesting.

But the thing is, unlike the descriptive narrative, the tag line's only purpose is to let the reader know, without intruding, which character is speaking.

So it should be bland. The reader should be able to read it, identify which character is speaking, and dive back into the story as if the tag line had never been there. The tag line that revolves around "said" accomplishes that.

Or put in another way, anything that draws attention to itself ("is interesting") jerks the reader out of the story and is self-defeating, not only for the story but for the writer. Why would any writer want to pull the reader intentionally out of the story? Yet many do exactly that.

This ugly habit is so pervasive that several years ago I started keeping a list of verbs that do not indicate a form of utterance, yet were used for exactly that purpose.

A dialogue tag line consists of a noun or a pronoun plus a verb that indicates a form of utterance. The best such verb is "said." The other verbs that indicate a form of utterance are these:

announced, ASKED, exclaimed, implored, mumbled, murmured, muttered, quipped, remarked, responded, SAID, screamed, stammered, stated, yelled, uttered, muttered, mumbled.

But you don't really need "asked" since that sentence would be followed by a question mark, right? And of course, you don't need a tag line at all if you've used a brief descriptive narrative to indicate some action by the character who then speaks. Most often those two elements would be included in the same paragraph:

Macy Marie came into the room. “What’re you two talking about?”

“She asked” or “Macy said” or any other tag line would be extra here and unnecessary. Because again, the tag line exists only to let the reader know which character is speaking. In this example, the brief descriptive narrative fulfilled that purpose, so a tag line is not necessary.

On the other hand, none of the following verbs (all of which I’ve seen used in tag lines) indicate a form of utterance:

accused, acknowledged, admonished, affirmed, amended, amplified, announced, answered, argued, assured, attacked, attempted, balked, beamed, blathered, blurted, blustered, bossed, brayed, broke in, brooded, brought up, bubbled, burlesqued, burst out, cajoled, called, called out, came back, cautioned, challenged, chastized, cheered, chided, chimed, chimed in, chirped, chirped in, choked, chorused, chuckled, clarified, coached, coaxed, commanded, commented, commiserated, complained, complimented, conceded, concluded, consoled, contributed, corrected, correcting, countered, cracked, criticized, cursed, cut in, defended, delivered, delved, digressed, denied, editorialized, ejaculated, encouraged, ended, enjoined, enlightened, enquired, enthused, eructated, evaded, exhaled, expostulated, extemporized, finished, fished, fly casted, followed, frowned, frowning, galloped on, gave, gave him, gave him back, gave out, giggled, got out, greeted, grinned, griped, gripped, grouched, grumbled, gushed, harrumphed, hazarded, heaped on, hedged, helped out, huffed, identified, improvised, informed, instructed, interrupted, intoned, invited, jumped in, justified, kicked out, laughed, lectured, maintained, managed, modified, morosed, mouthed, nagged, nibbled, nitpicked, objected, offered, oozed, opened, opined, ordered, owned up, paddled back, persisted, piped in, piped up, placated, played back, pointed out, pontificated, pounced, pressed, prodded, promenaded on, prompted, pronounced, protested, protracted, pushed, put in, quavered, questioned, quavered, quipped, reasoned, reassured, recommended, reminded, reposted, resumed, retorted, returned, revealed, ridiculed, scolded, screeched, seconded, sentenced, shot, shrieked, shrilled, sighed, sleazed, smiled, smirked, snapped, sneered, snarled, snickered, sniffed, sobbed, spat, spat out, speculated, spewed, spoke up, spouted, squealed, started, started out, started out full throttle, stumbled, submitted, suggested, sulked, summarized, supplied, sussurrated, syruped out, talked on, teased, telegraphed, temporized, testified, threatened, tossed, touted, tried, trilled, trotted out, trumped, tumbled out, ventured, vocalized, voiced, volumed, volunteered, warbled, warned, waved, went on, worried.

And yes, I do add to the list as I encounter new misuses. If you’ve seen any others, please let me know so I may add them to the list.

And please please please don’t email me to say Famous Writer uses verbs like these in tag lines all the time, so it must be all right to do so. It isn’t, and Famous Writer’s stories would be vastly improved if s/he would stop that.

Years ago, during one of my live seminars, a woman actually asked why she should use quotation marks to indicate dialogue. “Cormac McCarthy doesn’t use them.”

She was unpersuaded by my argument that Cormac McCarthy was famous before he tried that particular stunt and that he did so in only one novel. She was also unpersuaded by the fact that literally MILLIONS of writers enclose probably BILLIONS (or more) passage of dialogue in quotation marks, whereas One Author did not in One Novel.

“Well,” she said, arms crossed firmly over her chest and a smug look on her face, “I think I’ll believe Cormac McCarthy over you.” Mind you, she hadn’t talked with the man. He hadn’t advised her not to use quotation marks.

Nor, I suspect, had she ever talked with or received advice from Norman Mailer, though if she ever read one of his books I suspect she would go forth believing misplaced modifiers are The thing to do.

All of that to say, as always, you do what you want.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Based on Elmore Leonard” at <https://www.tcm.com/articles/Programming%20Article/021678/based-on-elmore-leonard>.

See “The Draft” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/10/the-draft.html>. A cautionary tale inside a cautionary tale.

See “How Writers Fail (Part 9): They Quit” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/how-writers-fail-part-9-they-quit/>. You might want to click through to the OP on this one.

See “Timely & Inspired Social Media for Authors in November” at <https://www.amarketingexpert.com/2022/10/13/timely-inspired-social-media-for-authors-in-november/>.

See “An Attempt At Working With Angel” at <https://deanwesleymith.com/an-attempt-at-working-with-angel/>. DWS and a cat.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1160 words

Writing of The Stirchians (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... 4106 words. Total words to date..... 4106
Day 2..... 3505 words. Total words to date..... 7611
Day 3..... 2392 words. Total words to date..... 10366
Day 4..... 3336 words. Total words to date..... 13339

Total fiction words for October.....	21541
Total fiction words for the year.....	141923
Total nonfiction words for October...	11360
Total nonfiction words for the year.....	164580
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog).....	306503
Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date.....	2
Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date...	0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	68
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014).....	217
Short story collections.....	31

Disclaimer: In this Journal, I discuss various aspects of the writing craft. I also illustrate, with my own writing, a Zen-like non-process called Writing Into the Dark and what is possible when you trust the characters to tell the story that they, not you, are living. WITD also leads to greatly increase productivity and a rapid ascension along the learning curve because you get a great deal more Practice. This is not opinion. It is all numbers and facts.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Dialogue Tags](#), [Elmore Leonard](#), [Tags](#)

From Great Story Ideas to Waiting and Watching

October 16, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Great Story Idea? What Next?
- * Waiting and Watching? Um, No.
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“Some writers struggle with ever getting one word of their Great Idea down on the page, for fear of crafting an imperfect beginning.” Joni B. Cole

“Now comes the waiting, the watching. Your book is out there on its own. The initial thrill begins to fade, replaced by that onerous irritant, expectations. You’re hoping—for sales, great reviews, a bestseller list, a call from Spielberg.” James Scott Bell

Oh my god, I think I'd rather shoot myself. h

Great Story Idea? What Next?

In today's "Of Interest" there's a post about how to get started once you have a "great idea" for a story.

Please, read the post.

Then, the next time you have a story idea, great or otherwise, sit down at your computer, put your fingers on the keyboard, and write the first sentence that occurs to you.

That's the characters telling the story.

Then write the next sentence, and the next and the next. When you feel the story stalling, and you will, DON'T try to figure out what's wrong or what comes next or even why it stalled. And DON'T wonder whether you should just throw out the story and start something else. That's all negative, critical mind crap.

Instead, as boring and routine as it sounds, Just Write the Next Sentence, then the next and the next. Soon the story will be racing along again, usually in a direction that wouldn't even have occurred to you if you'd "thought about it" or "figured it out."

And just so you know, that new direction that wouldn't have occurred to you is a truly wonderful feeling. It's as if the characters are saying, "We've got this. Just keep typing and hold on for the ride."

And it's true. They do have it. If you just write the next sentence and the next and the next (that is you trusting your characters), they will lead you all the way through to the end.

Waiting and Watching? Um, No.

Also in today's "Of Interest," I've linked to James Scott Bell's article titled "Is It Still A Thrill?"

The post is at best a cautionary tale. It and other advice like it is why so many writers are mired in the worthless, useless, harmful myths of writing. Or it is perhaps a set of instructions for what to do if you'd rather be part of the elite literati than just a plain old fiction writer.

I only mention it at all so I can display the comment I left on the post. If I can get through to even one reader over there, it will have been worth my time to write:

"I'm happy for those who have the time, energy and inclination to plan and attend or host actual or virtual launch parties for their books. Personally, I don't. I don't have time. But then, last year in 7 months and one week (up through August 6), I wrote 13 novels.

[Seriously, I *am* happy for them. If they'd rather do that than write, then that's what they should do. And to those poor, lost souls who just thought *But I have to do all that, don't I?* the answer is no, you don't.]

“I didn’t write fiction at all from August 2021 through April of this year (life interfered) and I faltered through June, July and August. Finally around mid September I started easing back into my writing habit. Yet I’ve written two novels this year, am about 1/3 of the way through a third at 20,000 words, and have set a modest goal to write two more before December 31.

“I’m always thrilled to begin a journey with new characters or a new journey with old characters. I always grieve a little when the novel is finished and the journey’s over.

“All of that said, my novels are only a few hours’ entertainment [,nothing more]. As such, they are not important in the slightest.

“Or rather, whether and how important (or not) they are is the readers’ call. Not mine, not some critic’s, and *definitely* not some 20-something in New York. [Of course,] I hope readers like my characters’ stories, but whether they do is out of my hands so I don’t fret over it.

“As far as waiting and watching for sales, reviews, etc., nope. I’m too busy writing the next story or novel.”

And yes, folks, this stuff really does work. If you want to be a fiction writer, then get over yourself, sit down and write. If you’re only in love with the romantic idea of being a fiction writer, then all of that other stuff is fine. More power to you.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “7 Ghost Stories That Will Haunt You” at <https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/best-ghost-stories>.

See “Better Call Brad: Hollywood’s Secret Problem Solver Speaks” at <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/business/business-news/hollywood-secret-problem-solver-brad-herman-1235233540/>. Story ideas and fodder.

See “Queen releases unheard recording from 1988 sessions” at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ijj_hheGEi0. Hey, any chance to hear something new from Freddie Mercury....

See “The tiny worm that can help treat trauma patients and facilitate long-distance human space travel” at <https://phys.org/news/2022-10-tiny-worm-trauma-patients-long-distance.html>. Story ideas.

See “You Have a Great Idea for a Story. Where Do You Start?” at <https://www.janefriedman.com/first-things-first-not/>.

See “Is It Still a Thrill?” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/10/is-it-still-a-thrill.html>. A horrible, horrible cautionary tale. Waiting two years to see something published? The “thrill” of seeing your book available?

The Numbers

The Journal..... 920 words

Writing of The Stirchians (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... 4106 words. Total words to date..... 4106

Day 2..... 3505 words. Total words to date..... 7611

Day 3..... 2392 words. Total words to date..... 10366

Day 4..... 3336 words. Total words to date..... 13339

Day 5..... 3227 words. Total words to date..... 16566

Total fiction words for October..... 24768

Total fiction words for the year..... 141923

Total nonfiction words for October... 145150

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 165500

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 310650

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 2

Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 68

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: In this Journal, I discuss various aspects of the writing craft. I also illustrate, with my own writing, a Zen-like non-process called Writing Into the Dark and what is possible when you trust the characters to tell the story that they, not you, are living. WITD also leads to greatly increase productivity and a rapid ascension along the learning curve because you get a great deal more Practice. This is not opinion. It is all numbers and facts.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Just Write the Next Sentence](#)

Something for (Almost) Everyone

October 18, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

* Quotes of the Day

* Something for (Almost) Everyone

- * Oops, Sorry
- * A Pueblo Verse
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“Never be limited by other people’s limited imaginations.” Mae Jemison

“Always do your very best. Even when no one else is looking, you always are. Don’t disappoint yourself.” Colin Powell

Something for (Almost) Everyone

I suspect “Of Interest” today holds something of interest for almost everyone.

Oops, Sorry

Um, the ghost is posting again.

I have MailerLite set to send the Journal every day, but I also checked a box so it would send only when there was new content.

Today I went in and looked again, and the box was not checked. So I checked it (again), then restarted the campaign. So from now on, or until the ghost chooses to uncheck the box again, you should receive only new, previously unpublished editions of the Journal.

You know, fingers crossed. If this doesn’t work, I’ll take more drastic action. And unless I have something pressing to post tomorrow, I probably won’t post as a test.

A Pueblo Verse

Hold on to what is good
even if it is a handful of earth.
Hold on to what you believe
even if it is a tree which stands by itself.
Hold on to what you must do
even if it is a long way from here.
Hold on to life
even when it is easier letting go.
Hold on to my hand
even when I have gone away from you.

(Thanks to Sam T. for the pueblo verse.)

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Groundbreaking Motionless Wind Turbine at <https://interestingengineering.com/innovation/groundbreaking-motionless-wind-turbine>. The future, today.

See “Most Powerful Cosmic Gamma-Ray Burst” at <https://interestingengineering.com/science/nasa-detects-the-most-powerful-cosmic-gamma-ray-burst-ever-discovered>. SF ideas? Mutations? Dystopia? New super beings?

See “GIFTS.... We Got Gifts” at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/gifts-we-got-gifts/>.

See “I grieve and dare not show...” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/i-grieve-and-dare-not-show-my-discontent/>.

See “Why Art Was Such a Powerful Tool...” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/why-art-was-such-a-powerful-tool-for-englands-tudor-monarchs/>. Mostly for PG’s note about the Met.

See “Pronunciation Guides” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/auto-draft-3/>. See PG’s comment too.

See “Writers, be wary...” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/writers-be-wary-of-throat-clearers-and-wan-intensifiers-very-very-wary/>.

See “Why Don’t Americans and Brits Have the Same Accents?” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/why-dont-americans-and-brits-have-the-same-accents/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 350 words

Writing of *The Stirchians* (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... 4106 words. Total words to date..... 4106
Day 2..... 3505 words. Total words to date..... 7611
Day 3..... 2392 words. Total words to date..... 10366
Day 4..... 3336 words. Total words to date..... 13339
Day 5..... 3227 words. Total words to date..... 16566
Day 6..... 2821 words. Total words to date..... 19387
Day 7..... 2900 words. Total words to date..... 22287

Total fiction words for October..... 30489
Total fiction words for the year..... 150871
Total nonfiction words for October... 12630
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 165850
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 316721

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date.....	2
Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date...	0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	68
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014).....	217
Short story collections.....	31

Disclaimer: In this Journal, among many other things, I illustrate a Zen-like non-process called Writing Into the Dark and what is possible when you trust the characters to tell the story that they, not you, are living. WITD also leads to greatly increase productivity and a rapid ascension along the learning curve because you get a great deal more Practice. This is not opinion. It is all numbers and facts.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [dialogue](#), [Pronunciation guides](#), [SF](#), [The MET](#)

Qualifying “Just Write the Next Sentence”

October 19, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Topic: Qualifying “Just Write the Next Sentence”
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“You know, everybody is ignorant, only on different subjects.” Will Rogers

“Success is stumbling from failure to failure with no loss of enthusiasm.” Winston Churchill

Topic: Qualifying “Just Write the Next Sentence”

Surprise! This is not a repeat.

As a test, I wasn’t going to post today, but I had a question, and I felt it was too important to put off (and maybe forget). So I’ll plan to not post anything tomorrow as a test.

A day or two ago in this space, I wrote (as I’ve written often in this Journal) that if you get “stuck” partway through a story, the best approach is to just write the next sentence, then the next and the next. Soon the story will be flowing again. Even as overly simple as that sounds, it is true.

But my conscience dictates that I qualify that advice slightly.

The method works, absolutely—if you’ve written into the dark up to the point where you feel “stuck.” If you’re working from an outline or otherwise planning In Any Way, then you’ll probably have to follow your own lead and dig yourself out of the muck the same way you dug yourself into it. (grin)

But obviously I’m not writing all this for plotters and planners and candlestick makers. I’m writing it for those who Most Often trust their characters to tell the story that they, not the writer, are living.

If you let your guard down and allow your always-negative, conscious, critical mind to move the story in any direction at all, when the story begins to slow and you feel it’s bogging down, chances are it is.

The direction you took as a result of “thinking” about the story is a false direction as far as the characters are concerned because it was predetermined and forced on them.

After all, they don’t know in advance what will happen next in their story anymore than you know what will happen next in yours. And by “yours,” I mean the one you are living, sitting there at your keyboard.

So when something is predetermined—when your conscious, critical mind forces a new direction on your characters and all at once they know what’s coming—they recognize a skunk in the works and that the new direction isn’t part of the story they’re Just Living as they go about their lives.

So as long as you force them to put up with it, they’ll trudge through their paces like good little characters. But their arms will be crossed over their chest and they’ll drag their feet, making the story feel slow or bogged down. And chances are, they’ll also be muttering something I promise you would rather not hear.

To correct this problem, first, be sure it IS a problem. Be sure the slowing is due to interference by the critical mind.

To do that, ask yourself this, and be honest: Did the story move in the new direction as a result of anything negative in you, such as fear or uncertainty about where it was going?

If your answer is yes or maybe or anything other than a firm NO, the new direction came from your critical mind.

And just so you know, despite my use of kid gloves in the previous paragraph (Did *the story move* in the new direction...) honesty does count: The story didn’t “move in a new direction” of its own accord. YOU intentionally moved the story in a new direction. And anything YOU do to a story is author overreach. Get out of the story, and stay out. (grin)

That said and done, now you have to fix it. And to do that, you have to find where you turned the story in the wrong direction. Follow these steps:

Method One—

1. Being brutally honest once again, chances are you won't have to look far. Chances are you already know what the wrong direction is and even when and where it happened. In that case, I suggest you teach your critical mind a lesson:
2. Go back to the place where you intentionally turned the story and delete everything from there forward. Just trash it. Seriously, toss it out. They're only words, my friends. Words to a writer are like nails to a carpenter. If one is bent, toss it out and get another one.
3. Take a break. Go get a cuppa or a glass of water or something.
4. When you come back to the newly shortened novel, read through it from the beginning. When you get to the white space, Just Write the Next Sentence—whatever comes—then the next and the next and so on.

Method Two—

1. If you honestly don't know where the story went wrong, go all the way back to the opening sentence and read Just as a Reader. Read as quickly as you can. When you get to the place where the story turns unnaturally, meaning in a way the characters themselves didn't intend, it should pop out at you. In that case
2. See 2, 3, and 4 above.

After all of that, keep your guard up. Don't allow the critical mind to creep its way in again. Trust your characters. Be true to them and they'll tell you some excellent stories.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Marketing and Branding Books Quiz: Why Isn't My Title Selling?" at <https://www.amarketingexpert.com/2022/10/18/marketing-and-branding-books-quiz-why-isnt-my-title-selling/>. I got tired just reading the quiz. (grin)

See "Doing Good Radio" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/10/doing-good-radio.html>.

See "Top 10 AI Marketing Tools..." at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/top-10-ai-marketing-tools-you-should-use/>.

See "Maria Pallante, Copyright Crusader" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/maria-pallante-copyright-crusader/>.

See "Where's Wendig?..." at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/wheres-wendig-wayward-wanderings-a-wendig-in-the-wild-book-tour/>. See PG's take.

See “9 Negative Character Arcs in the Enneagram” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/9-negative-character-arcs-in-the-enneagram/>. Maybe interesting.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 960 words

Writing of The Stirchians (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... 4106 words. Total words to date..... 4106
Day 2..... 3505 words. Total words to date..... 7611
Day 3..... 2392 words. Total words to date..... 10366
Day 4..... 3336 words. Total words to date..... 13339
Day 5..... 3227 words. Total words to date..... 16566
Day 6..... 2821 words. Total words to date..... 19387
Day 7..... 2900 words. Total words to date..... 22287
Day 8..... 1288 words. Total words to date..... 23575

Total fiction words for October..... 31777
Total fiction words for the year..... 152159
Total nonfiction words for October... 13590
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 166810
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 318969

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 2
Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 68
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: In this Journal, among many other things, I illustrate a Zen-like non-process called Writing Into the Dark and what is possible when you trust the characters to tell the story that they, not you, are living. WITD also leads to greatly increase productivity and a rapid ascension along the learning curve because you get a great deal more Practice. This is not opinion. It is all numbers and facts.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [AI](#), [Chuck Wendig](#), [copyright](#), [Interviewing](#), [Just Write the Next Sentence](#), [marketing](#)

Numbers Do Not Lie (It's Called Practice)

October 20, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Oh Well
- * Numbers Do Not Lie (It's Called Practice)
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“Do something you really like, and hopefully it pays the rent. As far as I’m concerned, that’s success.” Tom Petty

“I’m moving ahead making every day matter.” Garry Rodgers

Oh Well

Again, I planned not to post and did anyway. No worries. Soon enough I’ll have a day away from posting and that will serve as the test to see whether MailerLite will resends a post.

I don’t think they will. I’ve checked all the right boxes. But if they do, you won’t have to point it out to me. I get the Journal too. And we all know where the Delete key is. (grin)

Numbers Do Not Lie (It’s Called Practice)

This morning I inadvertently set a new long-range goal. But I’m kind’a glad because it’s a good one. Given life rolls etc. it will make me stretch a little, but it’s far from impossible to reach. Read on.

In response to Garry Rodgers’ question (“Have you given any thought to your runway of life? Care to share an urgency?”) at the end of his post at the Kill Zone blog, I wrote this:

“Yes sir. That’s exactly why I write fiction the way I do, and why I will have written at least my 70th novel before my 70th birthday in a month or so. I don’t have a cash-out age, but I hope to surpass 82 (that genealogy thing at work). I would like very much to have written 200 novels (total) before that.”

I can almost see and hear some of you shaking your heads and saying “That’s impossible,” but don’t toss out the notion yet. Instead,

“Check the math: 130 novels in 12 years = 11 novels per year = 60,000 words per month (with one month off, ahem, as if) = 2000 words per day (2 hours of ‘work’). Not a bad way to make a living. (grin)”

Of course, some are mumbling, “But are the stories any good?” or stating, “But the stories can’t possibly be any good.”

Why? Because I didn't depend on a lot of strangers to tell me how to write my characters' story? That's just silly. (grin) But my standard response to such insulting questions or statements is (ahem) read one and find out. (grin)

I'll even send you one free. Of course, I'm somewhat limited in scope: I can offer only Western (and Western Romance), Magic Realism, Science Fiction, Action-Adventure-Thriller, Crime and Detective/PI novels.

But yes, according to comments I get from readers, the stories and novels I write are good despite the fact that I (my characters) generate a lot of them. But then, I don't hover in that seemingly endless cycle: plan, write, revise, critique, rewrite, polish, submit. I don't have to.

Instead I write, submit or publish, and then write something new. I put new words on the page. It's called Practice.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "The black market for blue checks" at <https://www.theverge.com/23379133/twitter-instagram-verified-account-for-sale-scam-criminal>.

See "What Is A Brand?" at <https://deanwesleymith.com/what-is-a-brand/>.

See "Your Runway of Life" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/10/your-runway-of-life.html>.

See "Sayings of Latvian origin" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/sayings-of-latvian-origin/>.
Story ideas abound.

See "How To Add More Amazon Categories To Your Book Or Ebook" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/how-to-add-more-amazon-categories-to-your-book-or-ebook/>.
I saved this one to my Writers Resources page.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 540 words

Writing of The Stirchians (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... 4106 words. Total words to date..... 4106
Day 2..... 3505 words. Total words to date..... 7611
Day 3..... 2392 words. Total words to date..... 10366
Day 4..... 3336 words. Total words to date..... 13339
Day 5..... 3227 words. Total words to date..... 16566
Day 6..... 2821 words. Total words to date..... 19387

Day 7..... 2900 words. Total words to date..... 22287
Day 8..... 1288 words. Total words to date..... 23575

Total fiction words for October..... 31777
Total fiction words for the year..... 152159
Total nonfiction words for October... 14130
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 167350
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 319509

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 2
Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 68
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: In this Journal, among many other things, I illustrate a Zen-like non-process called Writing Into the Dark and what is possible when you trust the characters to tell the story that they, not you, are living. WITD also leads to greatly increase productivity and a rapid ascension along the learning curve because you get a great deal more Practice. This is not opinion. It is all numbers and facts.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Amazon Categories](#), [How To Add More Amazon Categories](#), [Long-Term Goals](#)

Spreading the Word, and Memes

October 21, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Spreading the Word
- * Memes
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day (maybe even the year)

“You don't have to wait to be confident. Just do it and eventually the confidence will follow.”
Carrie Fisher

What excellent advice!

Spreading the Word

In reply to my comment on Garry Rodgers' TKZ post yesterday, Garry wrote, "I checked your math and it works. BTW, WTF do you do in your spare time?"

I couldn't pass up an invitation like that:

"In my spare time I do things I enjoy, of course. Like writing. But seriously, I write only three to four hours per day, depending on what else is going on, in one-hour sessions. I start each session by reading over what I wrote in the previous session and allowing my characters to touch it as I read. When I've finished I send it to my first reader (an avid reader, but not a writer) for whatever wrong words or inconsistencies pop out at him. I make the corrections I agree with, and then publish it and start the next story.

"I think most writers write at about 1000 words per hour. That's a blazing fast 17 words per minute. That's why the math works. So a 60,000 word novel takes about 60 hours to write. Whether I spread that 60 hours over 2 weeks or a month or a year is up to me. Some folks lose time in second-guessing. I don't do that. I'm not trying for The Great American Novel. I just enjoy telling stories."

Memes

My wife told me yesterday she saw this on Facebook in a meme:

*I wrote a 60,000 word novel on cats.
It would have been a lot easier if I'd used paper.*

And then there's this:



To which one of my sons replied, “If they’d cut out all the walking, it would have been a pamphlet.”

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “5 Do’s and 5 Don’ts For Fiction Writers...” at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/5-does-and-5-donts-for-fiction-writers/>. Great stuff. Read it, learn it, do it.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 340 words

Writing of The Stirchians (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... 4106 words. Total words to date..... 4106
Day 2..... 3505 words. Total words to date..... 7611
Day 3..... 2392 words. Total words to date..... 10366
Day 4..... 3336 words. Total words to date..... 13339
Day 5..... 3227 words. Total words to date..... 16566
Day 6..... 2821 words. Total words to date..... 19387
Day 7..... 2900 words. Total words to date..... 22287
Day 8..... 1288 words. Total words to date..... 23575

Total fiction words for October..... 31777
Total fiction words for the year..... 152159
Total nonfiction words for October... 14470
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 167690
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 319849

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 2
Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 68
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: In this Journal, among many other things, I teach a Zen-like non-process called Writing Into the Dark. It greatly increases productivity and practice, and thereby provides a rapid ascension along the learning curve of Craft. This is not opinion. It is all numbers and facts.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [copyright](#), [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [trademark](#), [WITD](#)

A New Short Story Market, and Marketing

October 22, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * A New Short Story Market
- * A Tiny Marketing Strategy
- * Of Interest

A New Short Story Market

From subscriber and writer friend [Dawn M. Turner](#),

“Do you have subscribers who write horror and/or paranormal short stories? A YouTube channel I follow ... is now offering .03 per word for short stories they narrate on their channel.

“They provide credit to each writer when stories are presented, so it might be a good way to get some spare change AND help with name recognition.”

For details, see <https://www.youtube.com/c/DarknessPrevails>.

And (not about writing, but) if you're interested in really great looking beaded designs for yourself or to give as gifts, visit Dawn's Etsy store at <https://www.etsy.com/shop/TurnerTreasuresUS>. Everything from pen covers to bells to ornaments to whatever else. Take a look.

A Tiny Marketing Strategy

Dawn didn't ask me to mention that last part, by the way, but she made the URL for her Etsy site and the URL for her author website available to me in the signature in her email.

Those of you who have received emails from me know that I also use the signature feature. Mine looks like this:

* * *

I only write when I'm inspired, so I see to it that I'm inspired every morning at 3 a.m.

<https://harveystanbrough.com> — my author website

<https://hestanbrough.com> — my instructive Daily Journal

<https://StoneThreadPublishing.com> — my publisher website

The point is, if you do NOT use the signature feature at the bottom of your email, you're missing a sure bet.

Will using the signature cause every recipient of every email to click through every time? Of course not.

But using the signature is a one-time investment (the few minutes it takes to set it up) that can pay dividends for as long as you're using that email address. Should someone wonder about your website or publisher or whatever, all they have to do is click the appropriate link in your signature.

Becoming known is all about making yourself available via your email signature, in the back matter of your books, and even in person.

Back in the day, I used to do the same thing at writers' conferences where I was invited to speak. Most presenters would present their session, then disappear into their room upstairs.

After I presented a session, I usually hung out in the lobby, or more likely in the restaurant or bar, always at a large table. In other words, I made myself available to anyone who wanted to talk.

I think the conference in Tulsa (or maybe Tucson) was where I first explained the hierarchy of the writing business to a young writer:

“Writers are the only truly important part of the writing and publishing business.”

The writer frowned. “Really?”

“Sure. Do you know what writers would do if there were no editors or publishers?”

“No.”

“They’d write. But do you know what editors and publishers would do if there were no writers?”

“No.”

I grinned. “You want fries with that?” (I stand by that, by the way.)

Thanks for letting me reminisce. Now go add a signature to your outgoing emails.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Nuclear War Map” at <https://www.christopherminson.com/articles/nuclearwarmap.html>. From the links near the top of the page, you may choose between a large-scale attack, a single-city attack, or both. I suggest reading the page first. Great info for SF, action-adventure, thriller and other writers.

See “A Brief Adventure” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/a-brief-adventure/>. You can’t make this stuff up. Life happens. This is exactly why I preach simply recording what happens as your characters live their lives.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 590 words

Writing of The Stirchians (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... 4106 words. Total words to date..... 4106
Day 2..... 3505 words. Total words to date..... 7611
Day 3..... 2392 words. Total words to date..... 10366
Day 4..... 3336 words. Total words to date..... 13339

Day 5..... 3227 words. Total words to date..... 16566
Day 6..... 2821 words. Total words to date..... 19387
Day 7..... 2900 words. Total words to date..... 22287
Day 8..... 1288 words. Total words to date..... 23575
Day 9..... 3584 words. Total words to date..... 27159

Total fiction words for October..... 35361
Total fiction words for the year..... 155743
Total nonfiction words for October... 15060
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 168280
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 324025

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 2
Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 68
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [marketing](#), [Self-promotion](#)

A Minor Conundrum

October 24, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * A Minor Conundrum (and Your Opinion Counts)
- * Of Interest

A Minor Conundrum

Despite my having checked the box at MailerLite to “send only when there’s new content,” today it actually sent a BLANK email that contained only the header and the unsubscribe information. Because, um, there was no new content. If that isn’t a human being snubbed by a machine, I don’t know what is.

And when I tried to click the minuscule Help link at the bottom of the page at MailerLite, it was greyed-out and unresponsive. Its little eyeballs were rolled up in its head, its skin was grey and clammy, and it had no pulse.

So I can't even ask MailerLite why, after I jumped through the hoops and checked the right boxes, It Doesn't Work. Ahem. Great customer service.

I really don't mean to sound grumpy, but I'm old enough to remember a time when your word as a company mattered and the customer mattered. Dinosaur, that's me.

And yes, I also understand that's how practically every company is run these days because they know chances are a lot of people will take their crap, beg for more, and still send them money. I would have to simply accept it if I continue to use their service. But I don't have to use their service.

So I'm considering a few alternatives. All three include canceling my MailerLite account because, frankly, it's as worthless as unnecessary appendages on a boar hog.

Alternative 1 is that I continue to post regularly at hestanbrough.com OR even to move the Journal back over to my "big" author website at harveystanbrough.com. Just thinking out loud here, if I choose this option, I could even let hestanbrough.com go away because it currently exists only to host the Journal. So one fewer websites to keep updated. Hmmm.

Either way, with this option, you would no longer receive the Journal in your email inbox.

Then (fingers crossed) those who enjoy or need my silly little blog will bookmark it and stop by to read it. (And I guess those who use a "reader" can still have it delivered directly to them by subscribing via RSS. Whatever all of that means. I'm not being flippant. I've never used a reader so I don't know.)

Frankly, Alternative 1 is the most attractive to me personally at the moment, and it seems to be the trend lately anyway. And it's what I do myself. I stop by Dean Wesley Smith's blog (religiously), the Kill Zone blog, The Passive Voice blog and a few others each morning unless I'm off wandering the Lower Gila Box Wilderness in southwest New Mexico or something.

Alternative 2 is switching all of you subscribers *And The Journal Itself* over to Substack. For subscribers, it should be as seamless as switching over from MailChimp to MailerLite, so no real worries there. You'd still (ostensibly) get the Journal in your email inbox, but there might be a few days' downtime as I get used to the new setup over there, get the graphics reset so they'll work with Substack, etc.

For those who currently stop by to check the Journal when they think about it, they would do the same thing but at a different URL. I don't believe Substack is set up so I can post to my own website but have the article also appear on Substack.

All of which is fine, but I suspect I will be in for more of the same unresponsive, the-customer-doesn't-matter BS over there. After all, Substack also is a company in the 21st Century in the United States.

The only other concern I have is, as a friend mentioned awhile back, I don't like pitching my tent on someone else's turf. If they close-up shop, do I get to pack up and get all my crap outta there? (Of course, I always save the latest post to the PDF archives, so there's that.)

Alternative 3 is, to me, the least attractive. In this one, I would take the Journal onto Facebook. I mean, does anyone who's reading this (other than me) NOT have a Facebook account? Seriously, I'm asking.

If all of you would be good with that, I *might* do that instead (or in addition to continuing to post the Journal on my website but not have it sent to inboxes).

I could even open a Facebook account, then post to the Journal as I always have, and then "share" it to my new Facebook page. If that's even a thing. I think it is, but I dunno.

Of course, we'll all have to wear our flame-retardant undies if we actually express opinions or even actual facts on Facebook. If you write that "two plus 3 is V," someone will say you can't mix English text with Arabic numerals or Arabic numerals with Roman numerals because Cultural Misappropriation or something.

And again there's the thing about putting my content on someone else's turf. But on the other hand, maybe we'd even get more folks following the Journal. Then again, they might "join" only to chuck rocks at us. I think that's more likely.

Okay. So anyway. this is your chance to be heard. And unlike 99+% of yer federal politicians, I actually care what you think. PLEASE let me know.

1. If I simply post the Journal either at its present location or on my author site, but don't have email subscriptions, would you still stop by to see what's going on? (Is it worth my time, one to two hours per day, to continue posting at all if there are no email subscribers?)

All I really need is a Yep or a Nope (and if you vote Nope, please mention whether you would prefer Alternative 2 or 3, 'cause I'm pretty sure that's the only way either of those will come into play).

To vote, you can either leave a comment below this post at <https://hestanbrough.com/a-minor-conundrum/> or email me directly at harveystanbrough@gmail.com.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "The Last Sale" at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/the-last-sale-2/>.

See "Using Weather to Convey Mood in Fiction" at <https://www.janefriedman.com/using-weather-to-convey-mood-in-fiction/>. An extremely good article.

See “Writing Through the Impossible” at <https://www.janefriedman.com/writing-through-the-impossible/>. Just in case some of you need this.

See “The Despicable Kids For Cash Scandal” at <http://dyingwords.net/the-despicable-kids-for-cash-scandal/>. Read. Shudder. Pound your desk. Write.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1070 words

Writing of *The Stirchians* (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... 4106 words. Total words to date..... 4106
Day 2..... 3505 words. Total words to date..... 7611
Day 3..... 2392 words. Total words to date..... 10366
Day 4..... 3336 words. Total words to date..... 13339
Day 5..... 3227 words. Total words to date..... 16566
Day 6..... 2821 words. Total words to date..... 19387
Day 7..... 2900 words. Total words to date..... 22287
Day 8..... 1288 words. Total words to date..... 23575
Day 9..... 3584 words. Total words to date..... 27159

Total fiction words for October..... 35361
Total fiction words for the year..... 155743
Total nonfiction words for October... 16130
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 169350
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 325093

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 2
Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 68
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Leaving MailerLite](#)

Thank You

October 25, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Thank You
- * In Other News
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“The purpose of art is washing the dust of daily life off our souls.” Pablo Picasso

“For most [people], an ignorant enjoyment is better than an informed one; it is better to conceive the sky as a blue dome than a dark cavity; and the cloud as a golden throne than a sleety mist.”
John Ruskin

Absolutely true in my case. I hate it when anyone feels the need to suck all the wonder out of wonderful objects and events. h

Thank You

to everyone who voted. I was pleasantly surprised at the overwhelming support for Alternative 1.

So this will be the last edition of the Journal to arrive directly in your email inbox. After this edition, to read the Journal you'll need to stop by <https://hestanbrough.com>.

If it helps to alleviate the inconvenience a little, you can now access the Journal three or four hours earlier than you used to. The email version was sent each day at 10 a.m. Arizona time. But I usually post it online by 6 a.m., and almost always by 7 a.m.

(Oh... for Kay L., I received your email and I appreciated your input. But when I clicked Reply and sent a response, the mailer daemon bounced my response as undeliverable to your “Mail for Windows” email address.)

After MailerLite sends this post at 10 today, I had intended to use what I need of the rest of today to move everything from hestanbrough.com over to harveystanbrough.com.

However, I started prepping the big site yesterday and discovered some snags that will prevent me from transferring the Journal over there for some time to come.

Primarily, all the old posts over there (almost 700 of them) pop up on the “posts” page. So that includes some of the older Journal entries (those are also included in my published archives) as well as free stories of the week and other categories.

I hadn't realized there were that many posts over there. But then, there are just under 1600 posts on the current Journal site too. (grin) Fortunately, I've saved all of my Journal posts since 2014

in the free Journal Archives, a PDF copy of which you can download by clicking the links listed at <https://hestanbrough.com/the-daily-journal-archives/>.

I don't mind leaving hestanbrough.com behind once I'm able to figure out how to set up multiple posts pages (something to do with categories) over on the big site. When that happens, I'll let you know. I know how to send posts in different categories to different RSS feeds, but not how to separate them on the actual website. If any of you have any special knowledge of how to do that, please enlighten me.

But it's all good. As a result of my poking around over there, I did make several beneficial changes. Most notably, I got rid of all those patronage tiers on both the Journal site and my author site. Nobody was taking advantage of the tiers anyway. And really, if you're a patron or a donor and you want something, you have only to ask.

You can still become a patron or a donor if you want. I also changed [the statement on the Patronage page](#) if you'd care to take a look.

As far as the (almost) Daily Journal goes, it's been a journey already, but it's far from over (knock on wood). For now, at least, I'll continue posting new content to the Journal right here at <https://hestanbrough.com>. If I ever make the switch over to the other site, of course I'll announce that here as well.

In Other News

I suffered a minor setback yesterday that still gripes me to no end. Recently I've been carrying my little 11.5" HP PowerBook up to the house where I sit outside on the porch and write.

Yesterday I did the same thing, and after I'd written for a little over an hour (and about 1500 words), I got up to let one of the cats into the house or something. And when I came back to the computer, the screen was Just Blank. No Word document, no desktop. Nothing. It wasn't dark, like it was turned off. It was still light, but blank.

Nothing I did worked to get the thing going again, and I finally had to shut it down and restart it. No worries, I thought. I have Word set to autosave every five minutes or so.

Only when the 'puter finally came back to life and I opened the document, expecting to see an autosaved version in the left margin, there was only the document with a query in the lower right corner. It asked whether I wanted to return to where I'd left the document *a little over an hour ago*.

So long story short, I lost about 1500 words. That was annoying. I'm not worried about "rebuilding" them or anything like that. I wrote into the dark the first time, so I'll just do that again. And I don't mind tossing out words that aren't working. But to just lose them like that—ugh.

Guess I'll have to buy a new writing 'puter. Well, a new used one. I like the keyboard on that 11.6" HP enough to drop a couple hundred bucks on a new used one. But in the meantime I'll write on my 14" business computer. (And of course, count among my many blessings that I have that option.)

Anyway, once I get my head screwed on straight again I'll start leaving word counts below again.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Watch how forensic experts use insects to find criminals" at <https://interestingengineering.com/video/watch-how-forensic-experts-use-insects-to-find-criminals>.

See "Is our planet surrounded by a giant magnetic tunnel? Let's find out" at <https://interestingengineering.com/science/is-our-planet-surrounded-by-a-giant-magnetic-tunnel-lets-find-out>. More on magnetism.

See "The Curious Case of the Bog Bodies" at <https://nautil.us/the-curious-case-of-the-bog-bodies-235510/>. Story ideas, anyone? (Frank O'Connor's "Guests of the Nation," anyone?)

See "Why do people have slips of the tongue?" at <https://theconversation.com/why-do-people-have-slips-of-the-tongue-191383/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 990 words

Writing of The Stirchians (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... 4106 words. Total words to date..... 4106
Day 2..... 3505 words. Total words to date..... 7611
Day 3..... 2392 words. Total words to date..... 10366
Day 4..... 3336 words. Total words to date..... 13339
Day 5..... 3227 words. Total words to date..... 16566
Day 6..... 2821 words. Total words to date..... 19387
Day 7..... 2900 words. Total words to date..... 22287
Day 8..... 1288 words. Total words to date..... 23575
Day 9..... 3584 words. Total words to date..... 27159

Total fiction words for October..... 35361

Total fiction words for the year..... 155743

Total nonfiction words for October... 17120

Total nonfiction words for the year.....	170340
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog).....	326083
Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date.....	2
Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0	
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	68
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014).....	217
Short story collections.....	31

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A Major Personal Anniversary

October 26, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * A Major Personal Anniversary
- * You're Seeing This in Your Inbox
- * And Some Exciting News for Readers
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“A contract is always cheaper than a lawsuit.” The Passive Guy

“If one does not know to which port one is sailing, no wind is favorable.” Seneca ‘the Younger’, Roman philosopher and poet, c.4 bc–ad 65

“So yesterday, without the slightest bit of fanfare or the nano-slightest bit of intent on my part, I started writing my first novel. When I realized what was going on about 1500 words later, I almost succumbed to ‘Oh Hell No.’ Instead I took a deep breath, remembered nobody would nuke my house if I failed or succeeded, and set a release date of 8 December (45 days).” Harvey Stanbrough in the Journal entry for Oct 26, 2014 (Thanks to Frank for mentioning this.)

Update: I actually published *Leaving Amarillo* on November 11, 2014. Then I published *Longing for Mexico* on December 12, 2014 (four days after my original self-imposed deadline for *Leaving Amarillo*), and *South to Mexico* on December 27, 2014.

I'm not bragging, folks. When I started this journey, I'd been mired in the myths up to that point. This is what you can do when you trust yourself and give WITD a real, honest try. I was amazed when it actually worked, and most of the time I still am even 8 years later.

A Major Personal Anniversary

A reader, Frank, left a comment on yesterday's post: "Hey there, just reading the archives, and it looks like you started writing *Leaving Amarillo* 8 years ago today! Congrats!"

For some reason, I'd always thought I'd started writing that novel, my very first, on either October 19 or 21. Still, that's kind'a cool, and I appreciated Frank passing along that tidbit.

For a limited time, if you'd like to read my very first novel, email me at harveystanbrough@gmail.com. Let me know whether you want it in PDF, .mobi or .epub format and I'll send it right out.

To date, I've written 17 novels centered around Wes Crowley. That was the very first one.

