

Lecture #1 Monday, May 4th

Welcome to Day One of wrestling ideas from your muse. That is sorta what we'll be doing, though the characters will be called to account for themselves, as well this month.

Why? Well, because the best stories feed from who the characters are...and then we twist 'em, manipulate them, drive them nuts...because that's exactly what they'll try to do to us and who knows for which side the muse is going to be shaking those virtual pompoms?

Sometimes I wonder about mine. He does let the characters do things I never had planned. I picture him leaning back in his chair, feet on his desk and saying to the visiting character, "Oh, yeah, do that. She'll hate it! But she'll work with it."

Yeah, my muse is a dude and he always looks like the hero in whatever book I'm writing. Some romance writers claim the heroine is the most important character, but to me she's just makin' time with my man. Heck, if I don't love the hero, why would anyone else care to spend a lot of time with him?

Of course, I am a Pantser, which means I only have a vague idea of what is going to play out in a story. I tried outlining, doing a detailed synopsis, but when I sat down to write the only time the story had life in it was when I went totally off script. To me, if I'd already written it down, the story was told and didn't have to be told from scratch with the same scenario.

Not all writers are like that though. You might prefer having things worked out in advance. One of the guys in one of my writing groups spins adventurous YA tales (actually, he's a #1 Best Selling Kindle author – so I'd hate him if he didn't love the fantasy I write), and he can pound out 10,000 words a day because he creates a detailed outline of the entire book. And his books go well over the 100,000 word mark. He claims that it's the only way a writer who spins fiction for a living can make a living.

I'm still not going to write an outline and spoil my fun. His fun comes in fleshing things out. Mine comes in being as surprised at what happens next as I would be in reading someone else's book.

Which brings us to the one thing I didn't ask you to tell everyone in the Introduction, and that is (drum roll, please), which kind of writer are you?

An Outliner who sticks to the drawn up plan...or a Pantser, who only knows what's going to happen when 1) the character does it, 2) you actually know or have an inkling of what needs to happen next, or 3) know how it all has to end so there is a specific goal in sight.

Of course, you can also be a mix of the two types of writer, not shunning outlining or pre-writing synopsis spinning and not being totally committed to what could happen next if some new idea comes along.

So we're going to have a two part CHALLENGE today...the first part is confessing what type of writer you are.

Honestly, I'm not going to tell you that one way is right and another is wrong. There is no one way to write a book, only the right way for YOU to write a book or short story or novella. This isn't essay writing 101. This is Introduction to Writing Fiction for a Living, or the next nearest thing if it will be a sideline for you.

Confession-wise, I only managed to totally support myself with just what I made from writing fiction for a little over a year...and that was back when advances were decent and handed out regularly. When the bank account began dwindling and new income wasn't surfacing, it was back to the daily grind to earn someone else's dollar with fiction spinning as a sideline. I'm retired from the world of physical classroom teaching now but that just means I spend more time writing, not that I am actually able to live on what comes in. Still dreaming of such a future though. As they said in *Galaxy Quest*, "Never give up. Never surrender."

But we're gathered this month to sort out how to decide what comes next in the current work in progress and every work we ever put into progress in the future. So where do we start?

With the original premise. I have some questions for you to answer, naturally.

- **What came first on this project? One character, a situation/scene you had in mind, the desire to write a particular type of story in a specific genre niche (and even literary style, which is a genre with niches as far as I'm concerned, they just don't have endings that I find satisfying)**
- **Which was the first character to have a name? Did you spend time trying to decide what they should be called, or did they tell you their name? Or are you still trying to come up with a name for them? Personally, I think some writers spend too much time looking for the "perfect" name. Like they need symbolism every time. They don't. Most readers would totally miss that there was symbolism anyway, or simply not care probably. I will admit to liking some that are less than common, though I have written a hero answering to Harry Smith to life in the past**
- **Do you know the inciting incident? You know, what kicks everything off. In a murder mystery it might be the discovery of the body, the arrival of the detective at the scene. It might be finding a clue or map or better yet, part of a map that leads to buried treasure. It could be whatever brings the soon to be lovers (well, at least by the close of the book if not sooner) into contact – first meeting or first re-meeting if they've met in the past**
- **What was your first thought on how to start the story...or are you still "hunting" for the best way to kick things off? I have a friend who thinks in scenes and then writes them. The trouble is, she can't sort out how to put them together then so**

hasn't finished a book...well, okay, that's not exactly true. She did finish writing one and was never happy with it because it was disconnected in many ways. So, if your mind works in scenes, what is the best scene to kick things off?

Here are some of the ways I've started books:

- Heroine in office of person who has hired her to write and produce a series of documentaries on Arizona ghost towns, both of them waiting for the camera man who shows up – our hero, who shows up fairly fast, though late for the meeting...on purpose (RIBBONS AND RAWHIDE written as Lisa Dane)
- Hero arrives back home after his enlistment was up (hasn't let his family know when he's arriving) and takes the time to just drink in the scene of his sister and her friend seated on the floor watching TV after school. Being dumbfounded over how four years have turned both girls from children into young women, and is uneasy about being extremely aware of the girl next door – one he considered a secondary sister until this moment (SUPERSTAR by Beth Henderson)
- Graveside at the burial of hero's best friend and his wife, her twin sister (a stranger) standing next to him and her niece and nephew (to whom she is a stranger and he is an adopted uncle) with them. The little girl at her side, he holding the little boy. Hero being all too aware of how much like her dead twin the heroine is. And how his friend had never had a good word to say of her. (AUNTIE MOMMIE by Beth Henderson)
- Heroine witnesses a murder and runs into hero who helps her hide from the pursuing murderer simply because rescuing a damsel in distress suits his mood. (WICKED by Beth Henderson, a historical set in San Francisco 1880)
- Heroine doing her rounds in her capacity as a covert operative working as a nurse in an Army hospital where all the patients are wounded men who were given replacement parts that make them part metallic and also government property. She has been assigned to discover who is stealing the special formula that helps body and metal replacement parts meld together and is checking on the hero who has been resisting adapting to his new body parts. (THE CASE OF THE REPURPOSED MAN by Nied Darnell...it's Weird West Steampunk)
- Hero dusting ash of recently dispatched vampire off is accosted by teenaged siren who claims she needs his help because she's being stalked by the serial killer known as The Leech. (RAVEN FOR A SONG by J.B. Dane...urban fantasy comedy mystery)

Of course, a story could also begin with an explosion, with a main character being shot, arrested, kissed!

CHALLENGE

This is the second part of your challenge. Tell us what came first in the creation of the story you want to focus on this month. If you have more than one thing that pushed into your mind right away, please share.

We're just getting our feet wet (figuratively) today. We'll dive a bit deeper on Thursday. See you then but will be looking for posts every day just in case you've sent one along.

Beth

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