



# The Gabriel Writer

For The San Gabriel  
Writers' League

www.SGWL.net

November 2010



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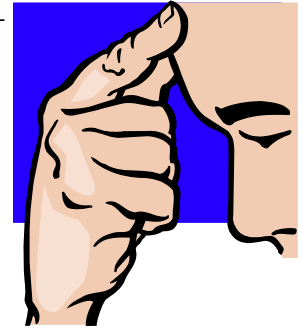
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## SGWL November Meeting We Want Your Brains! By Sam Holland

No, this isn't a zombie movie—it's an invitation to the SGWL 2011 Planning Meeting! On Thursday, November 4 at 7:00 at the Georgetown Library (regular meeting day, time and place) we will convene to brainstorm and discuss our organizational activities. From member only events to community projects to fundraisers we need your ideas and enthusiasm.

What would you like to see the League do next year? What current programs do you think need an overhaul?

Come and let your voice be heard! Why wait? If you've got an idea to share that just can't wait, drop me a line at [SamHolland@austinfoam.com](mailto:SamHolland@austinfoam.com)



## Join Me in the NaNoWriMo Madness!

By Kayla Marnach

November, the National Novel Writing Month begins at the stroke of midnight. For the fifth year I'm poised and ready; outline – check; monitor covered – check; chocolate beside keyboard – check, ready and anxious to spend endless hours to reach 50,000 written words in one month – check! Oh, I cover my monitor because those red and green squiggly lines call to me to be "fixed" and for November – I just don't have the time!

All over the world, yes the world, on November 1<sup>st</sup> writers begin their journey of 50,000 words in thirty days. Michelle, who lives in British Columbia, and I have remained "friends" after we met on a NaNo forum in 2004. I've traded stories and advice with writers from Australia, England, Japan, and many other countries, all of us reaching for the same goal...to be a winner. And that's the beauty of NaNo, it doesn't matter if you're a planner or a pantsier, everyone can be a winner. All you have to do is write a mere 1,667 words a day for thirty days. Started in 1999 by Chris Baty and several friends, they decided to stop saying they were going to write a novel and just do it. The word count of 50,000 was chosen because classic novels such as *Grapes of Wrath* and *Of Mice and Men* are both within that word range. You too, could be writing a classic! In 2009, there were 165,000 participants and more than 30,000 crossed the finish line with word goals intact. Don't you want to be part of such an elite group? Isn't it time to stop saying you're "going to write a novel" and do it in the company of others who are going through the same angst?

Participating in NaNo, I've written three complete novels (this year I'm completing a trilogy started with the first two books) and started two others (that year I grew board after 25,000 and started a different novel). I had never written more than a 300 word story, when Sam Holland challenged me to join him in the trenches of the 1,667 words a day goal. Much to the dismay of my family I took the challenge and promptly sequestered myself in my home office, often writing twelve or more hours a day to make up for the days when no words would come.

I just finished Donald Maas' book *Writing the Breakout Novel* and have started *45 Master Characters* by Victoria Lynn Schmidt. My goal is to finish *20 Master Plots and How to Build to Build Them* by Ronald B. Tobias by the end of October. But I still have a lot of plotting and planning to do.

As Sam said to me six years ago, "Come on, join me...I dare ya!"

Go to [www.nanowrimo.com](http://www.nanowrimo.com) for additional information

## Minutes for October 2010 meeting

The October 7, 2010 meeting of the **San Gabriel Writers' League** was called to order by **President Sam Holland**.

**Sam** welcomed 33 members and 7 guests.

Jaime Roton read the **Treasurer's Report** for Helen Nardecchia.

**Carol Menchu** reminded members to send her their words for the upcoming newsletter. She was short member submissions last month.

The **Fall Workshop** is coming up on Saturday November 6. It's from 9 to 3. The cost to members is \$25. Nonmember is \$35.

**Flashes of Fear** is complete. Ross Carnes designed the cover. Jason Minor created the interior art. Members will be reading their stories and poems on October 16 at Hill Country Books. Art on the Square is going on at the same time. Authors can give a discount code to order more copies of Flashes of Fear online. Sam asked members if anyone had a microphone they could lend for the readings.

**Boo Run** on October 30 in San Gabriel Park.

**Open Board Positions:** We need volunteers for Vice President and Publicity Chair.

**Planning Meeting** next month in place of the regular meeting. First Thursday at 7:00.

### Announcements and Brags:

**Hill Country Book Festival:** Registration forms for children and teens are available in the library and online at [www.hillcountrybookfestival.org](http://www.hillcountrybookfestival.org). The deadline for grades 3-8 is October 18; for grades 9-12, November 4.

**Suzy Miller** will be back next month.

**Sylvia Dickey Smith** is having a cookbook signing from noon - 2.

**Dave Ciambrone's** mystery, *Quest for the Crystal Skull*, is out.

**Ann Bell** is having a book signing noon - 2.

**Jeanelle Bolton** finalled in a contest in Chicago and received an email from an agent requesting a manuscript. Jeanelle also finalled in another contest.