A couple of maybe interesting tidbits:

1. *That first novel* resulted from a short story I wrote titled "Adobe Walls." (The name of the real town is Charleston, Arizona. Over the years, unfortunately, the army used it for gunnery practice. Today, only adobe walls remain.) After I published that story in October 2014, ol' Wes kept tugging on my sleeve. He said, "Wouldn't you like to know how all that came to happen?"

Why yes. Yes I would. (grin) So I wrote *Leaving Amarillo*, then *Longing for Mexico*, and then *South to Mexico*. And silly me, I thought that trilogy would be all the Wes Crowley books I'd ever write. Shows you what I know. It really is all up to the characters.

2. *After that* (while also writing short stories and novels in other genres like crime and SF) I wrote three prequels to *Leaving Amarillo*. So even though *Leaving Amarillo* was my first novel, three others come before it chronologically. And then I wrote six more novels later to finish out the Wes Crowley saga in 12 novels.

Um, but then I realized (happily) there was a 16-year gap between Books 2 & 3 (or 3 & 4, I forget). And frankly, I missed writing about Wes and his friends and his loves and his enemies. And so the Wes Crowley Gap Series was born. I've written five novels in that series so far, with (I hope) a lot more to come.

So there you have it. The whole history of Wes Crowley and how he came to be. And yes, I like to think I would have been him in the late 19th and early 20th century. There is nothing like the thrill of riding wild on a good horse in a just cause. (grin)

Oh, there were a few spin-offs too. Rider Jones of the novel by the same name met Wes one time down in Palominas, Arizona (if I remember right) and then saw him later again at Wes' home in the state of Guerrero along the Pacific coast in Mexico.

And in *No Kind'a Time*, Wes's great-grandson and his great-great-granddaughter star. And they're both pretty much as tough as ol' Wes is. Another descent of Wes' might have starred in *The Day the Earth Shuddered and Stood Still* too, but I can't remember for sure. Anyway, it's a good story. (grin)

You're Seeing This in Your Inbox

because I didn't get MailerLite canceled yesterday. I'll definitely do that today, right after this goes out at 10 a.m. my (Arizona) time.

So starting tomorrow, drop by the Journal site at <https://hestanbrough.com> if you want to see whether anything good's going on. I'll be as descriptive as I can in the title, and then there will be an excerpt.

And Some Exciting News for Readers

If you read my fiction, or if you're just interested in something you might do yourself as a writer for your own readers, stop by <https://harveystanbroughwrites.com> and read the Welcome page.

I bought Harvey Stanbrough Writes quite awhile back and was hoping eventually to find a good use for it. I think it's a perfect title for a website for my readers.

Over there, I plan to fire up my Free Short Story of the Week again. Additionally, I plan to write at least one blog post per week about my characters or settings or pretty much anything else readers might be interested in. I might even serialize some of my novels. (grin) Of course, all of those will appear on the Blog page (or whatever), but they'll also be separated by category. And the categories are all individual tabs in the menu.

Any thoughts on free story of the week or free serialized novels or anything else over there, feel free to chime in either in a comment or via email at harveystanbrough@gmail.com.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "What You Should Know About Writing a Co-Authored Book" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/what-you-should-know-about-writing-a-co-authored-book/>. Especially for PG's take. Informative, and hilarious.

See "The Forgotten Sisters Who Pioneered the Historical Novel" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/the-forgotten-sisters-who-pioneered-the-historical-novel/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1010 words

Writing of **The Stirchians** (novel, tentative title)

Day 10... 1330 words. Total words to date..... 28459

Total fiction words for October..... 36691

Total fiction words for the year..... 157073

Total nonfiction words for October... 18130

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 171350

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 328423

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 2

Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 68

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

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Tidying Up Loose Ends

October 27, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Wes Crowley
- * Thanks
- * The Vote Wasn't Close
- * Stanbrough Writes
- * The Little Writing 'Puter
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

"[Y]ou as a writer can prepare for success without dealing with the insecurity at all. It's easier now than it ever was, because writers can publish their own work and keep it in print for decades." Kristine Kathryn Rusch

Wes Crowley (giveaway)

In case you missed it in the mishmash of news yesterday or the day before, in honor of the 8th anniversary of starting my first novel (Oct 25, 2014) I'm giving that novel away.

You only have to email me at harveystanbrough@gmail.com and let me know which eformat you want: PDF, .epub, or .mobi. I'll send it right out.

Thank You

I appreciate you stopping by, especially if you used to receive this blog in your inbox. I understand it's a little inconvenient, and I appreciate the effort. Yesterday about noon I deleted my MailerLite account. Feels kind of freeing, really.

I DID export the subscriber list just in case I decided to try the email format again with another outfit. But I doubt that will happen. According to several comparison sources, MailerLite was hands-down the best, and they laid a massive egg as far as I was concerned.

The Vote Wasn't Close

In case you were wondering, of 90-some email subscribers to the Journal, maybe 15 people voted at all. Two said they would rather continue receiving the Journal in their email but would put up with checking the site each morning. A third recommended I move the Journal to Substack.

Absolutely nobody recommended moving the Journal to Facebook. That surprised me, but I also saw it as a very good thing. And here we are.

Stanbrough Writes

If you didn't see yesterday's Journal or if you haven't had a chance yet to drop by my new Stanbrough Writes: HS's website for readers at <https://harveystanbroughwrites.com>, I hope you will do so. Read over the Welcome page and let me know what you think.

My goal, eventually, will be turning out this almost daily Journal, posting a new short story once a week over at the Stanbrough Writes, and writing articles over there once a week or so also on the characters and settings and situations that have occurred in my novels, novellas and short stories. Oh, and continuing to write fiction. (grin)

With any luck at all, I'll spend at least 6 or so hours per day actually writing something at one keyboard or the other.

The Little Writing 'Puter

I meant to add this to yesterday's post, but didn't. You'll remember I was whining the other day because my little writing 'puter Just Stopped Working.

Well, rather than buying another one right away, once I got to the point where I could at least see the desktop on this one again, I went to the Settings > Update & Security > Recovery and clicked Reset this PC. I figured at the worst I'd lose the computer, so really I'd be no worse off. The reset took about an hour, but when the smoke cleared I had a brand new installation of Windows.

Of course, I had to reset a lot of things and reload some of my programs, but I got finished with all that at least a few days sooner than a new computer would have arrived. And the money I would have spent on a new one is still in the bank.

Now we'll see how well it works. I'm hoping for the best.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Book Cover Ideas & Design Tips for More Sales Conversions" at <https://www.amarketingexpert.com/2022/10/25/book-cover-ideas-design-tips-for-more-sales-conversions/>.

See "America's quirkiest state governments" at <https://www.kiteandkeymedia.com/videos/weirdest-state-governments-in-america>. Good stuff for writers to know.

See "A Snopes Collection of Spooky 'Unsolved' Mysteries" at <https://www.snopes.com/collections/solved-unsolved-mysteries/>. Story ideas.

See "...woman claims her late father was a prolific serial killer" at <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/10/26/us/iowa-serial-killer-claim-donald-studey/index.html>. More story ideas.

See "Serial Killers Fast Facts" at <https://edition.cnn.com/2013/07/09/us/serial-killers-fast-facts/index.html>.

See "Some Updates" at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/some-updates-4/>.

See "Writing Horror vs. Writing Terror" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/writing-horror-vs-writing-terror/>.

See "Thinking Big" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/thinking-big/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 670 words

Writing of The Stirchians (novel, tentative title)

Day 10... 1330 words. Total words to date..... 28459

Total fiction words for October..... 36691
Total fiction words for the year..... 157073
Total nonfiction words for October... 18800
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 172020
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 329093

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 2
Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 68
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

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Categories [Daily Journal](#)

OMG: K.M. Robinson

October 28, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * K.M. Robinson
- *
- *
- *
- *
- *
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“[W]riting ... is the smallest part of being successful in this industry, whether you're traditional or indie published. The vast majority of it is marketing, engaging on social media, handling edits, reading contracts, communicating with design professionals, and interacting with fans.” K.M. Robinson

“I've been both traditionally and indie published, but my career and financial security in this industry is heavily due to my indie work.” K.M. Robinson

“If reviewers do it accurately, the post will only help other readers decide yes or no to a book, and therefore offer no feedback to the author, and if they pen a review incorrectly, it’s unqualified advice for a writer.” K.M. Robinson

K.M. Robinson

Reader Peggy K. sent along a link to an article by K.M. Robinson, a fiction writer and author of multiple bestsellers. You will find the link in “Of Interest.”

The article is extremely interesting and informative. In it, Robinson says a lot of things I’ve read or heard before about how to make it in this business, but she says those things in a different way. A way that makes sense. I urge you to read it.

Most of the article is about marketing. In the list in the first quote of the day above, she mentions “marketing, engaging on social media, ... and interacting with fans.” All of those are marketing.

She also mentions “handling edits.” I agree with that one too, if she’s talking about copyedits. But “handling” them is only a matter of accepting or rejecting each suggestion the copyeditor made. If she’s talking about any other kind of edits, anything at all that has to do with content, I say you don’t need an editor. You need to learn to defend your work.

Finally, Robinson also mentions “reading contracts [and] communicating with design professionals.” If you’re fortunate enough to have to deal with the first, hire an IP attorney to go over the contract for you and with you. As for communicating with design professionals, either do that or learn how to do your own design, whether book cover, book interior, or whatever.

As I told Peggy in my response, “I agree with every point [Robinson] makes. I don’t do all of them, but I agree with all of them.”

That’s true. I don’t do all of them—I don’t do hardly any of them—yet I recommend that *you* do all of them (other than maybe the book signings before you get super famous).

The thing is, we each have our own path. I am quite a prolific fiction writer, and for me, that’s enough. I suspect the first grandchild of mine who is willing to do the work of marketing will make a ton of money on my books. And that’s fine.

I write because I love telling stories. I would also love to be a multiple bestseller, but if that happens for me, it’s going to happen generically, from readers stumbling across my books, liking them enough to tell other readers, etc.

But I’m not normal. I won’t discuss my severe personality flaw or its source, but trust me when I say it’s there, and it precludes me annoying or schmoozing others into buying my books. That just isn’t my place. And by and large, I don’t do social media. (I have a Twitter account I literally never read, and I post to it maybe two or three times per year, usually with a link to a blog post.)

The big takeaway here is that to be a successful Writer, you only have to write. But to be a successful Author, you have to learn the business—especially marketing—and then *TREAT* it as a business.

In the article, I strongly recommend you read Robinson's point 9, "Social Media Presence is a Game Changer." (I don't think she mentions Facebook at all.) Read it as many times as necessary to make it sink in. And as she says in point 2 on marketing, "[O]nly take advice from qualified sources who have had trackable success three times or more so you know it's a strategy and not a happy accident."

Bearing that advice in mind, I strongly recommend you do what I do when it comes to writing stories if 1) you want to have fun writing fiction and 2) you want to write prolifically. I wouldn't lie to you about what great fun it is and how freeing the non-process of Writing Into the Dark is.

Speaking of which, I don't know K.M. Robinson's writing process, but she said she's been writing for only 5 years. If you add up the number of books she's holding in the picture on her site and divide by 5—well, she seems pretty prolific to me.

You don't even have to write novels to be prolific if you don't want to. [According to Frank in a comment a few days ago](#), I "wrote 33 stories (83,220 words) into the dark between April 16 2014 and Oct 25 2014." Sounds pretty prolific, doesn't it? Yet I was writing one short story per week.

So yes, listen to me if you want to learn about writing. Not so much when it comes to business. If you say the word "business" within a hundred yards of me I'll fall asleep. For business, marketing, etc. I recommend you turn to Kristine Kathryn Rusch (her blog is at kriswrites.com) and maybe this K.M. Robinson. I suggest you start by perusing and studying her "books" website at <https://kmrobinsonbooks.com/>. Take your time. There's a lot there.

Then move on to her author/instructional website at <https://kmrobinson.com/>. It's a tour de force in marketing and more, and there's a lot of free content. Unlike a lot of authors, I think she really does want to help, and not just in exchange for money.

Take your time there too. There's even a lot of free content. And unlike K.K. Rusch, from what I could tell K.M. Robinson didn't mention politics or say anything disparaging about anyone even one time. She focuses on the topic at hand.

Young Ms. Robinson seems savvy as hell to me. Learn from her. If I was anyone other than me, that's exactly what I would do. And I might even pop some anti-snooze pills and try a few of her business recommendations myself. (The timing seems right, what with me recently standing up HarveyStanbroughWrites.com.)

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Curious About Becoming A Fiction Author? Here Are 10 Things You Should Know...” at <https://www.eviemagazine.com/post/curious-about-becoming-a-fiction-author-here-are-10-things-you-should-know>. THIS! READ THIS!

See “Why Are We Afraid Of The Dark? New Study Has An Answer” at <https://www.iflscience.com/why-are-we-afraid-of-the-dark-new-study-has-an-answer-60088>. Um, 'cause stuff can hide in there. No study needed.

See “Reddit users recount their creepiest experiences.” at https://www.reddit.com/r/AskReddit/comments/ntofxm/what_the_scariest_true_story_you_know/. Story ideas.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1120 words

Writing of The Stirchians (novel, tentative title)

Day 10... 1330 words. Total words to date..... 28459

Day 10... 2337 words. Total words to date..... 30836

Total fiction words for October..... 39028

Total fiction words for the year..... 159410

Total nonfiction words for October... 19920

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 173140

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 332550

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 2

Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 68

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [K.M. Robinson](#), [marketing](#), [Social Media](#), [Story Ideas](#)

Adobe Walls, and Great Marketing Advice

October 29, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Adobe Walls
- * Market Your Work
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

“A Positive Indie Author/Publisher Mindset — This is the most important factor of all. Once I made the decision (February 17, 2020) to treat my indie writing and publishing as a business, things really changed. It takes time and persistence, but it’s worth it.” Garry Rodgers

Adobe Walls

My wife found a couple of pics of me in and near Adobe Walls. If you’d like to see them, I added them to [the Old Promo Pics page](#) on Stanbrough Writes.

Adobe Walls is the fictional name I gave the real ghost town of Charleston Arizona in the short story that gave rise to all the Wes Crowley novels that would follow.

Charleston lies about halfway between Tombstone and Sierra Vista along the west bank of the San Pedro river. It served primarily as the bedroom community for Millville, just across the river, where the ore was processed in stamping mills. Back in the olden days, they’d drop their dead into Dead Man’s Gulch, which flowed into the San Pedro River, which flowed north. At Fairbank a few miles farther north, citizens would fish-out the bodies and bury them.

Clanton Ranch, home of Ike Clanton and the “Cowboys” of the movie Tombstone fame is five miles south of Charleston and about 12 miles west of Tombstone. When they didn’t want to ride all the way into Tombstone, some of the Clanton ranch hands would head for a saloon in Charleston. Not surprisingly, that’s also where Wes Crowley first introduced himself to me.

Market Your Work

Don’t be like me. Market your work. I mentioned in [a comment to Maggie K.](#) that there are two books I hear most often mentioned when writers are talking about marketing. Actually, there were three books.

I finally bit the bullet and looked them up. This time I’ll add them to my writer resources over on HarveyStanbrough.com so I don’t lose them again:

The Indie Author Mindset by Adam Croft at <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B07FZ3X349/>

The Indie Author Checklist by Adam Croft at <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B07NHVFTYZ/>

I couldn’t remember the title of the third one, but I suspect it was written by Joanna Penn, and it’s probably one of those shown at <https://www.thecreativepenn.com/books/>.

Whatever else, once you buy the books you have to actually read them and then apply what you learn. Although some marketing seems to happen by osmosis, learning about marketing doesn't. I mention this only because when I finally found the first Adam Croft book above, Amazon reminded me I bought it back in September 2018. As far as I can remember, I haven't read it.

Write like I do, folks. I seriously believe you won't find a better role model for writing fiction. But when it comes to marketing, don't be like me. Market your work.

And by the way, if you're a successful indie author who has found your way in marketing, don't be like DWS either. Give something back and help the next guy up the ladder. (You can even write a guest post for this Journal if you want.)

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Jerry Lee Lewis, Rock Pioneer and 'Great Balls of Fire' Singer, Dies at 87" at <https://variety.com/2022/music/news/jerry-lee-lewis-dead-singer-great-balls-of-fire-1235415340/>. A great overview of his life, rife with story ideas.

See "Courtroom Comedy" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/07/courtroom-comedy.html>. A fun blast from the past.

See "Indie Publishers — Exclusive or Wide?" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/03/indie-publishers-exclusive-or-wide.html>.

See "How To *Easily* Publish On Apple Books" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2021/07/how-to-easily-publish-on-apple-books.html>.

See "Kobo — A Truly International Indie Publishing Platform" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2020/10/kobo-a-truly-international-indie-publishing-platform.html>.

See "Top Ten Tips for Amazon eBook Publishing Success" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2020/09/top-ten-tips-for-amazon-ebook-publishing-success.html>.

See "Workshops Not Ending... Only the Sales" at <https://deanwesleymith.com/workshops-not-ending-only-the-sales/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 610 words

Writing of The Stirchians (novel, tentative title)

Day 10... 1330 words. Total words to date..... 28459

Day 10... 2337 words. Total words to date..... 30836

Total fiction words for October.....	39028
Total fiction words for the year.....	159410
Total nonfiction words for October...	20530
Total nonfiction words for the year.....	173750
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog).....	333160
Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date.....	2
Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date...	0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	68
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014).....	217
Short story collections.....	31

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Adam Croft](#), [Adobe Walls](#), [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [Garry Rodgers](#), [Joanna Penn](#), [marketing](#), [Writing Fiction](#)

Elizabeth Sims, Fiction Lengths, Critique Groups

October 30, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Elizabeth Sims and Fiction Lengths
- * Critique Groups
- * Of Interest

Elizabeth Sims and Fiction Lengths

In Elizabeth Sims' article on why fiction writers should write short stories (see "Of Interest") I was pleased to see her offer "a general guide on length and terminology."

It spurred me to look at my own fiction length and pricing guide, and to revise it for the first time since 2017.

I use fiction lengths and terminology to determine price. There's no difference in how I price a short story and how I price a long short story (novelette), but I do price novellas and novels at different levels. Forgive the awkward spacing. I was going to set all of this up in a table, but that seemed like far too much effort for too little reward (grin):

To 99 words.....	Flash fiction.....	(collections only)
To 1999.....	Short-Short.....	1.99
2000 to 6999.....	Short Story.....	2.99
7000 to 9999.....	Long Short Story....	2.99
10,000 to 24,999....	Novella.....	3.99
25,000 to 44,999....	Short Novel.....	4.99
45,000 to 79,999....	Novel.....	5.99
over 80,000.....	Long Novel.....	6.99

A lot of what Sims writes is directly tied to the myths (of course). In general, writing shouldn't feel intimidating regardless of length. You're only writing a fictional story for goodness' sake, not contemplating how to shore up the world economy or racing to defuse a bomb in the basement of an elementary school.

I disagree with some of her points and pretty much all of her assumptions and innuendo, but overall the article is pretty good and it has a few gems scattered throughout.

As I've written here many times before, THAT you write is important (because you're a writer) but WHAT you write doesn't matter in the slightest. It's only a few minutes' or hours' entertainment, nothing more.

Sims also talks about critique groups as if they're a necessary and integral part of a writer's life. Don't get me started. Oops, too late.

Critique Groups

I especially don't recommend critique groups. In fact, I actively recommend against them. And yes, I've been a member of critique groups, though I always had a nagging little feeling: *What right do I have to tell this writer how to write his/her story?* Instead of recommending critique groups, I recommend you believe in yourself and defend your work aggressively.

And if you can't do that, frankly, I recommend you find another hobby. You probably won't make money at that one either, but at least you can relax and enjoy yourself and not feel scared to death or insignificant all the time.

Maybe you can go hiking or do something else you actually enjoy. But don't ask other hikers their opinion of your technique. Seriously, you've been walking since you were like two feet tall. (You know, about the same time you started telling stories.) You've got this.

As a side note, if you enjoy having your work ripped apart by members of a critique group and even invite them to do so, you might consider getting some professional help. (I'm not joking.) Or find another way to improve your opinion of yourself and your characters and grow some confidence.

You don't even have to be confident that you're a great storyteller. But you ALWAYS should be confident that you write each succeeding work to the best of your ability with your current skill

set. Then you read more, learn more, absorb more, and write the next story a little more skillfully.

Anyone who comments about the content (characters, storyline, etc.) in someone else's story is Just Flat Wrong. Or put another way, the comment from a member of a critique group is absolutely right—for that commenter's tastes as a reader. But s/he is absolutely, slap-your-grandma WRONG for every other person on the planet. Even in mentoring, I might tell you what elements are missing from your opening, but I won't tell you what to write. That's between you and your characters.

Defend Your Work. I once set aside a novel for several months because a good friend (and a prolific professional writer) ACCIDENTALLY blurted out what he thought might be a good ending. He would never have done that on purpose. (This is exactly why I advocate not talking to anyone about your work while it's ongoing.)

But hey listen, if you personally like critique groups, go for it. I have a writer friend who defends his critique group as avidly as I preach defending his (my, and your) work. But to each his or her own. I really don't care. (grin) Everybody's gotta have a hobby, right? I can only make recommendations and explain why I believe those recommendations are correct. What you do with them is up to you.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Thriller Writing Advice From James Bond's Creator, Ian Fleming — Circa 1963" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2021/07/thriller-writing-advice-from-james-bonds-creator-ian-fleming-circa-1963.html>.

See "20 Reasons Why Everybody Should Write Short Stories" at <https://www.janefriedman.com/20-reasons-why-everybody-should-write-short-stories/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 770 words

Writing of **The Stirchians** (novel, tentative title)

Day 10... 1330 words. Total words to date..... 28459

Day 11... 2337 words. Total words to date..... 30836

Day 12... 2115 words. Total words to date..... 32951

Total fiction words for October..... 41145

Total fiction words for the year..... 161525

Total nonfiction words for October... 21300

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 174520
 Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 336045

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 2
 Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0
 Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0
 Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 68
 Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
 Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
 Short story collections..... 31

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [critique groups](#), [Fiction Lengths](#)

Series

October 31, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Series
- * Of Interest

Series

For awhile now, I've been casting about looking for a Jack Reacher type character, by which I mean one who would carry a series that was both interesting for readers and fun to write. To that end, I've gone through several series:

Joseph "Joey Bones" Salerno, a Brooklyn mob-guy anti-hero, stood up and carried several short stories and a novella. But I had neither the chops nor the permission to write a Joey Bones series.

Then along came Nick Spalding in the exploratory Hemingway-esque novella *Jobs Like That*. Spalding was fun, and the novella led to the four-novel Nick Spalding action-adventure series.

But with that one I inadvertently limited Nick and his stories (and therefore myself as a writer) to the period between the Spanish Civil War and World War I.

Nick also found himself a woman, one who turned out to be a lot like my ex-wife. But she disappeared and later he found another one — a good one — and soon after that he lost interest in being a mercenary.

Marie Delacroix (the second woman) was a pretty capable mercenary herself, but she also was in love, wanted children, etc. Sigh. So Nick collected his pay and went off hand-in-hand to a new kind of adventure. One I will not put on the page.

After that, Stern Talbot came along. Stern is a classic detective turned PI. As I wrote the stories, I even saw Bogie in the lead role. But there are only so many stories you can write in that genre, and it's mostly for a very niche audience. I'll probably write more Stern Talbot books, but I'm not in a rush to do so.

Then I turned to the Blackwell Ops series. I thought for certain (in the early stages) that would be my Jack Reacher series. But the series characters (yeah, plural) themselves had other ideas.

Several POV characters popped up, each wanting to tell of his or her own experiences as an operative for TJ Blackwell. And who could blame them? All I could really do as the writer was sit down at the keyboard and hold on for the ride. (grin)

I hasten to add that it's been a good ride so far and it will continue. But it isn't the Reacher character I was looking for when I came through the door.

In the Blackwell Ops series, because of the necessary series-of-stories structure in each novel, the actual writing is like encountering an accordion effect in traffic on a major highway at rush hour.

You know. You race along for awhile, then come to a crawl, then race along again. Eventually you get to your destination (the end of the book).

In Blackwell Ops, the POV character goes on an assignment and the story races along. But the assignment eventually ends. Then I'm obliged to write a short, quieter transition as the operative is between assignments. Then another assignment comes in. The story grinds to a standstill as I take an hour to a few hours to a day to research the new location so the setting is authentic. Then the story speeds up, etc. Again, the accordion effect.

So in the back of my mind, even as I write Blackwell Ops, I still want to find that one character who carries a series on his or her own strong, capable shoulders.

But awhile back I realized I'd already written that character once.

The Wes Crowley Saga, although it featured dozens of characters, remained focused on (was "about") one character, Wes Crowley, from the beginning to the end around 700,000 words later.

And with one exception as I neared the end of the third prequel in the saga, when I had to tie-in the prequels to my first novel (which would become Book 4 in the series), the story raced along throughout. I love it when that happens. (grin)

I think that's one of the reasons I keep looking for a new series to write. I want the endorphine rush (or “writer’s high” or whatever it is) to keep going, unabated by anything but my own happy fatigue at the end of the day. And certainly unabated by anything in the story itself.

I had an “Earth invaded” story going, and it might have lasted through several books, but I painted myself into a corner with that one. So it lasted through only two novels and I seriously doubt I’ll revisit it.

Then I also had The Future of Humanity (FOH, or Journey Home) SF series (10 novels) in which Earthers climbed aboard a generation ship and headed off to Terra 2, a new home planet. They were doing all right when I last talked with them, and it was great fun to write, but I’m pretty sure that one’s over.

Even as I continue toward the end of the sequel to *The 13-Month Turn*, I was thinking my next series might be a spin-off of Blackwell Ops, even as I continue the BO series into the future.

All I know about that possible new series (all that popped into my head) is that it would have three main characters and that they would strike out on their own on their downtime from Blackwell Ops. But I feel like that one isn’t going to pan-out. I’m just not that interested.

In a way, I’m like a Hollywood producer. Characters come in to pitch me story ideas, and the idea either grabs my interest and I make the “film” in my head or it doesn’t. Frankly, I wish another character as magnetic and interesting and real as Wes Crowley or Four Crows or as interesting and real as almost any of the major characters from the Future of Humanity series would step forward.

But probably I’ll stop looking. I’ve learned we tend to find things more easily when we aren’t straining to look and therefore focusing on too small an area. Probably I’ll just write one-off novels and short stories, and one day a character will really grab me and we’ll be off and running in a new series.

What about you? What does your ongoing learning look like? What do you want to write that you’ve never written before (or what do you want to write again)?

I hope you’ll play along. We can all learn from each other. I appreciate you sharing your comments in the comment section below.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “One Day Extension of the Sale” at <https://deanwesleymith.com/one-day-extension-of-the-sale/>.

See “Pumpkin Spice and Writing” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/10/pumpkin-spice-and-writing.html>.

See “How to Write an Absolutely Great First Sentence” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/how-to-write-an-absolutely-great-first-sentence/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1110 words

Writing of The Stirchians (novel, tentative title)

Day 10... 1330 words. Total words to date..... 28459

Day 11... 2337 words. Total words to date..... 30836

Day 12... 2115 words. Total words to date..... 32951

Total fiction words for October..... 41143

Total fiction words for the year..... 161525

Total nonfiction words for October... 22410

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 175630

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 337155

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 2

Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 68

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: In this Journal I promote Writing Into the Dark, a Zen-like letting go and trusting yourself and your characters. I have never said (and never will) that WITD is the “only” way to write, but it greatly increases both your productivity and the amount of practice you get as a writer, and it provides a rapid ascension along the learning curve of Craft. This is not opinion. It is all numbers and facts.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Series](#), [Writing Into the Dark](#), [Writing Series Novels](#)

[Audio Lectures, Books, and Other News](#)

November 1, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Audio Lectures and Books
- * Publisher Penguin Random House
- * Spoiled Brats Are Like Flies
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“Artificial intelligence will reach human levels by around 2029. Follow that out further to, say, 2045, we will have multiplied the intelligence, the human biological machine intelligence of our civilization a billion-fold.” Ray Kurzweil

Story ideas, anyone?

“PG says for once, cancel culture gets slapped across the wrist. It’s nice to see some adults in the room for a change.” The Passive Voice

Audio Lectures and Books

I got all motivated yesterday. I got a nice email from a young woman who’s eager to write more fiction and build her inventory. She even ordered my audio lectures on Writing Off Into the Dark, a 9-session series.

And that reminded me the lectures are over there. (grin) To see them for yourself along with the course description, just click the new tab in the menu above.

So I checked in on them, dusted them off a bit, double-checked the prices (they’re cheap, dirt cheap, at only \$5 per session) and thought I’d remind all of you they’re over there too.

There are corresponding books for most of the lectures. The books cost less and contain roughly the same information. The links will take you to the book page on Amazon.

Writing Realistic Dialogue (<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B004TAY6RU>)

Creating Realistic Characters (<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B004SBOBDO>)

Writing Dialect (<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B004SBOAB2>)

Narrative in Fiction (<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B004SBPKAM>)

The Seven Writerly Sins (tongue-in-cheek humor) (<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B004SBO5R6>)

Writing Flash Fiction (an art form all its own) (<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B004SBO8Q4/>)

Poetry Techniques for the Fictionist (<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B00LU4QXVK>)

There are also audio lectures on

Writing Poetry (no book available but The Craft of Poetry: Structure and Sound is available at <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B004SBPKWK>)

Writing Off Into the Dark (no book available)

Writing Great Beginnings (no book available)

Point of View (no book available)

Of course, all of the above is conscious, critical mind learning stuff. Listen and/or read, allow yourself to understand and absorb it, and then forget about it while you're writing. The knowledge will be there even though you aren't consciously thinking about it.

Here are a few books I highly recommend too, and not just because I wrote them:

Quiet the Critical Voice (and Write Fiction) (<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B07TMP13C8>)

Writing the Character-Driven Story (<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B01BMSHONO>)

Punctuation for Writers, 2nd edition (<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B004SBO8Z0>)

Publisher Penguin Random House

will not be allowed to absorb publisher Simon & Schuster. If you're one who needs a 20- or 30-something slush pile reader you've never met to validate your work, this will be good news.

If you are self-actualized enough to eagerly anticipate letting readers decide for themselves whether they like your stories, then this is ho-hum, good-for-them, yawn, stretch, business as usual.

Spoiled Brats Are Like Flies

especially when they're old enough to know better but persist in their disgusting, fly-like annoyances. What exactly is it that keeps them from simply leaving others (the hell) alone? Are they really that insecure? Or is it just a spite thing: because they're unable to create anything themselves they want to tear down what others have created?

Once again, some spoiled-brat bullies have put out a call to "cancel" a book (see "Of Interest"). Fortunately, Pen America had the good sense to reject that call. Let's hope the spine they developed in this instance will remain a part of the organization's anatomy.

Yes, the book was written by a big name, but that shouldn't matter. Nobody has a right to demand a writer change so much as a word of his or her text, much less his or her thoughts, thought process, or opinions.

As a retired Marine, it annoys me to no end that these snot-nosed brats are trying to destroy the very Constitution from which they derive their power. Apparently nobody ever taught them that one person's rights stop where the next person's rights begin. Besides, are they really stupid enough to believe the censorship they unleash will stop short of them?

As an aside, note that during riots they wear masks (the NARFA rule: Never Accept Responsibility For Anything) and when they harrass people from behind computer screens they typically do so via aliases (same NARFA rule).

Why? Because they're cowards. If they were proud of what they're doing, they would put their name on it. Since they obviously aren't, maybe they should consider doing something they wouldn't mind Mom knowing about.

I agree wholeheartedly with PG's comment at the end of the post. And frankly, I believe anyone who doesn't should put himself or herself in Justice Amy Coney Barrett's place. Because yes, it can happen to you.

That any writer would agree to anyone else's "demands" with regard to what s/he writes in a story or in a nonfiction opinion piece is ridiculous to the point of being inane.

Now, I'm going to see whether I can spend some quality time with my novel today. Maybe I'll even insert something that goes against the PC grain. Just Because I Can.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Science fiction worries": Baby born from 1996 frozen sperm sparks debate" at <https://interestingengineering.com/science/baby-born-from-frozen-sperm-sparks-debate>. Story ideas abound.

See "Judge blocks Penguin Random House-Simon & Schuster merger" at <https://apnews.com/article/entertainment-business-government-and-politics-02310cdea6a656423380d37ed37679d6/>.

See "The Dénouement: Tying Up The Yarn Strands Of Your Story" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/11/the-denouement-tying-upthe-yarn-strands-of-your-story.html>.

See "Pen America Rejects Calls to Cancel New Book..." at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/pen-america-rejects-calls-to-cancel-new-book-by-justice-amy-coney-barrett/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 880 words

Writing of The Stirchians (novel, tentative title)

Day 10... 1330 words. Total words to date..... 28459

Day 11... 2337 words. Total words to date..... 30836

Day 12... 2115 words. Total words to date..... 32951

Total fiction words for November.....	0
Total fiction words for the year.....	161525
Total nonfiction words for November...	880
Total nonfiction words for the year.....	176510
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog).....	338035
Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date.....	2
Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date...	0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	68
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014).....	217
Short story collections.....	31

Disclaimer: In this Journal I promote Writing Into the Dark, a Zen-like letting go and trusting yourself and your characters. I have never said (and never will) that WITD is the “only” way to write, but it greatly increases both your productivity and the amount of practice you get as a writer, and it provides a rapid ascension along the learning curve of Craft. This is not opinion. It is all numbers and facts.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Audio Lectures and Books](#), [Cancel Culture](#), [Censorship](#)

K.M. Robinson (again) and Marketing

November 2, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * K.M. Robinson (again) and Marketing
- * Math Doesn’t Lie
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“I do not know what I may appear to the world, but to myself I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the seashore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me.” Isaac Newton (Somehow this seemed pertinent to writing fiction.)

“Hatred paralyzes life; love releases it.” Martin Luther King Jr.

“Small goals allow things to be attainable, but small goals add up in the long run.” K.M. Robinson

K.M. Robinson (again) and Marketing

Today, a short post to share a few extra notes on marketing. As I've said all along, to be successful in any business venture, you have to do the work up front.

Now, in [K.M. Robinson](#) we've found that rarest of business people: a writer and author who actually shares her techniques for success free of charge as a way of paying her success forward. If you missed it, I first mentioned her on October 28 at <https://hestanbrough.com/omg-k-m-robinson/>. *I recommended her then, and I recommend her more strongly now.*

Before you read this post further, I suggest you visit and read the comments at <https://hestanbrough.com/omg-k-m-robinson/#comments>. I recommend you read (or re-read) all of the comments to get the context, primarily because K.M. Robinson, whose website and marketing efforts were the thrust of that post, stopped by and left two comments herself.

One of her comments was to me (I replied) and the other, more lengthy one, was to writer Maggie King. (Maggie, stop by and reply if you want.)

One other note: I don't know how K.M. or others are notified that someone has mentioned them or their website or whatever, but I use TalkWalker Alerts (<https://talkwalker.com>). It's free. I have one alert set up for my name and one for each of my major websites. To me, that's another part of marketing.

Math Doesn't Lie

In a post over at the Kill Zone today (see "Of Interest"), John Gilstrap talks about his efforts to get the book he just finished in to his publisher slightly after the deadline:

"Because I tend to write down to the wire on deadlines, those last weeks closing in on the final sentence are face-on-fire marathons of 12-hour writing days. For *Harm's Way* [the title he just finished], I believe I wrote about 50,000 words in five weeks."

Wait. I suspect he did a lot more than writing if he was enduring "face-on-fire marathons of 12-hour writing days." Why? Because he says he believes he wrote "about 50,000 words in five weeks." By itself, that doesn't equate to 12-hour days. Not without some magical math or extremely slow typing.

The Math—Five weeks is 35 days. Divide 50,000 words by 35 days and you'll find that's only 1,429 words per day. Spread that over 12 hours, and he was writing a paralyzingly fast 119 words per hour, or 2 words per minute. Quite a face-on-fire marathon.

No, I'm not stupid. When he said he spent "12-hour writing days," I'm sure he meant writing, then revising/rewriting/polishing etc. to make things as perfect as possible. Of course, that's fine. Hey, his way is his way and who am I to judge. The guy's a bestselling author.

But while he's posting things that younger writers will read and take to heart, I only wish he'd check his math, that's all.

Also no, I didn't leave a comment. When I see something like that, I figure it's best to just move along quietly. No reason to insert my Grumpy Gus self into the midst of the shower of congratulations and accolades.

Besides, I wouldn't want to say anything that might cause John any embarrassment. He's one of the authors whose work I regularly promote in my own novels.

But as an abject lesson, this really is too good not to pass along. Just do the math for yourself.

By the way, I just posted the first free short story of the week over at the reader site. Take a look at <https://harveystanbroughwrites.com/category/short-story-of-the-week/>. Enjoy.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "10 of Isaac Newton's most famous and revolutionary inventions" at <https://interestingengineering.com/innovation/10-of-isaac-newtons-most-famous-and-revolutionary-inventions>.

See "The cosmologist who claims to have evidence for the multiverse" at <https://www.newscientist.com/article/0-the-cosmologist-who-claims-to-have-evidence-for-the-multiverse/>.

See "How to Promote Your Book Globally and Build an International Readership" at <https://www.amarketingexpert.com/2022/11/01/how-to-promote-your-book-globally-and-build-an-international-readership/>.

See "FCC Calls for TikTok Ban" at <https://www.axios.com/2022/11/01/interview-fcc-commissioner-says-government-should-ban-tiktok>.

See "Empty Brain Syndrome" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/11/empty-brain-syndrome.html>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 730 words

Writing of *The Stirchians* (novel, tentative title)

Day 10... 1330 words. Total words to date..... 28459

Day 11... 2337 words. Total words to date..... 30836

Day 12... 2115 words. Total words to date..... 32951

Day 13... 2242 words. Total words to date..... 35193

Total fiction words for November..... 2242

Total fiction words for the year..... 163767

Total nonfiction words for November... 1610
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 177240
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 341007

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 2
Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 68
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: In this Journal I promote Writing Into the Dark, a Zen-like letting go and trusting yourself and your characters. I have never said (and never will) that WITD is the “only” way to write, but it greatly increases both your productivity and the amount of practice you get as a writer, and it provides a rapid ascension along the learning curve of Craft. This is not opinion. It is all numbers and facts.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Bad Math](#), [John Gilstrap](#), [K.M. Robinson](#), [Marketing and Promotion](#)

Emailing Programs and Other Stuff

November 3, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Short Story of the Week
- * Emailing Programs
- * Of Interest

Short Story of the Week

As I mentioned yesterday, I just posted a new free short story over at <https://harveystanbroughwrites.com/category/short-story-of-the-week/>.

Those of you who have social media accounts, please consider sharing the URL. I appreciate it.

Emailing Programs

In absence of word-of-mouth about the Stanbrough Writes website for readers, I'm also looking for a new program to send posts.

I felt like I wanted to use Substack, so I tried that first.

Turns out I was actually unable to upload a csv file to my Stanbrough Writes account on Substack even though I had *just downloaded that same file* from my HarveyStanbrough.com account on Substack. Seriously, does this sort of stuff happen to other people? (grin)

So anyway, it looks like I'll be tied up with my search for awhile. So if I don't post to the Journal for a day or two, that's what's going on.

I had planned to give this stuff my morning (yesterday), and then write all afternoon. However, apparently I'm not built that way. Once I get my teeth into something, I like to see it through.

So no writing yesterday, and thus far, no writing today. I'm checking various email sending outfits until I find one that feels like a good fit.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Just a note to say" at <https://journal.neilgaiman.com/2022/11/just-note-to-say.html>.

See "Top 41 Free Email Marketing Tools for 2022..." at <https://influencermarketinghub.com/free-email-marketing-tools/>. The article title mentions "41" tools but there were only 39 listed.

See "Solving the JonBenet Ramsay Murder" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/11/solving-the-jonbenet-ramsay-murder.html>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 260 words

Writing of The Stirchians (novel, tentative title)

Day 10... 1330 words. Total words to date..... 28459

Day 11... 2337 words. Total words to date..... 30836

Day 12... 2115 words. Total words to date..... 32951

Day 13... 2242 words. Total words to date..... 35193

Total fiction words for November..... 2242

Total fiction words for the year..... 163767

Total nonfiction words for November... 1870

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 177500

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 341267

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 2

Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	68
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014).....	217
Short story collections.....	31

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Categories [Daily Journal](#)

A Newsletter Platform, and the State of the Nation for Fiction Writers

November 5, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * A Newsletter Platform
- * The State of the Nation for Fiction Writers
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“The best way to make a dream come true is to wake up.” Dame Anna Wintour

“Manners are a sensitive awareness of the feelings of others. If you have that awareness, you have good manners, no matter what fork you use.” Emily Post

“There is no such thing as a little freedom. Either you are all free, or you are not free.” Walter Cronkite

“Certainly what one is, is of far greater importance than what one appears to be.” Emily Post

A Newsletter Platform

Sorry for my absence yesterday. I’ve been myopic in my search for a new subscriber aggregator. Finally, I believe I’ve found one in [a little-known platform called Revue](#).

The thing is, Revue is owned by Twitter, and the new owner of Twitter is currently making massive cost-saving cuts. Anyway, I’ll post my first “newsletter” from Revue sometime this morning. If it works out, and if it looks like it’s going to hang around, I might import all of you guys into a separate newsletter at the same place and use it to send each new issue of the Journal to your inbox. So we’ll see.

If Revue goes away, I'll try to move back to Substack and start fresh over there. The only other similar platform (for *Just A Newsletter, Not Marketing*) I've been able to find is Bulletin (owned by Facebook), and to use that I'd have to establish a new Facebook account. And I have just enough free-spirited child in me that I don't wanna. (grin)

In the meantime, thank you for being here. I'll launch something from Revue today. Once I know that's successful, I should finally get back to the novel and back to regular Journal posts.

The State of the Nation for Fiction Writers

To paraphrase Walter Cronkite—a trusted and trustworthy news anchor from the mid-20th century up through early 1981—there is no such thing as a little freedom of speech. You either have it or you don't.

Writers of SF or fantasy dystopia should rejoice. You can now write your stories at least in part about, from, and because of contemporary America. You can write snapshots. You can pull topics straight from the headlines and sound bites. And in so doing, especially if you are not politically biased, you can write things that will absolutely horrify your readers.

We live in a nation in which freedom of speech (or freedom of “expression”) is no longer a given. Those who would suppress the opinions of others and even facts they find unfavorable no longer even attempt to keep up the façade that freedom of speech is a thing in this nation. Ironically enough, neither do we live in a nation in which one can warn others of that limitation without real risk.

Understand, I'm not making any value judgments here, and I'm not taking a political stance. That's not my job in this forum, and the Constitution is written in plain English. I'm also not saying anyone is right or wrong in their beliefs or lack thereof. I'm only reporting an observation to fiction writer friends and acquaintances because I found it uniquely bone-chilling. And that's the way it is.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “An Interesting Opinion” at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/an-interesting-opinion/>.

See “Perfecting Pre-Orders on Amazon for Maximum Impact” at <https://www.amarketingexpert.com/2022/11/03/perfecting-pre-orders-on-amazon-for-maximum-impact/>.

See “Priestess, Poet, Politician” at <https://www.archaeology.org/issues/488-2211/features/10886-akkadians-enheduanna-poet-politician>. The world's first-known author.

See “Wild Horse Photographer Braves Snake Bites for Breathtaking Images” at <https://petapixel.com/2022/11/02/wild-horse-photographer-braves-snake-bites-for-breathtaking-images>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 580 words

Writing of The Stirchians (novel, tentative title)

Day 10... 1330 words. Total words to date..... 28459

Day 11... 2337 words. Total words to date..... 30836

Day 12... 2115 words. Total words to date..... 32951

Day 13... 2242 words. Total words to date..... 35193

Total fiction words for November..... 2242

Total fiction words for the year..... 163767

Total nonfiction words for November... 2450

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 178080

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 341847

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 2

Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 68

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Revue](#)

Today’s Journal, My Writing, and Subscriptions

November 6, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Today’s Journal
- * My Writing

- * Subscriptions
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

“Ehh, good enough.” Mediocre (from a meme a friend sent me)

Today's Journal

First, a personal note: Happy Birthday to my youngest son, Roy, who turns 37 years old today. I'm shaking my head, wondering where the time's gone.

The first three items in “Of Interest” are all from Jane Friedman’s blog digest. The first two repeat some things I’ve been teaching for years. But they say those things in a different way, and in the first article, actually back up the advice with hard science. I found that fascinating.

Because Jane and many of her guest bloggers propagate the myths of writing (like most writers) and continue to see traditional publishing as an important pathway, I seldom share posts from her site. That said, if you know what to keep and what to toss aside, you can learn good things from almost any source.

To sign up for Jane’s weely digest yourself, visit <https://www.janefriedman.com/>. Hover over Resources for Writers, and click Free Email Newsletters. Then select which one(s) you want.

My Fiction Writing

From a thought-experiment perspective, there are some strange, interesting things going on with my own writing . Remember my short-term goal to have written 70 novels before my 70th birthday? Ain’t gonna happen.

It looks as if *The Stirchians* is going to be a lot longer than I originally thought it might be, which of course means it will take more time to write. And even if it was only going to be around 50,000 to 70,000 words, it will take longer than usual to finish. As you can tell from the numbers, I’ve been stammering along with it, burdened at times with critical voice popping in. Strange, the damage a year without practice can do.

Anyway, the slow writing might just be me feeling the pressure of the short-term goal.

But that’s ridiculous, really. There should be no sense of pressure at all because what possible difference can it make whether I’ve finished 68, 69, or 70 novels by a particular date? None.

It might also be one of those Life Happens things or a conspiracy of the universe (*Wow, how important am I that the whole universe would conspire against me? Snort*) or whatever. Or maybe my characters are just being mischievous: *The old man’s getting too full of himself. Hold my beer and watch this.*

But I suspect it's because I'm still "coming back" from a long time down. So my intention now is to stop worrying about when I'll be fully back and just write. Then one day I'll glance at the stream of words in the rear-view mirror and notice I've been back for awhile. However it all happens, I don't really care. I just want to tell stories.

Subscriptions

I'm working to get this Journal on an aggregator site again so each new edition is emailed to you. Recently, most of the email/subscription aggregators stopped offering RSS integration with their free plan. At its most basic, that means the aggregator won't pick posts up from the website and broadcast them automatically.

I suspect this happened because, as is most often the case with American businesses, money means a great deal more than customer relations or even providing services as advertised.

I suspect some ingenious 20-something business-major brain trust at whichever company started the trend—as part of his master plan to leave his mark on the company—thought Slashing Services to those on its "forever free" (*ahem*) plan would cause those folks to leap at the chance to cough up some dough. Then most of the other similar service providers, chirping and chattering like lemmings, leapt into line, scared to death they might be left behind. And here we are.

A few of the more timid customers who have grown used to being bullied, probably did actually switch to a paid service even though they couldn't afford it. But what I suspect (and hope) actually ensued is a stampede and a frenzied search for another service provider.

Well, that and a thoroughly puzzled executive (with any luck at all) being summarily fired.

But that's probably too much to hope for. Probably what actually happened is something akin to a "launch" party at which the young executive was the center of attention and received warm accolades for cutting away the chaff.

AnNeeWay, I personally would rather pay another provider up front than be forced into paying by a provider who has a record of unilaterally changing the rules. So we'll see. Frankly, I'm not wild about the idea of paying a monthly fee to provide free content to other folks. I don't mind being altruistic (or very nearly so) but I don't want to pay some corporation for the privilege.

Today, from what I can tell, there is Revue (which is owned by Twitter so who knows how long it will be around), Bulletin (which is owned by Zuckerberg so who knows anything at all), and Substack. Hmm.

Anyway, thank you all for being here. I hope some of what I post helps with your own writing.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “3 Key Strategies for Effective Fiction—Derived from Neuroscience” at <https://www.janefriedman.com/3-key-strategies-for-effective-fiction-derived-from-neuroscience/>.

See “How to Write Your First Paragraph” at <https://www.janefriedman.com/write-your-first-paragraph/>.

See “A Primer on TV & Film Adaptation for Writers (Where the Rules Change Often)” at <https://www.janefriedman.com/a-primer-on-tv-film-adaptation-for-writers-where-the-rules-change-often/>.

See “I Don’t Care” at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/i-dont-care/>.

See “The Problem With Canon” at <https://www.esquire.com/entertainment/tv/a41837029/canon-adaptation-rings-of-power-star-trek-essay/>.

See “The weird way language affects our sense of time and space” at <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20221103-how-language-warps-the-way-you-perceive-time-and-space>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 910 words

Writing of *The Stirchians* (novel, tentative title)

Day 10... 1330 words. Total words to date..... 28459

Day 11... 2337 words. Total words to date..... 30836

Day 12... 2115 words. Total words to date..... 32951

Day 13... 2242 words. Total words to date..... 35193

Day 14... 1325 words. Total words to date..... 36518

Total fiction words for November..... 3567

Total fiction words for the year..... 165092

Total nonfiction words for November... 3360

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 178990

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 341847

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 2

Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 68

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: In this Journal I promote Writing Into the Dark, a Zen-like letting go and trusting yourself and your characters. I have never said that WITD is the “only” way to write, but it greatly increases both your productivity and the amount of practice you get as a writer, and it provides a rapid ascension along the learning curve of Craft. This is not opinion. It is all numbers and facts.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [DeanWesleySmith.com](#), [Fiction writing](#), [janefriedman.com](#), [Subscriptions](#)

The WIBBOW Rule and Rules of Writing

November 7, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Applying the WIBBOW Rule
- * Keep Working the Problem
- * Other Stuff
- * Of Interest

Applying the WIBBOW Rule

Wow. Yesterday I received stats on my first “newsletter” sent from Revue to my readers:

Of 351 emails delivered, only 39 were opened (11% of the recipients).

Of those 39 subscribers who actually opened the email, only 5 (12%) clicked through to the site at [HarveyStanbroughWrites.com](#).

Nobody unsubscribed, so I guess that's something. Still, with only 39 subscribers bothering to even open the email, and with only 5 clicking through to visit the site, I have to apply Scott Carter's WIBBOW Rule: Would I Be Better Off Writing?

In other words, is it worth my time even to post a free short story every week (about an hour to prep and post a story) or would I be better off applying that hour to whatever novel I'm working on?

I already have enough short stories written to post a different one every week for over four years. Maybe I should just post them to Medium or someplace similar and ~~grow~~ develop an audience that way.

And each article on a character or a setting will take from an hour to a few hours to write and post, then prep and send. So I've already decided it won't be worthwhile at all to post articles like that unless a subscriber expresses interest.

So I reckon [HarveyStanbroughWrites.com](#) is destined to be a flop. And that's fine. If Revue will pick up the URL from an RSS feed and send it automatically (I haven't investigated that far yet)

I'll continue to post a free story each week. If not, I'll probably just redirect the site and be done with it.

Keep Working the Problem

There are very few rules if you want to actually BE a fiction writer and storyteller. I'm not talking about the myths—that you “must” revise, seek critical input, edit, rewrite, and polish. In fact, generally they are non-rules. They are what you do when you choose not to follow anyone else's rules:

1. Trust your characters to tell the story that they, not you, are living.

Duh. We all do this every day with flesh-and-blood people we know, despite the fact that we don't know them half as well as we know our characters. We would never dream of interrupting even complete strangers who strike up a conversation and are telling us what happened to them at a particular time in their life. We MIGHT interrupt to excuse ourselves from listening to the rest of the story, but we would never interrupt to correct the details of the story or the sequence of events. They lived through it, so we let them tell it. The same thing goes for our characters. They, not we, are living the story, so let them tell it.

2. Just write the next sentence.

Because we trust our characters, when we feel the story has bogged down, we scroll back a few paragraphs and read to see whether maybe we've written past the end of a scene or chapter. And if we don't “find” the end of a scene or chapter, when we get back to the white space, we simply write the next sentence that occurs to us, then the next, then the next.

Remember, it's all right that we don't know where the story is going. Neither do the characters, because they're living it moment by moment. What you haven't written yet is in the characters' future. It hasn't revealed itself yet. Neither you nor the characters can know what awaits around the next corner until the character walks around that corner and you record what happens and/or what he says.

So it's all right. Just go with it. Trust your characters. Just keep writing the next thing that happens, the next reaction, the next line of dialogue until the characters lead you to the end of the story. And they will.

3. Keep Working the Problem.

This wisdom applies to any kind of situation you might have. If you keep working the problem—sometimes that means just going over your reverse outline one more time and noticing something you hadn't noticed before—you will discover the source of the problem and at least the beginning of a solution. The key: Don't abandon your story.

Sometimes the story bogs down for a reason. As I mentioned above, sometimes the writing slows (usually dramatically) when you write past the end of a scene or chapter. At other times, as

happened recently with my current novel *The Stirchians*, it bogs down in general. Not in a specific place, but overall, as if I was losing interest in writing the story.

Only I wasn't losing interest. As I discovered after I read my reverse outline for the fifth or sixth time, I was being overwhelmed. There were so many important characters and scenarios that I wasn't sure which to write each time I sat down. And there was an underlying fear that I might not remember to follow each major character/situation through to its resolution.

I've said dozens of times, every novel writes differently. This one proved the rule. In this novel, there was something wrong with the structure. I set out to follow my characters straight through their story, beginning to end, but I've come to realize this story is larger than that. *The Stirchians* is more a series of novellas or short novels (or both) than it is one big story.

I mentioned that I went over and over my reverse outline. Laborious as that sounds, it was a lot easier and quicker and less confusing than reading and rereading what I've written thus far. (Another benefit of reverse outlines.) And I was able to break down what I've written (and what I haven't yet written) into several shorter parts of the overall story:

Bold Information Services (BIS) — Current chapter 1-10 and 21-22.

Rose's Story — Current chapters 11-20 plus chapters that have not yet been written.

The Search on Luna — As yet unwritten

The Search on Earth (AKA Rose, Part 2) — As yet unwritten

The End Game (including various schemes and gambits by world leaders ousted from their offices by the aliens, especially the president and defense secretary of the former United North America who made a brief but significant appearance earlier) — As yet unwritten

And that's only so far. I don't expect any more big segments to unfold, but they might as the story itself opens up.

Don't be confused. The list above isn't any sort of outline or structure. And it certainly isn't something I have to "follow." Look again. There are no "plot points" or even any sort of sequence. It's only a list I can glance at to remind me of what's gone before, what the characters have established thus far.

So as you can see, *The Stirchians* has some distance to go, which is fine. Depending on how things unfold from here, I might publish this in different volumes, but at the moment I expect it will be a single, large volume. We'll see. I'm just glad writing it is fun again. I started this story on October 10, so 28 days ago. Yet it has stuttered along so that I've written on only 14 of those days. I seriously doubt I'll log anymore zeroes before it's finished.

Other Stuff

I should have written a couple thousand more words yesterday, but during my one break I decided to try out my reciprocating saw (my latest toy) on a fallen century plant (agave plant) pole. It was about a 10" diameter near the base. (Not heavy. It's basically a gigantic stalk of grass.)

The saw made short work of it, but then the cleanup began. That's what really took the time.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Paper or No Paper" at <https://harveystanbrough.com/pro-writers/paper-or-no-paper/>. A blast from the past.

See "The Old Ways Part 2" at <https://kriswrites.com/2013/12/18/the-business-rusch-the-old-ways-part-2-or-discoverability-part-4-continued/>. Another related blast from the past.

See "The Deadliest Marksman's Cold, Brave Stand" at <https://narratively.com/the-deadliest-marksmans-cold-brave-stand/>. Some gems in this if you're ever writing a sniper in cold weather.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1320 words

Writing of *The Stirchians* (novel, tentative title)

Day 10... 1330 words. Total words to date..... 28459

Day 11... 2337 words. Total words to date..... 30836

Day 12... 2115 words. Total words to date..... 32951

Day 13... 2242 words. Total words to date..... 35193

Day 14... 1325 words. Total words to date..... 36518

Day 15... 1006 words. Total words to date..... 37524

Total fiction words for November..... 4573

Total fiction words for the year..... 166098

Total nonfiction words for November... 4680

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 180310

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 346408

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 2

Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 68

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: I promote Writing Into the Dark, a Zen-like non-process of letting go and trusting your characters to tell the story that they, not you, are living. Duh. WITD greatly increases your productivity and provides a rapid ascension along the learning curve of Craft because you get a great deal more practice at actually writing. This is not opinion. It is all numbers and facts.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Real Rules of Fiction](#), [WIBBOW Rule](#)

Not Moving, HarveyStanbrough.com and Mentorships

November 8, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Sorry for the Confusion
- * Not Moving
- * The City That Is HarveyStanbrough.com
- * Mentorships Slots Are Open
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

“As a child, I felt that books were holy objects, to be caressed, rapturously sniffed, and devotedly provided for. I gave my life to them. I still do. I continue to do what I did as a child; dream of books, make books and collect books.” Maurice Sendak

Sorry for the Confusion

In yesterday's Journal, I whined a bit about getting so few opens and click-throughs on my first newsletter sent from Revue.

I should have explained, that was a silly test newsletter to direct readers to check out the Welcome page and my free short story of the week, “Coralín.”

If you're interested, that story is over at <https://harveystanbroughwrites.com>. Click the free short story tab. (In fact, I just added a new free short story this morning—“Rabbits & Wild Dogs”—but “Coralín” is still up too, for now. This time I remembered to include the cover too. (grin)

Not Moving

For awhile I was thinking about moving this Journal back over to my main site at HarveyStanbrough.com. I'd almost forgotten I'd mentioned that because it's been at least a week ago. My brain is always in Race mode. Once I've seen that an idea works (or doesn't) I move on. Guess I have an overdeveloped sense of urgency. (grin)

Anyway, just to clarify, if I ever DID decide to move the Journal, I would give you plenty of notice. I'd probably let you know a month in advance and then do a countdown of days from the announcement to the move. That would give everyone an opportunity to see the notice before I moved the Journal.

However, not long after I first mentioned that moving the Journal was an option, I decided I like it here. So the chance I'll ever move the Journal is extremely slim. Ours is a nice, clean neighborhood. Folks stop by to visit now and then, and everything's far cleaner here than it is at the dimly lit, scarred big city of HarveyStanbrough.com.

The City That Is HarveyStanbrough.com

For any newbies, I'll talk for a moment about what I typically call "the big site" over at HarveyStanbrough.com. There are far more amenities over there than there are here. Here you have only the Journal itself, a link to my free tutorial on Microsoft Word for Writers, the free Journal Archives, and a few other things.

[Over there](#) you'll find reader and writer resources, free downloads, my books in bundles (no doubt covered with dust and cobwebs), the audio lecture series, plus links to my publisher site and my novels, novellas, short stories and story collections, poetry collections and books on writing.

There are around 25 items on the [Free Downloads](#) page alone. On the [Resources for Writers](#) page are 20 links, most of which lead to other pages full of links.

For example, if you click Resources for Writers and then [Conversion Tools](#), you'll find 22 links to different conversion tools. If you click [Dictionaries](#), you'll find almost 20 free dictionaries or translators. And so on. When you have some spare time, I hope you'll drop by and explore.

Mentorships Slots Are Open

I've had a few folks complete their mentorships, so I have a few slots open. The mentorships are conducted via email, cost only \$25 per month, and cover whatever writing or publishing topics you want to talk about. There are also Extended Q&A Sessions available. For more details, see <https://hestanbrough.com/new-mentorships/>.

Go Vote, Please.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Go Vote!" at <https://deanwesleymith.com/go-vote-2/>.

See "Dream Hacking" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/11/dream-hacking.html>. Stephen King often uses this advanced technique.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 620 words

Writing of **The Stirchians** (novel, tentative title)

Day 10... 1330 words. Total words to date..... 28459

Day 11... 2337 words. Total words to date..... 30836

Day 12... 2115 words. Total words to date..... 32951

Day 13... 2242 words. Total words to date..... 35193

Day 14... 1325 words. Total words to date..... 36518

Day 15... 1006 words. Total words to date..... 37524

Day 16... 2532 words. Total words to date..... 40056

Total fiction words for November..... 7105

Total fiction words for the year..... 168630

Total nonfiction words for November... 5300

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 180930

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 349560

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 2

Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 68

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: Because It Makes Sense, I promote the idea of trusting your characters to tell the story that they, not you, are living. Duh. This practice greatly increases your productivity and provides a rapid ascension along the learning curve of Craft because you get a great deal more practice at actually writing. This is not opinion. It is all numbers and facts.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [HarveyStanbrough.com](#), [Mentorships](#)

Head Hopping and Author Intrusion

November 9, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Head Hopping and Author Intrusion
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

“Imagination will often carry us to worlds that never were. But without it, we go nowhere.” Carl Sagan

Head Hopping and Author Intrusion

First, these are two different problems.

In today’s “Of Interest” there’s a link to an excerpt of a post about head-hopping. The post is by Susan DeFreitas.

What Susan writes in her post, which is basically a response to a question, is probably good advice. To be honest, I didn’t read it. Just be sure to toss out anything about consciously revising, rewriting, and any of the other myths.

What interested me was the question that spurred the post: “I’m new to writing fiction. I’m wondering whether I’m guilty of ‘head hopping,’ or of author intrusion, by allowing the reader to peek into the thoughts of minor characters of the story.” *signed* Ready to Revise

The way the question is written, it sounds like Ready to Revise believes “head hopping” and “author intrusion” are the same thing. They aren’t.

But then, it doesn’t matter. You won’t have either problem if you remember this:

Every word you put on the page must come through the POV character.

That’s every emotion, every physical sense, and every word of description or dialogue. Every word, period.

You can only describe what the *POV character* thinks, sees, hears, smells, tastes, and feels, both physically and emotionally, plus his or her *opinions* of those things. This alone will keep you from “head hopping.”

(About that “opinions” thing: The presence of cherry pipe tobacco in the library of the home of a wealthy decedent is a bit of description. Anything more than that is an opinion. More on this later, in the section on author intrusion.)

So if your POV character et al are approaching the front of a barn, s/he might hear a sound that seems to have come from behind or inside the barn, but s/he (so you) can’t describe what happened to cause the sound because the POV character couldn’t see it.

Now, one of the other non-POV characters might say in dialogue, “What was that?” indicating s/he heard the sound too, or s/he might reveal what s/he heard and even offer an opinion aloud as to what caused it. But you (the author) can’t reveal any unspoken thought of any characters except the POV character.

But wait. How can every word of dialogue come through the POV character?

Great question. Here's some next-level stuff:

When the POV character speaks, the writer records what s/he said.

When another character speaks, the writer records what the POV character heard. Or misheard.

Every word of the story comes through the POV character, remember? The POV character is the reader's sole source of sensory input for the duration of the story.

As you might imagine, this can create some interesting and complex scenarios and situations. All sorts of misunderstandings and all levels of conflicts have been caused by one person (the real-life POV character) mishearing what someone else said.

That should immediately spur some story ideas. (grin)

Author Intrusion is a whole other matter. It has nothing to do with the POV character. In fact, it has to do with the writer, consciously or subconsciously, shoving the POV character aside.

Author intrusion most often happens in description. It is the result of a writer inserting what s/he believes should be in the setting or scene rather than simply recording what the POV character thinks, sees, hears, smells, tastes and feels (physically and emotionally) about the setting. And don't forget the POV character's opinions of those things.

First, let me just get this out of the way:

If you "cycle" back through any part of the manuscript *while remaining in the creative subconscious* (that is key) and allow the CHARACTERS to touch the story, that's fine. It's their story, so no harm can come of that.

But if you consciously revise and rewrite what your characters have given you, or if you force the characters to conform in the first place to a "character sketch" or outline by any other name, you are continually guilty of author intrusion. The world won't end. If that's what you want to do, go for it. But you are constructing a story, not creating one.

If you do any of that—if you, the writer, consciously decide how a sentence should read or what items should be in a setting or what a character should say or anything else—and if you're staunchly committed to that process, you can stop reading now if you want to. Probably nothing else I write here will register.

Author intrusion is the infliction of the writer's values, descriptions, and opinions into the story (and thereby onto the reader). As a fiction writer, your job is to entertain, not to browbeat.

Earlier I mentioned the smell of cherry pipe tobacco lingering in a library in the home of a wealthy decedent. If the POV character has no opinion about it, the writer will record that the POV character "noted the presence of the smell of cherry pipe tobacco."

If the POV character has a positive opinion about the smell, the writer will record that the POV character noted “the sweet aroma of cherry pipe tobacco” or some such thing. And if the POV character has a negative opinion, the writer will record something like “the stench of cherry pipe tobacco.”

Whether that smell is present is simply a fact of the setting, but whether that particular smell is a “sweet aroma” or a “stench” is a matter of opinion. And that’s fine, but it has to be the POV character’s opinion, not the writer’s opinion. If you pay attention and trust them, you will soon learn that—like your family, friends and acquaintances—your characters do not all have the same values and opinions that you have. And that’s just refreshing.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Scientist claims he has made the ultimate unhackable voting machine” at <https://interestingengineering.com/innovation/ultimate-unhackable-voting-machine>. If I could, I would take out a personal loan for a million dollars to bet politicians will never approve such a device.

See “How Big of a Problem Is ‘Head Hopping’?” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/how-big-of-a-problem-is-head-hopping/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1050 words

Writing of The Stirchians (novel, tentative title)

Day 11... 2337 words. Total words to date..... 30836

Day 12... 2115 words. Total words to date..... 32951

Day 13... 2242 words. Total words to date..... 35193

Day 14... 1325 words. Total words to date..... 36518

Day 15... 1006 words. Total words to date..... 37524

Day 16... 2532 words. Total words to date..... 40056

Day 17... 2759 words. Total words to date..... 42815

Total fiction words for November..... 9684

Total fiction words for the year..... 171389

Total nonfiction words for November... 6350

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 181980

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 353369

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 2

Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	68
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014).....	217
Short story collections.....	31

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Author Intrusion](#), [Cycling](#), [Head Hopping](#), [POV Character](#)

Very Short, Cozy Post

November 10, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Very Short, Cozy Post
- * Happy Birthday
- * Of Interest

Very Short, Cozy Post

We're making a trip to Sierra Vista a little later this morning. This post is short so I can get to the novel more quickly.

Today's "Of Interest" is all about cozy mysteries. But don't let that put you off if you aren't a writer of cozy mysteries. Almost any discussion of a particular genre includes gems and tidbits that apply, if not across the board of fiction, at least to other genres.

Also, more than one fiction writer has expanded his or her storytelling range into other genres after reading about them. Many more writers have included in their work techniques found in other genres once they've become aware of those techniques.

Finally, there's at least one more post on cozies at <https://thepassivevoice.com>.

Happy 247th birthday to the United States Marine Corps. Sometime today I'll have a bit of cake.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “5 Unbreakable Rules Of Cozy Mysteries (And How To Bend Them)” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/5-unbreakable-rules-of-cozy-mysteries-and-how-to-bend-them/>.

See “What Makes a Cozy Just That?” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/what-makes-a-cozy-just-that/>.

See “How Cosy Can You Get?” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/how-cosy-can-you-get/>.

See “5 interesting facts about the Marine Corps birthday” at <https://www.wearethemighty.com/mighty-history/5-interesting-facts-about-the-marine-corps-birthday/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 190 words

Writing of *The Stirchians* (novel, tentative title)

Day 11... 2337 words. Total words to date..... 30836

Day 12... 2115 words. Total words to date..... 32951

Day 13... 2242 words. Total words to date..... 35193

Day 14... 1325 words. Total words to date..... 36518

Day 15... 1006 words. Total words to date..... 37524

Day 16... 2532 words. Total words to date..... 40056

Day 17... 2759 words. Total words to date..... 42815

Day 18... 1740 words. Total words to date..... 44555

Total fiction words for November..... 11604

Total fiction words for the year..... 173129

Total nonfiction words for November... 6540

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 182170

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 355299

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 2

Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 68

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: Because It Makes Sense, I preach trusting your characters to tell the story that they, not you, are living. Duh. This practice greatly increases your productivity and provides a rapid ascension along the learning curve of Craft because you get a great deal more practice at actually writing. This is not opinion. It is all numbers and facts.

An Idea-Breeding Article

November 11, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * An Idea-Breeding Article
- * By the Way (the novel)
- * There's a post
- * Of Interest

An Idea-Breeding Article

Note: I will share several ideas for a story based on the post I mention below. Please share your ideas in the comments too. You can't copyright an idea anyway, right? Might as well share it and let everyone get some practice. (grin)

This is not, as you might expect, especially for science fiction writers. This event and its fallout could be included in mystery, thriller, crime and other genres as well. Even romance, I suppose. I recommend this three-step process to use the article to generate story ideas:

1. Take a moment to read "This new VR headset will kill you if you die in an online game" at <https://interestingengineering.com/culture/vr-headset-kills-you-if-you-die>.

This is not fiction. It's real. So here's your first string of story ideas:

- How many people has this game killed so far?
- Who is liable?
- Can we allow for personal responsibility here (so are recipients/players of the game required to sign a consent form absolving all others of responsibility in case the player falls short and is killed)?
- Or do we blame the game developer?
- Or the companies that sell the game?
- Or the government(s) for allowing the game?
- Do the citizens riot and scream for "game control laws" or do they sleep through it as long as it doesn't directly affect them?

2. Extrapolate. What if the federal or world government run with this? In a dystopian future, this might easily be a "fun" method of population control. That notion alone gave me several story ideas:

- Maybe the game is compulsory every year beginning at a certain age. BUT if you play and live through it, you're awarded a 5 or 10 year exemption before you're compelled to play again.
- Change the length of the exemption to suit the world in which your story takes place, the dominant religion, etc. (e.g., the exemption is 7 years for good luck, etc.).
- Maybe everyone has to play but instead of the headset killing you automatically if you fail to reach a certain point you are put to death by the state.
- Are exemption certificates transferrable either for profit (which the player's family could use after the player is killed) or free (donated to a loved one in lieu of that person having to play the game)?
- Would there soon be a burgeoning black market for exemption certificates, both authentic and forged?
- Write from the viewpoint of someone who's used to this future society, someone for whom this is the norm. Perhaps one spouse wins the game and earns an exemption and the other spouse is due to play next month. Note: For me, other story ideas abound from this one idea all by itself.
 - Does the exempted one hold the exemption back as a surprise birthday present?
 - Does the other spouse believe the first has decided not to transfer the exemption?
 - Will one spouse give up life for the other?
 - Will a spouse TAKE the life of the other to get the exemption?
 - Whichever way s/he chooses, does that spouse then learn the exemption certificate is fake?
 - And on and on and on.
- Write (horror?) from the viewpoint of someone from the past who "wakes up" to this new, strange reality. (Maybe someone who was cryogenically preserved until a certain date.)
- Write the player's story.
- Write the executioner's story (if the game itself doesn't kill the player).
- Write the story of the game designer. Why would s/he design such a game or headset in the first place?
- And of course, write the story(ies) of the individual or band who chooses to break away from this society and live on their own somewhere.
- (Hmmm. So are there walled cities? Citizen-control boundaries? Electro-shock implants or collars or ...?)

Of course this deadly serious VR game/headset might also be used for some purpose other than population control. And then the *technology itself* (not the game or headset) might also be used for other nefarious purposes.

So how might this technology be used? Again, please share your ideas in the comments. Here are a couple to get you started.

- a threat to a national or international leader? (your hero or heroine will try to save the leader)

- a replacement for or adjunct to the prenuptial agreement (to ensure the spouse's fidelity)

Run. Play. Enjoy. And don't forget to share your own story ideas in the comments.

By the Way (the novel)

My ploy yesterday didn't work. At all. I came out early to write, became interested in other things, and didn't write a word on my novel. I'm really looking forward to this one being over, too. I'm getting tired of it. I've lived with it for an entire month. That's far too long.

There's a post

in "Of Interest" on how to "Write a Sympathetic Villain..." There are probably some gems to be gleaned from the post.

However, it must be said that if you trust your characters, you won't have to "give" or "assign" any of them anything. Their traits, quirks, and well-rounded personalities will emerge as you get to know them (and as you write the story) just as personality emerges when you get to know anyone you've only just met.

If you don't believe me, try it. You will be amazed.

Talk with you again soon.

(May you have a thoughtful Veteran's Day, or as Marines call it after partying the night before for the USMC birthday, Recovery Day.) (grin)

Of Interest

See "What's In Your Closet?" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/11/whats-in-your-closet.html>.

See "In Defense of King George" at <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/in-defense-of-king-george-180978852/>. Fascinating. Characters are ALWAYS more than stereotypes.

See "What the ruling against the PRH-S&S merger means for the publishing business" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/what-the-ruling-against-the-prh-ss-merger-means-for-the-publishing-business/>. Nothing, really, for indie publishers. But see PG's interesting take.

See "Write a Sympathetic Villain Your Readers Will Love to Hate" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/write-a-sympathetic-villain-your-readers-will-love-to-hate/>. Probably some gems in this.

See "In Defense of King George" at <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/in-defense-of-king-george-180978852/>. Fascinating. Characters are ALWAYS more than stereotypes.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 970 words

Writing of The Stirchians (novel, tentative title)

Day 11... 2337 words. Total words to date..... 30836

Day 12... 2115 words. Total words to date..... 32951

Day 13... 2242 words. Total words to date..... 35193

Day 14... 1325 words. Total words to date..... 36518

Day 15... 1006 words. Total words to date..... 37524

Day 16... 2532 words. Total words to date..... 40056

Day 17... 2759 words. Total words to date..... 42815

Day 18... 1740 words. Total words to date..... 44555

Total fiction words for November..... 11604

Total fiction words for the year..... 173129

Total nonfiction words for November... 7510

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 183140

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 356269

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 2

Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 68

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: Because It Makes Sense, I preach trusting your characters to tell the story that they, not you, are living. Duh. This practice greatly increases your productivity and provides a rapid ascension along the learning curve of Craft because you get a great deal more practice at actually writing. This is not opinion. It is all numbers and facts.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [publishing](#), [Story Ideas](#), [Writing Villains](#)

Heinlein's Rule 2

November 12, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

* Quote of the Day

* Heinlein's Rule 2

* Of Interest

Quote of the Day

“Learning and innovation go hand in hand. The arrogance of success is to think that what you did yesterday will be sufficient for tomorrow.” William Pollard

“The arrogance of success”—this is why so many Stage 2 writers remain Stage 2 writers.

Heinlein’s Rule 2

Rule 1 is “You must write.”

Rule 2 is “You must finish what you write.”

I probably won’t break that rule, but I came close to bending it pretty severely. I was going to put off finishing *The Stirchians* for awhile.

I’ve decided not to. Some things worked out that I didn’t expect to work out, so I’ll continue with it, at least for now. But for your benefit, I’ll explain why I almost set it aside at over 40,000 words.

Some of you will remember me talking in the past about a novel titled [*Situation Solved*](#). It was rolling along just fine. Then, as a buddy and I were talking, I told him a little about the story and he blurted out what he thought might be a perfect ending.

Of course, as soon as the words left his mouth we were both aghast: I for discussing a work in progress in the first place, and he for letting that “advice” slip past his lips. Writers don’t easily unhear things.

As a result, I set aside that novel for a few to several months (I forget now exactly how long it was). After I’d written other things and was able to come back to *Situation Solved* with fresh eyes (and without that possible ending hanging over my head), the story wrapped in only a few more days of writing. The ending was a complete surprise, and I moved on to the next project.

Before now, that’s happened to me only once or maybe twice.

But with The Stirchians, two weeks or so ago (by the calendar, not writing days) a fictional situation popped into my head from a copyedit I performed on another “they came here” SF novel series.

I conducted that edit around 18 years ago, but two or three situations from that series are still fresh in my mind. That’s how well the series was written. And that’s the problem. One of those situations popped into my head, and instead of immediately stopping writing my current novel, I continued, albeit haltingly and wondering what was wrong.

The author of that excellent series, Glen M. Glenn, and I lost touch over the years. To my knowledge, he never did publish most of those books. If I remember right he was having trouble with a contract from a subsidy publisher. So today only the first volume might be available to the public.

And that is a terrible shame. Each novel was well over 100,000 words, and in my opinion, those six books comprise the greatest science fiction story ever written, including even the *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* franchises.

As an aside, if you'd like to see whether you can find any of Glen's books, look for *The Wallingford Files: Last of the Firstborn*. That's the title of the first book. When I checked, a print edition was listed on Amazon. The other titles, in order, are *A New God Is Born*, *The Storm Born*, *King of the Black Dawn*, *Prisoners of the Dawn*, and *Perpetual Dawn*.

Anyway, as I wrote above, one twist of that novel series popped into my head and seemed like a really great idea. But anything that "seems like" anything is a conscious thought and a result of your critical mind.

Instead of setting *The Stirchians* aside at that point, for some stupid reason I thought maybe it would be all right. Now remember, I actually know better! But I reminded myself to ignore the mind worm, to Just Write the Next Sentence. And miraculously, the writing picked up again for a day or so.

But the problem, the conscious-mind change of direction in the novel, was still in place. So from that point, any writing I did took the story farther from what it would have been if I hadn't imposed that conscious decision on it. I did a truly stupid thing, and as a result I'm paying for it.

If you have any questions about any of this or want me to clarify any of it, please let me know. I'm only admitting it in the first place so maybe you can benefit from my stupidity. (grin)

I wrote this yesterday morning. When I finished, I spent the rest of the day reading over the story (consciously), and looking for and rooting out any vestiges of that conscious-mind intrusion.

To be honest, I thought I might be too close to the story to even do that much. But surprisingly, even as I jettisoned the little tendrils of that critical-mind thought, the characters started taking over their story again.

So maybe I won't have to set it aside after all. I should know before the end of the day today. If it takes off and keeps running once I've finished the purge, I think it will be pretty much a race to the finish.

If it bogs down because I'm unable to erase the harm I did, then I'll set it aside and start something new. I'll keep you apprised. (I should be able to list a new word count in the morning. Click this link for your own annotated copy of [Heinlein's Rules](#).)

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Here There Be Dragons" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/11/here-there-be-dragons.html>.

See “Editorium Update” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/editorium-update/>. So much easier to just write the story as the characters convey it to me.

See “5 Great Book Binding Services” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/5-great-book-binding-services/>.

See “DeviantArt upsets artists...” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/deviantart-upsets-artists-with-its-new-ai-art-generator-dreamup/>. I included this one for PG’s take.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 950 words

Writing of The Stirchians (novel, tentative title)

Day 11... 2337 words. Total words to date..... 30836
Day 12... 2115 words. Total words to date..... 32951
Day 13... 2242 words. Total words to date..... 35193
Day 14... 1325 words. Total words to date..... 36518
Day 15... 1006 words. Total words to date..... 37524
Day 16... 2532 words. Total words to date..... 40056
Day 17... 2759 words. Total words to date..... 42815
Day 18... 1740 words. Total words to date..... 44555

Total fiction words for November..... 11604
Total fiction words for the year..... 173129
Total nonfiction words for November... 8460
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 184090
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 357219

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 2
Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 68
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: Because It Makes Sense, I preach trusting your characters to tell the story that they, not you, are living. Duh. This practice greatly increases your productivity and provides a rapid ascension along the learning curve of Craft because you get a great deal more practice at actually writing. This is not opinion. It is all numbers and facts.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [AI](#), [bogging down](#), [book binding](#), [slogging down](#)

The Yawning Chasms Along the Way

November 13, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * The Yawning Chasms Along the Way
- * And Then There's Plottr
- * Dean's In-Person Classes
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

"I've discovered Plottr. Without going into detail, it is the best tool I've used so far. Loving the timeline feature and templates for a variety of genres. It gives me writing prompts in the places I usually flounder, as well as a host of other nice features." Cecilia Marie Pulliam

"Mama says 'Stupid is as stupid does'." Forrest Gump

The Yawning Chasms Along the Way

If you don't see the value of unvarnished truth, you might want to skip reading this post.

I made the stupid mistake of reading the comments on a Kill Zone blog post this morning. I won't do that again. Probably 99%+ of the comments are ringing endorsements of the myths, a batting back and forth of the assurances that Stage 1 and 2 writers need to make them feel they're on the right track.

I took the first Quote of the Day from one of those comments (more on that later), but the most inane one was the one in the following paragraph. I've omitted the author's name because it doesn't matter:

"[O]utlining can save your sanity. The path upward might not be totally clear, but you have checkpoints to reach and logical steps between them. The yawning chasms along the way should be under the hero's feet, not yours."

If you've never seen a product description of a safety net, read the second sentence of that quote again, then the first three words of the last sentence. The fear is practically palpable.

I especially like that last sentence, where the person who wrote the quote—the person who so ardently recommends outlining to "save your sanity"—actually tosses a modicum of respect to the character: "The yawning chasms along the way should be under the hero's feet, not yours."

Really? So why shouldn't the entire story be "under the hero's feet, not yours"? It IS the hero's story, not yours, right?

But I know exactly what the commenter meant because I've heard it so many times before. Once you, the writer, feel safe (from what? carpal tunnel? eye fatigue? papercuts?), you'll go ahead and let the character live the "yawning chasms" part of the story? That hardly seems fair.

At any rate, you're only letting the hero live the *much-altered* story, not the actual, authentic story. The authentic story flew out the window when you decided to use an outline and control any part of the story in the first place.

Do you see how insane that is? You, the writer, are in No Danger At All from whatever happens in the story, so why the need for a safety net? And in the "real world," if the story fails miserably and everyone hates it, you're still in zero danger. There are no consequences. None. So why the overpowering need to control the story via an outline?

Why not just take a deep breath, ignore all the danger you, um, Aren't In, and let the entire story be "under the hero's [or heroine's] feet"? How difficult is that to understand?

Well, no, that isn't the right question, it is? Obviously it's extremely difficult to understand. If it weren't, more people would understand it. The real question is WHY it's so difficult to understand.

But whether or not you understand, and whether or not you exert authorial control over any part of the story, you will still be Just You. You are not racing to defuse a ticking time bomb. You are not riding wild on a good horse in a just cause. And you are not screaming through space on a generation ship aimed at the new Earth.

You are only a writer. You are sitting at a keyboard, probably alone, tapping the keys. At least you can help the true adventurers, your characters, get their stories out. As a fiction writer who wants to write an authentic story, your only task is to document the story that the characters, not you, are living.

But if you, like the majority, choose to exert control over the story and the characters, all you will accomplish is wrenching the story away from them. You'll make it "your" story, your personal fantasy, and end up with two unauthentic stories: yours and your characters. But hey, good luck with that.

And Then There's Plottr

Re "Plottr," wow. How insecure and disbelieving of your own abilities as a writer do you have to be to actually WELCOME writing prompts from a program?

That's like getting input from a critique group without ever having to talk with an actual human. How can some stupid machine know BETTER THAN YOUR CHARACTERS what should come next in your story? For goodness' sake, trust your characters and Just Write the Next Sentence.

Right this moment, someone out there is thinking, *But the program is created by humans, so the prompts are from humans.*

Mmm hmm. As if that makes the situation any better. You shouldn't welcome prompts from humans either. And I'm not talking about prompts to START a new story. I'm talking about prompts in a story that's already ongoing. No! Have some faith in yourself. Defend Your Work.

I won't even talk about "templates for a variety of genres." Why bother with Plottr? Why not just relax, do something you enjoy, and wait for AI to advance to the stage where it can write a complete, "original" story on your behalf? Then all you'll have to do is click a button, sit back, and rake in the cash.

Hey, listen, look up Plottr and use it if you want—every writer is different—but I guarantee it will take you farther from the actual story and probably farther from actually writing (putting new words on the page).

I have a superpower: I can say things that make perfectly rational sense all day and never get through to a single person. I'll just add, there's more to writing (and life) than staying in step with everyone else and focusing on the back of the head of the writer in front of you. When the ground drops away and he and his writing disappears into the abyss of the slush pile with all the other manuscripts that sound exactly like each other, it might well be too late to jump out of line.

Dean's In-Person Classes

Most of you reading this know I have a great deal of respect for Dean Wesley Smith and Kristine Kathryn Rusch as writers. Why? Because you can't (reasonably) argue with success. Now DWS and ostensibly KKR are teaching a series of in-person classes in Vegas through 2023. You can find them listed in the second item in "Of Interest."

If you're that well-heeled and want to go, I'm sure you'll get something of value out of the experience. I've learned (actually, realized) a great deal from Dean over the years, mostly from reading his blog—reading his blog is what actually made me want to start the Journal—and from his Heinlein's Rules lecture and from maybe three or four of the twenty-two online workshops I've taken.

The main thing I learned from him is this: The best way to learn how to write fiction is to sit down at your keyboard, put your fingers on the keys, and put new words on the page. That's what real writers do. They write. Do the best you can the first time through, and when you're finished, spell check it and publish it.

You don't need an outline. You don't need to revise or rewrite. You don't need Plottr or Grammarly or any other machine, and you DON'T need input from some critique group. You really don't even need anyone, including me, to instruct you.

All you need is the confidence and belief in yourself to trust your characters, type the first sentence of the story, then type the next and the next and the next until the characters lead you through to the end of the story.

Then, if you honestly try to adhere to Heinlein's Rules, as a fiction writer you'll be golden.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Will Mars Colonists Evolve Into This New Kind of Human?" at <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/the-big-questions/mars-colonists-might-evolve-entirely-new-type-human-n708636>.

See "In-Person Workshops" at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/in-person-workshops-2/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1390 words

Writing of The Stirchians (novel, tentative title)

Day 11... 2337 words. Total words to date..... 30836
Day 12... 2115 words. Total words to date..... 32951
Day 13... 2242 words. Total words to date..... 35193
Day 14... 1325 words. Total words to date..... 36518
Day 15... 1006 words. Total words to date..... 37524
Day 16... 2532 words. Total words to date..... 40056
Day 17... 2759 words. Total words to date..... 42815
Day 18... 1740 words. Total words to date..... 44555

Total fiction words for November..... 11604
Total fiction words for the year..... 173129
Total nonfiction words for November... 9850
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 185480
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 358609

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 2
Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 68
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: Because It Makes Sense, I preach trusting your characters to tell the story that they, not you, are living. Duh. This practice greatly increases your productivity and provides a rapid ascension along the learning curve of Craft because you get a great deal more practice at actually writing. This is not opinion. It is all numbers and facts.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Lemmings](#), [Outlining](#), [WITD](#)

Emphasis, Critique Groups, the Novel

November 14, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * How Not to Indicate Emphasis
- * Offering Critiques
- * The Novel
- * Of Interest

How Not to Indicate Emphasis

Re Sue Colletta's post (linked in "Of Interest") on how *not* to emphasize words and phrases in fiction, I left a comment and thought I would share it here just in case any of you might find it useful.

I learned in an Aldus PageMaker design class about a jillion years ago, if you HAVE TO USE ALL CAPS (headlines, etc.) it's a good idea to hit the spacebar twice between every pair of words, as I did in the example. That keeps the words from running together. (To create the same effect in WordPress, as I did above, shift to your Text screen (vs. your Visual screen) and then type a space and then ** ** between each two words. That little bit of code will add an extra "non-breaking space.")

Anyway, I've never used all caps or bold in a short story or novel. In fact, I stopped reading a Stephen King book (*The Dome*) because of the typesetter's use of bold. It was annoying, and each use actually jerked me out of the story.

The best rule of thumb I've found is this: Never put anything on the page that distracts the reader from the story. It's one of those very few absolutes.

Offering Critiques

Just in case anyone needs or wants it, I've added a link in "Of Interest" to "Critiquing 101: Ten Do's and Don'ts for Giving Helpful Critiques."

I didn't read it. You know my opinion: Defend your work. Don't allow any critical minds (even your own) to alter the content of your characters' story.

All of that said, a very long time ago (2013, before I started writing novels) I did write a post regarding how to start a good, helpful critique group (i.e., one that wasn't merely a mutual admiration society). I updated that post and reposted it again in 2017. I've linked to that one in today's "Of Interest" too.

And by the way, I apologize to anyone to whom I offered a critique of the content of their story or novel way back in the day. I was displaying the arrogance of ignorance. Because seriously, what the hell did/do I know about the content of a story that's taking place in your characters' world?

Even in my role as a mentor, I don't critique story content. I can tell you whether a story opening needs more depth and how to achieve that, and I can advise you all day long on specific craft techniques. But nothing about content. Don't ask me about the content of your story because the only honest and not self-centered answer is "How should I know? I'm not living it."

The Novel

Still working to weed out bits of the critical mind insertion with occasional spurts of new activity from the characters, which of course I dutifully and happily record. (grin) I've already cut over 3000 words, and there's more to cut. When the weeding-out is finished—maybe today, maybe tomorrow—I expect the book to break wide open. From there it should be a race to the finish. Anyway, I'm not recording numbers below until the smoke clears.

It's a weird feeling. I really like some of the characters, but I've lived with this story far too long so I'll be glad to see it end. I could drop it right now and not look back, but the characters deserve to have it recorded.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Emphasized Words in Fiction" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/11/emphasized-words-in-fiction.html>.

See "Critiquing 101: Ten Do's and Don'ts for Giving Helpful Critiques" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/critiquing-101-ten-dos-and-donts-for-giving-helpful-critiques/>.

See "12 Ways to Make That Critique Group Work (Revised and Updated)" at <https://harveystanbrough.com/pro-writers/12-ways-critique-group/>.

See “In Written Opinion, Judge Florence Pan Delivers Knockout Blow to PRH, S&S Merger” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/in-written-opinion-judge-florence-pan-delivers-knockout-blow-to-prh-ss-merger/>. Great stuff, smart judge.

See “8 billion and counting” at <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-11-13/earths-population-reaches-eight-billion-people/101643854>. And now we’re in decline. Story ideas.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 660 words

Writing of *The Stirchians* (novel, tentative title)

Day 11... 2337 words. Total words to date..... 30836
Day 12... 2115 words. Total words to date..... 32951
Day 13... 2242 words. Total words to date..... 35193
Day 14... 1325 words. Total words to date..... 36518
Day 15... 1006 words. Total words to date..... 37524
Day 16... 2532 words. Total words to date..... 40056
Day 17... 2759 words. Total words to date..... 42815
Day 18... 1740 words. Total words to date..... 44555

Total fiction words for November..... 11604
Total fiction words for the year..... 173129
Total nonfiction words for November... 10510
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 186140
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 359269

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 2
Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 68
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: Because It Makes Sense, I preach trusting your characters to tell the story that they, not you, are living. Duh. This practice greatly increases your productivity and provides a rapid ascension along the learning curve of Craft because you get a great deal more practice at actually writing. This is not opinion. It is all numbers and facts.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [critique groups](#), [Critiques](#), [emphasis in fiction](#)

Mostly Dean Koontz

November 15, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Mostly Dean Koontz
- * Cuts Are Ugly
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“I used to write from outlines. But when I wrote *Strangers*, which ended up having an enormous cast and being about a quarter of a million words, I decided not to do an outline and just start with the premise and a couple of interesting characters. I decided to wing it, and it was the best decision. I've never used an outline since.” Dean Koontz

“If the character doesn't work in the first 20 pages, you might as well quit. If a character comes alive, I let the character move the story along. This is the hardest thing to explain to young writers. ... If you give the character free will, the character becomes richer, more layered, more interesting.” Dean Koontz

“Trust in your ability to be original.” PJ Parrish

In other words, “Dare to be bad.” Nina Kiriki Hoffman, Dean Wesley Smith

Mostly Dean Koontz

Matt P, a writer and reader of the Journal, sent me a link to Matt Cardin's Substack, which is titled [Living Into the Dark](#). Sound familiar? (grin) But of course, the connotation for Cardin's “living into the dark” is much broader than for writing into the dark, though it apparently includes the latter. Part of the post is aimed at Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and when you click the link and scroll down, you'll see other posts that have to do with the odd relationship between religion and horror and other mystical, dark topics.

Anyway, in the post are three excerpts, each from a different post. I encourage you to read the excerpts, then click through if the content seems appealing to you.

But I'll take that a step further. If you read nothing else today about writing, read “Life's Work: An Interview with Dean Koontz”. The link is in “Of Interest.” The section titled “Tell me about your process...” alone is gem-filled, as are some other sections.

There's a section on rewriting too. Koontz doesn't mention whether he works from the critical mind or the creative subconscious, but he does have an interesting take. And he admits “I always have been in love with language.” As one who has always felt his mother pinched his heel and dipped him into the river of language at birth, I can attest that being in love with the language definitely helps.

I find myself wishing Stephen King and Dean Koontz would take over writing this Journal. Dude, even I would read that.

Cuts Are Ugly

but clearing away clutter so you can start again is priceless. When I cut something from a story, I typically append it to the end of the story under CUTS so I can still count the words. After all, I wrote them.

With this novel, ironically, I haven't done that. When I cut something, I just deleted it and kept typing.

But now the dust and smoke from the purge have cleared. In getting rid of the critical mind insertion that I initially (and foolishly) tried to make work, I deleted just under 7,000 words during a grueling 3-day process. I cut the word count for the novel from 44,555 to 37,750.

As I mentioned a day or two ago, my characters are helpful. They occasionally took over as I read through the manuscript. They added almost 2000 more words, so the current word count is nearing 40,000 again.

That's where I started with the adjusted numbers for the novel. Yesterday, right at the end of the day, I wrote just under 1000 words. Now I'm hoping the characters will wrap this thing in the next few to several days.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Life's Work: An Interview with Dean Koontz" at <https://hbr.org/2020/03/lifes-work-an-interview-with-dean-koontz>.

See "Imagining the International Space Station flying at 10,000 feet" (short video) at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f9QHSGpTEkY>.

See "What We Can Learn About Writing From Reading On Vacation" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/11/what-we-can-learn-about-writing-from-reading-on-vacation.html>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 650 words

Writing of The Stirchians (novel, tentative title)

Day 16... 2532 words. Total words to date..... 40056

Day 17... 2759 words. Total words to date..... 42815

Day 18... 1740 words. Total words to date..... 44555
CUTS..... 6805 words. Total words to date..... 37750
ADDS..... 1928 words. Total words to date..... 39678
Day 19... 0982 words. Total words to date..... 40660

Total fiction words for November..... 12586
Total fiction words for the year..... 174111
Total nonfiction words for November... 11160
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 186790
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 360901

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 2
Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 68
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Dean Koontz](#)

Nothing

November 16, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * Nothing
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

“I was wise enough to never grow up while fooling most people into believing I had.” Margaret Mead

Nothing

Nothing, really, to talk about today. But some of the stuff in “Of Interest” was too much fun to keep to myself.

The novel is inching along. That's all I can say about that at the moment without yelling a lot.

Writing it brings up a less than fond memory of climbing Mount MF in full gear and drenched plastic ponchos at Camp Pendleton, California during a heavy rain some 52 years ago during my ITR training. (If you don't know the acronyms, don't worry about it. Trust me, you're better off. Just proves you were smarter than I was.)

Anyway, the hill was so steep in places, you could touch the ground (well, the mud) by putting your hand straight out in front of you. One step forward, slip three steps back, all the way to the top. How, you ask? Impossible, you say? Nope. I'm doing it again with this stupid novel.

Some progress is better than no progress, maybe, but it's no kind of fun.

The bit about the "long-form synopsis" below is not in "Of Interest" because I recommend it. It's there because I find it ridiculous. It might be construed as "good advice" only if you want to delay writing as long as possible so you can *seem* to others like a writer and maybe even *feel* like a writer without actually *being* a writer.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Kurt Vonnegut's Daily Routine..." at <https://www.mentalfloss.com/posts/kurt-vonnegut-daily-routine-iowa-writers-workshop>.

See "Have the Courage to Ignore Expert Advice" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/11/have-the-courage-to-ignore-expert-advice.html>. I added a comment.

See "How to Use a Long-Form Synopsis to Plan Your Novel" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/how-to-use-a-long-form-synopsis-to-plan-your-novel/>. Just for fun. ('Cause nothing's quite as much fun [or as productive] as writing the Same Novel two or three times: once in the long-form synopsis and/or in the outline, and then once when you, well, um, you know, actually write the story.) (grin)

See "Desperate Writer Query Template" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/desperate-writer-query-template/>. Just for fun.

See "We might be alone in the universe" at <https://interestingengineering.com/science/we-might-be-alone-in-the-universe>. Because climate change or something.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 370 words

Writing of The Stirchians (novel, tentative title)

CUTS..... 6805 words. Total words to date..... 37750
New 1928 words. Total words to date..... 39678
Day 19... 0982 words. Total words to date..... 40660
Day 20... 0860 words. Total words to date..... 41520

Total fiction words for November..... 134466
Total fiction words for the year..... 174971
Total nonfiction words for November... 11530
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 187160
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 362131

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 2
Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 68
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: Because It Makes Sense, I preach trusting your characters to tell the story that they, not you, are living. Duh. This practice greatly increases your productivity and provides a rapid ascension along the learning curve of Craft because you get a great deal more practice at actually writing. This is not opinion. It is all numbers and facts.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [climate change](#), [sarcasm](#), [satire](#), [Vonnegut](#)

An Excellent Question, and an Epiphany

November 17, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * An Excellent Question
- * Update, and an Epiphany
- * Of Interest

An Excellent Question

In response to my post "[Mostly Dean Koontz](#)," Peggy K. asked an absolutely excellent question. It felt so important and maybe necessary that I was going to reprint her question and my response as today's Journal post.

However, I also experienced an epiphany yesterday shortly after I replied to Peggy. So today's post is about that epiphany. I feel as if it's one I've been straining to find ever since I started writing again.

So please read Peggy's comment and my response at <https://hestanbrough.com/mostly-dean-koontz/#comments>. Then come back here and read this

Update, and an Epiphany

Yesterday, I re-read the last paragraph from my response to Peggy, and a realization hit me like a sledgehammer. In that paragraph, I wrote, "I'm fighting my way back to the authentic story" and "It isn't easy."

Wow.

1. I should never have strayed from the authentic (characters') story in the first place.
2. Writing fiction should never be something you have to "fight" your way through. It should always be easy, and fun.

And this is me, folks, the guy who routinely writes a novel in 2 weeks. The guy who's been WITD and loving it since early 2014. See how easily this critical-mind stuff can sneak up? You have to be on your guard all the time.

Frankly, it's a little embarrassing to admit all of this, but if you can learn from my mistakes and avoid some of this lost time, I'm good with that. Small price to pay.

I finally figured it out. My big problem with this novel is that I've made it "important." And of course, the instant you start to think a story is important for any reason, you'll start second-guessing your characters and yourself, and that's a story killer. Every single time.

Even back when I first thought about writing this novel, for some reason I actively wanted it to be the only sequel to *The 13-Month Turn*. I don't know why; I really enjoy the characters and the situations. But that "only sequel" stuff made this book important without me even noticing.

The book being "important" caused three things to happen:

1. The characters were restricted before I'd even written the first chapter. (And I take great pride in NEVER restricting my characters. It's their story.)
2. My critical mind started thinking of (critical mind) ways to wrap the whole story in this one book, and
3. ways to wrap this particular book quickly.

(Remember, I wanted to finish this one, my 69th, in October so I could finish my 70th on or before my 70th birthday. How's that for a truly meaningless fake deadline and unnecessary pressure?)

The only way to wrap the whole story in this book (and wrap this book quickly) was for the citizens on Earth to come up with a way to repel the aliens. That's when I tried to work-in that device from a novel I edited long ago. (I'm not talking about plagiarism here, just using a device, a trope.)

That was just a stupid thing to do. Think about it. That's about as far as you can get from trusting your characters and conveying the story that they, not you, are living.

As I wrote above in my response to Peggy, "the characters are pure. They're just living the story. They don't think about where it's going or what will happen next. They're actually living it and whatever happens, happens."

You know. Just like your life, or mine.

In fiction writing, recognizing a problem is 99% of solving it. A few days ago I nuked the story, ripping out everything that had to do with my critical-mind intrusion. (That 7000 word cut.) And yesterday afternoon, I hit the story again with a slightly lower-yield weapon.

I read over my reverse outline to get a quick, uncluttered glimpse of the story (so yet another use for the reverse outline) and highlighted anything I wrote after the story stopped being fun to write.

Then I scrolled through the manuscript (not reading anything) and deleted anything I'd highlighted in the reverse outline. It wasn't much. A little over 2000 words.

But why did I do that?

Because as hard as I was trying to "resolve" the story quickly, ***I don't need to resolve the story***, quickly or any other time. Even the characters don't resolve the story. They just keep living it until the story resolves itself. Again, just like your life or mine.

(As an aside, we *can* make decisions that help our own stories resolve in our own lives, and the characters can do that in their lives too. But we shouldn't attempt to resolve our characters' story anymore than we would want someone else to come in and resolve ours.)

Now all I have to do is follow the characters around, write down what happens and what they say and do, then come back the next day and the next and keep doing that until the story resolves itself. Now I feel as if I've had a wonderful, hot shower on the first day of the rest of my life. (grin)

By the way, I wrote most of this yesterday, not this morning. So today, once I post this edition of the Journal, I'll read over a few paragraphs of the crisp, clean manuscript with a relaxed smile on my mind, and when I get to the white space, I'll keep writing. And the novel will be fun again.

And frankly, I don't care how long (or how many novels) this story takes to resolve. I'm just going to enjoy the journey. Finally.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Clue — Analyzing the Board Game’s Murder Weapons” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/11/clue-analyzing-the-board-games-murder-weapons.html>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 970 words

Writing of *The Stirchians* (novel, tentative title)

Day 19... 0982 words. Total words to date..... 40660

Day 20... 0860 words. Total words to date..... 41520

CUTS..... 2009 words. Total words to date..... 39551

Total fiction words for November..... 134466

Total fiction words for the year..... 174971

Total nonfiction words for November... 12500

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 188130

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 363101

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 2

Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 68

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: Because It Makes Sense, I preach trusting your characters to tell the story that they, not you, are living. Duh. This practice greatly increases your productivity and provides a rapid ascension along the learning curve of Craft because you get a great deal more practice at actually writing. This is not opinion. It is all numbers and facts.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Epiphany](#), [Starting Clean](#)

Goals and Goal Setting

November 18, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Goals and Goal Setting
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“Individual science fiction stories may seem as trivial as ever to the blinder critics and philosophers of today — but the core of science fiction, its essence, has become crucial to our salvation if we are to be saved at all.” Isaac Asimov

“As soon as you have an idea that changes some small part of the world you are writing science fiction. It is always the art of the possible, never the impossible.” Ray Bradbury

Goals and Goal Setting

It’s coming up time to consider setting or adjusting daily, maybe weekly or monthly, and annual writing goals.

As I lean back and relax against the Bradbury quote for a moment, I suggest that in setting goals also the writer should start by figuring out what is possible. Instead of, say, beginning with the assumption of what is not possible.

Back on October 20 I wrote a post titled “[Numbers Do Not Lie \(It’s Called Practice\)](#)” I wrote that I hope to reach at least age 82 before I kick off, and that by then I would like very much to have written 200 novels.

When I wrote that post, I assumed I would have finished my 70th novel on or before my 70th birthday, and that isn’t going to happen. But it doesn’t matter.

To start with clean math, let’s assume that to reach the goal of 200 novels by a particular date, I would have to write 130 novels in 12 years.

I can almost see and hear some of you shaking your heads. “Nope, that’s impossible.” But it isn’t. In fact, it’s entirely possible for anyone who writes into the dark.

Often when something seems impossible, the math proves it’s not only possible but may be achieved relatively easily: 130 novels in 12 years = 11 novels per year = 60,000 words per month (with one month off, ahem, as if) = 2000 words per day (2 hours of ‘work’). Not a bad way to make a living. (grin)

But let’s strain the example a bit, because Why Not?

If I wanted to write TWO hundred and thirty novels in that same 12 years, that would be 19 novels per year for 11 years and 20 novels for one year.

Writing 19 novels per year would require a new novel every 2.74 weeks, so about every 19 days. Completely possible. Writing 20 novels in that one year would require turning out one new novel every 2.6 weeks, so about every 18 days. Ditto. Entirely possible.

Again, in the first 7 months of 2021 (so 181 days) alone I turned out 13 novels, an average of one new novel every 14 days. In other words, I was on pace to write 26 novels in 2021. I was writing around 3000 to 4000 words per day of fiction, and I was enjoying every minute of it.

Still, I guess maybe those are extreme examples, though long-time prolific writers wouldn't think so. But maybe you have limits. Maybe you have a job or other obligations, so you can write only so many days per week or so many hours per day. That's fine.

You don't have to aspire to write 19 novels per year, or even 11, or even 4 to be considered prolific. Writing two 60,000 word novels per year (so 10,000 words per month or 334 words per day) will have people blathering on about how wonderfully prolific you are.

And writing 334 words takes, on average, about 20 minutes (@17 words per minute). Most of us spend longer than that (cumulatively) in the bathroom each day. So just sayin', you CAN carve out the time to write if you really want to. If you can carve out one hour per day, and if you spend that hour actually writing, that's 365,000 words per year. (That's more than six 60,000 word novels per year.)

The purpose of goals and personal challenges is to make you reach, to add to your practice time by driving you to the keyboard, and to add to your inventory by driving you to finish more novels or short stories.

But all of that requires your participation. The new calendar dawn that's approaching will also provide the perfect opportunity for some of you to toss aside whatever fears are holding you back and give writing into the dark an honest try. If you do, chances are a whole new world will open up for you, as it did for me 8 years ago.

I hope you will consider what is possible. Not necessarily easy (and certainly not overly easy) but not really difficult either. Just possible vs. impossible.

Of course, also bear in mind the elephant dictum: How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time. Forget writing a novel. Writing an entire novel is as impossible as eating an entire elephant.

To achieve your goals, trust your characters to tell their story, and actually write while you're in the chair. Just write a sentence, then another and another. When the scene ends, write another scene. Keep following the characters, and they will lead you through to the end. And one day you will look up to find you have written a novel.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “MegaThreats” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/megathreats/>. Story ideas.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 850 words

Writing of *The Stirchians* (novel, tentative title)

Day 21... 2621 words. Total words to date..... 42178

Total fiction words for November..... 16067
Total fiction words for the year..... 177592
Total nonfiction words for November... 13350
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 188980
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 366572

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 2
Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 68
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: Because It Makes Sense, I preach trusting your characters to tell the story that they, not you, are living. Duh. This practice greatly increases your productivity and provides a rapid ascension along the learning curve of Craft because you get a great deal more practice at actually writing. This is not opinion. It is all numbers and facts.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Challenges](#), [Goals](#), [What is Possible](#), [Writing Into the Dark](#)

New Short Story of the Week

November 19, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * New Short Story of the Week
- * The Novel
- * Of Interest

New Short Story of the Week

Since I was a little late posting the most recent installment of my Short Story of the Week offering for readers, I thought I'd post a novella instead. This one's a little over 15,000 words and it's never been posted free before.

To see the story, visit <https://harveystanbroughwrites.com/category/short-story-of-the-week/>. If you're learning anything from me, this might be a golden opportunity for you. Maybe study this one for description, pacing, and detailed action.

The Novel

As you can see from the numbers, once I freed myself of the stupid notion that my current novel is "important" in any way, I'm making good headway. I expect that to continue until I've reached the end of this particular story.

My next novel might be the next story in this new series or it might be something else. I really don't care. As I tell others, WHAT you write doesn't matter in the slightest. All that matters (if you're a writer) is THAT you write.

My youngest son came in yesterday for a visit, so I'm out a little early this morning to get my writing done.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "The Speed of Light: This Visual Shows How Fast (and Also Slow) It Really Is" at <https://interestingengineering.com/video/the-speed-of-light-this-cool-visual-shows-how-fast-but-also-slow-it-is>. Also shows how truly expansive are the distances in space. Fascinating.

See "Archetypes; Unmasking Your Villain; and the Final edit" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/11/archetypes-unmasking-your-villain-and-the-final-edit.html>. Maybe useful in some way.

See "Passwords" (and "The Best Password Managers...") at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/passwords/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 260 words

Writing of The Stirchians (novel, tentative title)

Day 21... 2621 words. Total words to date..... 42178

Day 22... 5133 words. Total words to date..... 47309

Total fiction words for November..... 21200

Total fiction words for the year..... 182725

Total nonfiction words for November... 13610

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 189240

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 371965

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date.....	2
Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date...	0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	68
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014).....	217
Short story collections.....	31

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Free story](#), [Passwords](#)

Another Myth

November 20, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Another Myth
- * The Novel
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“Write a short story every week. It’s not possible to write 52 bad short stories in a row.” Ray Bradbury

“A short story is a love affair, a novel is a marriage. A short story is a photograph; a novel is a film.” Lorrie Moore

“The short story is about One Event; longer fiction is about a series of interrelated or connected events.” Harvey Stanbrough

“Most folks are about as happy as they make up their minds to be.” Abraham Lincoln

Another Myth

we hear too often and seldom talk about: “The writing in a short story has to be more intense and more tightly focused, and the use of the language has to be more economical.”

This myth persists presumably because a short story is, well, short. At least shorter than a novel. But is it true? Uh, no.

Chances are, the folks who are trying to convince you of this “truth” are making money selling nonfiction books that propagate the myth.

Hmm, I just had an idea for my own next how-to book. I won't spoil it here, but it will be available in the next couple of months, I'm sure. Not that those who read today's post and the Journal itself will need it, and not that most writers will believe what I write in it anyway. But the few who do will find a whole new world they never new existed.

If the myth were true—if the writing in a short story has to be more intense and more tightly focused, and the use of the language has to be more economical—then conversely that would mean the writing in a novel can be less intense and less tightly focused, and the use of the language less economical.

Does that make sense? You have to write short stories cleanly and tightly because they're short, but it's all right to be sloppy in a novel just because it's longer? C'mon, man. You know that doesn't make sense.

Well, with one caveat: If you're writing flash fiction (double-digit fiction), yes, you have to watch words, use contractions, etc. to be sure the story comes in at 99 words or fewer, not including the title. Otherwise it isn't flash fiction.

But otherwise, a story is a story is a story. The only difference is the number of Events that take place. A short story is a story about one event, period.

A short story can wrap anywhere from 1,999 words (short short), 6,999 (short story), or 9,999 words (novelette or long short story). Of course, you don't set out to write a particular length. You just write the story and let it be whatever length it needs to be.

Any longer form (novella or novel) is about more than one interrelated or connected events. You can see this plainly in *A Rough New World*, the novella I posted yesterday as the Free Story of the Week. You can read it at <https://harveystanbroughwrites.com/a-rough-new-world/>.

In that story, because some the events are happening simultaneously, each is separated into it's own little container. There are other ways of presenting such a story, but that is the way I chose for this particular story.

Had I tried to write all of the events as simultaneously as they happened, the story would be a garbled, convoluted mess. You might also look at the novella as a collection of five short stories that interconnect to tell the overall tale.

So when you think about writing a story, Just Write. If the story naturally wraps at under 10,000 words, it's a short story of one type or another. If it keeps going, go with it. It will either wrap as a novella or a novel. If it keeps going after that, you've got a series on your hands.

And another myth: Writing a short story requires a different skill set.

Again, um, no. In a short story, as in a novella or novel, the characters are living a story. All the things you've subliminally or consciously learned about description, pacing, structure, etc. come into play.

Again, the ONLY difference is that the short story is about One Event and the longer forms are about more than one interrelated or interconnect events.

And yes, you may quote me.

The Novel

Although I came to the Hovel early in order to write, there were still other things I had to do in my routine: read, put the finishing touches on the Journal, and so on. So I didn't write as much as I'd hoped, but I only had an hour of writing time, so it's all good.

While my son's visiting that takes priority. I'll write fiction as I can. I'm out of the woods with critical voice now and the story is flowing so no worries.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Flash Sale On December Regular Workshops" at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/flash-sale-on-december-regular-workshops/>.

See "Down in the Writing Weeds" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/11/down-in-the-writing-weeds.html>. A rare good post. A few gems in this one. I left a comment (not that it will change his mind, but it might make sense to others). Just can't seem to avoid poking the bear.

See "Two Bites of the Apple on Kindle Vella" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/two-bites-of-the-apple-on-kindle-vella/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 860 words

Writing of The Stirchians (novel, tentative title)

Day 21... 2621 words. Total words to date..... 42178

Day 22... 5133 words. Total words to date..... 47309

Day 23... 1240 words. Total words to date..... 48549

Total fiction words for November..... 22440

Total fiction words for the year..... 183965

Total nonfiction words for November... 14470

Total nonfiction words for the year.....	190100
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog).....	374065
Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date.....	2
Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date...	0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	68
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014).....	217
Short story collections.....	31

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Kindle Vella](#), [Myths](#), [Short Stories](#), [Suddenly](#)

Substack and the Novel

November 21, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Substack
- * The Novel
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“To stay young requires unceasing cultivation of the ability to unlearn of falsehoods.” Robert A. Heinlein (Thanks to Dan Baldwin)

“Common sense is not so common.” Voltaire

“Re common sense, what's common to some is a luxury to others.” Yours truly

Substack

I'm setting up a substack again to see what I can do with it. As a result, this Journal will be coming to your email inbox again. I hope that's more convenient for those of you who still want it.

If you don't want to receive the Journal, please email me and I'll unsubscribe you. No harm, no foul. I'm not here to annoy people.

I probably will also create a substack for HarveyStanbroughWrites.com, my website for readers. Unfortunately, Revue isn't working the way I hoped it would.

The Novel

is going extremely well, which is to say the characters are living their story and I'm trying to keep up with them, recording it as I go. And having a ton of fun again, finally. Everything in this profession is about priorities, coming back, and having fun.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Was Natalie Wood Murdered By Her Husband, Robert Wagner?" at <http://dyingwords.net/was-natalie-wood-murdered-by-her-husband-robert-wagner/>. I strongly recommend Garry's "Dying Words" blog.

See "Why Fabergé eggs are eggs" at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-M2jyFLSoSE>. 9 minute video.

See "What's Inside the Titanic" at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HLrBUwNSEo0>. 22 minute video. Story ideas.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 230 words

Writing of The Stirchians (novel, tentative title)

Day 21... 2621 words. Total words to date..... 42178

Day 22... 5133 words. Total words to date..... 47309

Day 23... 1240 words. Total words to date..... 48549

Day 24... 4535 words. Total words to date..... 53084

Total fiction words for November..... 26975

Total fiction words for the year..... 188500

Total nonfiction words for November... 14700

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 190330

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 338830

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 2

Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 68

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Garry Rodgers](#), [Substack](#)

Why Does Anyone Believe Anything We Say?

November 22, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Why Does Anyone Believe Anything We Say?
- * Of Interest

Why Does Anyone Believe Anything We Say?

A fiction writer, by definition, is a liar for hire. Why does anyone believe anything we say?

Lawrence Block (IMHO, with Stephen King the other Stage 5 writer working today) even came completely clean. He wrote a nonfiction book titled [Telling Lies for Fun and Profit: A Manual for Fiction Writers](#). (The paper edition is actually less expensive than the Kindle edition at the moment.)

I understand there's an unwritten agreement, that it's all right, even preferable, to lie when writing fiction, but not when writing nonfiction. So a blog for example. Or in my case, this Journal.

But who knows? Everything I've ever written in this Journal might be a lie. At this very moment, there might not even be a manuscript tentatively titled *The Stirchians*. I might not be on the 26th writing day today. I might never have written so much as a word. I might have simply made it all up.

In fact, I might have made it all up every morning, then piled into my pickup, driven to a lake, and spent the balance of the day fishing. Indeed, some days I wish I had. Unfortunately, I don't wish it strongly enough to actually get up and do it.

Instead, I check websites, add links to "Of Interest," and compose the rest of the most recent edition of the Journal. Sometimes, when I have very little to say, I skip it. More often, I write some silly little bit like this, then publish it, then swivel around in my chair to my writing desk and—start putting new words on the page.

And none of those words in any combination comprise lies. I promise. (Well, unless this is.) Instead, they comprise the truth of the story that my characters, not I, are actually living. Maybe they're in my mind. Maybe they're in another dimension that I'm fortunate enough to be able to access with my creative subconscious.

Well, you know, once I've set aside my disbelieving critical mind. Because the true purpose of the conscious, critical mind is to safeguard us. But (ahem) *Nothing In My Characters' Story Can Possibly Hurt Me*, so what would my critical mind be protecting me from? What purpose would it serve to allow my critical mind to second guess everything? Or anything?

I just pull aside the edge of a curtain and peek into the life (story) my characters are living as it unfolds.

For an instant, most of the time, the characters are all standing around on the stage amidst boom mikes and little rolling carts (one of which carries a coffee maker and a stack of Styrofoam cups and little blue and pink and yellow and white packets of sweetener but, strangely, no powdered, non-dairy creamer), and cameras and camera operators.

As they enjoy light conversation and cups of coffee, grips are coming and going, and various assistants with clipboards and microphone-equipped headsets (and elevated opinions of their importance) are moving about jerkily here and there as if looking for someone who (psst) *Doesn't actually exist.*

To one side, nestled among power and data cables strewn hither and yon across the stage floor, a director is slouched, probably drunk again and soundly asleep, in his folding chair.

Then one of the characters notices me in his periphery. He freezes a tiny bit, then turns away again, a little conspicuously, as if to convince me he's seen nothing. But he (slightly too stiffly) takes another sip and whispers beneath slightly raised eyebrows, "Don't look now, but that guy's back."

And the coffee cups and sweetener packets and the coffee maker and the little rolling carts and the cameras and camera operators and boom mics and grips and assistants disappear. The director might actually still be there, but if he is, who cares?

The characters flash into action and the vacuum sucks me onto the stage even as it's transforming into the next setting. And we—the characters and I—race through the strains of the story, them flashing through dialogue and from scene to scene and setting to setting and me doing my level best to keep up and Just Get It All Down.

Of course, I might have made all that up too, but I don't think so.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Humans to live on the moon by end of this decade” at <https://interestingengineering.com/science/humans-to-live-on-moon-nasa>.

See “Coming Clean” at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/coming-clean/>.

See “Negotiation Secrets for Writers” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/11/negotiation-secrets-for-writers.html>. Not about contracts.

See “When It Comes to TikTok, Authors Must Manage Their Expectations” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/when-it-comes-to-tiktok-authors-must-manage-their-expectations/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 770 words

Writing of *The Stirchians* (novel, tentative title)

Day 21... 2621 words. Total words to date..... 42178

Day 22... 5133 words. Total words to date..... 47309

Day 23... 1240 words. Total words to date..... 48549

Day 24... 4535 words. Total words to date..... 53084

Day 25... 2867 words. Total words to date..... 55951

Total fiction words for November..... 29842

Total fiction words for the year..... 191367

Total nonfiction words for November... 15470

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 191100

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 382467

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 2

Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 68

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: Because It Makes Sense, I preach trusting your characters to tell the story that they, not you, are living. Duh. This practice greatly increases your productivity and provides the fastest possible ascension along the learning curve of Craft because you get a great deal more practice at actually writing. This is not opinion. It is all numbers and facts.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [fiction](#), [Fiction Writers](#), [Lawrence Block](#)

November 23, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Welcome
- * Fear
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“A champion is afraid of losing. Everyone else is afraid of winning.” Billie Jean King

“In Heinlein's Rules, Product Focused writers have trouble with Rules #1,#2, and #3. Process Focused writers have a horrid time with Rules #4 and #5.” Dean Wesley Smith

Welcome

to my hometown friend Leslee E. and several other new subscribers since I started posting to Substack.

Fear

Most writers who are steeped in the myths are also mired in the fear of rejection. They are what Dean Wesley Smith called “product focused.”

It's “important” that everyone likes their novel, so they start with a carefully constructed outline. Then they write, then revise. They seek critical input, rewrite at least once (and often several times) and then do a final “polish,” whatever that means. And with each revision and each rewrite, the story gets farther and farther from the writer's unique, original voice.

Yes, of course every fiction writer, myself included, hopes millions of readers around the globe enjoys his or her stories. But the simple fact is, that's largely out of our control. All we can really do is write the best story we can at our current skill level and publish it. Everything else is up to the reader, as it should be.

But notice I said “WRITE” the best story we can. I didn't say you should hack your unique, original story to death with revisions and rewrites from your and others' critical minds. That is counter productive.

And frankly, the only people who get flustered and angry and yell at me when I say things like that are other writers who have nonfiction books for sale in which they propagate the myths. As Twain once wrote, “It's easier to fool people than it is to convince them they've been fooled.”

Years ago, when I was steeped in those same weary myths and mired in the same ridiculous fear, Dean Wesley Smith suggested I “turn the fear around.”

What does that mean?

It means, instead of being frightened of what might happen if you publish a story that’s less than “perfect,” be afraid of how you will feel if you don’t finish the story at all. That rang absolutely true to me.

The truth is, if you publish a story that’s less than perfect (in your opinion) it will be perfect in someone else’s opinion. If you trust your characters and write what they give you to the best of your current skill level, most people will like your story, a few will love it and a few will hate it. Nature of the business.

But no matter what, if you write a story to the best of your current ability and then publish it, there will be only good consequences:

1. You will feel better because you’ve accomplished something (written and finished another story).
2. You will have published another story.
3. Your inventory will have grown and your name will be more widespread.

And if someone doesn’t like your story, can you name even one bad consequence?

You can’t. Nobody will come to your house to beat you up. You won’t “ruin” your career. (If you think this way, you don’t have a career to ruin.) And nobody remembers the title or author of a story they didn’t like.

So believe in yourself. [Follow Heinlein’s Rules](#): Write. Finish. Do not rewrite. Publish. Start the next story.

I searched Dean’s site for variations on “turn the fear around,” but unfortunately I found nothing. Very odd. I was certain he talked about that very topic in a blog post in early 2014, but (shrug) what do I know?

Maybe it was an aside as he talked about his early days as a writer with his friend Nina Kiriki Hoffman. Or maybe it was part of his Heinlein’s Rules lecture, or one of the many workshops I took. I only know it was a life-changing concept for me.

I did find “Deadly Problems For Writers” at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/deadly-problems-for-writers/>. (His quote of the day above is taken from his response to my comment on that post.)

Ah. In his post on Chapter Four of his Heinlein’s Rules book, I found this passage where he’s talking about the Rules. (I reparagraphed it a little):

“Think of the rules this way: Rule #1... You Must Write. Not writing is failure. Rule #2... You Must Finish What You Write. Not finishing is failure.

“So if you are having fear issues, move the fear over to not writing and not finishing. ... The idea of not writing and not finishing what I write scares hell out of me.”

So there is is: Instead of succumbing to the fear of what might happen if you write or what might happen if you finish what you’re writing and are faced with submitting or publishing what you wrote, turn the fear around. Fear how you’ll feel if you don’t write or don’t finish or don’t submit or publish. That fear at least makes sense and it has real, negative consequences.

And yes, I also strongly recommend his book [*Heinlein’s Rules: Five Simple Business Rules for Writing*](#).

Finally, if you’re writing while suffering a chronic illness, I second Dean’s recommendation in “Of Interest” of Kris’ book, [*Writing With Chronic Illness*](#).

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Two Recommendations” at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/two-recommendations/>. I second his recommendation of Kris’ book.

See “The Last Furriers” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/the-last-furriers/>. See PG’s take.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 910 words

Writing of The Stirchians (novel, tentative title)

Day 21... 2621 words. Total words to date..... 42178

Day 22... 5133 words. Total words to date..... 47309

Day 23... 1240 words. Total words to date..... 48549

Day 24... 4535 words. Total words to date..... 53084

Day 25... 2867 words. Total words to date..... 55951

Day 26... 3825 words. Total words to date..... 59776

Total fiction words for November..... 33667

Total fiction words for the year..... 195192

Total nonfiction words for November... 16380

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 192010

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 387202

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date.....	2
Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date...	0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	68
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014).....	217
Short story collections.....	31

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Fear of Failure](#), [Heinlein's Rules](#), [Turning the Fear Around](#), [Unreasoning Fear](#), [Writing with Chronic Illness](#)

Happy Thanksgiving

November 24, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Happy Thanksgiving
- * It's All Substack
- * The Great Pretender (preview)
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“I’ve brought you something to wear over your dress and I do not want to hear your views on killing animals to provide coats for the wealthy. I have it on the best authority that these ermine committed suicide.” Ann Cristy

“In a meat-eating world, wearing leather for shoes and even clothes, the discussion of fur is childish.” Karl Lagerfeld

“You miss 100% of the shots you don’t take.” Wayne Gretzky

That last one is something to think about while you’re making excuses not to try trusting your characters and writing into the dark. Just sayin’.

Happy Thanksgiving

I hope you enjoy your Thanksgiving Day tradition today. And don’t forget to get some words down on your current story (or start a new one).

Writing fiction provides a great start to any day, and writing a little on a day like this sends a message to the creative subconscious and your characters just how important they really are to you.

It's All Substack

Since Substack can import previous posts (archives) from the Journal website via RSS, I sent them a note to ask whether they could also import and broadcast new posts via RSS.

So for example, I'd write my post per usual at <https://hestanbrough.com>. Then Substack would pick up that post via my RSS feed (the URL above plus “/feed/” appended after .com) but they said no, they don't currently have that ability.

I understand, of course, and in retrospect it was a silly question. Substack, like anyone else, is in business to make money. They do that by taking a percentage of the income substack writers earn from their paid newsletters.

No big deal. It's only one more step—maybe another five minutes—to copy/paste the Journal from hestanbrough.com to harveystanbrough.substack.com/.

So you'll still continue to receive the Journal in your email inbox, albeit the stripped-down version from Substack, or you can follow the Journal at it's home on hestanbrough.com.

The Great Pretender—a truly great song but a truly lousy professional. Coming soon. I don't want to go that negative on Thanksgiving day.

For now, here are two points to ponder:

If you're an aspiring or beginning writer (fewer than 50 or so short stories, fewer than 10 or 12 novels), check to be sure your would-be instructor is much farther along the road of craft than you are.

And if you haven't published a million words or so of fiction (or if you haven't bothered to write and publish any at all), you shouldn't be teaching aspiring or beginning writers how to write fiction. Or grocery lists for that matter.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Thanksgiving Holidays” at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/thanksgiving-holidays/>. A nice post.

See “Great Dialogue is the Art of the Unsaid” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/great-dialogue-is-the-art-of-the-unsaid/>. Right. Then why report dialogue at all? If this is true, let's go for perfection and leave it all unsaid.

Ugh, I probably shouldn't have posted that last link but some will find it useful. The title is one of those buzz-phrases, and it's pure, unadulterated BS. Great dialogue is dialogue that sounds like two or more real people interacting. Period. [Writing Realistic Dialogue & Flash Fiction](#)

The Numbers

The Journal..... 510 words

Writing of The Stirchians (novel, tentative title)

Day 21... 2621 words. Total words to date..... 42178

Day 22... 5133 words. Total words to date..... 47309

Day 23... 1240 words. Total words to date..... 48549

Day 24... 4535 words. Total words to date..... 53084

Day 25... 2867 words. Total words to date..... 55951

Day 26... 3825 words. Total words to date..... 59776

Day 27... 2710 words. Total words to date..... 62486

Total fiction words for November..... 36377

Total fiction words for the year..... 197902

Total nonfiction words for November... 16890

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 192520

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 390422

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 2

Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 68

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Thanksgiving](#), [Writing Dialogue](#)

The Novel

November 25, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * The Novel
- * New Goal
- * The Great Pretender
- * Of Interest

The Novel

A very happy Thanksgiving indeed. (grin)

The novel wrapped yesterday at 57,535 words after I cut just under 5,000 more words and wrote maybe a hundred words to wrap it.

But I thought it would be silly to add more “cuts” to the totals under Numbers and then try to figure out exactly how many new words I wrote to wrap the story, so instead I’m just reporting the final count here.

If you’re keeping score, I cut around 14,000 words out of this novel all told, but most of the 5000 words I cut yesterday will go into the next installment of the series.

The novel tally had reached 62,486 words, but on Wednesday afternoon the writing began to slow again, dramatically. I thought maybe I’d written past the end of a chapter, so I checked. Nope, that wasn’t it.

So I sat back and looked at the overall story from *The 13-Month Turn* forward. Still couldn’t find it. (If you’d like a FREE copy of *The 13-Month Turn*, email me at harvevstanbrough@gmail.com and let me know whether you want PDF, .epub or .mobi.)

Then a little light bulb went on. In a first, I read over the reverse outline for this novel. And that’s when I realized this particular novel was predominantly Rose’s story. I had indeed written past the end of it.

But I tested it to be sure. I removed three chapters from the reverse outline, which I first saved under a different file name, of course. And I immediately saw that this part of the story was finished.

The three chapter I removed will be included in the next installment of the series. (If you’re wondering, when I write that installment I won’t count those words again. I’ll just start with that particular word count—4951—instead of zero.)

Either way, I’ll write a novel or two (or more) in some other world(s) before I come back to write the third novel (and maybe the fourth) in this series.

I’ve said many times before that every novel writes differently. I hope I never have another one that writes the way this one did. Of course, a lot of that was based on the attitude I had when I started writing this one (it was “important”). I definitely won’t do that again.

New Goal

For the rest of this year, my goal is to write two more novels. That gives me 36 days, or 18 days per novel if you toss out one day. Should be plenty of time.

The Great Pretender—as I wrote briefly yesterday, this is a truly great song but a shameful profession.

I'm not talking about those poor souls who talk about writing fiction but never quite get around to it, those who have a great idea for a novel but haven't yet put a word on the page, and those who buy all the how-to-write books and follow writing blogs and attend writers' conferences but don't have a publication or an active manuscript they can actually show you.

Those folks are largely harmless except to themselves, and frankly, it's none of my business how they waste their time or money. I do hope they eventually find a way to just trust themselves. They aren't pretenders, at least not in the sense that they actively harm other writers' growth.

Here I'm talking about the harmful pretenders.

So maybe I'm talking a little about Stage 1 & 2 writers who hold forth regularly on the writing craft. Don't get me wrong. They know how to put words and punctuation on the screen by tapping keys on a keyboard. But they don't know Story yet, and they don't know how to convey one yet. Simply because they haven't practiced enough to experience that aha! moment.

Yet they profess to be storytellers, and through their mostly innocent ignorance they steer dozens or hundreds of other writers into mistakes they themselves have not yet found a way to escape. They need to stop teaching others a craft at which they're still beginners themselves, but I'm sure they won't.

But I'm mostly talking about those who don't write novels or short stories themselves, but who profess to be able to teach others how to write novels or short stories. As a copyeditor, I've been cleaning up after them for years.

You might be surprised at how vehemently a writer Who Actually Hired Me to Copyedit His/Her Work will defend some completely inane technique or word or phrase that some non fiction-writing "instructor" told him or her was the right way to do things.

There's a quote that perfectly explains the attitude: Twain's "Its easier to fool people than it is to convince them they've been fooled" is absolutely spot on.

But it isn't really so much about convincing them they've been fooled as explaining to them there's nothing to be embarrassed about. After all, most of us have been there. But if they want to improve as a fiction writer, they have to find a way to shake off the mushroom fodder the "instructor" fed them by the shovelful, pull up their big-person pants and get on with learning the writing craft *from people who actually write fiction for a living*.

I can't tell you how many times I've argued with well-meaning writers as I tried to correct their false perception of "show, don't tell" or "kill all your darlings" or "active voice" or "passive voice" or "deep POV" or "present tense is more immediate" and on and on and on.

False writing instructors use those and many other buzz-phrases because they sound good, and dutiful students nod and take notes and never think to ask the instructor, "Um, what does that mean specifically?"

Of course, no surprise there. Those students are the same ones who bought the how-to book or signed up for the lecture or workshop without bothering to even check Amazon to see whether their would-be teacher has ever written so much as a novel.

Folks, learning anything about writing fiction from those people is like learning to set the headspace and timing on an M2 .50 caliber heavy machine gun from a university professor who's never been in the military. It's like seeking legal advice from a plumber or plumbing advice from a lawyer. Basically, it's like a fish on a bicycle: it makes absolutely no sense.

But back to the buzz-phrase instructors: If they can't explain or refute (and explain why it should be refuted) all of the above and more, as I wrote yesterday they shouldn't be teaching anyone to write fiction, or even a grocery list. The guy will probably have you buying plastic grapes to garnish your supper.

Now, I understand at least a few writers who read this probably will be annoyed with me. To those, my apology. As always, do what you think is best. I can only sound the alarm.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "The Spectacular Life of Octavia Butler" at <https://www.vulture.com/article/octavia-e-butler-profile.html>. Apologies if you hit a paywall. My suggestion would be to pay the one dollar for a trial, read what you want (there are three more links in the article), then cancel.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1150 words

Writing of Santa Fe (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... XXXX words. Total words to date..... XXXXX

Total fiction words for November..... 36877

Total fiction words for the year..... 198402

Total nonfiction words for November... 18040

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 193670

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 392072

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date.....	2
Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date...	0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	68
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014).....	217
Short story collections.....	31

Disclaimer: In this blog I share my experiences, good and bad, as a prolific professional fiction writer. Because It Makes Sense, I trust my characters to tell the story that they, not I, are living. This greatly increases my productivity and provides the fastest possible ascension along the learning curve of Craft because I get a great deal more practice at actually writing.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Book Giveaway](#), [False Writing Instructors](#)

A New Wes Crowley Novel

November 26, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * A New Wes Crowley Novel
- * Adobe Walls
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“Life is like a 10-speed bicycle. Most of us have gears we never use.” Charles M. Schulz (Today is Schulz’ birthday.)

“Before I came here I was confused about this subject. Having listened to your lecture I am still confused. But on a higher level.” Enrico Fermi

A New Wes Crowley Novel

For my new novel, I’ve started another Wes Crowley story. For anyone who’s new to this Journal, my first novel was about Wes Crowley, a Texas Ranger back in the late 19th century. An orphan of abandonment, Wes started in the Texas panhandle and ended up 60-some years later in the fictional fishing village of Agua Perlado in the state of Guerrero, Mexico.

But between two of the novels in that 12-volume Wes Crowley Saga, there was a 16 year gap. And I kind’a missed Wes, so one day I started writing “Gap” novels to fill in that 16 years. I’ve written five so far.

And then a few days ago, I had an idea for another Wes novel. That's the one I started yesterday morning.

Santa Fe will be the 6th novel in the Gap series and the 18th Wes Crowley novel overall, but it will also be the first novel in the Santa Fe subseries if the series takes off the way I think it might. How cool is that? And even after the Santa Fe subseries ends, there probably will be more novels to write in the Gap series.

Adobe Walls

On a related note, I also posted another free short story yesterday, "Adobe Walls." I was in a Wes Crowley mood, and "Adobe Walls" is the very first story that started me on that road. It gave rise to the 17 Wes Crowley novels and several other short stories.

I've gotten a lot of positive feedback on that story. If you aren't on that list and you'd like to read the story, click <https://stanbroughwrites.substack.com/p/adobe-walls>.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Coming Out of a Fog" at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/coming-out-of-a-fog/>.

See "Alternative Book Review: Letter To A Protagonist" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/alternative-book-review-letter-to-a-protagonist/>. What a cool idea for a way to leave reviews!

See "More than half of young readers credit BookTok with sparking passion for reading" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/more-than-half-of-young-readers-credit-booktok-with-sparking-passion-for-reading/>.

See "No, Books Should Not Have Content Ratings Like Movies" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/no-books-should-not-have-content-ratings-like-movies/>. My knee-jerk response is why not? People who are frightened of such ratings often have a reason to be. But see PG's take.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 410 words

Writing of Santa Fe (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... 3877 words. Total words to date..... 3877

Total fiction words for November..... 40754

Total fiction words for the year..... 202279

Total nonfiction words for November... 18450
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 194080
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 396359

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 2
Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 68
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: In this blog I share my experiences, good and bad, as a prolific professional fiction writer. Because It Makes Sense, I trust my characters to tell the story that they, not I, are living. This greatly increases my productivity and provides the fastest possible ascension along the learning curve of Craft because I get a great deal more practice at actually writing.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Adobe Walls](#), [Book reviews](#), [BookTok](#), [Content ratings for books?](#), [Dean Wesley Smith](#), [Wes Crowley](#)

20Books Vegas 2022 and Other Stuff

November 27, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * 20Books Vegas 2022
- * Daily Word Counts
- * Favorite Writing Spots
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

“Between exhaustion from completing a readable draft of a novel on deadline and *the confusion caused by having too many critical voices in my head* (thanks, workshop), I didn't know where to begin, let alone how to get to The End of something.” Matthew Duffus (emphasis mine)

20Books Vegas 2022

For any of you who might be interested, the first video for the 2022 20Booksto50k conference in Las Vegas is up.

See “20Books Vegas 2022 Day 1 – Opening Ceremonies & High Powered Authors Panel” at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YHyiwwKlcD4>. The High Powered Authors Panel begins at about 26:00 minutes into the video.

If you look below the video on the left, someone posted a timeline there so you can see specific topics and times.

I also stumbled upon some other links I thought you might like. One is titled “14 Strategies for Indie Author Success,” though you might want to take it with a grain of salt as it’s posted on a site called IndieReader. I’m always skeptical of non-writers (even readers) presuming to teach writers how to be successful, but this particular post is written by Penny Sansevieri, the marketing guru behind Author Marketing Experts.

Daily Word Counts

There’s also a link to an interesting post titled “The Daily Word Counts of 19 Famous Writers.” Be prepared to be gagged by clichés though. The post is riddled with them.

Also understand that some of the numbers are averages and nothing else. Tom Wolfe’s daily word count is listed as 135. That has to be the average the author of the article came up with by dividing 370,000 words by 11 years.

The author also got the math wrong. By my calculator, writing 135 words per day and 365 days per year for 11 years will net the writer over 542,000 words. To write 370,000 words in that same time period requires only 92 words per day. Does any of this matter? Of course not. I seriously doubt any writer ever set a daily word count goal of 135 words. To hit that goal, you’d have to write for about 8 minutes. Ahh! What a sense of accomplishment! (grin)

According to the article (and to his book *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*) Stephen King, a highly prolific author, has a goal of 2000 words per day. That doesn’t sound like much, until you realize that’s actually 180,000 words in 3 months.

I’m not sure what to think about Ernest Hemingway’s supposed 500 words per day, considering that he wrote about six HOURS per day. That’s what, about 83 words per hour or 1.4 words per second? Makes my silly 17 words per minute seem like light speed.

I’ve always opted for setting my daily word count goal a little high (but still attainable), something that will make me stretch to stay in the chair a little longer. My daily goal is currently 3500 words, but lately I’ve seldom reached it and, frankly, I didn’t care.

For several years my daily goal was 3,000 words per day, and that seemed about right. Sometimes I shot far past it, but most times I was very close to it.

The point is, if you don’t want your goal to “stretch” you, that’s fine. There is value in setting a daily goal you can attain with relative ease. Then the real goal becomes attaining that word count every day and establishing a streak.

Favorite Writing Spots

There’s also a link to a post about favorite writing spots. Do you have a favorite writing spot?

Mine used to be the Hovel, an adobe mud building with thick walls and the atmosphere of a 19th century saloon in the Arizona Territory. Today I still write in the Hovel most of the time, but really I enjoy writing pretty much anyplace that's generally free of distractions. I often write in a surprisingly comfortable metal rocking chair just outside the back door of my house.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Fear Thesaurus Entry: Rejection" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/fear-thesaurus-entry-rejection/>. Not about writers, but writing.

See "Tips For Indie Author Success And 20 Books To 50K With Craig Martelle" at <https://www.thecreativepenn.com/2022/02/21/tips-for-indie-author-success/>.

See "14 Strategies for Indie Author Success" at <https://indiereader.com/2018/03/14-strategies-indie-author-success/>.

See "The Daily Word Counts of 19 Famous Writers" at https://wordcounter.net/blog/2017/12/04/103207_the-daily-word-counts-of-19-famous-writers.html.

See "8 Famous Authors and Their Favorite Writing Spots" at https://wordcounter.net/blog/2017/10/23/103161_8-famous-authors-and-their-favorite-writing-spots.html.

See "How to Get Back to Writing" at <https://www.janefriedman.com/how-to-get-back-to-writing/>. Note that the author, an MFA graduate, has written ONE novel, compiled ONE collection of short fiction and ONE poetry chapbook, and works as the Writing Center Director at Earlham College in Richmond Indiana. He also offers book coaching and editing services. Seriously?

The Numbers

The Journal..... 760 words

Writing of Santa Fe (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... 3877 words. Total words to date..... 3877

Day 2..... 3460 words. Total words to date..... 7337

Total fiction words for November..... 44214

Total fiction words for the year..... 205739

Total nonfiction words for November... 19210

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 194840

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 400579

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date.....	2
Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date...	0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	68
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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [20Booksto50K](#), [Daily Word Counts](#), [Fear Thesaurus](#)

What Matters, Picture Manager, and Publishing

November 28, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Does It Matter?
- * Microsoft Office Picture Manager
- * Publishing
- * Of Interest

Does It Matter? You Decide for You

After I posted the link in the last item in “Of Interest,” I wrote “See PG’s take.” You might also want to see my comment.

I can forgive PG his minor lack of grammar knowledge (since he is not a professional writer) but I wonder whether I should be asking him (and errant English teachers around the world) to forgive me for knowing something they don’t know?

What PG called “run-on” sentences were not run-on sentences at all. None of them. I corrected him, not to show him up or even to convince him, but only in case other writers were looking in.

I didn’t want them going away believing that the number of words that are strung together in a row is a factor in determining whether that group of words is a “run-on” sentence. Because it isn’t. (But I’m willing to bet many will disagree with me and cite Grammarly as their source.)

To me, it matters that writers study and learn grammar and syntax and the nuances of the language. After all, the language is their currency. I believe companies like Grammarly should be held legally and financially liable for spreading misinformation through ignorance in implying (as they did in an ad that I saw) that a run-on sentence is just a really long sentence.

But does it matter, really?

Sometimes I think we've entered an era during which purveyors of the soup sandwich will rule. Not that sloppiness will no longer matter officially, but that the definition of sloppy will be changed to suit those who mutter things like "Oh well, the reader will know what I mean."

When I see a person of PG's obvious intelligence labeling very long sentences "run-ons," my mind leaps ahead in human time to the era so aptly illustrated by the film *Idiocracy*.

Not that everyday citizens should necessarily know what a run-on sentence or a comma splice is, but surely professional writers should.

Shouldn't they?

As I noted earlier, my memory is already plagued with would-be professional fiction writers, to my disbelieving shock, dismissing my advice to tend to the nuances of the language with a wag of the hand and "Oh, the reader will know what I mean."

The fact is, the reader *might* well know what they mean. The reader might also snort, toss the book into the *Donate to the Friends of the Library* pile and find something else to read.

As is the case with so many issues today, I suppose it all boils down to pride in one's self as a craftsperson. Being professional, to me, means knowing the tools of your trade intimately. Knowing things about them and ways to use them that those who are not involved in the craft do not know.

After all, the only job of those who are not directly involved in the craft is to like something or not. They aren't required to know why. Why they like something is the magic wielded by the craftsperson.

Microsoft Office Picture Manager

Remember this nifty little tool? After Microsoft Office 2010, Microsoft stopped including it in the Office package. I've often had two different versions of Office on my computer just so I could access this invaluable tool.

Well, I've found a way to install it as a stand-alone app. If you have Office 2013 or 365 or anything newer and you miss Picture Manager, click <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l5NV79nNbkc> for instructions on how to download and install it. I suggest listening to the entire video once before starting, but the video is less than 4 minutes long.

Publishing

Wow. As I was about to turn my chair around to face my writing desk yesterday (about 7:20 a.m.) I noticed the PDF file my first reader had sent me with his feedback on my novel, *Carmen Morales*, the fifth novel in the Wes Crowley Gap series.

I hadn't applied his notes, created a cover or a promo doc, or published *Carmen Morales* yet. It just completely slipped my mind.

So I did that. Creating the cover took all of 10 minutes, if that long. Creating the promo doc took considerably longer since that was a complicated book with a lot of stories, twists and turns. And then trying to remember how to publish it took almost as long. (I really, really, *really* screwed up when I stopped smoking cigars.)

Finally, an hour and a half later, I'd published the book to both Draft2Digital and Amazon.

Of course, Amazon's made some of those MBA changes since I last used it. You know what I mean, right? Completely senseless changes made by newly hired MBAs?

The changes don't enhance the user experience At All and tend only to confuse things really, but they do at least justify the MBA's employment. Or at least that seems to be what the new MBAs, and apparently their supervisors, believe.

It's kind of the same as how brand new baby Walmart managers change the location of items in the store every week or so to keep in practice, or to keep customers on their toes, or whatever. But I digress.

The point is, it took me an hour and a half to publish that little novel, and that was just to D2D and Amazon. Then I remembered I needed to add it to my publisher site at StoneThreadPublishing.com. That was a whole other rabbit hole. Being a one-man show isn't nearly as glamorous as it probably seems. (Yes, I'm joking.)

I created [*a new page for the book*](#) then added the book in the right sequence to the Westerns and the Wes Crowley Saga page. That took almost two more hours.

I didn't publish the novel to Smashwords, and I might not. The interface is far too clunky and time-consuming, and the sales venues, though there are a dozen or so, don't add up to more than a few sales per year for me, if that. Not enough to justify the hassle of dealing with the clunky interface.

Anyway, my point is, I pretty much have to publish *The Stirchians: Rose's Story* once I get it back from Russ. (There are folks waiting for it.) But after that I might just put a hiatus on publishing anything else until I get in the mood to publish a lot of them at once, if at all.

I've always been bad at staying on Heinlein's Rule 4. I really just want to write and tell as many stories as I can. Then, if my heirs want to make any money on my labors, they can figure out how to publish what's left and market the rest.

From what I keep hearing, marketing books and licensing intellectual property really isn't that difficult if you have the right mindset (business). And I don't mind them making the big bucks. I've had the joy of being the very first person ever to hear the stories. For me at least, it doesn't get any better than that.

After all of that, for some reason I schlepped over to the new website at harveystanbroughwrites.com and started working on the Reading Order for Novels page. Whew! That's gonna take awhile. Anyway, all I could think of was all the new words I could be putting on the page.

Then as I ate lunch, I came back over here and wrote this. I finally got to the novel at noon.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "The World's Most Beautiful—and Cheapest—Beach Towns for Expats" at <https://www.thrillist.com/travel/nation/cheapest-beach-cities-to-live-in-world>. If I were a younger man, I'd be gone in a heartbeat.

See "Amazing Power" at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/amazing-power/>.

See "A Case for the Midlist" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/a-case-for-the-midlist/>. See PG's take.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1290 words

Writing of Santa Fe (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... 3877 words. Total words to date..... 3877

Day 2..... 3460 words. Total words to date..... 7337

Day 3..... 2011 words. Total words to date..... 9348

Total fiction words for November..... 46225

Total fiction words for the year..... 207750

Total nonfiction words for November... 20500

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 196130

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 403880

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 2

Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 68

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: In this blog I share my experiences, good and bad, as a prolific professional fiction writer. Because It Makes Sense, I trust my characters to tell the story that they, not I, are living. This greatly increases my productivity and provides the fastest possible ascension along the learning curve of Craft because I get a great deal more practice at actually writing.

An Email, and You Who Disagree

November 29, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * An Email
- * You Who Disagree, I Understand
- * Of Interest

An Email

I recently received an email from an instructor at the Star Fall Arts Center thanking me for one category of my writer resources at harveystanbrough.com. Then she asked me to list another resource there. She provided the link and said it “covers everything from inspiration and outlining all the way to editing and proofreading.”

It was one of those unbelievably comic moments during which, had it happened face to face, I might have put my palm on her forehead and said, “Um, have you MET me?” (grin)

Anyway, I thought my response would make a good Journal entry. Here it is:

“Thanks, and thank your students, but no, I won’t add that resource to my website. Unfortunately, writers can find information on those writing myths—and they are myths—literally everywhere. I do not propagate the myths.

“I am a successful and very prolific professional fiction writer. I also get a great deal more practice at actually writing than most do. I have written and published 69 novels, 8 novellas, and well over 200 short stories. I write because there is no greater fun than watching my characters’ stories unfold.

“In my own blog for writers (see <https://hestanbrough.com> or see <https://harveystanbrough.substack.com/>) I teach writers (young and old, beginner and advanced) to trust the characters to tell the story that they, not the writer, are living. This is how most prolific, long-term professional writers write. Unfortunately, most writers come to this knowledge late because so many people are making so much money propagating the myths.

“If you want to give your students the best possible gift for anyone who is serious about writing fiction, give them my free archives. You can download those at <https://hestanbrough.com/the-daily-journal-archives/>.

“I also recommend my books, [Writing the Character-Driven Story](#) and [Quiet the Critical Voice \(and Write Fiction\)](#), and Dean Wesley Smith’s book [Writing Into the Dark](#).

“Seriously, if I thought it was necessary to outline, revise, rewrite, get input from critique groups (none of which is writing), etc. ad nauseam, I wouldn’t write at all. I would go fishing or find something else fun to do.”

Yes, You Who Disagree, I Understand

I’m not stupid. I realize I’m beating my head against a wall.

To say that one who teaches writing into the dark might experience a little pushback is like saying that one who stands in the path of a tidal wave might experience a little moisture. Wave over wave have been crashing over me for over eight years. Constantly. No let up. And always from “experts” who have written far fewer stories than I have. And most of their stories were polished to imperfection.

Writers for whom I was hopeful have come and gone. Most of them drifted away in that same sea, tugged away by the prevailing current (probably in accordance with some Great Outline).

I’ve even lost some writers whom I tutored personally, probably because I said something they didn’t like or said it in a way they didn’t like. That’s the world we live in. Many folks spend whole days queued, waiting to hop on the I’m Offended ride.

Of course, if that’s how they want to spend their life, it’s fine with me. I generally just tug my hat a little lower, flip up the collar of my jacket, and creep past them as quietly as possible. Believe it or not, I’m actually a very quiet person when I don’t have something original to say, and especially when traversing territory that might be landscaped with ambushes.

And yes, I realize if I talk a Zen-like letting go and having fun to 1000 would-be writers I might get through to 10. And chances are, 6 or 8 of those will succumb to fear and revert to the myths later. And no wonder. It’s comfortable there. You don’t get anything done, but at least you fail in comfort. And hey, if you and your critique group and your book doctors can turn out two novels a year, you’ll be hailed as being prolific. (grin)

Anyway, I do this only because nobody else does, at least with any regularity. Plus I’m an anti-control freak. I hate seeing people fall into lockstep, follow the crowd, and then wonder why writing seems like such hard work.

Face it: The crowd seems never to be going anywhere good or fun. But the herders make it sound like fun until the edge of the cliff suddenly appears.

But I do understand. At least those in the crowd get to go *with* the flow rather than struggling against it. Ugh.

I can't tell you how tempting it is to stop talking about writing altogether. If I don't talk about writing, I don't have to listen to and feel a need to refute all the BS, which the speaker ironically utters just as if it's a brand new sparkingly original thought. And people believe it. Sigh.

Maybe it should be a little satisfying (but it isn't) to know that most of those who keep spreading the BS aren't even aware it's BS.

They've been conditioned, inundated with the myths year after year after year by teachers in public school and university and in TV shows and films and commercials and everyday life, etc. until finally, any alternative to writing a novel by committee is too frightening a prospect to even attempt.

What's really disheartening to me is that all those poor, trusting souls have been taught what they *can't* do.

They've been taught that something as simple as telling a story is beyond their capability unless they carefully outline it first, then revise it, then invite others to provide their opinions on how they would have done it, then rewrite, etc.

How horrible is that?

They're innocents, stuck in the middle of a minnow flow that's being herded by sharks who value them only as a food source. As long as they keep buying how-to books and visiting blogs that propagate the myths, the how-to books and regurgitated advice will keep coming.

I've been talking about writing for a long time, offering a freeing, Zen-like alternative that somehow makes writers suspicious and even cautious. And in their ignorance, proponents of the myths use outright lies, half-truths and innuendo ("I could write into the dark, but I prefer to turn out *quality* fiction"), not to *refute* what I teach, but to keep others from even *trying* it!

Figure that one out. What are they afraid of? I mean, other than admitting they've been fooled or fearing that their non-fiction book sales will fall off precipitously. There are no other reasonable explanations.

But it doesn't matter. Well over 99% of those would-be fiction writer hopefuls who follow the myths will quit and move on to other opportunities within the first year or so. And good for them.

Soon, I think, it will be time for me to shut my pie hole and recede into the sensible world populated by my characters. I suspect I'll at least fill out the rest of this year. I would want the archives to be complete.

But the fact is, I'm powerless to help those who don't want to be helped, and I've already laid out the path to success as a fiction writer for those who want it. They only have to let go, trust themselves and their characters more than they trust the collection of critical minds that is a critique group, and write.

The Journal archives will always be there, of course (including for 2022 early in the new year), as will my own few how-to books. The only real difference will be that I won't be on the sideline nagging. Those who can summon the requisite courage will simply pull up their big-person pants and actually try writing into the dark—hey, even if only to disprove it.

Be a skeptic, by all means. I'm fine with that. After all, that's all I did back in mid-April 2014.

Then again, meh, WITD probably doesn't work anyway. Probably those 70 novels, 8 novellas and over 220 short stories were a fluke.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "A Writing and Health Tip" at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/a-writing-and-health-tip/>.

See "Misjudging A Book By Its Cover, Getting Back In The Saddle, And In Praise of Bad Writing" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/11/misjudging-a-book-by-its-covergetting-back-in-the-saddleand-in-praise-of-bad-writing.html>. Strictly for fun.

See "Amazon Advertising Strategies" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/amazon-advertising-strategies/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1290 words

Writing of Santa Fe (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... 3877 words. Total words to date..... 3877
Day 2..... 3460 words. Total words to date..... 7337
Day 3..... 2011 words. Total words to date..... 9348
Day 4..... 1050 words. Total words to date..... 10398

Total fiction words for November..... 47275
Total fiction words for the year..... 208800
Total nonfiction words for November... 21830
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 197460
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 406260

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date.....	2
Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date...	0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	68
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Writing Into the Dark](#)

Recommendations

November 30, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Recommendations
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“The World Health Organization announced yesterday it would begin referring to the monkeypox virus as ‘mpox,’ the result of a six-month effort to find a nondiscriminatory alternative to avoid stigma. ... [C]ritics argue mitigation efforts were hampered by false stereotypes associating the virus with Africa and primates.” from the news source 1440https://join1440.com/ (Sigh. You really can't make this stuff up.)

“Truth is incontrovertible. Panic may resent it. Ignorance may deride it. Malice may distort it. But there it is.” Winston Churchill

Recommendations

I've made these recommendations before, but in light of having several newer readers to the Journal, I thought I should mention them again.

Every morning I check [DeanWesleySmith.com](#). More and more often, there's little or nothing to see there regarding the craft of writing, so my visit is usually only for a few seconds.

If you want to learn a ton about writing in relatively short order, go back to January 2014 and start reading his posts every day. Then put what you learn into practice.

Often you will not believe that what he suggests is actually possible, or you will believe it's only possible after you've gained a lot of experience. But if you test it, you will find that you were wrong, as I did. And you will be truly happy as a fiction writer for maybe the first time in your life.

Every morning I check [the KillZone blog](#). These days, the Stage 2 and early Stage 3 authors there are so steeped in the myths I seldom read past the first paragraph, but every now and then one drops a gem. If I didn't write the Journal, I wouldn't visit TKZ blog at all, but some of you might find it of value.

And every morning I check [The Passive Voice](#). There you will find a potpourri of posts on writing, publishing and marketing that are of interest to fiction writers.

Be on your guard. TPV is well worth visiting, but it is a minefield in which valuable, informative posts are mixed with posts that propagate the myths. But if you didn't know the difference you probably wouldn't be reading this.

Crime writer Sue Colletta offers a blog that is particularly useful for writers of crime, mystery, and other genres. You can subscribe to her infrequent posts. Visit <https://www.suecolletta.com/murder-blog/>.

And Garry Rodgers, a true-crime and fiction writer as well as a retired Mountie and coroner, offers the Dying Words blog at <http://dyingwords.net/>.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention (again) the archives for this Journal. They're free, and I can only wish I'd had such a resource when I was first starting out. Clicking <https://hestanbrough.com/the-daily-journal-archives/> will lead you to a page with 7 links on it. (In early January 2023, there will be 8 links after I post the archives for 2022.)

Clicking any of those links will automatically download a PDF document to your computer. The archive is completely searchable and is probably the most valuable resource on this page.

Finally, I strongly recommend you [browse my writer website](#) and check the Downloads for Writers and Resources for Writers tab. You might want to visit the bathroom first and have your favorite beverage on hand. This will take awhile.

Most of the links you click on the Resources for Writers tab will lead you to other pages filled with even more links. You could easily spend 8 hours per day for a week and not see everything.

If the Journal doesn't appear for the next day or two, it's all right. I'm testing a new schedule.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Converting Direct Speech into Reported Speech” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/converting-direct-speech-into-reported-speech/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 620 words

Writing of Santa Fe (novel, tentative title)

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Day 2..... 3460 words. Total words to date..... 7337
Day 3..... 2011 words. Total words to date..... 9348
Day 4..... 1050 words. Total words to date..... 10398
Day 5..... 3673 words. Total words to date..... 14071

Total fiction words for November..... 50948
Total fiction words for the year..... 212473
Total nonfiction words for November... 22450
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 198080
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 410553

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 2
Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0
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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Recommendations](#)

A Good Question, and Punctuation

December 1, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * A Good Question
- * Punctuation
- * Of Interest

A Good Question

In a comment on “An Email, and You Who Disagree,” Chynna P wrote “[D]oes this mean you’ll stop writing the Journal soon?”

I doubt many read the comments, so I thought I’d respond in today’s edition of the Journal. (I hadn’t planned to post an edition today at all.)

First, thanks to Chynna for the question. She read the post correctly, but the answer is, I honestly don’t know.

I’m not getting any younger, and I’d really rather fashion an intentional end to my contribution in the Journal than just disappear one day.

Also, I feel like I’ve passed along pretty much everything anyone needs to completely change his or her life as a writer and to become a prolific professional writer. In the Journal over the past 8+ years I’ve freely donated all the tools you need. Whether or not I continue with the Journal, everything in your writing life really is up to you.

Those who want to have fun telling stories and enjoy writing fiction will at least try WITD, and those who would rather “suffer for their art” blah blah blah won’t.

Difficult as it is for some to believe, becoming a prolific professional fiction writer really is simple:

1. Trust what you’ve learned consciously over the years from school and subconsciously from TV, movies, reading others’ fiction, etc.
2. Trust your characters to tell the story that they, not you, are living. And
3. Do your best to follow [Heinlein’s Rules](#) 1-4. (Rule 5 really is a no-brainer, isn’t it? Once it’s published, don’t take it down. Duh.)

In other words, just let go and write. It most definitely does NOT take a village.

One other note—many (I assume and hope) are taking advantage of my free, downloadable, searchable Journal Archives. If you don’t have them yet, you can find them at <https://hestanbrough.com/the-daily-journal-archives/>.

When you’re in the mood to learn, for more craft- and publishing-related posts you might also want to visit <https://harveystanbrough.com/category/pro-writers/>. This is not something I’ve talked a lot about.

Some of the posts aren’t relevant (book giveaways, posts about Dean’s sales, etc.) but most of them are about craft. And remember that if you’re looking for a particular topic (setting, characters, five senses, etc.) you can key that into the Search box in the sidebar.

I hope to go through those posts myself soon and create another searchable PDF archive that you can download free, but I suggest you shouldn't wait for me to do that.

With just a little effort you can learn a great deal of information at no cost. Between the craft posts in the Pro Writers category over there and the Journal archives here, you pretty much have access to a free masters' program in writing fiction.

And trust me, when you finish and If You Apply What You Learn, you will know a great deal more about writing fiction than the average MFA graduate knows.

By the way, I'm testing a new personal schedule at the moment, so I might not post here for a few days. But if I decide to wrap the Journal or radically change the publication schedule (e.g., drop back to posting weekly or less often instead of daily), that probably won't happen until at least the end of the year.

Punctuation

PG noted that one commenter on a post in The Passive Voice wrote that "English punctuation is a mess."

I agree, but that's because in school—even in creative writing classes—we're taught to REACT to punctuation as readers, not to wield it as a tool to direct the reading of our work. If you think about it, you know that's true.

If you want the only book that teaches punctuation as something to actively use instead of something to decipher and fear, pick up a copy of *Punctuation for Writers*, second edition. You can read about it or buy it at <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B00466H138>.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Albert Einstein – Imagination For Writers and Other Good Stuff" at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/12/albert-einstein-imagination-for-writers-and-other-good-stuff.html>.

See "And don't start sentences with a conjunction." at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/and-dont-start-sentences-with-a-conjunction/>. Frankly, this is stupid. You can't start a sentence with a conjunction. You can start a sentence FRAGMENT with a conjunction, and in fiction sometimes that's exactly the right thing to do. Because That's How People Speak.

See "Coordinating vs. Subordinating Conjunctions" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/auto-draftcoordinating-vs-subordinating-conjunctionsauto-draft/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 730 words

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Day 3..... 2011 words. Total words to date..... 9348
Day 4..... 1050 words. Total words to date..... 10398
Day 5..... 3673 words. Total words to date..... 14071
Day 6..... 2501 words. Total words to date..... 16572

Total fiction words for November..... 53449
Total fiction words for the year..... 214974
Total nonfiction words for December... 730
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 198810
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 413784

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 2
Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0
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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Craft of Writing](#), [HarveyStanbrough.com](#), [Heinlein's Rules](#), [Pro Writers Blog](#), [punctuation](#), [Writing Into the Dark](#)

The Sentence

December 2, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * The Sentence
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

“Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”
James Baldwin (the original quote)

Confused much? Here’s a translation into active voice:

“You can’t change every problem you face, but you can’t change any that you don’t face.” James Baldwin (paraphrased into active voice)

The Sentence

I really didn’t expect to post this. I looked up and there it was. I’m reminded of a line uttered by Pacino (as Michael Corleone) during a scene in Godfather III: “Just when I think I’m out...”

I enjoyed a tongue-in-cheek “argument” yesterday with another commenter on a post on The Passive Voice. You might like it.

To begin, see my comment at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/and-dont-start-sentences-with-a-conjunction/#comment-467129>.

Then see Mr. Hershberger’s response just below that, and then my blog-post length final retort.

Barring a discussion of “the sentence vs. the period sentence,” in the past I might have asked, “Can anyone refute the definition of the sentence?” It’s such a simple concept, I wouldn’t have thought so.

But today, as with almost all other topics, I would have to ask, “Can anyone REASONABLY refute the definition of the sentence?”

Then again—and again as with almost all other topics in this topsy-turvy, me-me-me new world—it really doesn’t matter as long as a basic understanding is there.

But really, we can leave spats over whether or not a particular grouping of words is a sentence to people who enjoy employing one-upsmanship and those who enjoy slapping them down. For fiction writers, if a thought is complete In Context, that’s good enough. We’re going for Story, not Typing.

I didn’t write yesterday.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Thinking About Next Year” at <https://deanwesleymith.com/thinking-about-next-year/>.

See “10 English slang terms you need to know in 2022” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/10-english-slang-terms-you-need-to-know-in-2022/>. I don’t like other people presuming to know

what I “need.” Anyway, unless we’re writing something that includes a Brit character, I’m not sure why we “need” to know these, but whatever.

See “9 British slang words you need to know” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/9-british-slang-words-you-need-to-know/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 340 words

Writing of Santa Fe (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... 3877 words. Total words to date..... 3877
Day 2..... 3460 words. Total words to date..... 7337
Day 3..... 2011 words. Total words to date..... 9348
Day 4..... 1050 words. Total words to date..... 10398
Day 5..... 3673 words. Total words to date..... 14071
Day 6..... 2501 words. Total words to date..... 16572
Day 7..... XXXX words. Total words to date..... XXXXX

Total fiction words for December..... XXXX
Total fiction words for the year..... 214974
Total nonfiction words for December... 1070
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 199150
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 414124

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 2
Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 68
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: In this blog I have shared my experiences, good and bad, as a prolific professional fiction writer. Because It Makes Sense, I trust my characters to tell the story that they, not I, are living. This greatly increases my productivity and provides the fastest possible ascension along the learning curve of Craft because I get a great deal more practice at actually writing.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [The Sentence](#)

Setting Goals and Challenges

December 3, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today’s Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * A New Short Story
- * Setting Goals and Challenges
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

“The electric guitar. A vast improvement over the gas and steam-powered guitars of the past.”
James Taylor to the audience as he strapped on a Fender solid body electric guitar

A New Short Story

I posted a new short story yesterday and have received several kind comments on it. Possibly because it's so weird. You can read it at <https://harveystanbroughwrites.com/category/short-story-of-the-week/>.

If you'd rather not miss a story, you should be able to subscribe at <https://stanbroughwrites.substack.com/>. If that doesn't work and you want to subscribe, email me.

Setting Goals and Challenges

As Dean noted yesterday, it's that time of year, a great time to begin thinking about your goals and challenges for next year. I'm going to go ahead and set mine today. I'm not so influenced by particular dates on a calendar as I am by the knowledge that A New (Day/Week/Month/Decade)Year Starts In Every Moment.

First, remember that goals and challenges are not the same thing as dreams. We all dream of our latest novel being a bestseller, or—dare I say it—even being #1 in our genre on Amazon. Hey, somebody's gotta be #1. Might as well be you.

But how many people actually buy a copy of your masterpiece is a dream, meaning it's not something that's within your control.

You can influence achieving your dream of having a bestseller somewhat by building an email list and doing all those other businessy things, but you can't simply decide who (or how many Whos) will buy your book.

That's the difference between dreams on one hand and goals or challenges on the other. Dreams are nice-to-haves that, though you can influence them, are not within your control. So go ahead and have dreams, even strive to make them a reality, but don't beat yourself up when they don't come true. It's not up to you.

Goals and challenges, on the other hand, are completely within your control, barring any emergencies.

(Wow. I started to write “unforeseen” emergencies, but if you see it coming and do nothing to avert it, that’s more of a result than an emergency, don’t you think?)

Then again, we live in The United States of America, where Personal Responsibility crept out through the bedroom window of Self-Reliance and slouched out of town on the midnight train to Nowhere sometime in the late 1960s. And yes, I got the memo, but I balled it up and tossed it into the round file with all the other ridiculous notions that have come down the sluice ever since. But I digress.)

For me a goal is something to strive for that, if I reach it, causes me to feel a sense of accomplishment. It’s a realistic daily word count that, if I want to reach it, forces me to stay in the chair and keep writing a little longer every day.

A challenge (again, for me) is the same thing but with a streak involved. My daily word count goal is 3500 words of publishable fiction per day. That’s actually a little high for me. I often flirt with it without quite reaching it, fall short of it quite often, and surpass it every now and then.

My Daily Word Count Goal—I’ve actually thought about not using a daily word count goal at all. After all, at this point me showing up and writing is pretty much automatic.

But I would feel naked without a daily goal, and even I don’t want to see that. So instead of doing away with it completely, effective today, I’m reducing my daily goal back to 3000 words per day, my long-term standard.

Doesn’t matter all that much, except I get to reach it a little more often. Like when your mom walks past your chair and drapes a towel fresh out of the dryer over you, it’s just more comfy.

If you do the math, you’ll find my average word count for my current novel over the 7 writing days alone is around 2945 wpd. Over the 8 calendar days, it’s below 2600 wpd. And in this profession, if you want to be prolific, the mean average is what matters.

My challenge—days off annoy me. Um, who needs a day off from having fun? Seriously, ask anyone.

So to sweeten the pot, although I just lowered my daily word count goal back to the more reasonable (for me) 3000 words per day, I’m also adding a challenge, also effective today.

I will write at least 2000 words of publishable fiction per day, every day. That’s an hour and a half to two hours a day, and frankly (or fredly, or marionly or alisonly etc.) if I can’t find a couple hours per day—in 15-minute increments if necessary—to write fiction, exactly why do I call myself a fiction writer again?

Full disclosure, I got the idea for my challenge from Dean Wesley Smith, a challenge he set for himself a year ago, and the disastrous results.

One of his 2022 challenges was to write a short story every day. Period. Every day. Well, but that would never have involved a streak, because he built-in days off and catching up, both of which are negative connotations, and both of which are self-destructive “outs.”

Had he chosen to write a short-story length number of words per day (say 2000?) but hadn't limited himself to putting all of those words in short stories, I have a feeling he not only would have been successful, but he might have carried the same challenge through into the new year, or maybe even bumped it up a bit.

So there you go. Beginning today, my daily goal is 3000 words of publishable fiction per day, and beginning today, my minimum word count is 2000 words per day. No days off, because that's just silly.

Of course, the oldest and probably most basic fact of life remains: shtuff happens. If an emergency happens or if a result happens because I was unable to avert it, I might take a day off. No excuses. A day off will end the streak, but that doesn't mean I can't start a new streak when I emerge from the smoke and rubble.

Bigger goals—I can hear some of you thinking (not really, but that's what everybody says) *Wull, whut about thangs like the number 'a novels you aim t'write durin' the year an' stuff like that there?*

Honestly? I'm not worried about it. If I hit even my 2000 wpd challenge every day all year, that's 730,000 words of publishable fiction. That would be 7 100,000+ word novels, or a dozen of my more usual 60,000 word novels.

If I hit my daily goal of 3000 wpd, that's a whole other deal: 1,095,000 words of publishable fiction. That's just under 11 100,000 word novels or slightly over 18 60,000 word novels.

See what you can accomplish if you just set a daily word count goal and stick to it?

To write 18 novels in 12 months I'd have to write one every 20 days. That is completely doable. To round it up to 20 novels in 12 months I'd have to write one every 18 days. Again, if you look at my output during the first 7 months of 2021 (13 novels), this is completely doable.

So I'm not setting a number-of-novels goal. No pressure. I just wanna have fun playing with my characters and putting new words on the page. I wish and hope the same for you.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “On the Gift of Longhand” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/on-the-gift-of-longhand/>. Especially for PG's take. Primarily because of damage incurred by the formation of my “pencil bump,” I literally can't write more than a few words, printed or in cursive, without my right hand cramping into a claw. However, I don't miss it.

See “Map of the universe lets you journey through space-time” at <https://www.space.com/interactive-universe-map-back-to-big-bang>. Human hubris never ceases to amaze me.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1320 words

Writing of Santa Fe (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... 3877 words. Total words to date..... 3877
Day 2..... 3460 words. Total words to date..... 7337
Day 3..... 2011 words. Total words to date..... 9348
Day 4..... 1050 words. Total words to date..... 10398
Day 5..... 3673 words. Total words to date..... 14071
Day 6..... 2501 words. Total words to date..... 16572
Day 7..... 4046 words. Total words to date..... 20618

Total fiction words for December..... 4046
Total fiction words for the year..... 219020
Total nonfiction words for December... 2390
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 200470
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 419490

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 2
Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 68
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: In this blog I share my experiences, good and bad, as a prolific professional fiction writer. Because It Makes Sense, I trust my characters to tell the story that they, not I, are living. This greatly increases my productivity and provides the fastest possible ascension along the learning curve of Craft because I get a great deal more practice at actually writing.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Dreams](#), [Setting Goals and Challenges](#)

Blurbs, Numbers, and Thanks

December 4, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Corrected Numbers
- * Blurbs
- * Thanks
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“When you write, just write. Then get feedback and work on improving your craft.” James Scott Bell

“Excellent. Perfect advice. I’d make only two tiny additions: ‘When you write, just write. Then [publish,] get feedback and [write the next story or novel to] work on improving your craft.’”
Harvey Stanbrough

Corrected Numbers

I just realized as I was wrapping up my writing yesterday that I didn’t update my novel counts under Numbers when I finished my previous novel. I’ve since corrected that oversight.

With the completion of *The Stirchians: Rose’s Story* on November 24, that made my third novel finished this year and my 69th overall.

I think it’s very cool that a Wes Crowley novel will be my 70th overall, especially since my novel-writing career started with Wes Crowley. It’s been one hell of a fun ride thus far.

Blurbs

There’s a link in “Of Interest” to a post about writing blurbs. To me a blurb is something good about your book from another author, preferably an author of stories that are similar to yours.

And blurbs, especially from other authors, are important. (I no longer write them, so please don’t ask.)

But I do write sales copy (which some call blurbs) for my own books. The ability to write great fiction does not necessarily lend itself to being able to write even adequate sales copy. Sales copy is nonfiction and enticing, and it’s a whole other animal.

If you want to increase sales of your books and stories, you have to learn how to write good sales copy.

And if you want to learn how to write good sales copy, you really REALLY need to buy Dean Wesley Smith’s book *How to Write Fiction Sales Copy*.

I strongly recommend paying \$10 for the paper edition (<https://www.amazon.com/dp/1561466476/>), but you can pay \$6 for the Kindle edition instead (<https://www.amazon.com/B0178MQVX2/>).

There you go. Everything you need to know about writing effective sales copy.

Thanks

My sincere thanks to my friend and fellow professional fiction writer, Robert J. Sadler. In his most recent post, “Prolificity,” he reprinted my post from November 29. I appreciate that a great deal.

To check out Robert’s blog and his other topics visit <https://www.robertjsadler.com/blog-1>.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “In Praise of the Worker-Owned Company...” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/in-praise-of-the-worker-owned-company-or-what-to-do-about-simon-and-schuster/>. God I’m glad I’m no longer traditionally published. See PG’s take.

See “On Writing Blurb Your Enthusiasm: An A-Z of Literary Persuasion” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/on-writing-blurb-your-enthusiasm-an-a-z-of-literary-persuasion/>. Blurbs, especially from other authors, are important. I no longer write them, but I do write sales copy (which some call blurbs) for my own books.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 450 words

Writing of Santa Fe (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... 3877 words. Total words to date..... 3877
Day 2..... 3460 words. Total words to date..... 7337
Day 3..... 2011 words. Total words to date..... 9348
Day 4..... 1050 words. Total words to date..... 10398
Day 5..... 3673 words. Total words to date..... 14071
Day 6..... 2501 words. Total words to date..... 16572
Day 7..... 4046 words. Total words to date..... 20618
Day 8..... 2273 words. Total words to date..... 22891

Total fiction words for December..... 6319

Total fiction words for the year..... 221293

Total nonfiction words for December... 2840

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 200920
 Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 422213

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 3
 Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0
 Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0
 Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 69
 Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
 Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
 Short story collections..... 31

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Blurbs](#), [Sales Copy](#), [Writing Fiction Sales Copy](#)

Timing Apps

December 5, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Timing Apps
- * Of Interest

Timing Apps

According to the comment of a writing friend on one of DWS's posts, she uses a free writing app called Be Focused. It enables you to "set intervals for the time you want to write, and ... an interval for the break."

Not my cuppa, but every writer is different. Some of you might need or want this app or a similar one. Whatever works.

Be Focuses has helped my friend "consistently write 2000 words per day" with four write/break intervals set (in minutes) at 25/15, 25/45, 25/15, 25/15. She writes "about 500 words each 25-minute interval."

Apparently this app is based on something called the Pomodoro Technique. So I assume if you're interested you might search for "Pomodoro Apps."

While I was looking to see where you might get this particular app if you want it, I ran across this:

“The Pomodoro Technique is a time management method based on 25-minute stretches of focused work broken by five-minute breaks. Longer breaks, typically 15 to 30 minutes, are taken after four consecutive work intervals. Each work interval is called a pomodoro, the Italian word for tomato (plural: pomodori).”

You can read a review of Be Focused at <https://www.educationalappstore.com/app/be-focused-focus-timer>.

If you own a Mac, you can get Be Focused through your Apple app store at <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/be-focused-focus-timer/id973130201>.

If you own a PC, from what I can tell you're out of luck for this particular app, but you can find several similar apps at “7 Android Apps to Help You Stay Focused and Avoid Distractions” (<https://www.makeuseof.com/tag/avoid-distractions-anywhere-android-apps/>). If you search, you'll probably find a lot more.

Or I suppose you could set a timer on your phone or watch or computer or, if you're a neanderthal like me, just head down to WalMart or over to Amazon and buy a food timer for anything from \$6 on up.

Full disclosure, as I said up front, this is not my personal cuppa. I honestly don't understand the need for something like this, but every writer is different, and success is success. I'm glad my friend is consistently churning out 2000 words per day, no matter how she's doing it.

I just love to write, period, whether it's fiction or putting out this stupid Journal or whatever. Maybe that's even part of *why* I keep putting out the Journal. Maybe it's a way to get my fingers warmed up for the fiction. (shrug) I dunno.

If I could, I would *literally* spend 24 hours per day with my fingers moving over the keyboard.

When I first learned to type, I discovered a magic I had never known existed. When I learned to trust my characters and serve as their typist while they share with me the exciting stories that they, not I, are living, I discovered a whole new magic.

If I had my druthers, I'd rather *be* a character than a writer. But I'd want to be one who could move among genres with ease.

But back to timers and timing and alternating writing and breaks.

Because I've conditioned myself to do so for my physical health (to avoid eye/wrist/back strain), I'm used to writing for an hour, then taking a break. That's anywhere from 850 words or so on up to 1500 words or so.

Regardless, when I've written for an hour, my head gets a little cloudy and the writing seems to lag just a bit. Time for a break.

Sometimes I go up to the house for one reason or another (10-15 minutes). Sometimes I take a walk out back (a half-hour). Sometimes we go to the grocery or run other errands (up to a few hours). And sometimes I just walk 20 feet to the end of the Hovel and back (maybe 10 seconds).

But no matter the length of the break, when I come back, I sit down, put my fingers on the keyboard, read a little to set myself in the story again, and go on typing.

Like sleeping, to me the break is a necessary waste of time. It's basically an intentional inconvenience. It's something I do (something I put up with) *only* so I'll be able to continue writing over the long term.

To be clear, I DO strongly recommend you take a break however often for the health reasons I listed above. The nature and length of the break is up to you, as is your reason for taking it in the first place.

I actually hope you AREN'T as driven to write as I am or as tortured as I am by the severe limitations of the human body.

To me, the true leader among cosmic jokes is that we are pretty much required to be unconscious for a full 1/3 of our life.

But that's just me.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "52 things I learned in 2022" at <https://medium.com/magnetic/52-things-i-learned-in-2022-db5fcd4aea6e>. Story ideas.

See "Sci-fi-like space elevators..." at <https://interestingengineering.com/innovation/sci-fi-like-space-elevators>.

See "AI Reveals the Most Human Parts of Writing" at <https://www.wired.com/story/artificial-intelligence-writing-art/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 820 words

Writing of Santa Fe (novel, tentative title)

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Day 4..... 1050 words. Total words to date..... 10398

Day 5..... 3673 words. Total words to date..... 14071
Day 6..... 2501 words. Total words to date..... 16572
Day 7..... 4046 words. Total words to date..... 20618
Day 8..... 2273 words. Total words to date..... 22891
Day 9..... 2614 words. Total words to date..... 25505

Total fiction words for December..... 8933
Total fiction words for the year..... 223907
Total nonfiction words for December... 3660
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 201740
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 425647

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 3
Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 69
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Breaks](#), [Timer apps](#), [Timers](#), [writing](#)

The Fiction Writer Is an Action Correspondent

December 6, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quote of the Day
- * The Fiction Writer Is an Action Correspondent
- * Of Interest

Quote of the Day

“The miracle isn't that I finished. The miracle is that I had the courage to start.” John Bingham, running speaker and writer

The Fiction Writer Is an Action Correspondent

I define an “excellent question” as one that forces me to think about and explain a concept in a different way, a way that might get through to more students.

I received such a question yesterday from my longtime writer friend and dedicated Texan Gary V. As is often the case, my response here is more complete than the response I sent to his email.

Gary wrote

Just curious. You talk a good deal about trusting your characters. Have you ever had a character mislead or betray you? I'm not referring to The Bad Guy who's supposed to be shifty and cruel, but a character who leads you on a fool's errand, diverting or weakening the story. In other words, wasting your time and causing plot problems, rendering the tale watered down or just plain stupid.

Actually, that's kind of a trick question, not that it was intentional.

The short answer is No.

The fiction writer is like an action correspondent in the days before the sleight-of-hand BS of so-called "advocacy journalism."

I use "action correspondent" here instead of "war correspondent" because this particular correspondent has reported from a small fishing village in Mexico around 1900, a war zone in Europe in the early 20th century, another war zone in Indochina in the late-mid 20th century, and a generation ship soaring deep into the galaxy a thousand years from now.

But the keyword there is "reported." I didn't make up anything. I simply looked in on one set of characters or another and wrote down what was going on and what they were saying and doing. That's it.

Consider, the "real-life" action correspondent might be reporting from a war zone in Iraq or Afghanistan or Ukraine or (unfortunately) from the scene of a shooting at a shopping mall or restaurant. Wherever s/he is, s/he doesn't know the overall picture and s/he doesn't know what will happen next.

S/he only knows and reports what s/he sees, hears, smells, tastes, and feels physically and emotionally in that small theater of action.

S/he also has absolutely no way of knowing what will happen next, and a good reporter doesn't anticipate anything or make anything up. The good reporter simply reports what's going on, what's being said and done as the story unfolds.

Note especially that s/he doesn't make up what happens; s/he only reports it. And s/he doesn't make up what the people in the immediate vicinity—the characters in the unfolding story—say or do. Again, s/he only reports it.

That's the action correspondent's job. And as a writer, that's your job too.

As the characters live their story, which is just as “real” to them as yours is to you, consider yourself an action correspondent. Don’t make things up. Just report what happens as it happens. Report the story as it unfolds, as the characters live it.

Yes, I’ve had characters do and say things I didn’t expect. In one of my Crowley novels, I remember a group of Texas Rangers were charging a bad guy, and he’d turned his horse and was charging them, planning to go out in a blaze of glory or something (he survived, for awhile) but at the last second, just as he fired, he recognized one of the Rangers.

That Ranger, before he’d become a Ranger, had during a drunken stupor broken into the back of a bank to burgle it while the bank was still open. Naturally the two men were caught. I honestly don’t remember how they became separated, but one left, wandered awhile, changed his name and joined the Rangers (and he was a good one) and the other guy did some time and became a hard core outlaw.

Had you told me that Ranger used to be an amateur outlaw I never would have believed it. But the thing is, that’s who he actually was. Obviously, he knew it all along, but neither I nor any of the other characters knew it up to that point. (And he fessed-up before he died.)

But the real meat of your question was whether a character can “lead you on a fool’s errand, diverting or weakening the story ... wasting your time and causing plot problems, rendering the tale waterered down or just plain stupid.”

I hope I answered that with the paragraphs above about the action correspondent. But if not, let me ask a few questions in return:

1. *How can the character* “divert or weaken” a story that isn’t contrived and pre-ordained?

In an authentic, original story, whatever happens happens. If the story is contrived, I can’t help you. In a contrived story from your conscious, critical mind, you, not the characters, control the story, including anything that is weak or watered-down.

2. *Who’s to say that what seems* “diverted or weakened” at one juncture won’t feed a future event in the story? We can’t know because it hasn’t happened yet.

This has happened to me many time. I didn’t “like” where something seemed to be going. But I held my tongue, reminded myself to trust the characters, and just wrote the next sentence and the next and the next. And it worked every single time.

3. *How can the character* “*cause plot problems*” with a plot that hasn’t happened yet?

In a unique, original story, Character and Story come first. The plot consists of the markers the characters *leave behind* as they run through the story. In other words, plot is only a result of the story, the residue of the story. Plot is something for the critics and deconstructionists and other non-writers to discuss.

In a contrived, constructed, false fiction, plot comes first, often in the form of an outline of one kind or another (sign posts, mileposts, phaselines, etc.). The contrivance in whatever form provides writers who don't trust their characters with "plot points." The writer then manipulates the characters from one plot point to the next. And because every story builds on what came before, nothing about the story is authentic.

Here's the thing about trusting the characters. You're writing what they're living, right? So you can't write it until it happens.

If you're writing what your characters are living, the story is unfolding as you're writing it. Their story is happening as you run through it with them. So naturally, surprises happen. (See the bit about action correspondents.)

At no point do you have to stop, look around or ahead and try to foresee what will happen next.

Actually, what will happen next is none of your business until it happens. And even then it isn't happening directly to you. Your only task is to report what is happening and what is being said as it happens.

The character doesn't know what's going to happen next in his/her life anymore than you or I do in our life.

And the character in an authentic story isn't moving from plot point to plot point through an outline anymore than you or I are. Like you and I, the character is simply living his/her life (the story).

But everything begins with trust, and there are no grey areas. You either trust your creative subconscious and your characters or you don't.

If you trust the characters, they *can't* lead you astray because they don't know what's coming in their story anymore than you know what's coming in their story (or in your own).

If this is the case, as Bradbury says (paraphrased), Plot is merely the footprints the characters leave behind as they race through the story.

If you don't trust the characters, then you have to depend on one kind or another of a conscious, critical-mind construct, and most often that's a contrived outline.

Even if you try to write your own life, unexpected things happen, things you could never have foreseen until they happened. So you can't write them until they happen. Can you fill out a diary a month or six months or a year in advance? Of course not.

Same thing with writing the characters' story. So no, the characters can't mislead me or themselves or anyone else because their life (story) is happening as I'm recording it.

Hope this explains it better, Gary, and I hope it helps some of you.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Running and Writing – The Finish Line” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/12/running-and-writing-the-finish-line.html>. I saw a little writing in there somewhere. Just in case this helps any of you. Please, please believe in yourself and defend your work. Please never let a ‘developmental’ editor anywhere near it.

See “Editor Interview – Val Mathews” at <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/12/editor-interview-val-mathews.html>. For those of you who are interested.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1480 words

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Day 7..... 4046 words. Total words to date..... 20618
Day 8..... 2273 words. Total words to date..... 22891
Day 9..... 2614 words. Total words to date..... 25505
Day 10... 3778 words. Total words to date..... 29283

Total fiction words for December..... 12711
Total fiction words for the year..... 227685
Total nonfiction words for December... 5140
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 203220
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 430905

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 3
Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0
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living. This greatly increases my productivity and provides the fastest possible ascension along the learning curve of Craft because I get a great deal more practice at actually writing.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Busting Myths](#), [Fiction Writer as Action Correspondent](#), [Writing Into the Dark](#)

Adios TKZ, the Run-On Sentence, and the Novel

December 7, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Adios TKZ
- * What Constitutes a Run-On Sentence
- * Pearl Harbor Day
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“Fear of life closes off more opportunities for us than fear of death ever does.” Agnes Moorehead

“If you can walk away from a landing, it's a good landing. If you use the airplane the next day, it's an outstanding landing.” Chuck Yeager

“Dare to be bad.” Nina Kiriki Hoffman

Adios TKZ

After several years of checking The Kill Zone blog every day, [my own blog post yesterday](#) caused me to look at TKZ in a different light. Why should I help them sell the myths and their nonfiction books in which they propagate the myths?

As a result, I deleted TKZ from my bookmarks this morning. Over the years it has become more and more deeply steeped in the myths.

Most of the writers there actively promote the myths despite the fact that every myth is based on an unreasoning fear and is actually harmful to writers in how it inhibits their learning curve on craft. The myths stunt your growth as a writer.

Unfortunately, the writers there also actively and loudly denounce, shout down and ridicule anyone who proposes that you as a writer really CAN simply believe in yourself and your abilities to do something as simple as telling a story.

TKZ has also transformed into a platform that seems to exist primarily for promoting the contributors' fiction and, unfortunately (and much worse), some contributors' nonfiction how-to books that further promote and promulgate the myths of writing.

I understand very well that fiction writers lie for a living. But they shouldn't lie to other fiction writers just to make a few (or even a million) lousy bucks pushing the myths.

I can't in good conscience pass along articles that I believe might lead astray those who look to me for instruction and recommendations.

For any who believe I'm being unfair, if you would like to continue to check TKZ for articles that might be of interest, you may do so at <https://killzoneblog.com>. That's as fair as I can be.

What Constitutes a Run-On Sentence

Writing friend Alison H wrote,

“In an earlier newsletter, you mentioned run-on sentences. You said something to the effect of a super long sentence isn't always a run-on sentence but I don't think you went into detail about what makes a sentence a run-on sentence. In one of your newsletters, could you explain?”

The post she mentioned was “What Matters...” at <https://hestanbrough.com/what-matters-picture-manager-and-publishing/>. I reread it, and she's right. I stopped short of defining a run-on sentence.

However, I did define it in response to a comment on that post from Peggy:

Simply put “*two or more independent clauses joined without either a semicolon or a coordinating conjunction is a run-on*. My point was that length had nothing whatsoever to do with it.”

Also see <https://hestanbrough.com/the-journal-a-run-on-sentence-nope/>.

And of course, if you [download the Journal archives](#), you can always key “run-on” into the search box. The archives are free. I get nothing when you download them. I suggest you take advantage of this while you can.

For reference—

A clause is any group of words that contains a subject and a verb.

An independent clause (and simple sentence) is a group of words that has a subject and verb *and* makes sense all by itself.

So “Jesus wept” is an independent clause and a simple sentence. “The heavens opened up” is also an independent clause and a simple sentence.

A dependent clause is a group of words with a subject and a verb and a subordinate conjunction. It depends on an independent clause to make sense. “Because Jesus wept” is a dependent clause.

Next time it’s raining where you are, go out in it, turn your palms up, smile at someone and say, “It’s raining!” Chances are they’ll smile and go on their way. What you said made perfect sense.

On the other hand, if you turn your palms up, smile and say, “Because it’s raining” or “After it stops raining” or “Until it stops raining” and then stop, chance are they’ll look at you as if you have two heads. They’ll want you to say something else to fill-out the thought.

“Jesus wept the heavens opened up” is a run-on sentence, two independent clauses joined without a comma and a coordinating conjunction, a semicolon, or a subordinate conjunction. If you insert only a comma after “wept,” you’ll have a comma splice. (The coordinating conjunctions are FANBOYS: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so.)

“Because Jesus wept, the heavens opened up” is a complex sentence (a dependent or subordinate clause followed by an independent clause. If the order is reversed—”The heavens opened up because Jesus wept” it’s still a complex sentence).

Some commenter on TPV the other day asked why you have to follow a subordinate clause with a comma when it is the first clause in the complex sentence but you don’t have to follow an independent clause with a comma if it’s the first clause in a complex sentence.

The first half of the sentence is the important position. If the less-important information (the subordinate or dependent clause) is in that position, you follow it with a comma to provide a brief pause to “introduce” the more important independent clause. When the order is reverse and the important information is in the important first half of the sentence, no comma is necessary. That’s why.

“Jesus wept, and the heavens opened up” is a compound sentence (two independent clauses appropriately joined).

“Because Jesus wept, the heavens opened up, and it rained for forty days” is a compound/complex sentence.

“Jesus wept early in the morning while hanging on a cross on a hill called Golgotha outside the city of Jerusalem” also is a simple sentence. If you continued adding prepositional phrases all day but never added another subject or verb, it would still be a very long simple sentence, but it would still not be a run-on. (The subject and verb are “Jesus wept.”)

Finally, for all of this and more, see [*Punctuation for Writers, 2nd Edition*](#). Ten lousy bucks, for the best explanation you’ll ever see of punctuation and a great little grammar refresher.

Pearl Harbor Day

I wish you a thoughtful Pearl Harbor Day. Some of us remember when December 7 on calendars was routinely labeled “Pearl Harbor Day.”

Of course, that was a different time. Back then it was not only acceptable but fashionable to be proud of America and defend her rather than run her down.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “11 Scientific Advancements Inspired by Sci-Fi Stories” at <https://www.mentalfloss.com/posts/scientific-advancements-inspired-by-science-fiction>. Someday the intergalactic magnetic drive will be among these. (grin) I suspect Jack Williamson’s “The Humanoids” predated any Manga series.

See “The Elizabethan era is not yet at an end” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/the-elizabethan-era-is-not-yet-at-an-end/>.

See “3 Action-Reaction Misfires That Flatten Your Writing” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/3-action-reaction-misfires-that-flatten-your-writing/>. Sigh. Read this in case it’s important, then forget it and Just Write.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1170 words

Writing of Santa Fe (novel, tentative title)

Day 1..... 3877 words. Total words to date..... 3877
Day 2..... 3460 words. Total words to date..... 7337
Day 3..... 2011 words. Total words to date..... 9348
Day 4..... 1050 words. Total words to date..... 10398
Day 5..... 3673 words. Total words to date..... 14071
Day 6..... 2501 words. Total words to date..... 16572
Day 7..... 4046 words. Total words to date..... 20618
Day 8..... 2273 words. Total words to date..... 22891
Day 9..... 2614 words. Total words to date..... 25505
Day 10... 3778 words. Total words to date..... 29283
Day 11... 2672 words. Total words to date..... 31955

Total fiction words for December..... 15383
Total fiction words for the year..... 230357
Total nonfiction words for December... 6310
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 204390
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 413054

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date.....	3
Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date...	0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	69
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014).....	217
Short story collections.....	31

Disclaimer: In this blog I have shared my experiences, good and bad, as a prolific professional fiction writer. Because It Makes Sense, I trust my characters to tell the story that they, not I, are living. This greatly increases my productivity and provides the fastest possible ascension along the learning curve of Craft because I get a great deal more practice at actually writing.

The Origin Story Wrapped

December 8, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * The Origin Story Wrapped
- * No More Stupid Streak Challenge
- * Too Necessary for "Of Interest"
- * Of Interest

The Origin Story Wrapped

Every novel writes differently. Yawn, stretch. How many times have I said that? I keep waiting for them to run out of new ways to write and start repeating. Hasn't happened yet.

As far as I can remember, I've never written any story of any length before in which I wrote the ending long before the entire story was laid out. I did that with this one.

A few days ago (Writing Day 7, so about 20,000 words in), I wrote a sentence, then physically flinched back away from the screen and all but jerked my fingers away from the keyboard. I frowned. "Wow. That's the end of the story."

But there was a problem. The story wasn't long enough to be even a short novel yet.

That really isn't a problem but it was a little jarring for me. From the beginning, I had expected this one—the origin story for the Santa Fe subseries—to be a novel. I actually expected it to be around 50,000 words. Most of my Crowley novels are in that range.

Of course, I allow stories to be whatever length they need to be. It isn't up to me or even the characters. It's up to the story. I've never varied in that.

But I felt like something was missing, or maybe like something wasn't whole. (Calm down, this isn't my critical mind, as you'll see later.) I admit I hoped that somewhere along the way, a character or two had failed to show up or that they had omitted some scenes they should have included.

Fortunately, I've encountered that a few times before, so I knew exactly what to do. I opened the folder for my previous Wes Crowley Gap novel ([Carmen Morales](#)) and read over the reverse outline.

Sure enough, I spotted a couple of characters who had figured significantly in that novel and a couple of situations that no doubt would have carried over into the current story. The characters just hadn't bothered to show up to tell me about them yet.

In the stories I report, we don't do outlines or preplanning or rehearsals. Everything's live. (See [The Fiction Writer Is an Action Correspondent](#).)

Having identified the characters and having refreshed my memory as to the situations in which they were involved, I returned to the current story and just started reading for pleasure.

Of course, I turned those into cycling sessions by allowing my fingers to rest on the keyboard as I read and allowing the characters (any characters) to touch the story as I read through it. The result was two consecutive 2000+ word days (Writing Days 8 and 9).

But get this: what came through my fingers on those days had nothing to do with the characters and situations from the previous novel.

Both days I was simply reading, and both days the current characters were touching the current story, adding things that, as their recorder, I had inadvertently left out. Almost 4800 words worth of things I had inadvertently left out.

Then two days ago, on Writing Day 10, I wrote two new chapters one of those older characters finally provided.

It was no surprise to me that both of those chapters were incredibly relevant to the current (and future) stories, as will be the chapters I will write today. Because that's what happens when you trust your characters.

On Day 11 the same thing happened and the story moved forward again. And yesterday, on Writing Day 12, I did only the final cycling session and the story wrapped as a short novel at 26,306 words. I wrote and later cut 6680 publishable words.

Then I ran a spell check and sent the little monster off to my first reader. Good to have it off my desk. Today or tomorrow I'll be onto something else.

No More Stupid Streak Challenge

Only a few days ago, I decided I wanted to write a minimum of 2000 words per day of fiction.

Yeah, that ain't gonna happen. For one thing, honestly, streaks don't do much for me anymore.

Hard to psych myself into doing something 'cause I'm In Here, y'know? I'm privy to what I'm trying to finagle myself into doing. Kind'a takes away the mystery. Besides, between the Journal and/or my fiction, I write almost every day, and most days I write at least a few thousand words.

I've probably written more words in this stupid Journal this year (204390 words) than most fiction writers have written in fiction. And my own fiction numbers at this point surpass even that (231,388) although my fiction only surpassed my nonfiction sometime last month.

So to paraphrase the banditos in *Blazing Saddles*, "I don't need no stinkin' challenges." (grin)

I've needed them in the past, though. If you're currently attempting a challenge, good luck with it.

Too Necessary for "Of Interest"

In Writer Unboxed today there's an article titled "The Eighth Element" by literary agent Donald Maas. You can read it at <https://writerunboxed.com/2022/12/07/the-eighth-element/>, and I recommend you do.

Why? Because as they so often do, he upholds writing into the dark even as he believes he's talking against it.

In the article, Maas, who no doubt advises every writer to revise, seek critical input, rewrite, etc. talks about "the eighth element," something he can more easily define by saying what it isn't: "It's not safe. It's not careful."

To which I reply, Yes, I know. That's precisely why I advise writers to "Dare to be bad" (Nina Kiriki Hoffman), "Write into the dark" (Dean Wesley Smith), and "Trust your characters to tell the story that they, not you, are living." (That would be me.)

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "German Coup Arrests" at <https://apnews.com/article/europe-germany-constitutions-d7e67cfefbd1f33e2909f9c2fe1a3d3d>. Story ideas abound.

See "The Forever Witness" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/the-forever-witness/>. Story ideas.

See "Top holiday toys from the year you were born" at <https://stacker.com/retrospective/top-holiday-toys-year-you-were-born>.

See “3D map showing the world in a new way” at <https://www.weforum.org/videos/this-3d-map-is-showing-us-the-world-in-a-new-way>.

See “You Could Spend the Night in Hobbiton” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/you-could-spend-the-night-in-hobbiton/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1010 words

Writing of Santa Fe: A New Era (novel)

Day 1..... 3877 words. Total words to date..... 3877
Day 2..... 3460 words. Total words to date..... 7337
Day 3..... 2011 words. Total words to date..... 9348
Day 4..... 1050 words. Total words to date..... 10398
Day 5..... 3673 words. Total words to date..... 14071
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Day 9..... 2614 words. Total words to date..... 25505
Day 10... 3778 words. Total words to date..... 29283
Day 11... 2672 words. Total words to date..... 31955
Day 12... 1031 words. Total words to date.....32986 (done)

Total fiction words for December..... 16414
Total fiction words for the year..... 231388
Total nonfiction words for December... 7320
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 205400
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 436788

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 4
Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 70
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: In this blog I have shared my experiences, good and bad, as a prolific professional fiction writer. Because It Makes Sense, I trust my characters to tell the story that they, not I, are living. This greatly increases my productivity and provides the fastest possible ascension along the learning curve of Craft because I get a great deal more practice at actually writing.

Editing, Mentorships, Streaks and a New Story

December 9, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * No More Editing
- * Why No Streak Challenge?
- * Mentorships End
- * A New Story
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“There is no terror in the bang, only in the anticipation of it.” Alfred Hitchcock

“Film your murders like love scenes, and film your love scenes like murders.” Alfred Hitchcock

“If I made Cinderella, the audience would immediately be looking for a body in the coach.”
Alfred Hitchcock

“Wanting or believing in something—the concept of critique groups, for example—does not validate its usefulness.” Harvey

No More Editing

I've decided I won't be doing anymore copyediting for other writers. Unfortunately, editing for others takes too much time away from my own writing. To make it worth my while, I'd have to charge too much, and nobody wants that. (I actually removed the copyediting link from my Resources for Writers page several days ago.)

As I wrote to a friend yesterday, I want to devote as much time as I can to this Journal (while it lasts) and to my own writing.

If I may, I do suggest you find a first reader, someone who preferably is not a writer. Ideally your first reader should be an avid reader who enjoys your work. The first reader

- should be up front and honest (willing to hurt your feelings)
- should just read for pleasure (should not “look” for anything)
- should get back to you to let you know of any misspellings, wrong words, or inconsistencies in the story
- should let you know anyplace where s/he felt pulled out of the story, and why if s/he knows

I send my first reader a PDF version of the manuscript.

He highlights areas where there are problems and uses the Comment function to add a brief note.

Getting to see your work first will be your first reader's payment. Ask him (yes, or her) to Just Read for Pleasure, then get back to you with anything that pops out at him or kicks him out of the story.

As a work-around, until you find a first reader you can simply read the stories aloud to yourself. Reading them aloud For Pleasure As a Reader will enable you to catch things you don't catch when you're reading silently.

And yes, you can do that with novellas or novels as well as short stories. Just take your time, read for pleasure, and enjoy the story.

Why No Streak Challenge?

I got a few emails wondering why I decided to discontinue my 2000-wpd streak challenge.

The short answer is because I don't care. I was going to start and maintain a streak and blah blah blah. Then I realized I don't want to.

What practical difference would it make if I wrote a set number of words every day for 365 days instead of 364 days or 3 days?

None. It makes absolutely no difference. So why add the pressure for zero reward?

That's also one reason I'm considering publishing the Journal less often or not at all after the new year.

I don't EVER want to find myself posting to my little Journal just to keep posting, even when I have absolutely nothing to say, or strictly as an advertising platform, or to beg people to send me money like some folks I know.

Mentorships End

Speaking of money, I've also decided to close my mentorship offering. In fact, this morning I refunded a payment from my sole-remaining mentorship student after I haven't heard from her since early October. Apparently \$25 per month is too much to pay to get answers to any question about fiction writing, cover design, indie publishing, etc .

Here's the deal: To become a prolific professional fiction writer, you need

- the drive to keep learning,
- to read or consider some things over and over again until you get them,
- to trust all the knowledge you've gained subconsciously over a lifetime of absorbing Story,

- to trust your characters to tell the story that they, not you, are living (it's their story, not your story), and
- to *write*.
- And maybe you need a place to report, assistance in holding yourself accountable.

But seriously, nobody who's reading this needs a mentor. You just don't.

Why? Because you can find literally *anything* you want or need about the writing process, writing craft or indie publishing by downloading my free, fully searchable PDF Journal archives (see below) or by searching and reading the Pro Writers Blog posts (see below) over at my author site.

If you need support, (for example, a place to report your numbers), I suggest

1. creating a spreadsheet so you can watch your numbers grow (now THAT'S a streak that matters), and
2. teaming up with another, like-minded writer for your mutual benefit.

But team up with another like-minded writer NOT to critique each other or any of that ridiculous nonsense, but just to support each other by providing a little external accountability.

(I know some of you find critique groups valuable. That's your fear talking. People want all sorts of things. Wanting something does not validate its usefulness. However, it's your life to waste, your story to dilute.)

For the Journal archives, visit <https://hestanbrough.com/the-daily-journal-archives/> and click on each link to download the archive for that year. The archive for 2022 will be up early in January.

For the Pro Writers Blog posts, click <https://harveystanbrough.com/category/pro-writers/>. There you'll find all sorts of posts going back several years on the writing craft and on indie publishing.

And yes, you'll stumble across a few self-serving promotional posts, but not nearly as many as you might find elsewhere.

Finally, if you don't mind spending a few dollars to learn a TON of information as a very small investment in your writing career, visit <https://stonethreadpublishing.com/writing-books/> and browse my books on writing. (Don't buy the Year in the Life book. That's just one year of my Journal archives.) Otherwise I strongly recommend at least the whole top row. And yes, you can get a discount if you email me and let me know which titles you want.

A New Story

I started a new story. Yes, with Wes. It will be the 7th Gap novel, the 19th overall Wes Crowley novel, and the 2nd Santa Fe sub-series novel.

It's only natural that I'd continue with Wes' story. Like all humans everywhere I spend more time with the people I like the best, and I really like Wes.

As I told a friend via email earlier, I'm feeling very locked-in with Wes Crowley at the moment. It's as if he lives just down the road and he and I might walk out to a cow tank later this morning with our rods and a small frying pan. You know, like back when the world was a little more innocent.

There we'll dig up some red earthworms and go fishing for a couple of perch or a catfish for breakfast. We won't be checking our hand-held computers for messages every other minute, and we won't have to key "sunrise" into a search engine to see one.

Back to writing stuff.

The start of a novel (when the novel is in a series) is always the toughest for me, so if you're the same way, you aren't alone.

Even very brief research drives me nuts (IT'S *FICTION!*) but if you don't get things right at least within the world you've created, you're cheating the reader. I have to get real place names and fictional place names and people names from the past right and so on. That takes time.

Fortunately, much of the setting for this one and for future novels in the sub-series will be new and different so I can let the characters run wild.

It dawned on me just now as I was writing this that there wasn't a lot of action (guns being drawn, people being shot, Indians marauding, etc.) in *Santa Fe: A New Era*. It's almost as if the characters were resting up for what they expect is coming.

I wouldn't be surprised if they release all that pent-up frustration in the current novel. By the way, I don't have a name for it yet. So for now I'm just calling it WCG 7 Santa Fe 2.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "More Words You're Probably Using Wrong" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/more-words-youre-probably-using-wrong/>. This! (But remember it's all right for characters to make mistakes in dialogue.)

See "The Year in Review Part 3: Bestsellers" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/the-year-in-review-part-3-bestsellers/>. Probably would be a good idea to click through to Kris' site and find Part 1 and Part 2.

See "Cozy Mystery Book Covers" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/cozy-mystery-book-covers/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1300 words

Writing of WCG 7 Santa Fe 2 (novel tentative title)

Day 1..... 2190 words. Total words to date..... 2190

Total fiction words for December..... 18604

Total fiction words for the year..... 233578

Total nonfiction words for December... 8750

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 206830

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 440488

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 4

Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 70

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: I am a prolific professional fiction writer. Because It Makes Sense, I trust my characters to tell the story that they, not I, are living. This greatly increases my productivity and provides the fastest possible ascension along the learning curve of Craft because I get a great deal more practice at actually writing. It will do the same for you if only you trust it.

The Number One Lie Professional Fiction...

December 10, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * I'll Get to the Lie
- * The Number One Lie Professional Fiction...
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“Having your book turned into a movie is like seeing your oxen turned into bouillon cubes.”
John le Carre’

“Forever is composed of nows.” Emily Dickinson

I'll Get to the Lie

in a moment, but first, as a preface, something I got from a friend via email. No doubt he thought it was funny:

“In a brief exchange in a book I read a while ago, two undercover FBI agents were on their way to meet and arrest a drug bigshot. The woman says to the man, ‘Do you think this is an ambush?’

“He replies, ‘No. I won’t get gunned down in an Izod shirt. God doesn’t hate me that much.’”

For whatever reason, people (apparently including my friend) bought and read this book. Does *anyone* grab a book off the rack without opening it and reading a few paragraphs?

I ask because you literally can’t write that poorly in one dialogue exchange between characters and then write well through the rest of the book. Like that smell that comes up through bad plumbing, horrible writing spreads throughout.

If I knew who wrote those Bulwer-Lytton Contest Worthy lines, I would BEG him or her to write a guest post on marketing for the Journal, because to have sold more than a few copies of that book, s/he would have to be a masterful marketer. Which leads me to

The Number One Lie Professional Fiction Writers Tell Amateurs

1. The best marketing you can do is write the next book.

Actually, I’ve passed that one along myself on more than one occasion. I didn’t realize it was a lie. I hadn’t tested it yet. Now I have, and I’m here to tell you it’s the worst kind of mushroom fertilizer. My sincere apologies.

If you are an established major author with major publishing companies and film studios salivating over even the opportunity to vie for your titles by throwing money at you in the form of six- or seven-figure advances, this is probably true.

But for us working-class schmucks, not so much. The best marketing we can do (apparently) is making friends with people with whom we probably wouldn’t speak at all if we weren’t writers and they weren’t potential readers.

We have to bust our butt begging for names and email addresses and “followers” while trying to appear friendly and trying not to feel like a shyster.

My mental image is of an alligator lying in the reeds at the edge of a stream, peering up at a gentle, fragile, innocent flamingo: “Oh, what a lovely creature you are! Come closer. I want to be your friend.”

So readers venture closer, and then Some Of Us reward them with complete and utter crap about God not disliking us enough to let us be killed while wearing an Izod shirt. *Expletive deleted* me.

I'd rather take my pay from being entertained by my characters.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "7 Ways Public Readings Can Help Your Writing" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/7-ways-public-readings-can-help-your-writing/>. See PG's take and the comments.

See "Author's tweet about a disappointing book signing snowballs..." at <https://mashable.com/article/chelsea-banning-book-signing-tweet-stephen-king-neil-gaiman>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 540 words

Writing of WCG 7 Santa Fe 2 (novel tentative title)

Day 1..... 2190 words. Total words to date..... 2190

Day 2..... 3049 words. Total words to date..... 5239

Total fiction words for December..... 21653

Total fiction words for the year..... 236627

Total nonfiction words for December... 9290

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 207370

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 443997

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 4

Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 70

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

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One Writer Disagrees re Marketing

December 11, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * One Writer Disagrees re Marketing
- * The Passing of an Era
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“Starting a novel for me is always fun. The key is to not care, and I do mean that exactly as it sounds. If I allowed myself to care in the slightest, made writing the novel some major thing that I had to pick carefully on, I would freeze down and never write a word.” Dean Wesley Smith

“The great fun in my life has been getting up every morning and rushing to the typewriter because some new idea has hit me. The feeling I have every day is very much the same as it was when I was 12.” Ray Bradbury

“I have what I call ‘the theater of morning’ inside my head. And all these voices talk and when they come up with a good metaphor, then I jump out of bed and run and trap them before they’re gone.” Ray Bradbury

One Writer Disagrees re Marketing

as do several others probably. And that’s fine. With one short story collection published, he believes writing the next book is more important than actively marketing.

From a writing perspective, of course, he’s right. But from a *writing-business* perspective, he’s as wrong as I’ve been all these years. The difference is, he has me forewarning him that simply writing the next book as your primary means of marketing is a fool’s errand. He needs to start collecting emails of potential readers NOW.

But whatever he chooses to do is fine. He, and of course, all of you, are free to conduct your business as a writer in whatever way you see fit.

I can only pass along my own experiences. You may use them to cut your own learning curve or you may ignore them. Completely up to you.

But I personally consider “the best marketing or promotion is writing the next book” as just another myth. It’s not only misleading, but it can actually harm your career as a writer.

My own (albeit unintentional) mentor told me repeatedly the best marketing is to write the next book. That once you get 10 or so novels out there, things would begin to take off, readers would discover your work, etc. etc. etc. ad nauseam.

And yes, something in the back of my mind said he has people who do his marketing for him, and that since I can’t afford that I need to do some on my own, but I pushed it down. I just wanted to write and tell stories.

I'm an old guy. I don't like this world in which everyone expects everyone to lie to them, in which everyone mistrusts everyone else until they prove they can be trusted, which of course nobody can do.

I'm from a friendlier, less-suspicious time when the norm is to trust someone until they give you a reason not to, and most people of that time were trustworthy. As a result, when I trust I go all-in. Stupid me.

(On the other hand, I never expect or ask anyone to blindly trust me. I lay it out and suggest you try it for yourself. But very few will even go that far. I suppose they assume if they try something on their own, somehow I'll benefit. Not only will I not benefit, I won't know or care.)

Because I, like a complete and utter moron, clung doggedly to the nonsensical dictum that the best promotion is to write the next book, I didn't bother to collect names, emails, etc. like all the marketing gurus say you should.

And today, with almost 80 novels and novellas and well over 200 short stories in 30+ collections, I'm telling you point blank that simply writing the next book did not work For Me. Learning to design covers and write sales copy didn't work either. Your results may vary. I hope they do. Or maybe you can afford employees to do the dirty work for you.

One way or another, I suggest you do what I did not do. Begin compiling an email list. That is at the top of every marketing advice to-do list out there.

But again, you do what you want.

The Passing of an Era

Not specifically to do with writing, but an account of one more bit of the erosion of my segment of American culture. Actually, the era passed long ago. Today there are fewer and fewer radio stations where fans of true country-western music can hear the "oldies."

For several years in Benson Arizona, just such a station existed. Complete with dick jockeys and hokey, home-made advertisements for local businesses. The station played a mixture of older country music (all the way back to before I was born) as well as the newer artists.

Recently, the owner passed away.

Whoever had the power to do so sold the station almost immediately, and of course, the new owner changed the format. Now for the First Time Ever we can hear exactly the same identical programmed crap on the local station that we hear on every other "country" station nationwide.

This is called "progress." Eh, slap a coat of plastic on it and call it new and innovative.

Come to think of it, this is exactly what writers who are mired in the myths do: revise, seek critical input, rewrite, and polish until their novel sounds exactly like all the other novels in that genre at that time.

Unique. Original. Um, NOT.

Listen, I might be off here for a day or two. I have a story to tell. You guys talk amongst yourselves.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “The Making of The Silent Count...” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/the-making-of-the-silent-count-or-how-i-learned-to-stop-worrying-and-love-the-bomb/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 940 words

Writing of WCG 7 Santa Fe 2 (novel tentative title)

Day 1..... 2190 words. Total words to date..... 2190

Day 2..... 3049 words. Total words to date..... 5239

Day 3..... 2588 words. Total words to date..... 7827

Total fiction words for December..... 24241

Total fiction words for the year..... 239215

Total nonfiction words for December... 10230

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 208310

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 447525

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 4

Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 70

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: I am a prolific professional fiction writer. Because It Makes Sense, I trust my characters to tell the story that they, not I, are living. This greatly increases my productivity and provides the fastest possible ascension along the learning curve of Craft because I get a great deal more practice at actually writing. It will do the same for you if only you trust it.

Who's In Charge Here? (Guest Post)

December 12, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Who's In Charge Here? (Guest Post)
- * Correction
- * Because This Directly Feeds
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“What If You're New to Writing and Don't Know How to Fix Things?” title of an article by Tiffany Yates Martin in Jane Friedman's weekly blog digest

Lucky you. You're as pure as your characters. Now you only need to push down the myth that things need to be 'fixed.' Run a spell check, have a first reader check for wrong words and inconsistencies, then publish and start the next story.

“If you rewrite and have sold 50 novels, you know how to rewrite in creative voice. It's a learned skill. ... Many professional writers don't rewrite. Many only do one or two drafts.” Dean Wesley Smith

“Having imagination, it takes you an hour to write a paragraph that, if you were unimaginative, would take you only a minute.” Franklin Pierce Adams

“The best revenge is massive success.” Frank Sinatra

Who's In Charge Here?

a guest post by Dan Baldwin

“[O]f the 58,000 trade titles published per year, fully half of those titles ‘sell fewer than one dozen books.’ (Not a typo, that's one dozen.) More broadly, 90 percent of titles sell fewer than 2,000 units. Even a small advance of a few thousand dollars would not earn out at standard royalty rates.” [The Hot Sheet, on August 31, 2022](#)

Of course, you and I are the exceptions to the rule and will shortly earn our six-figure royalties and our Pulitzer Prize, but for the rest of the folks out there, here are a few thoughts on the numbers game.

The numbers in the Numbers Game are stacked against the writer. The odds of “making it” financially through traditional publishing are less than one out of ten – substantially less.

What can a struggling writer (most of us) do?

The answer for me is to have as much control over publishing my work as possible and that means self-publishing.

Yes, I occasionally publish traditionally, but only for very narrow and very specific reasons and those are usually related to a specific marketing challenge. Nine of ten books I write under my own name are self-published. Most of my ghostwriting clients throughout the past decades made the same choice.

Control means I can choose ebook, paperback or hardback versions or all three. I choose all three. I believe in using all possible formats to increase market share – basic business.

Control means my cover design (and formatting) is my design expressed by my designer under my guidance. It's not one of the usual take-it-and-like-it designs from a corporate artist who has no knowledge of me or the book other than a corporate work order.

One of my traditionally published Western-themed books ended up with an illustration of a gunfighter wearing weapons and clothing no real gunfighter would ever wear. That may seem minor, but that image is a killer for any reader of any books on the Old West. The designer just didn't know his subject and book sales would have suffered for it.

Control means I make my own mistakes. I published a book several years ago with a mid-size firm with a good reputation. They did a good job with the cover and formatting and even with setting up a few publicity events. Those events created a lot of short-term "buzz" about the book.

Unfortunately, people trying to find a copy couldn't – the publisher printed the damn thing with the wrong ISBN! I make enough mistakes on my own; I don't need anyone else running up that score.

Control means I publish on my schedule. Once my manuscript is complete and turned over to my designer/formatter, publication around the world is accomplished in a matter of weeks. Traditional publishing can take up to two years or more to achieve the same results.

While my contemporaries in my genres are slogging through writing query letters, sending sample chapters, dealing with agents, worrying with publishers, and so on and so on, I'm busy writing (and probably publishing) my next book.

One of the reasons my ghostwriting clients prefer self-publishing is their desire to get their message to their market as swiftly as possible.

Control means I'm in charge of my own publicity. Yes, traditional publishers say they'll handle all that for you. Some will make an effort, but it's naïve to think that you can avoid doing your own PR.

For example, one of my traditional book publishers assigned a PR person to me and I'll give her credit for working hard. But I was just one of the authors on her list. She emailed that she was reaching out to a specific international radio/podcast host to see if an interview was possible. I thanked her, but noted that I had already reached out and was already scheduled for the program.

Publicity isn't rocket science; it's basic labor, and struggling authors need to be ready to handle the chores on their own. The point? You're going to be forced to handle your own PR anyway, so why not publish the way that earns you the highest return on those efforts?

And speaking of return on investment, ***control means more profit for me.*** The rule of thumb states that an author's profit in selling 100 traditionally published works is the same when selling ten self-published works. I don't know where that rule comes from, but it seems right. Traditional profits are ten cents on the dollar for the author. Self-publishing profits range from 30 to 70 percent depending on the author's choices.

Control means I can handle the oops factor. Changes in the text or design can be made pretty much on the author's whim or need. For example, let's say I discovered I had accidentally slandered someone in the manuscript. The necessary change can be made to the manuscript and instantly uploaded so that the correction is immediate. An author can just as easily change a sentence, paragraph, chapter or whatever the same way if s/he so wishes.

Writing is an expression of heart and soul. It's pure creativity. Marketing is an expression of facts and figures – a numbers game. If you're going to play, remember, if you want your best shot at winning the game, there's safety in numbers when you control the numbers.

Thanks, Dan. Folks, to sign up for Dan's free blogette, email him at baldco@msn.com. And be sure to visit his websites (see "Of Interest").

Because This Directly Feeds

our recent discussion re whether "just write the next book" is the best marketing advice, I decided to present it here rather than in "Of Interest." By the way, if ANY of you are successful marketers of your books and would like to write a guest post to share your "secrets" with others, email me at harveystanbrough@gmail.com.

See "The Making of A Six Figure Author: How Authors Evolve With Their Income" at <https://www.writtenwordmedia.com/how-authors-evolve-with-their-income/>.

Wow. According to the chart, I should be making \$10,000 per month from book sales.

Correction

Of course, in yesterday's gripe session about the fading of our local radio station into mediocrity (what one writer called "Frat Boy Country"), I did not mean to misspell "diSk jockeys." I promise.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Animal Communication + Unnatural Mayhem" at <https://www.suecoletta.com/animal-communication-unnatural-mayhem/>.

See "Challenges for the New Year" at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/challenges-for-the-new-year/>. Of course, you can do these challenges for yourself and not pay anyone anything. Just sayin'.

See "DanBaldwin.com" at <https://danbaldwin.com/>.

See "FourKnightsPress.com" at <https://fourknightspress.com/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 350 words

Writing of WCG 7 Santa Fe 2 (novel tentative title)

Day 1..... 2190 words. Total words to date..... 2190
Day 2..... 3049 words. Total words to date..... 5239
Day 3..... 2588 words. Total words to date..... 7827
Day 4..... 3373 words. Total words to date..... 11200

Total fiction words for December..... 27614
Total fiction words for the year..... 242588
Total nonfiction words for December... 10580
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 208660
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 451248

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 4
Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 70
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: I am a prolific professional fiction writer. Because It Makes Sense, I trust my characters to tell the story that they, not I, are living. This greatly increases my productivity and

provides the fastest possible ascension along the learning curve of Craft because I get a great deal more practice at actually writing. It will do the same for you if only you trust it.

An Interesting Exchange, and Absurdities Abound

December 13, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * An Interesting Exchange
- * Absurdities Abound
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“He had the look of one who had drunk the cup of life and found a dead beetle at the bottom.”
P.G. Wodehouse

“I know I was writing stories when I was five. I don't remember what I did before that. Just loafed, I suppose.” P. G. Wodehouse

“It is a good rule in life never to apologize. The right sort of people do not want apologies, and the wrong sort take a mean advantage of them.” P.G. Wodehouse

An Interesting Exchange

A gentleman (a lawyer I believe, but I might be mistaken) named Felix Torres and I occasionally enjoy a good exchange of comments on posts on The Passive Voice.

Our most recent had to do with science fiction and science fantasy. To find the comments, visit <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/the-making-of-the-silent-count-or-how-i-learned-to-stop-worrying-and-love-the-bomb/> and scroll down.

Absurdities Abound

I won't delve into specifics, but so many complete absurdities come down the river every single day that it's difficult to keep up with them, much less refute them.

For the purpose of this post I define an absurdity as a ridiculous assertion—sometimes one that defies even direct physical evidence to the contrary—that is accepted as true by human beings who are generally sensible, confident, and productive in every other aspect of their lives.

I was going to write a whole long post about that topic, but I changed my mind. Too much griping this early in the day, and frankly, it isn't worth my time. Nothing will change. Plus I have a story to write. (I get to ride with Wes again today! Yay!)

So I'll leave you with a question: Are we blessed or cursed to live during a time when, Literally Every Single Day, we may appropriately utter, "Now I've heard everything"?

Doesn't matter to me. Right and wrong is not difficult to discern. I just turn off all the noise and go about my life.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "A Brief History of Mad Magazine" at <https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/648353/mad-magazine-history>.

See "What Is an Acronym?" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/what-is-an-acronym/>. Given that the source is Grammarly I have to wonder how much of the OP is accurate.

See "Children's book created with AI sparks controversy and accusations of plagiarism" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/childrens-book-created-with-ai-sparks-controversy-and-accusations-of-plagiarism/>. See PG's take.

See "Doctors and Lawyers Debate Meaning of Death as Families Challenge Practices" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/doctors-and-lawyers-debate-meaning-of-death-as-families-challenge-practices/>. Story ideas.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 410 words

Writing of WCG 7 Santa Fe 2 (novel tentative title)

Day 1..... 2190 words. Total words to date..... 2190

Day 2..... 3049 words. Total words to date..... 5239

Day 3..... 2588 words. Total words to date..... 7827

Day 4..... 3373 words. Total words to date..... 11200

Day 5..... 3317 words. Total words to date..... 14517

Total fiction words for December..... 30931

Total fiction words for the year..... 245905

Total nonfiction words for December... 10990

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 209070

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 454975

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date.....	4
Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date...	0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	70
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014).....	217
Short story collections.....	31

Disclaimer: I am a prolific professional fiction writer. Because It Makes Sense, I trust my characters to tell the story that they, not I, are living. This greatly increases my productivity and provides the fastest possible ascension along the learning curve of Craft because I get a great deal more practice at actually writing. It will do the same for you if only you trust it.

The Novel and Challenges, Collections

December 14, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * The Novel
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“Maybe I am wrong, but I tend to think of the back of book blurb as an advertisement. The only one we will get free forever!” Dan LaBash

“She is so odd a blend of Little Nell and Lady Macbeth.” Alexander Woollcott, of Dorothy Parker

“The English have an extraordinary ability for flying into a great calm.” Alexander Woollcott

“The scenery in the play was beautiful, but the actors got in front of it.” Alexander Woollcott

The Novel

The novel is rolling right along. In fact, I don't know when I'll post anything substantive again. If you'd like me to opine on one bit of the writing craft or another, I suggest you mention it in the comments or email me.

I'm posting this edition only for “Of Interest,” especially Dean Wesley Smith's time-sensitive post.

Remember, please, that you can do any of the challenges, create the collections, etc. on your own.

Really, you only need a place to report, someone to whom you can report your progress to hold your feet to the fire, but surely you can find that without spending a ton of money. You can even use me for that if you want. I can be a cheerleader without being paid.

Then again, if you have the money to spend and nothing more significant to spend it on, well, that's why I posted a link to the latest sale.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Blurb Matters: A Quiet Manifesto" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/blurb-matters-a-quiet-manifesto/>.

See "Blurbs, Numbers, and Thanks" at <https://hestanbrough.com/blurbs-numbers-and-thanks/>.

See "Flash Sale for Challenges and Collections Workshops" at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/flash-sale-for-challenges-and-collections-workshops/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 280 words

Writing of WCG 7 Santa Fe 2 (novel tentative title)

Day 1..... 2190 words. Total words to date..... 2190
Day 2..... 3049 words. Total words to date..... 5239
Day 3..... 2588 words. Total words to date..... 7827
Day 4..... 3373 words. Total words to date..... 11200
Day 5..... 3317 words. Total words to date..... 14517
Day 6..... 3771 words. Total words to date..... 18288

Total fiction words for December..... 34702
Total fiction words for the year..... 249676
Total nonfiction words for December... 11270
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 209350
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 459026

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 4
Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 70
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: I am a prolific professional fiction writer. Because It Makes Sense, I trust my characters to tell the story that they, not I, are living. This greatly increases my productivity and provides the fastest possible ascension along the learning curve of Craft because I get a great deal more practice at actually writing. It will do the same for you if only you trust it.

Value of IP, and First Readers

December 15, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * If you missed
- * Value of IP
- * First Readers
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“Curiosity is the essence of human existence.” Eugene Cernan (a once-famous US astronaut)

“A person should set his goals as early as he can and devote all his energy and talent to getting there.” Walt Disney

If you missed yesterday's post

and if you're interested in Dean Wesley Smith's workshop sales, [go back and read it](#).

I mention this because only 16 people viewed yesterday's post.

Value of IP

I moved this post by Dean up here from “Of Interest” because it's that important. It's the first of a series of posts that will form a primer on ways to value your IP. Extremely important. See “Value of IP” at <https://deanwesleymith.com/value-of-ip/>.

First Readers

Generally, I don't recommend asking any writer to be the first reader for another writer's work. Why? Because as a first reader, your job is to

1. read strictly for pleasure,
2. not “look for” anything,

3. after the fact, point out any errors or inconsistencies that pop out at you as you read, and
4. if you are shoved out of the story, let the writer know that, where it happened, and why (if you know).

That's it. But look up there at #2 again. A good first reader doesn't "look for" anything. Nor does the first reader tell the writer how s/he would have written it, give the writer tips on craft, edit, recommend craft books, etc. That isn't the first reader's job.

Yet as Mark Twain famously wrote, "There is no urge so great as for one [writer] to edit another [writer]'s work."

Again, the first reader's job is to read, for pleasure, period, and then report back on what pops out at him/her as s/he's reading.

And the fact is, a writer (you) CAN be a great first reader—IF you remember that in your capacity as a first reader you're a READER, not a writer.

So, I thought I'd toss out an experiment here.

If any of you are interested in serving as a first reader for other writers (not me), please take a moment to send me your name, email address, and which genre(s) and/or subgenre(s) you're interested in reading.

If I get any responses at all, I will compile a searchable, downloadable PDF list and will more than likely even include it in the Journal archives in a separate file. In other words it will be available to anyone who visits the Journal website at <https://hestanbrough.com>.

I look forward to seeing how this turns out.

And if anyone can think of any other ways writers can help other writers (including each others' books in bundles, mentioning real titles and real author names in your fiction as if your character is reading them, etc.) let me know.

FYI, I do currently have one writer who is looking for a first reader in the SF Horror and Splatterpunk genres. If you're interested, [let me know via email](#) and I'll put the two of you in touch.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "The 103 Best Book Covers of 2022" at <https://lithub.com/the-103-best-book-covers-of-2022/>. I wonder whether the judging was blind. I think probably not.

See "Artificial womb: Video shows what pregnancy may be like in the future" at <https://interestingengineering.com/innovation/artificial-womb-facility-30000-babies-a-year>. S-T-O-R-Y ideas.

See “Facts About the 500-Year-Old Incan Ice Mummies That Are Both Haunting and Fascinating” at <https://hasanjasim.online/facts-about-the-500-year-old-incan-ice-mummies-that-are-both-haunting-and-fascinating/>. Story ideas.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 570 words

Writing of WCG 7 Santa Fe 2 (novel tentative title)

Day 1..... 2190 words. Total words to date..... 2190
Day 2..... 3049 words. Total words to date..... 5239
Day 3..... 2588 words. Total words to date..... 7827
Day 4..... 3373 words. Total words to date..... 11200
Day 5..... 3317 words. Total words to date..... 14517
Day 6..... 3771 words. Total words to date..... 18288
Day 7..... 3102 words. Total words to date..... 21390

Total fiction words for December..... 37804
Total fiction words for the year..... 252778
Total nonfiction words for December... 11840
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 209920
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 462698

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 4
Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 70
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

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Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [First readers](#), [Value of IP](#)

[First Readers \(More Info\)](#)

December 16, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * New Free Story Posted
- * First Readers (More Info)
- * Short Day on the Novel
- * Publishing to Paper
- * Of Interest

New Free Story Posted

There's a new free story posted over at [Stanbrough Writes](#). I forgot to post one last week, but nobody mentioned it so apparently my lapse didn't matter. Which is a good thing. In the future, I'll post over there as I think about it, but I won't fret over posting every week.

First Readers (More Info)

In reponse to yesterday's brief post about what a first reader is or is not, one writer emailed to say I could add him to the first reader list. He also said the post was a great explanation of the job of a first reader.

So I thought I'd go ahead and post a full topic here about the concept of first readers, what is required of them, and more importantly, what is NOT required of them. Here is what I want from a good first reader.

(I wrote this in the first person so it would write more easily, but I personally am not actively looking for another first reader.)

What I Want from a Good First Reader

First, don't try to spare my feelings. We'll still be friends, I promise. Seriously, I'm trusting you to tell me the truth.

Second, you know how when you're reading a novel for which you paid good money, sometimes errors and inconsistencies pop out at you?

Like wrong word usages (waste vs. waist), typos (teh vs. the) and inconsistencies? Maybe the character's name is Jim but somewhere along the line the writer wrote "John" instead. Or maybe the character's wearing a blue jacket at the beginning of a scene and a brown jacket later in the scene, without any mention of him having changed suits.

And then sometimes maybe you encounter something while reading that confuses you or knocks you out of the story.

Things like that are what I need to know from you as you read through my novels. So

1. read strictly for pleasure,
2. after the fact, point out any errors or inconsistencies that pop out at you as you read,

a. you can do this in a notepad document if you reference brief segments of text (so I can search and find it) or you can do it by highlighting the problem area with a bold color and adding a comment, etc. Please do not reference problems with page numbers.

3. if you are shoved out of the story, let me know that, where it happened, and why (if you know).

What I Do NOT Want from a First Reader (and Probably Will Ignore Even if You Go to the Trouble of Adding Them so Please Don't Waste Your Time)

1. Don't read critically. Don't "look for" anything. Be lost in the story and just read. This is the most important part of the job.

2. Even if you're a writer, or maybe especially if you're a writer, don't tell me how you would have written it. Best of luck with your version, but for this project it isn't relevant, and I don't care. (This is why I don't do critique groups and very seldom use writers as first readers.)

3. Don't worry about spelling, grammar, etc. UNLESS it gets in the way of your understanding or pulls you from the story. (If it makes you stumble or boots you out of the story, see #4 in the list above).

4. Don't worry about my "style" of writing, sentence or paragraph construction, grammar, etc. etc. etc. Again, it simply isn't relevant.

5. Unless you've written and published a LOT more novels than I have, I don't want any kind of writing advice.

6. Finally, in your notes, don't reference page numbers. Page numbers change depending on your computer screen, magnification, etc. so any reference to page numbers is basically useless.

There you go. I hope this will save you hours of frustration.

Short Day on the Novel

I didn't write as much as I would have liked on the novel, but I did create a cover and publish Santa Fe: A New Era to D2D and Amazon.

I also decided to revise my [Westerns page at StoneThread Publishing](#). On all the other genre pages, the newest books are at the top of the page and the oldest are at the bottom. For Wes though, mostly because of this Gap series thing, I decided to list the books chronologically from Book 1 through the end.

So there are Wes Crowley Saga books 1 and 2, then the six (so far) Gap series novels, and then the Wes Crowley Saga books 3 through 12.

Wheeeeeee!

Publishing to Paper

I've decided to start taking my books to paper as well as ebooks. A friend got me started on Amazon. I wonder whether D2D's process is smoother. (If anyone out there knows, please share.)

I started the process this morning, but there was too much I didn't know or remember. For example, the text of your original (submitted) mss must fit within the trim size you choose.

So it appears that 99% of everything required for paper publication can be standardized and set up in advance, which means you only have to do the actual work of it once, which is perfect for me.

But rather than taking more time away from writing the current novel to delve more deeply into that, I'll do so after this novel is finished.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Top 50 Mark Twain Quotes" at <https://quotefancy.com/mark-twain-quotes>. Good site. You can delve deeper and find thousands of quotes from hundreds of sources.

See "The secret lives of MI6's top female spies" at <https://www.ft.com/content/741772c0-ee76-4d3d-bfcd-4fabcf1fb405d>.

See "Four Different Challenges" at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/four-different-challenges/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 950 words

Writing of WCG 7 Santa Fe 2 (novel tentative title)

Day 1..... 2190 words. Total words to date..... 2190
Day 2..... 3049 words. Total words to date..... 5239
Day 3..... 2588 words. Total words to date..... 7827
Day 4..... 3373 words. Total words to date..... 11200
Day 5..... 3317 words. Total words to date..... 14517
Day 6..... 3771 words. Total words to date..... 18288
Day 7..... 3102 words. Total words to date..... 21390
Day 8..... 2020 words. Total words to date..... 23410

Total fiction words for December..... 39824

Total fiction words for the year..... 254798

Total nonfiction words for December... 12790

Total nonfiction words for the year.....	210870
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog).....	465668
Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date.....	4
Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date...	0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	70
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014).....	217
Short story collections.....	31

Disclaimer: I am a prolific professional fiction writer. Because It Makes Sense, I trust my characters to tell the story that they, not I, are living. This greatly increases my productivity and provides the fastest possible ascension along the learning curve of Craft because I get a great deal more practice at actually writing. It will do the same for you if only you trust it.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [First Reader Requirements](#), [Publishing to Paper](#)

My Best Advice for Fiction Writers: Part 1

December 17, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Dwindling Numbers
- * Yesterday I got a late start
- * My Best Advice for Fiction Writers: Part 1
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“History is dramatic license, covertly-financed with a sprinkling of gold dust from the newly-enthroned.” Stewart Stafford

“The most effective way to destroy people is to deny and obliterate their own understanding of their history.” George Orwell

Dwindling Numbers

Fewer and fewer writers are looking at this Journal, at least the version that I send out via email. Recently the view rate is moving between 15% and 40% of subscribers.

Possibly that's in anticipation of me ending the Journal, or at least cutting back to a much less-frequent publishing schedule. Of course, the low numbers are also driving me to end the Journal or at least cut back, so kind of a two-edged sword there.

Yesterday I got a late start on the novel because a thought struck me about writing advice, then expanded. Consequently, I spent around three hours on that thought and this little bit of today's edition of the Journal.

Consequently, for those of you who've hung on, I thought I'd toss out a couple of special posts titled My Best Advice for Fiction Writers. Maybe more than two. We'll see. I'll also make the overall article available as a searchable PDF file.

The rest of the day all but fell apart with a lot of different little things adding up. Anyway, here you go. Thanks for being along for the ride.

My Best Advice for Fiction Writers: Part 1

With over 70 novels, 8 novellas, and well over 200 short stories written in *6 years, I feel qualified to pass along what I've learned in this much-abbreviated capsule.

Many of the individual points below could be expanded into a book-length discussion. But the core concepts, the core truths, are all presented here. These are a great deal more than I had when I started.

Besides, a book about any of them would only expand on those concepts. And the plain truth is,

1. no amount of expansion and explanation of these concepts will help you if you refuse to try them, and
2. any expansion will be redundant and unnecessary if you do try them.

Preface

In this writing life, some things are fundamental. Chief among those is your relationship with your characters. That relationship informs how you treat your characters, and it's ultimately your choice.

You can choose to see yourself as being ABOVE your characters or you can choose to see yourself as being AMONG them. You can't do both.

If you've chosen the latter, welcome and congratulations. Now you are free to choose to Trust the characters to convey the story that they, not you, are living. You should keep reading this post, if nothing else for camaraderie.

If you've chosen the former, read on if you want, but unless you're willing to at least try to throw off the fears that have been piled on you practically since birth, there's really nothing I can do for you.

Still, you're welcome. I get through to around 1 in every 300 or so writers.

If You've Chosen to See Yourself as Being Among Your Characters

Congratulations. You could as easily have donned your official, flowing, Authorial robes and ascended into the great ivory tower, whence you would control every single stinkin' aspect of your characters' lives and story: every event, every twist and turn, every word that's said. In other words, it wouldn't actually be your character's story. It would be something you consciously thought up, blamed on them.

But instead you chose to be a participant. You chose to put on your jeans and a t-shirt and sneakers and roll off the parpet into the trenches of the story.

You chose to run through the story WITH your characters, trying to keep up and recording what happens and what is said as the story unfolds around all of you.

Here are some pointers to help keep you on the straight and narrow. These comprise my best advice for fiction writers:

1. Understand the difference between *your* story and your *characters'* story. This is essential and fundamental to everything else.

In YOUR story, you are currently reading these words. Later, when you're writing fiction, you will not be conveying *your* story. You will be conveying your *characters'* story.

In YOUR story you will be sitting at table or desk or with your keyboard balanced on your lap or on a lap desk. Your fingers will be on the keys, and you'll be typing letters and punctuation and doing your best to keep up with your characters as you race through the story with them.

In your CHARACTERS' story, any number of things might be happening. But here's the real kicker:

***You can't "plan" or "plot" an authentic story. Life simply happens.
Authentic stories unfold in real time as they are lived and experienced.***

To convey your characters original, unique, authentic story, don't plan, and don't second guess them. What happened happened. *The characters* may add or subtract details as they go along. That's perfectly fine. It's their story, after all.

But remember, you are not a character in the story. You are only the reporter or recorder or typist or stenographer for your characters. As such, if you add or subtract details that you "decide" (conscious, critical mind) should be included or subtracted, you will veer far afield of that unique, original, authentic story.

But don't the characters and their story 'live' in your creative subconscious?

Maybe. Certainly in our limited human judgement, which we jealously guard as being “superior,” they live in our creative subconscious. We certainly access them through our creative subconscious.

Other possibilities are just as plausible. I personally believe when I access my creative subconscious I’m actually opening a window onto another dimension, one in which the characters are going about their lives.

But it doesn’t matter, does it?

Wherever you believe your characters reside—in your creative subconscious, in another dimension, in an alternate universe, or some other place—your two-fold task remains the same:

1. to enjoy and be entertained by their story yourself, and then
2. to convey their story in such a way that others may be entertained by it as well.

So how do you keep yourself out of your characters’ story?

Pay attention to what’s coming in through your creative subconscious.

Put your fingers on the keyboard, then type what you see and hear. Type what happens (in excruciating detail whenever possible) and the characters’ reaction, both what they do and what they say.

Recognize that any fear-based or negative thought (Ooh, that can’t be right; How will they ever get out of this? They can’t do this; No, something’s wrong here; That wouldn’t happen like that; etc.) is from your conscious, critical mind.

If you can, simply ignore it and go on typing.

If you are unable to ignore it, break the connection with the story. Take your fingers off the keyboard, get up, and physically walk away.

As you do, tell your critical mind, aloud if you want, that it has no place in your fiction.

Consider—Your fear-response based, critical mind has no right to embellish or retell anyone else’s story, whether it’s the story of your spouse or parents or more physically distant relatives, the story of your neighbors across the street, or the story of your characters.

You don’t know what will happen next even in your own story (your own life), much less what will happen next in your spouse’s or parents’ or siblings’ or neighbors’ or characters’ lives.

Just let the characters’ story unfold—just as you “let” your own and others’ stories (and lives) unfold—and be there to record it as it does.

More than enough for today. Tomorrow, we begin with a pop quiz. (grin)

Talk with you again then.

Of Interest

See “4 Perennially Misused Words” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/4-perennially-misused-words/>.

See “30% Off Sale Ends Tomorrow” at <https://deanwesleymith.com/30-off-sale-ends-tomorrow/>. If nothing else, take a look for some great ideas for collection themes.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1360 words

Writing of WCG 7 Santa Fe 2 (novel tentative title)

Day 1..... 2190 words. Total words to date..... 2190
Day 2..... 3049 words. Total words to date..... 5239
Day 3..... 2588 words. Total words to date..... 7827
Day 4..... 3373 words. Total words to date..... 11200
Day 5..... 3317 words. Total words to date..... 14517
Day 6..... 3771 words. Total words to date..... 18288
Day 7..... 3102 words. Total words to date..... 21390
Day 8..... 2020 words. Total words to date..... 23410
Day 9..... 1504 words. Total words to date..... 24914

Total fiction words for December..... 41328
Total fiction words for the year..... 256302
Total nonfiction words for December... 14150
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 212230
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 468532

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 4
Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 70
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: I am a prolific professional fiction writer. Because It Makes Sense, I trust my characters to tell the story that they, not I, are living. This greatly increases my productivity and provides the fastest possible ascension along the learning curve of Craft because I get a great deal more practice at actually writing. It will do the same for you if only you trust it.

My Best Advice for Fiction Writers: Part 2

December 18, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * One Subscriber
- * Another slightly shortened day
- * My Best Advice for Fiction Writers: Part 2
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“I don't know how you perceive my mission as a writer, but for me it is not a responsibility to reaffirm your concretized myths and provincial prejudices. It is not my job to lull you with a false sense of the rightness of the universe.” Harlan Ellison

“This wonderful and terrible occupation of recreating the world in a different way, each time fresh and strange, is an act of revolutionary guerrilla warfare. I stir the soup. I inconvenience you. I make your nose run and your eyeballs water.” Harlan Ellison

“I hate when a director says to me ‘Here's how I envision this scene’...excuse me? It's right here in the script – I ‘envisioned’ it FOR you. Do what I wrote. If you want to ‘envision’, you should become a writer. Where the fuck were you when the page was blank?” Harlan Ellison

One Subscriber

and an excellent storyteller in her own right, bless her heart, was concerned enough about my mention of the plummeting open rate of the Journal that she wrote me a whole long email about how to remedy it. I felt a little guilty that she spent so much time and effort on it.

I appreciated it, but as I explained to her, it didn't really apply to the Journal and its very niche audience. For the better part of 8 years, I've had roughly 90 subscribers to the Journal. That number has never varied more than 10 in either direction, and the list has never broken 100.

For that same extended time, my almost daily posts have enjoyed an average (and almost unheard-of) 89% open rate.

So when that suddenly fell off to 15-40%, I mentioned it because it seemed a precipitous drop. And as I wrote yesterday, probably it was caused by the uncertainty of the future of the Journal. But no big deal.

I more than likely will continue with the Journal into next year, albeit with a slightly different format and with less-frequent posting. For example, there's no reason for me to spend an hour or more each morning reading things online only to send them on to you.

Another slightly shortened day

Welp, another slightly shortened writing day, but with good reason. I went back to the Hovel to write one more session (Keep Coming Back, remember?) and heard what I thought was a hydraulic leak in my desk chair.

Nope. It was a rattlesnake. He had somehow embedded himself behind the desk on which I keep my writing 'puter. Which means for a few hours during the day, my right calf was within no more than two feet of his head and fangs. He might even live in a hole in the wall of my adobe-dirt Hovel. Wrap your head around that.

I don't scare very often, but that scared me. With my ticker problem, one strike and I'd be out for good. So I left the Hovel. I was able, leaning over my desk from the side, to get both my computers and bring them to the house, from which I'm reporting this morning.

OKAY, now, finally, onto something that might actually be helpful. By the way, if you do find any of this stuff useful, please consider sharing and/or recommending the Journal to your writer friends.

My Best Advice for Fiction Writers, Part 2

If you missed it, see Part 1 at <https://hestanbrough.com/my-best-advice-for-fiction-writers-part-1/>.

By Way of Example, a Pop Quiz

Please imagine that your distant cousin, who is rich or famous or infamous, asked you to write the story of one part of his or her life.

Maybe it was how s/he went about making that first million dollars, or maybe about the nomination, win, and acceptance of an Oscar for a performance in a film. Or maybe it was all about that last bank robbery, the one that failed and landed him or her in a high-security federal penitentiary.

Now imagine s/he somehow granted you full access to open a window into the past—to actually watch and listen as s/he made that first million or honed those acting chops or planned and carried out that bank robbery.

Would you

a. feel the need to outline or plot or plan what was going to happen in the story or embellish it afterward? Or would you

b. just watch, listen, and write it down as it actually happened?

If you chose b, yeah, me too. Because that would be the actual, authentic story, wouldn't it?

And don't say you can't change it because it was a "real" life whereas the other stuff you write is fiction.

Wrong.

First, memoir is much closer to fiction than nonfiction. It isn't an account of what actually happened. It's an account of what the POV character *remembers* happened. If you don't believe me, write even a brief a memoir about an event from your childhood, then invite comments from your parents and siblings.

But more importantly, the story from the exercise above is *your cousin's story*, not yours. Just as the story you write from your characters is your characters' story, not yours.

Finally, that's the end of my first bit of advice for fiction writers. If you've forgotten, the first point is ***Understand the difference between your story and your characters' story.***

I repeat it here because it really is essential and fundamental to everything else I'll talk about. If you haven't read Part 1, or if at this point you don't really get it, I recommend you go back and read it now at <https://hestanbrough.com/my-best-advice-for-fiction-writers-part-1/>.

On with Part 2—

2. Heinlein's Business Habits for Writers is invaluable. Heinlein's Rules are ridiculously difficult to follow and incredibly fun and fulfilling to attempt. Adhere to them. When you fall off (and you will fall off) get right back on as soon as possible.

For a free annotated copy of Heinlein's Rules, click <https://harveystanbrough.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Heinleins-Business-Habits-Annotated-2.pdf>.

3. Every word of the story must come through the characters.

4. Any description of setting must come through the POV character.

To lay to rest the myth of "too much" or "too little" description, any description that comes through the POV character can't be "too much." You can't "decide" (critical mind) whether anything is "too much" because you don't know what's going to happen later in the story. Duh. The POV character often will describe something that seems insignificant in the moment but plays a significant role later.

Conversely, ANY description that comes from the author (*Mmm, I think maybe I should describe the shelves in the library*) is always too much. Why? Because the source is external to the story.

And that one description, if you allow your conscious mind to insert it, will throw the story off track.

Use all five of the POV character's (not the writer's) physical senses and at least one indicator of at least one emotional sense (fear, anger, irony, joy, hatred, etc.) in every major scene.

And no, you don't have to force anything on the character. The POV character WON'T use every sense to describe every setting. Take what s/he gives you. But if s/he describes something, don't alter the description and don't leave it out.

That's it for today. I'll be back with Part 3 tomorrow.

Part 4 will round out my best advice and offer recommendations for resources and craft material.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Telepathic Communication + Unnatural Mayhem" at <http://dyingwords.net/telepathic-communication-unnatural-mayhem/>. This isn't a site I check, it's a subscription, and I recommend it.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1250 words

Writing of WCG 7 Santa Fe 2 (novel tentative title)

Day 1..... 2190 words. Total words to date..... 2190
Day 2..... 3049 words. Total words to date..... 5239
Day 3..... 2588 words. Total words to date..... 7827
Day 4..... 3373 words. Total words to date..... 11200
Day 5..... 3317 words. Total words to date..... 14517
Day 6..... 3771 words. Total words to date..... 18288
Day 7..... 3102 words. Total words to date..... 21390
Day 8..... 2020 words. Total words to date..... 23410
Day 9..... 1504 words. Total words to date..... 24914
Day 10... 2524 words. Total words to date..... 27438

Total fiction words for December..... 43852
Total fiction words for the year..... 258826
Total nonfiction words for December... 15400
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 213480
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 472306

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date.....	4
Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date...	0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	70
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014).....	217
Short story collections.....	31

Disclaimer: I am a prolific professional fiction writer. Because It Makes Sense, I trust my characters to tell the story that they, not I, are living. This greatly increases my productivity and provides the fastest possible ascension along the learning curve of Craft because I get a great deal more practice at actually writing. It will do the same for you if only you trust it.

My Best Advice for Fiction Writers: Part 3

December 19, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * SnakeBeGone
- * My Best Advice for Fiction Writers, Part 3
- * Of Interest

SnakeBeGone

Here at the GoodHovel SnakeBeGone the snake is, um gone. My wife and I moved things around, shifted desks, etc. and found 2 very likely and 3 plausible avenues of approach by which rodents or reptiles might relocate themselves to Inside the Hovel from Outside the Hovel. We assume our visiting snake poured himself back through one of those avenues while I was out.

We went to our friendly Ace Hardware store where we purchased moth balls and coarse steel wool. We (by which I mean "she" since if I get into any of the required positions I might never get up) shot a few mothballs along each hole and then stuffed between two and five pads of steel wool into it.

Unless the next snake, mouse, or packrat is packing dynamite, he ain't gettin' in. Anyway, after all that, I took the rest of the day to do nothing.

My Best Advice for Fiction Writers, Part 3

See Part 1 at <https://hestanbrough.com/my-best-advice-for-fiction-writers-part-1/>.

See Part 2 at <https://hestanbrough.com/my-best-advice-for-fiction-writers-part-2/>.

It dawned on me this morning that at the outside this series of posts is useful as a list of possible terms for you to type into the Search box on this hestanbrough.com, harveystanbrough.com or in the Journal archives. Anyway, here we go.

5. Pacing. Pacing, pacing, pacing. Sentence structure and paragraphing goes to pacing. Pacing dictates how fast or slowly the reader reads.

A few notes on sentence structure—

Longer, less-punctuated sentences (think flow) convey stronger emotion or convey emotion more strongly. Always. This is not opinion. It's fact.

Shorter sentences evoke drama and tension. Always. (However, overuse dilutes the intended effect.)

You may also insert dramatic segments into longer sentences through the appropriate use of punctuation.

It's insane to me that most fiction writers do not intimately know punctuation and how to wield it as a tool to direct the reading of his or her work.

To be frightened or unsure about one of the major tools in your writers' toolbox is just silly. If you have ANY questions about punctuation in fiction, pick up a copy of my [Punctuation for Writer 2nd Edition](#).

Yes, I'm speaking to your conscious, critical mind here. Your conscious, critical mind is valuable in two ways:

1. It protects you from harm. (Hence your fear-based reaction when you think about writing without knowing in advance where a story is going.)
2. It enables you to learn. You learn with your conscious mind. Then your creative subconscious absorbs what you learn. Then you forget about it and apply what you learned with your creative subconscious as you write.

6. Cliffhangers. Put one at the end of every major scene and every chapter, period.

Most often, if you trust your characters and write into the dark, the appearance of a cliffhanger will startle even you and mark the end of a scene or chapter.

Emotional or psychological cliffhangers are more prevalent than physical cliffhangers, but any will do.

The cliffhanger is what makes the reader turn the page. Think of the cliffhanger as the near end of the hook.

7. Hooks. The hook isn't only for the opening of the story.

Yes, it's important to hook the reader physically and/or emotionally at the beginning of the story. But you also want to hook the reader at the beginning of every major scene and chapter. (See Grounding below.)

Think of the hook is the other end of the cliffhanger.

8. Grounding. Grounding also isn't only for the opening of the story.

Ground the reader in the setting BEFORE you get anywhere near the character actually doing anything (action).

Let the reader see, hear, smell, feel, and taste the setting and hear or see the POV character's opinion of that setting (or part of it). That's how we pull the reader into the story.

On that "POV character's opinion" thing—

For example, some POV characters, if they step outside and it's raining, will frown or say, "Aw man" or "Bummer" or "Damn it." Both the frown and the comment are expressions of an opinion.

Other POV characters (or the same POV character at a different time), if they step outside and it's raining will smile or say, "Oh, what a great day!" or "Cool!" etc.

Again, facial expressions, body language, and comments are expressions of an opinion.

9. Don't Start with the Action. To be clear, the stuff up there in Grounding means don't start with the action.

Note that the segment above on Grounding had nothing whatsoever to do with "plot." The plot is the result of events happening and the characters either causing or reacting to those events. Don't attempt to plot or plan anything in advance.

Likewise, starting with the action is another myth. Yeah, I know. You've heard it forever. Just like you've heard forever that you have to plan (plot) the story before you write a word, and you have to revise, and you have to rewrite, and you have to seek critical input or "a second pair of eyes" or whatever.

Bovine excrement, folks, all of it.

If you just crossed your arms, absolutely determined that what I deride as myths really are necessary to writing good fiction, I probably can't help you. Only you can do that.

If there's any spark of the confident You still in there, the You who believes in yourself and can do things without a lot of unnecessary handholding, stop reading this right now and go back to

the beginning of Part 1. Then read it all slowly, absorbing it and making sure you understand each point before going on.

But if you have chosen to be irretrievably lost to the unreasoning fears (fears that have no actual real consequences) and the myths that spring from them, I suggest you stop reading this and go find something fun to do.

Again, the effectiveness of everything in this article relies on your ability to understand the difference between Your story and your Character's story.

If you're steeped in the myths, I promise, you do not understand that difference.

And if you're invested in them, you *can't* understand that difference.

But I like starting with the action—Listen, if you really want to “start with the action,” go ahead and do that. Then back up. You're the writer, so unlike the reader, you're unstuck in time.

Start with action. Zero description. Have your faceless, clothingless, bodyless character with no name and no history race into a plain white room with no dimensions to defuse an explosive undescribed something and somehow narrowly escape getting blown to smithereens.

Then ask your characters what happened in the few seconds or minutes or hours or days leading up to that action? Write that first and use it to ground the reader—that's your opening—*then* get into the action.

As an interesting aside, most best-selling books that you believe started with action actually didn't. Most started with grounding the reader in the setting. But they did it in such a way that it drew you (the reader) into the story. The writer hooked and grounded you, and then the action started.

But don't believe me. Check for yourself. Use Amazon's Look Inside feature to read the opening of some novels.

10. When writing slows or bogs down, trust your characters.

Just write the next sentence, then the next and the next. Soon the story will be racing along again. Yeah, I know, but it really is that simple.

a. If “Just Write the Next Sentence” doesn't work because there is no next sentence, read back a few paragraphs. Usually you'll find that you've written past the end of the scene or chapter. If that happens, start a new scene or chapter and Just Write the Next Sentence, etc.

b. If you're near the end of a novel, same thing. Read back a little. Usually you'll find that you wrote past the end of the novel. This has happened to me on three occasions. Same advice. Run a spell check, send the manuscript to your first reader, then start the next story.

That's more than enough for today. Back with Part 4 and some recommendations for reference and craft resources tomorrow.

Talk with you again then.

Of Interest

See "Intellectual Property Valuation Basics" at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/intellectual-property-valuation-basics/>.

See "How to Write that Last Chapter: 8 Tips for Ending your Book" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/how-to-write-that-last-chapter-8-tips-for-ending-your-book/>. Or you could, you know, let it end the way it ends. Still, learn with your conscious mind, apply (write) with your creative subconscious.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1420 words

Writing of WCG 7 Santa Fe 2 (novel tentative title)

Day 10... 2524 words. Total words to date..... 27438

Total fiction words for December..... 43852
Total fiction words for the year..... 258826
Total nonfiction words for December... 16820
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 214900
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 473726

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 4
Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 70
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: I am a prolific professional fiction writer. Because It Makes Sense, I trust my characters to tell the story that they, not I, are living. This greatly increases my productivity and provides the fastest possible ascension along the learning curve of Craft because I get a great deal more practice at actually writing. It will do the same for you if only you trust it.

My Best Advice for Fiction Writers: Part 4

December 20, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

* My Best Advice for Fiction Writers, Part 4

* Of Interest

My Best Advice for Fiction Writers, Part 4

See Part 1 at <https://hestanbrough.com/my-best-advice-for-fiction-writers-part-1/>.

See Part 2 at <https://hestanbrough.com/my-best-advice-for-fiction-writers-part-2/>.

See Part 3 at <https://hestanbrough.com/my-best-advice-for-fiction-writers-part-3/>.

11. Keep Coming Back. As most of you know, I recommend having a daily word-count goal, something that 1) drives you to the writing 'puter but 2) isn't difficult to reach if you stretch just a little.

I also recommend taking a break every hour or so. You can train your mind to call for a break at regular intervals, or you can just drink a lot of coffee or tea or whatever other beverage of your choice. Caffeine is your friend. If nothing else, it will drive you to go to the bathroom every so often. That's a break.

Sometimes a break is only a few seconds. I get out of my chair, walk to the front of the Hovel (about 20 feet) and back, and I'm ready for another writing session.

Sometimes I have to go up to the house. No problem. I do what I need to do there and then go back to the Hovel and my writing 'puter and the story. It's also not a problem if you have a planned much longer break, for example a trip to the store or the antique mall or whatever.

But sometimes the break is extended unintentionally. That's when it's a good idea to remember that you haven't reached your daily word count goal and discipline yourself to go back to your writing, even though maybe you don't feel like it.

The sense of accomplishment that will come to you when you reach or surpass your daily goal because you came back one more time is wonderful.

That is the essence of Keep Coming Back. That little mantra has enabled me to add tens of thousands of words to my stories and novels that I wouldn't have otherwise written.

12. Following the Myths of Writing will carry you farther and farther from your characters' unique, original, authentic story.

The big myths are all functions of the conscious, critical mind. NONE of them come from the creative subconscious, nor can you perform any of them from the creative subconscious.

Consider, the conscious mind can logically construct or build something, but it can't create anything original. It can't even come up with an original sentence or thought. Only your creative subconscious can do that.

Since the stories you're writing all come from the creative subconscious, the fact that the myths do not should tell you something. The myths will tell you that you must, with your critical mind,

a. construct an outline or plan or signposts or mind map or whatever before you begin writing

b. revise what your characters have given you

c. invite critical input, not only from your own critical mind by reading critically as you "look for" flaws, but from others—outsiders—just as if they could possibly have a more valuable opinion than any other reader on the face of the earth.

d. rewrite (and then polish, whatever that means) according to that input.

You can make yourself feel better about seeking critical input by remembering that you can discard anything that "doesn't work" for you.

That sounds good on the surface, but remember, it isn't YOUR story, and it most definitely isn't your critique group's story.

How can anyone, your critique group included, possibly know better than you how to write a story that's taking place in your head (other dimension, etc.)?

And how can even YOU possibly know better than the characters who are actually LIVING the story?

It's your characters' story, so how about discarding what doesn't work for THEM? Which means anything that doesn't authentically happen in the story that they, not you, are living.

How about not rethinking and second-guessing and revising and rewriting what they gave you in the first place? How about trusting them? Or put another way, how would your cousin feel if you changed the details of the bank robbery?

Believe in yourself. Defend your work.

You hear it even from traditional publishers and literary agents (neither of which I recommend) every day: They and readers all over the world are looking for unique, original, authentic stories.

Then they recommend revising, seeking critical input, rewriting, etc., all of which eats away at the "unique, original, authentic" story until it's no longer unique, original, *or* authentic. And when it finally looks and sounds like all the rest, they don't want it. And why would they? Again, believe in yourself. Defend your work.

You get to do the easy part, after all. You don't have to live the story, though you're welcome to fantasize about it. But your role is much less significant. You're the recorder.

13. Finally, to Help You Safeguard against rethinking what your characters give you in their story, you only have to remember this:

Writers Are the Worst Judges of Their Own Work. Always.

You've heard that before, probably a million times. Any opinion, even your own, is only one opinion, and it doesn't count. Why? Because writers really *are* the worst judges of their own work. It's true. But it's true all the time, not only when you believe your work is good.

I find it ridiculously convenient that writers remember and swear by that old saying whenever they believe their work is actually Good. "Oh, it can't *really* be good; writers are the worst judges of their own work."

But when writers believe their work sucks canal water from all 50 states plus Puerto Rico and Guam, suddenly they forget they are the worst judges of their own work.

When a writer thinks his or her work is bad, the saying goes out the window, and the work goes into a desk drawer or the electronic equivalent, never to be seen again.

My friends, THAT is the result of buying into all those stupid myths.

How very sad that those writers are so unconfident in themselves and their abilities, yet simultaneously are so pretentious that they feel the right to prejudge what the reader will or won't like. Wow.

Even your opinion as the writer isn't any more valid than any other opinion. Because, again, It Isn't Your Story.

It's your characters' story, and the characters have already given you their opinion. All you have to do is write it down as it happens.

Judging the story is the readers' job.

Your job is to write the story on behalf of your characters.

If you don't like your story or if some critic or other reader somewhere doesn't like it, so what? Ignore those opinions. They make no difference whatsoever to the readers who DO like it.

Let the characters' story stand as authentic. If you do that, the 10/80/10 rule will apply. Ten percent of those who read the story will love it, 80% will like it, and 10% will hate it, probably because they're having a bad day, it isn't in their genre of choice, etc. So don't sweat it.

Trust your characters. If you do, you will be the first to experience their unique, original, authentic story. As a bonus, you won't bore your readers to death with a story that's been revised and rewritten and "polished" until any unique, original voice is long since gone.

You are a lucky, lucky person. Once you learn to trust your characters, you only have to put your fingers on the keyboard, look in on the characters, and write down what you see and hear. Nothing could be easier or more fun. And I wouldn't change that for the world.

This got longer than I expected it to, so I'll post my Recommendations for Reference and Craft Resources tomorrow.

Thanks for coming along. I've had a blast. I hope the posts in this series have been enjoyable and informative for you.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Flash Sale for Decade Ahead and January Regular Workshops" at <https://deanwesleymith.com/flash-sale-for-decade-ahead-and-january-regular-workshops/>.

See "Comments on Intellectual Property Valuation Basics" at <https://deanwesleymith.com/intellectual-property-valuation-basics/#comments>.

See "Health Effects of Mothballs" at <http://npic.orst.edu/ingred/ptype/mothball/health.html>. In case you didn't know. I haven't written for the past two days because I was ignorant of this.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1330 words

Writing of WCG 7 Santa Fe 2 (novel tentative title)

Day 10... 2524 words. Total words to date..... 27438

Total fiction words for December..... 43852
Total fiction words for the year..... 258826
Total nonfiction words for December... 18150
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 216230
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 475056

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 4
Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 70
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: I am a prolific professional fiction writer. Because It Makes Sense, I trust my characters to tell the story that they, not I, are living. This greatly increases my productivity and provides the fastest possible ascension along the learning curve of Craft because I get a great deal more practice at actually writing. It will do the same for you if only you trust it.

Recommendations for Reference and Craft Resources

December 21, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * One Final Bit of Writing Advice
- * Recommendations for Reference and Craft Resources
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“The basic tool for the manipulation of reality is the manipulation of words. If you can control the meaning of words, you can control the people who must use the words.” Philip K. Dick (*Be sure to see “Of Interest” today.*)

“Certainly it constitutes bad news if the people who agree with you are buggier than batshit.” Philip K. Dick

“It makes increasingly less sense even to talk about a publishing industry, because the core problem publishing solves — the incredible difficulty, complexity, and expense of making something available to the public — has stopped being a problem.” Clay Shirky

One Final Bit of Writing Advice

Never one to leave well enough alone (except in my writing) I thought I'd add one more bit of writing advice:

14. You Do You. Hey, it's only fiction. It's only a story of whatever length. In the overall scheme, it doesn't matter in the slightest except as it is valued by the individual reader.

I literally can't remember what most of my novels are about except in the most general terms (genre, theme). I can't remember the story itself, the major scenes, turning points, etc. That's how important a story is.

But then, specifically *because* it isn't important, I don't go over and over and over it. I follow the characters around, write down what happens and what they say and do as the story unfolds. That is incredibly entertaining. But when the story ends, I ship it off and move on to the next story.

Frankly, if you can remember major scenes, turning points, etc. from your own novel, I'd bet good money you're mired in the myths. But that's fine too. Hey, if you're comfortable there, snuggle in. I've certainly had my say.

In this series and for the past eight years I've done my best to give you a way out, a way to actually have fun and be entertained while you're conveying the stories that your characters, not you, are living.

If you trust yourself and your characters and write into the dark, the result will be a few minutes' or hours' entertainment for you, and then for the readers.

If you don't trust yourself and your characters—if you outline and revise and seek-and-apply critical input and rewrite and polish—the final result probably won't be entertaining for you. After all, you constructed the story block by block by miserable block, so you probably know the whole thing backward and forward.

Frankly, I really don't know how you do it. Once I've finished a story and learned the ending (almost always in less than a month), I can hardly wait to get it off my desk and move on to the next one. I can't even begin to imagine how anxious you are to get your story off your desk after you've lived with it for months or years, going over and over and over it. Ugh. But I digress.

Writing into the dark doesn't require you to “do” anything. It's only a suggestion that you stop doing things that are harmful to the unique, original, authentic story your characters gave you. It isn't a set of requirements; it's a Zen-like letting go. It's running through the story with your characters, having fun with them, instead of overstaying your welcome by months.

I hope you will at least try WITD, if only to prove or disprove it for yourself. But if you choose not to, that's all right too. It really is all up to you.

You do you. Write however you want. Seriously, I don't care. I learned a long time ago that what doesn't adversely affect my paycheck or my liberty is of no significance.

Anyway, there you go.

Recommendations for Reference and Craft Resources

If you use Microsoft Word when you write and if you are not familiar with its Paragraph Formatting feature or its Find & Replace feature (in particular) I encourage you to visit my Downloads page at <https://harveystanbrough.com/downloads/> and click on the first link.

That will take you to my series of posts on Microsoft Word for Writers. The Paragraph Formatting and Find & Replace features are explained thoroughly there (along with all the other

features), and learning to use them will greatly enhance your writing and save time with your formatting.

You might also browse that Downloads page for other useful resources. And right next door you'll find other Resources for Writers. Check it out.

My Writing Books

Not recommending my own nonfiction books on writing would just be insane. I don't pad them with a bunch of foo-foo BS. They're entertaining, informative and straightforward. To see all of them, visit <https://stonethreadpublishing.com/writing-books/>.

I especially recommend *Quiet the Critical Voice (and Write Fiction)*, *Writing the Character-Driven Story*, and *Punctuation for Writers*. Those are the three most important nonfiction books I've ever written. The others on the page are just as informative in their specific subject areas.

If you need help with publishing, I recommend *The Essentials of Digital Publishing*. Some of the information is slightly outdated, but wow is it a great step-by-step guide to publishing electronically.

While we're at it, let's do a flash sale. I'll send you any three books from that page for \$20, and any seven books from that page for \$40. Email me to tell me which titles you want and your preferred eformat, then either mail a check or pay via PayPal, and I'll send them right out.

(Mail your check to PO Box 604, St. David AZ 85630.)

Dean Wesley Smith's Writing Books

You can see all or most of Dean's writing books (WMG Publishing's Writer's Guides) at <https://wmgpublishinginc.com/writers/>.

I especially recommend *Writing Into the Dark*, *How to Write Fiction Sales Copy*, the two *Killing the Top Ten Sacred Cows* books, and *How to Write a Novel in Ten Days*.

I also recommend *Think Like A Publisher: A Step-By Step Guide to Publishing Your Own Books* at <https://www.amazon.com/dp/1463698224>.

Lawrence Block's Writing Books

You can find all or most of Lawrence Block's writing books at <https://lawrenceblock.com/series/books-for-writers/>.

The World Intellectual Property Organization website

In particular, "Valuing Intellectual Property Assets" at <https://www.wipo.int/sme/en/ip-valuation.html>.

That's it for now. Happy writing!

Of Interest

See "The Stanford Guide to Acceptable Words" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/the-stanford-guide-to-acceptable-words/>. This should be satire, but it isn't.

See "Changes In Publishing With Jane Friedman" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/changes-in-publishing-with-jane-friedman/>. Be sure to read the comment.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1080 words

Writing of WCG 7 Santa Fe 2 (novel tentative title)

Day 10... 2524 words. Total words to date..... 27438

Day 11... 3156 words. Total words to date..... 30594

Total fiction words for December..... 47008

Total fiction words for the year..... 261982

Total nonfiction words for December... 19230

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 217310

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 479292

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 4

Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 70

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

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Best Advice Available and Christmas Gifts

December 22, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Best Advice Available and Christmas Gifts
- * What? Me Doing a TKZ Guest Post?
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“It’s much more likely that an asteroid will strike the Earth and annihilate life as we know it than AI will turn evil.” Oren Etzioni, founding CEO of the Allen Institute for Artificial Intelligence

“People ask me to predict the future, when all I want to do is prevent it. Better yet, build it. Predicting the future is much too easy, anyway. You look at the people around you, the street you stand on, the visible air you breathe, and predict more of the same. To hell with more. I want better.” – Ray Bradbury

Best Advice Article Available

My “best advice” article is now available in its entirety, tidied up and with a new introduction, as a downloadable, searchable PDF document [on the Journal Archives page](#). Sometime in early January I’ll make the archive for 2022 available there as well.

As an early Christmas gift, I’ve also put a few more things up there, again in downloadable, fully searchable, free PDF files. I suggest you visit. (grin)

What? Me Doing a TKZ Guest Post?

Garry Rodgers, retired RCMP detective and coroner, international best-selling crime writer, and blogger at both his own [Dying Words blog](#) and at The Kill Zone blog, has asked me to write a guest post for TKZ.

I almost turned him down, given the winding down of my own Journal and how many regular TKZ contributors’ heads will explode if I write an article for those hallowed pages. (Oh, it’s all right. They’ll explode only metaphorically.)

But Garry wrote, “You and I are on the same page on Heinlein and DWS Writing Into The Dark, and I believe this wisdom needs to be shared as often as possible.”

Of course, that pulled me over the line. He’s right. Heinlein’s Rules and trusting your characters to tell the story that they, not you, are living should be shared with as many people as possible. I mean, that’s why I’ve been doing what I’ve been doing for the past 8 years. But TKZ has a much broader reader base than the Journal does. Hmmm.

I wrote recently that I probably get through to only one in 300 with my blathering, but knowing that One is running free of the myths makes it worth it. In fact, that One is why the Journal is only scaling back instead of going away permanently.

So I wrote back that barring any unforeseen complications, I'd be happy to. I'll let you all know when the post is scheduled to go live.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Flash Sale On Regular Workshops and Decade Ahead" at <https://deanwesleymith.com/flash-sale-on-regular-workshops-and-decade-ahead/>.

See "6 Ways to Write Better Interview Questions" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/6-surprising-ways-to-write-better-interview-questions/>. This can help with writing sales copy and with interviewing yourself for your bio or for publicity.

See "The Making of A Six Figure Author: How Authors Evolve With Their Income" at <https://www.writtenwordmedia.com/how-authors-evolve-with-their-income/>. Much about marketing.

See "Routine Writing Is About to Be Free" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/routine-writing-is-about-to-be-free/>. If you're interested in AI, there are several posts that might interest you today on The Passive Voice.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 530 words

Writing of WCG 7 Santa Fe 2 (novel tentative title)

Day 10... 2524 words. Total words to date..... 27438

Day 11... 3156 words. Total words to date..... 30594

Day 12... 1065 words. Total words to date..... 31659

Total fiction words for December..... 48073

Total fiction words for the year..... 263047

Total nonfiction words for December... 19760

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 217840

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 480887

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 4

Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 70

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

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Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays

December 23, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“I'm too afraid to write.” Posted on reddit by u/OneRoundMate

Yes, u/OneRoundMate was honest enough to actually write that in public. If you'd like to see for yourself the critical mind at work ripping apart writers left and right, visit <https://www.reddit.com/r/writing/comments/zslqqi/comment/j1c4jia/>.

“Don't sit down and wait for the opportunities to come. Get up and make them.” Madam CJ Walker

Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays

Wishing you all a merry Christmas—I hope the day is good to you whether or not you celebrate it officially—and that all your holidays will be enjoyable.

As always, I also wish for all of you the upcoming new year will be a better one than the last.

I probably will take some time off from the Journal now.

There are Christmas gifts available for you at <https://hestanbrough.com/the-daily-journal-archives/>.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

Note: I took all of these from the “Etcetera” section of the free, UNBIASED newsletter 1440 Daily Digest. (You can subscribe by sending an email to DailyDigest@email.join1440.com.)

See “NORAD’s annual Santa tracker” at <https://www.noradsanta.org/en/index.html>.

See “Mistletoe, a parasitic plant with a rich history” at <https://hort.extension.wisc.edu/articles/mistletoe/>.

See “Old Saint Nick was a little creepier in past centuries” at <https://petapixel.com/2022/12/22/creepy-19th-century-photos-show-what-santa-claus-used-to-look-like/>.

See “The funniest Christmas-related local news bloopers” (via YouTube) at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xFbHhAgkEfg>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 230 words

Writing of WCG 7 Santa Fe 2 (novel tentative title)

Day 10... 2524 words. Total words to date..... 27438

Day 11... 3156 words. Total words to date..... 30594

Day 12... 1065 words. Total words to date..... 31659

Day 13... 2380 words. Total words to date..... 34039

Total fiction words for December..... 50453

Total fiction words for the year..... 265427

Total nonfiction words for December... 19990

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 218070

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 483497

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 4

Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 70

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

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My Three Big Takeaways from 2022

December 26, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * My Three Big Takeaways from 2022
- * Inspiration
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“I distrust plot for two reasons: first, because our lives are largely plotless, even when you add in all our reasonable precautions and careful planning; and second, because I believe plotting and the spontaneity of real creation aren't compatible.” Stephen King

“Remember: Plot is no more than footprints left in the snow after your characters have run by on their way to incredible destinations.” Ray Bradbury

“Amateurs sit and wait for inspiration, the rest of us just get up and go to work.” Stephen King

My Three Big Takeaways from 2022

This year, I experienced three epiphanies or realizations. All three are extensions of what I first learned from Dean Wesley Smith as writing into the dark, but they take the concept much deeper. They are the result of making WITD my own.

1. You must trust your characters to tell the story that they, not you, are living.

If you trust your characters to tell the story that they, not you, are living, you will write their unique, authentic, original story, untainted by your (or others') critical external input.

This is different than simply writing without an outline. This is WHY you should write without an outline. This is why you should never consider creating an outline.

Your characters are living their story, so let them live it. Your only task is to write it down. The bonus is that doing so will entertain you, and then you get publish it so it will entertain others too.

2. The fiction writer is an action correspondent.

Your job, like that of any correspondent, is to report the story as it unfolds from wherever it's happening. On my various assignments that's been a small fishing village in Mexico around 1900 to different war zones to a private eye in from Chicago to California to Arizona to a generation ship soaring deep into the galaxy a thousand years from now and finally an exoplanet.

The keyword is 'report.' Good correspondents don't make up anything. We simply look-in on one set of characters or another and write down what's going on in their world as it happens, and what they're saying and doing in response.

3. *It is literally impossible to outline or plan an authentic story,* because the authentic story unfolds as the characters live it.

How can you (or the characters, for that matter) foresee what's going to happen in the next few minutes or hours or days? You can't, and they can't.

The story is developing, unfolding, as they live it. Your only job is to write what happens and what the characters say and do as the story unfolds.

Certainly it is within your power to fabricate something, make something up, and that's fine. But that won't be your characters' authentic story. Not only will you never know how good that story might have been, you'll never even know WHAT that story might have been because you didn't trust your characters enough to let it unfold.

Those are my three big takeaways from 2022. But actually, one more is partially formed too.

4. *You must trust yourself at your current skill level.*

If you wait to write until you improve as a writer, you will never write.

Improvement in writing, as improvement in any art form, comes from practice (putting new words on the page). Reading about, talking about, or thinking about writing—all functions of the critical mind—is not writing.

For a long time, I equated trusting my characters with trusting myself and my creative subconscious. But that is not accurate. Trusting your characters and trusting yourself are two separate acts that will achieve two separate ends.

Part of writing an authentic story is trusting your characters to tell the story that they, not you, are living.

But your characters have no way of getting the story out. For that, they rely on you. And the thing is, your characters trust you more than you trust yourself.

Read that again. Your characters trust you more than you trust yourself.

Why else would they invite you to roll off the parapet into the trenches of the story with them, to run through it with them, and to record it To The Best Of Your Current Ability and then publish it so others can see it?

Unfortunately, most of us don't trust ourselves as much as our characters trust us. Even the few of us who trust our characters to tell the story that they, not we, are living don't always trust ourselves to convey the story the "right" way: with the "right" structure or the "right" ratio of dialogue to narrative or the "right" syntax or grammar or punctuation or whatever.

Which of course is an excellent opening for the critical mind to seep into.

Don't let it. You really *do* know a great deal more about storytelling than you realize. You really *have been* absorbing Story, including various types of structure, your entire life. You've probably been telling stories to others since before you even knew there was an alphabet.

Trust that you know how to tell a story, just as you trust that you know to capitalize the first letter of the first word of a sentence and when to use a question mark instead of a period at the end of a sentence. It's Exactly the Same Thing.

So go back to number 1 above. Trust the characters and write the story they convey to you as they're living it. And trust yourself that you will do so to the best of your ability at your current skill level.

Between stories, go learn something else about writing that you're interested in. Then write another story, and another, and another. Alternate learning with writing.

Engage in learning periods. Read and enjoy a master's work. Mark any passages that blow you away. (I attach a thin sticky note to the page, then go back to reading.) After the story ends, I go back to re-read, dissect and study the passages that blew me away to see how s/he did that.

You can also take a class, read a how-to on writing fiction, etc. All of these are conscious, critical mind exercises. What you learn will seep into your creative subconscious.

Engage in practice. Practice, as a writer, means putting new words on the page.

If you alternate periods of writing (or writing projects) with periods of learning, you will progress rapidly as a writer. Later, as your knowledge accumulates, you probably will practice more (write more stories or novels) between learning sessions.

Remember, you cannot improve as a writer by hovering over one work trying to perfect it. And even if you get it "perfect" to your taste, it will be far from perfect for many readers.

As the fourth realization—Trust Yourself—becomes more clear in my mind, I'll probably address it again in a future post.

The first three takeaways above are what helped me claw my way back to recording authentic stories for my characters after my hiatus. I hope they will help you in some way with your own writing too.

Inspiration

Don't wonder where you'll be with your writing a year from now if only you start writing today. Wonder where you'll be tomorrow, and a week from now, and a month from now. And where will you be if you don't start?

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Why scientists want to microwave the Moon” at <https://interestingengineering.com/science/microwaving-the-moon>. Humans: we’re number one at our inability to Just Leave Stuff Alone. And we always get it wrong. Always.

See “California’s carbon offsetting may actually be increasing emissions” at <https://www.newscientist.com/article/2352926-californias-carbon-offsetting-may-actually-be-increasing-emissions/>. Again. (See above.)

See “Forensic scientists are gaining an edge on crime” at <https://www.snexplores.org/article/forensic-scientists-new-tools-fingerprints-dna-solving-crime>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1300 words

Writing of WCG 7 Santa Fe 2 (novel tentative title)

Day 10... 2524 words. Total words to date..... 27438

Day 11... 3156 words. Total words to date..... 30594

Day 12... 1065 words. Total words to date..... 31659

Day 13... 2380 words. Total words to date..... 34039

Day 14... 3159 words. Total words to date..... 37198

Total fiction words for December..... 53612

Total fiction words for the year..... 268586

Total nonfiction words for December... 21290

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 219370

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 487956

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 4

Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 70

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

Disclaimer: I am a prolific professional fiction writer. Because It Makes Sense, I trust my characters to tell the story that they, not I, are living. This greatly increases my productivity and provides the fastest possible ascension along the learning curve of Craft because I get a great deal more practice at actually writing. It will do the same for you if only you trust it.

Categories [Daily Journal](#) Tags [Engage in learning](#), [Engage in practice.](#), [Fiction Writer as Action Correspondent](#), [Impossible to plot or plan an authentic story](#), [Trust your characters](#), [Trust yourself](#)

Five Days Left, and Don't Kill the Scene

December 27, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Five Days Left
- * Don't Kill the Scene (notes from a grouchy old writer)
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“My stories have led me through my life. They shout, I follow. They run up and bite me on the leg—I respond by writing down everything that goes on during the bite. When I finish, the idea lets go and runs off.” Ray Bradbury

“The best description of my career as a writer is, ‘At play in the fields of the Lord.’ It’s been wonderful fun, and I’ll be damned where any of it came from.” Ray Bradbury

Five Days Left

If January 1, the official beginning of a new week, month and year, has any significance for you from a goal-setting standpoint, you have five days left.

Have you considered your goals for 2023 yet? I have two pieces of advice:

1. Whatever goals you set, I urge you to break them down into smaller, more easily achievable bits.

It's completely ridiculous to even think about writing 24 novels in a year, yet in the first 7 months of 2021 I wrote 13 novels, an average of one every two weeks. The average length of those novels was 44,546 words, an average of 3181 words per day.

I didn't set out to write 13 novels in 7 months. I set out to write 3000 words per day. I wasn't worried about whether or how many short stories or novels would result from achieving that daily goal. Which leads me to my second bit of advice:

2. Whatever goals you set, make them quantifiable.

Saying your goal is to write 12 (or 1 or 2 or 6) novels in a year is not quantifiable because a novel can be anything from 25,000 words on up. It's like saying you're going to write a certain number of sentences or paragraphs or pages per day.

On the other hand, if you set and reach a certain daily word-count goal, you WILL write more short stories, novellas and novels than you expected.

My grandpa used to say of the gas tank on his old Chevy pickup, “If you keep the top half full, the bottom half will take care of itself.”

Same thing here. If you strive to reach your daily word-count goal, the number of stories and novels you write will take care of itself. Those words have to go somewhere.

If I, my friend Robert and my friend Dawn each wrote exactly 1,000,000 words of fiction in a year, all in novels, I will have written 20 50,000-word novels, Robert will have written 11.111 90,000-word novels, and Dawn will have written 8.333 120,000-word novels.

The number of novels doesn't make any of us more or less prolific than the others. The 1,000,000 words makes us all pretty prolific for this age.

Don't Kill the Scene (notes from a grouchy old writer)

We've been watching a Netflix SF series that was pretty good when it started. Which is to say it was pretty good until the first high-tension We Must Act Now action scene.

Depending on your skill level you can mix poignancy with tension, and human emotion with the immediacy of emergency.

For example, a fireman who is using the jaws of life to cut through a car door and extract his wife and child, who are lying bloodied but very much alive on the front seat, certainly will feel some emotion.

That's perfectly natural, and a good writer will know how to allow the character to express that emotion while continuing to do what's necessary to save his wife and child.

Or, if that character, based on his past behavior and his personality, is not capable of setting aside his emotions or controlling them in order to do what is necessary, another character will pull him away where he can watch as they free his wife and child. You can see this in action in pretty much any of the NCIS or 911 (or other) major series on television.

My point is, the characters won't suddenly forget they're in an emergency situation. To return to my example, the fireman won't simply stop trying to effect a rescue so he can launch into a two- or three-minute soliloquy to the other firemen about all the wonderful years he and his wife have had together and the moment they first met and the birth of their child and, oh, all the wonderful gag gifts they've bought each other over the years 'cause those were really funny, ha ha, hyuck hyuck hyuck.

In real life he would save all of that for later, right? Maybe until AFTER he has extracted the people he loves and sent them in an ambulance to a hospital?

He probably will even climb into the ambulance with them and maybe deliver his heartfelt memories into the camera then.

Or he might even reflect his emotions in a layer over the top of trying to effect a rescue.

But he won't simply set aside the rescue attempt and deliver his speech In Place Of the ongoing action. And seriously, Everybody Knows That. If you trust in what you've already absorbed and learned over the years about Story, you would never write it like that.

Welp, the Netflix series I'm talking about was written from the conscious, critical mind. Every word was what the writer(s) THOUGHT should be inserted at that point. I can almost see the actual characters, standing off to one side, leaning back against a wall, their arms crossed over their chest, smirking and saying, "Aw, c'mon, man!"

Because at least one time in practically every episode of the Netflix series, an absolute, time-sensitive emergency arises, and every time the action stops—is supplanted with, not supported by—a syrupy sweet soliloquy.

In one scene, the emergency was announced with a realization that a sibling is missing and possibly in real danger.

Of course, the characters, who often move as a herd (seriously, it's like watching a group of five year olds play soccer), found the sibling and indeed she was afflicted. (She was afflicted by a horizontal sword slash that severed her vocal chords but somehow didn't even nick her carotid artery. But that's a topic for another time.)

Anyway, per every emergency scene script that's ever been written anywhere by anyone, the characters arrived on the scene just in time to save their sister's life. Fine.

To be sure we got it, one of them yelled something like, "She's losing blood! We have to get her to the hospital!"

Whereupon—

Um, nope. You're wrong. They DIDN'T pick her up and pack her off to a hospital.

Instead, they all crouched around her and, incredibly, the sense of urgency disappeared. Completely.

One character knelt over his grievously wounded sibling, even lifted her up and hugged her, then chatted for awhile about how much he cares for her and all the wonderful times they've had over the years. And while he was doing that, the others—did absolutely nothing.

There were zero normal human reactions, least of all, "Hey, you maybe wanna save that crap for later? We have to get her to a hospital, remember? It says so on page 16 of the script."

But no. They sat around and watched as the afflicted one's lifeblood seeped into the floor.

Meanwhile, of course, the background music morphed from dramatic, driven, drumbeat action as they were arriving on the scene into hearts and flowers delivered by a weeping violin.

Okay. At long last, I'm tired of my own voice. This stuff is something every one of you already know, if you'll only trust in yourself enough to let go and just write.

As for the "writers" who actually got paid to write this craptrap, all I can say is I hope someday they'll learn to trust themselves and maybe not write by committee. I think the series was probably written during free period in a high school library by a group of lovesick, angst-ridden teenage poets. (My sincere apologies to any lovesick, angst-ridden teenage poets who might take offense. Trust me, things will get considerably worse.)

Anyway, my point is, um, Don't Do That.

There are ways to add psychological suspense and emotional tension while the necessary action is ongoing.

Almost all of my books have elements of psychological suspense and emotional tension—often during incredibly tense emergency situations—but it is NEVER permissible to stop what in the real world would be a necessary next action so a character can make a speech. Never.

Okay, that's more than enough for today. Please don't ask me the title of the series. And if you recognize it, please don't mention it by name in any comments.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Only Two Days Left On The Time Travel Bundle" at <https://deanwesleymith.com/only-two-days-left-on-the-time-travel-bundle/>. In case you're interested.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 1460 words

Writing of WCG 7 Santa Fe 2 (novel tentative title)

Day 10... 2524 words. Total words to date..... 27438

Day 11... 3156 words. Total words to date..... 30594

Day 12... 1065 words. Total words to date..... 31659

Day 13... 2380 words. Total words to date..... 34039

Day 14... 3159 words. Total words to date..... 37198

Day 15... 3072 words. Total words to date..... 40270

Total fiction words for December.....	56684
Total fiction words for the year.....	271658
Total nonfiction words for December...	227500
Total nonfiction words for the year.....	220830
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog).....	492488
Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date.....	4
Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date.....	0
Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date...	0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	70
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014).....	217
Short story collections.....	31

Disclaimer: I am a prolific professional fiction writer. Because It Makes Sense, I trust my characters to tell the story that they, not I, are living. This greatly increases my productivity and provides the fastest possible ascension along the learning curve of Craft because I get a great deal more practice at actually writing. It will do the same for you if only you trust it.

A Great Comment and Dean Wesley Smith

December 28, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * On yesterday's post
- * Dean Wesley Smith
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“Luck is when an opportunity comes along and you're prepared for it.” Denzel Washington

““If you want to be thought a liar, always tell the truth.” Logan Pearsall Smith

“There is one thing that matters—to set a chime of words tinkling in the minds of a few fastidious people.” Logan Pearsall Smith

On yesterday's post “[Five Days Left, and Don't Kill the Scene](#),” one anonymous commenter left the following, and I thought I'd share it. To make it a little easier to read, I reparagraphed it:

“I like the daily word count goal. Back when I was doing that, I know I wrote more than I did on some of my other challenges.

“When I was doing my daily word count I was doing easily 1000 words a day. Far more produced than when I was trying to do those crazy story challenges.

“This year I’m doing 2000 words a day. That extra 1000 words I can pull out. It will push me a little but it can be done by easily carving out a small space of time in the evening.”

Interesting that, in the first paragraph, Anonymous likened a daily word count goal to a writing challenge. I’d never thought of it that way before, but so it is.

My personal daily goal/challenge is to write 3000 words of publishable fiction per day. That’s only three hours per day or 21 hours per week. Frankly, I feel a little like a slacker, calling myself a professional fiction writer while spending only that much time in the chair practicing my profession.

Anyway, I hope the rest of you will also employ a daily word count goal/challenge for your own writing days as we move ahead into 2023.

Dean Wesley Smith has launched a new website specifically for WMG Workshops. (You can still find them on the WMG page at Teachable too.)

The new site conveniently sorts the workshops into specific categories. You can see those for yourself at <https://wmgworkshops.com/>. The new Advanced Craft Workshops (see “Of Interest”) are under the Study With Dean tab.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Advanced Craft Workshops” at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/advanced-craft-workshops/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 370 words

Writing of WCG 7 Santa Fe 2 (novel tentative title)

Day 10... 2524 words. Total words to date..... 27438

Day 11... 3156 words. Total words to date..... 30594

Day 12... 1065 words. Total words to date..... 31659

Day 13... 2380 words. Total words to date..... 34039

Day 14... 3159 words. Total words to date..... 37198

Day 15... 3072 words. Total words to date..... 40270

Day 16... 2419 words. Total words to date..... 42689

Total fiction words for December..... 59103

Total fiction words for the year..... 274077

Total nonfiction words for December... 23120
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 221200
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 495277

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 4
Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 70
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

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Novel Wrapped, Novel Published

December 29, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Novel Wrapped
- * Novel Published
- * Of Interest

Novel Wrapped

The Road to Santa Fe wrapped with fewer than 1000 words at a little over 42,000 words total and around 1100 words of cuts. I spell checked the manuscript, ran Find & Replace for a few common mistakes I make, then shipped it off to my excellent first reader, Russ Jones.

Like many westerners, Wes enjoys taking his time. This novel turned out to be only the transition from Amarillo to Santa Fe. Of course, a lot of other characters were doing things and setting other things in motion that have nothing to do with Wes—well, yet.

I can hardly wait to see what's coming next. But then, I don't have to. (grin) After a short break, I came back out to the Hovel to help Wes move into his new office.

I did think about waiting until January 1 to begin the next novel, but to me that's just silly. For one thing, I'm one who believes a new week, month and year (365-day span) begins every morning. Every minute, really.

For another, I don't like taking things for granted, least of all that I'll still be here on January 1. Literally anything can happen. I'd much rather fate would interrupt something I'm doing than find me waiting to do something.

Anyway, not a bad writing day yesterday, and much better than if I'd put it off until today or January 1. (grin)

Novel Published

As I reported above, I thought about waiting to start the next novel, but I didn't think about delaying publishing the one I just finished.

When I came to work this morning at 4:30, Russ' input was waiting for me. I applied his fixes, designed a cover, created a promo doc, and published *The Road to Santa Fe* to both D2D and Amazon before 6 a.m.

As I told Russ via email this morning, I only wish I could record these stories as fast as he can read them. (grin)

Then I moved over here to wrap up this edition of the Journal and post it. And soon, soon, I'll be hearing saddle leather creak again and smelling the dusty prelude to rain as Wes and I continue into his next adventure.

Thanks for being along for the ride. I'll talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Questions on New Workshops" at <https://deanwesleysmith.com/questions-on-new-workshops/>.

See "Bob Gottlieb Is the Last of the Publishing Giants..." at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/bob-gottlieb-is-the-last-of-the-publishing-giants-the-91-year-old-editor-waits-for-his-87-year-old-star-writer-robert-caro-to-turn-in-his-book/>.

See "Proof of Life" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/proof-of-life/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 410 words

Total fiction today..... 3691 words

Writing of Santa Fe: A New Office (novel tentative title, WCG8, Santa Fe 3)

Day 1..... 2815 words. Total words to date..... 2815

Writing of The Road to Santa Fe (formerly WCG 7 Santa Fe 2)

Day 1..... 2190 words. Total words to date..... 2190
Day 2..... 3049 words. Total words to date..... 5239
Day 3..... 2588 words. Total words to date..... 7827
Day 4..... 3373 words. Total words to date..... 11200
Day 5..... 3317 words. Total words to date..... 14517
Day 6..... 3771 words. Total words to date..... 18288
Day 7..... 3102 words. Total words to date..... 21390
Day 8..... 2020 words. Total words to date..... 23410
Day 9..... 1504 words. Total words to date..... 24914
Day 10... 2524 words. Total words to date..... 27438
Day 11... 3156 words. Total words to date..... 30594
Day 12... 1065 words. Total words to date..... 31659
Day 13... 2380 words. Total words to date..... 34039
Day 14... 3159 words. Total words to date..... 37198
Day 15... 3072 words. Total words to date..... 40270
Day 16... 2419 words. Total words to date..... 42689
Day 17... 0876 words. Total words to date..... 43565 (done)

Total fiction words for December..... 62794
Total fiction words for the year..... 277768
Total nonfiction words for December... 23530
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 221610
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 499378

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 5
Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0
Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 71
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217
Short story collections..... 31

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Everybody's Sleeping

December 30, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Everybody's Sleeping
- * Two Years in (Quick) Review
- * Happy New Year
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“Words are, of course, the most powerful drug used by mankind.” Rudyard Kipling

“I know I was writing stories when I was five. I don't remember what I did before that. Just loafed, I suppose.” P. G. Wodehouse

Everybody's Sleeping

If that's you too, and if that's what you want, I'm happy for you. I'm wide awake, but I'm not complaining.

I am aware of 'holidays' and celebrations and mournings. I even revel in the sweet irony of a lot of people getting what they want and then bemoaning the outcome. Absolutely delicious.

All of it is fodder for stories and novels, and in my world, beyond the health and well-being of my family and friends, nothing is more important than my stories and novels. I liken them to children.

As a writer, I birth what I am given. My mind, my choice, of course, but only on the near side of the equation. I carefully assess and choose the character or characters with whom I engage. That is solely my responsibility.

After that, the story takes its course and unfolds as it will. If it isn't a viable story within itself—if the words are stumbling all over each other with no obvious, meaningful direction or purpose—I kill it and start over, or engage with a different set of characters.

But if the story is viable—if it wants to live and run and play—the whole thing is out of my hands. Having made my choice to engage with a particular set of characters, I carry the story or novel until it ends and then deliver it to the world.

Soon, with any luck at all, so I can engage with another set of characters and do it all again.

Naturally, I will think each story or novel is wonderful or even special in one way or another, but I generally keep those thoughts to myself because they don't matter. I'm as entitled as the next person to my opinion, but my opinion is not the one that matters.

The only judgements that matter are those wielded by the people who choose whether to adopt my story or novel and bring it into their home.

As an enticement, I keep the adoption fees as low as possible, but that creates a conundrum of its own. Especially in our current society, in which we've been conditioned to focus on differences and suspect literally everyone, humans tend to equate generosity with treachery.

Songwriter and performer Barry Manilow once said—in a song, of course—“I write the songs.” He wasn't boasting. He was stating a fact and holding forth about a topic that filled him with joy.

Likewise, I am a prolific professional fiction writer. Because I have learned to trust the characters, I am blessed to convey the stories that they, not I, are living. What could be better than that?

Anyway, all of that is far more than enough responsibility for me. And sure, I know the stories aren't human children. I don't have to worry about who they hang out with or whether they're smoking dope or whether and which college or profession they'll enter.

I probably should fret a little over their future, though. Things like licensing not only the stories but the settings and characters inside them, farming them out to different media and venues (audio, paper, maybe even film).

But I consciously try not to think about any of that. Letting business into the creative side is inviting a murderer to your dinner table. Besides, that would take time away from engaging with that next character or set of characters.

That is something I can't personally allow to happen. On the other hand, if you have that superpower, go for it.

Two Years in (Quick) Review

Last year (2021) from January through July, I wrote 13 novels, an average of one every two weeks. Then I imposed a special kind of hell on myself from which I am still emerging and was unable to access my characters for over a year.

Finally, from September through December of this year, I've written five more novels, a much lower average of one every 3.4 weeks, or every 23.8 days. I expect that will improve as I move ahead into 2023, but I will be happy to take whatever the characters are willing to give me.

It's heartening to know if I form a “writing year” from the first 7 months of 2021 and the final 4 months of 2022 (a short year of 11 months), I wrote 18 novels during that time.

And that's quite more than enough to get the items in “Of Interest” out to you, which was the real purpose of today's edition of the Journal. Well, that and to say

Happy New Year

If I don't talk with you again tomorrow, I hope you will all have a happy, enjoyable and safe New Year's Eve. Remember to include a daily word-count goal and possibly other writing challenges in your resolutions.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "Thirteen Sites for Making a Spectacular Book Cover (Updated)" at <https://the-digital-reader.com/14-sites-making-spectacular-book-cover/>. Note: This is a throwback. Apparently the old Digital Reader site was assimilated (resistance is futile) by some foo-foo feel-good company.

See "Bite-Sized Copyright" at <https://deanwesleymith.com/bite-sized-copyright/>.

See "Missing link'..." at <https://interestingengineering.com/science/scientists-finally-unveil-source-life>. Story ideas.

See "Mastodon rejects..." at <https://interestingengineering.com/culture/mastodon-rejects-more-than-five-investment-offers-to-stay-a-non-profit>. Alternatives are good.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 900 words

Writing of Santa Fe: A New Office (novel, WCG8, Santa Fe 3)

Day 1..... 2815 words. Total words to date..... 2815

Day 2..... 2034 words. Total words to date..... 4849

Total fiction words for December..... 64828

Total fiction words for the year..... 279802

Total nonfiction words for December... 24430

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 222510

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 502312

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 5

Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 71

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

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Craft because I get a great deal more practice at actually writing. It will do the same for you if only you trust it.

Eh, Why Not?

December 31, 2022 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * Eh, Why Not?
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“One day, you will wake up and there won't be any more time to do the things you've always wanted. Do it now.” Paulo Coelho

“We tend to overestimate the effect of a technology in the short run and underestimate the effect in the long run.” Roy Amara (for you SF writers out there)

Eh, Why Not?

I hadn't planned to post an edition of the Journal today. I had planned to write this morning (and tomorrow morning) to put a cap and a start of writing on the years. And I will still do that. I'll add at least one session (about 1000 words) to the novel today and much more tomorrow.

Later today, I'll watch three college football games that promise to be entertaining. I watched three yesterday as well. I'm an SEC junkie. I prefer watching promising players display their talent before they go pro and become far too full of themselves.

I also planned to pre-stage a few free stories over on Stanbrough Writes. And by the way, I just posted a new one over there yesterday. If you aren't subscribed, you can see it at <https://harveystanbroughwrites.com/pete-and-the-angel/>.

If you want to subscribe to the Stanbrough Writes substack and receive the stories in your inbox, you can subscribe at <https://stanbroughwrites.substack.com/>. Naturally, it's free.

The main reason I'm posting this is to also put a cap on the year with the Journal and to pass along the links in “Of Interest,” especially that first one. From what I've read so far, it has some great tips and ideas in it.

I'll cap the Journal year on January 1 when I post the final fiction numbers for 2022. Ugh. I don't look forward to seeing all those zeros. (Did you know the plural of zero, the noun, is “zeros” but

the plural of the verb form is “zeroes”? I didn’t until a moment ago when my brain tripped over the word.)

And dusted off and brought forward from yesterday’s post, may you all have a happy, enjoyable and safe New Year’s Eve. And when tomorrow finally gets here, remember to include a daily word-count goal and possibly other writing challenges in your resolutions. Because eh, why not?

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See “Tea Leaves: Year in Review 2022” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/tea-leaves-year-in-review-2022/>. Kristine Kathryn Rusch, not only looking back but some great nuggets of advice.

See “How Will BookTok Change Publishing in 2023?” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/how-will-booktok-change-publishing-in-2023/>.

See “The 7 most inspiring book cover trends of 2023” at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/the-7-most-inspiring-book-cover-trends-of-2023/>. Of course, this is only one person’s opinion.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 420 words

Writing of Santa Fe: A New Office (novel, WCG8, Santa Fe 3)

Day 1..... 2815 words. Total words to date..... 2815

Day 2..... 2034 words. Total words to date..... 4849

Day 3..... 2650 words. Total words to date..... 7499

Total fiction words for December..... 67478

Total fiction words for the year..... 282452

Total nonfiction words for December... 24850

Total nonfiction words for the year..... 222930

Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 505382

Calendar Year 2022 Novels to Date..... 5

Calendar Year 2022 Novellas to Date..... 0

Calendar Year 2022 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014)..... 71

Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015)..... 8

Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014)..... 217

Short story collections..... 31

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increases my productivity and provides the fastest possible ascension along the learning curve of Craft because I get a great deal more practice at actually writing. It will do the same for you if only you trust it.

A New Year, a New Way Forward

January 1, 2023 by [Harvey](#)

In today's Journal

- * Quotes of the Day
- * A New Year, a New Way Forward
- * Ideas
- * Football
- * Of Interest

Quotes of the Day

“I’m interested in having fun with ideas, throwing them up in the air like confetti and then running under them.” Ray Bradbury

“Don’t think. Thinking is the enemy of creativity.” Ray Bradbury

“I’ve had a sign over my typewriter for over 25 years now, which reads ‘Don’t think!’ You must never think at the typewriter — you must feel. Your intellect is always buried in that feeling anyway.” Ray Bradbury

“Writing is not a serious business. It’s a joy and a celebration. You should be having fun with it.” Ray Bradbury

A New Year, a New Way Forward

It’s a little strange, waiting to post the Journal until later in the day. But this is one of the larger changes I’m making.

Probably I’ll still write the Journal early in the day on days when I have something to say, but posting it later will enable me to report real-time numbers for both my fiction and nonfiction.

Seems maybe my characters like this better too. I was finished writing by 11:30 a.m. today and I wrote well over 4000 words.

Ideas

Stephen King is widely known for taking ideas from other entertainment sources and writing novels from those ideas. For just one example, he took the idea for *The Dome* from *The*

Simpson's Movie, in which Springfield was completely covered with a clear dome. Nothing wrong with that. (You can't copyright an idea.)

I offer the first item (well, the only item) in "Of Interest" as a possible stimulus for ideas, or possibly as a stimulus to a way to get ideas.

Football

If you're a football fan, you're probably in heaven right now. If you aren't, at least something good is keeping the football fan in your life busy so you can do other things. Like write. (grin)

I was pleased to close out 2022 with 2209 words of fiction on December 31 and to open 2023 with 4214 words on January 1.

Talk with you again soon.

Of Interest

See "10 Novels Based on Folk Horror" at <https://www.thepassivevoice.com/10-novels-based-on-folk-horror/>.

The Numbers

The Journal..... 330 words

Writing of Santa Fe: A New Office (novel, WCG8, Santa Fe 3)

Day 1..... 2815 words. Total words to date..... 2815
Day 2..... 2034 words. Total words to date..... 4849
Day 3..... 2650 words. Total words to date..... 7499
Day 4..... 2209 words. Total words to date..... 9708
Day 5..... 4214 words. Total words to date..... 13922

Total fiction words for December..... 69687
Total fiction words for 2022..... 284661
Total words for 2022 (fiction and this blog)..... 507591

Total fiction words for January..... 4214
Total fiction words for 2023..... 4214
Total nonfiction words for January... 330
Total nonfiction words for the year..... 330
Total words for the year (fiction and this blog)..... 4544

Calendar Year 2023 Novels to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2023 Novellas to Date..... 0
Calendar Year 2023 Short Stories to Date... 0

Novels (since Oct 19, 2014).....	71
Novellas (since Nov 1, 2015).....	8
Short stories (since Apr 15, 2014).....	217
Short story collections.....	31

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