**Sid Frost's** book in the iLibrary.

**Joan Upton Hall** introduced the evening's speaker, Nancy Robinson Masters.

Respectfully submitted, Jaime Roton, Secretary

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## SGWL Board

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## Member(s): New and/or Changes

### New Members:

**Biffel, Bobby # 1069163**  
Robertson Unit  
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"Feed My Lambs, Feed My Sheep."

I knew it wouldn't be long before my husband took HIM literally. Yesterday, he brought in two ears of corn from the grocery store, shucked them and put the bowl next to the plush green ivy. I pretended I didn't notice.

Early this morning, our bright conversation began like this.

"I went out to get the paper," he said. "Nellie looked up at me. Her ears were perked, and you know, she seemed to smile. Then she put her head down and began to graze no more than about 10 yards from me. She didn't run away."

Incidentally, we named her "Nellie." No more Jezebel. Too questionable!

"You fed her?" I asked.

"Yes."

I knew instantly my warning about feeding her had gone out the window. The smirk on my face told him something because he then said, "She's too thin." And I envisioned a group of deer in mid air jumping the low wrought iron fence heading for the bowl. I remembered seeing one a couple of years ago, while looking out the back window, in that same position bound and determined to get those impatiens growing in front of the back fence. Antlers and all! I also thought about the magnolia tree in the front yard that got ripped by antlers, scattering beautiful dark leaves and full-bloomed flowers all over. As I went out to get the mail each day, my heart sank looking at the destruction done to this gorgeous, perennial woody plant.

I went out to lunch today with five wonderful ladies who live or had lived in our retirement unit. Consider my surprise when I learned that Nellie was cheating on us, and I began



to wonder if I should have changed her name.

She also is wandering in and out of another neighbor's yard. The gate is even left open for her to come and go whenever. My lunch friend called her Bambi, and argued that Nellie was male. Could there be more than one deer living in luxury on this rich, green soil? No way!

Now, this is the living end. I found the groceries on the kitchen table still in the HEB bags. Bud evidently returned from the store. He wasn't in sight, so I began to take each item out to put it away. At the bottom of one bag was a flat covered item concealed in a separate bag. Upon opening it, I discovered three large carrots with greenery attached.

Bud walked into the kitchen as I lifted the carrots from the bag. Holding them up in front of him, I said, "I was hoping you'd bring the little ones."

"They're not for you."

"Carrots, now?"

"We have to fatten her up," he answered.

He picked them up and walked out the back-door leading to the backyard.

I said nothing and continued to put the groceries away.

When he returned, I asked, "Where did you put them?"

"Come and see."

They were laid like a beautiful bouquet draped across the ivy. Not quite three o'clock, I looked around to see if she was there. No, she wasn't. Would she be excited when she sees the bouquet? I know I was when he gave me one fifty years ago.

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## **Recap: Nancy Robinson Masters** by Chris Lovett

Attendees at the October meeting of San Gabriel Writers' League were highly entertained by guest speaker, Nancy Robinson Masters. Humor, emotions, patriotism and education were interwoven into her presentation entitled, "Seven Easy Steps to Create Characters, That Aren't Card-board, for Fiction and Non-Fiction Stories."

To outline her seven steps Masters drew a vertical and horizontal axis on the chalk board. She explained that actions required to move the plot forward are listed on the horizontal axis. She then moved to the vertical axis and wrote seven questions that are answered to develop a character. The seven questions are:

1. When we approach our character, how do we describe his or her surroundings? This description should cause the reader to step into our story.
2. What is our character wearing? Describing the clothing gives an identity to our character.
3. The character has a bag. What is in the bag? We carry

our true identities in a bag and a description of the items further builds the character.

4. What do you see in the character's home? The answer to this question adds to our character's description.

5. What is seen in our character's bedroom? A bedroom is our private place and the bedroom description makes a reader feel more immanent with our character.

6. What do you smell in the bedroom? Smells reflect images in our minds and tell us more about the character. What does our character have hidden in the bedroom? The character must have something hidden that displays his or her major characteristics.

Masters explained that answering the above seven questions is known as *stepping a character*. As you step each main character and build the plot, the horizontal and vertical axis must eventually come together to form the story. The point, at which the axes come together, is called triangulation.

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## **Programs: 2010**

If You have a topic you would like to hear discussed, please email Robert Fears at Robert-fears@earthlink.net

**November 4: Planning for 2011 ideas**

**November 6: Workshop "So you want to be Published" Russ Hall, New York editor**

**December 2: Holiday Party**

Looking at *Flashes of Fear* as a reader, not a contributor, I have to say it is a pretty cool book.



ALL the stories are good ones; all the poems are cool; Joan, Sam, Ross, and Jason have done an excellent job a direct result of having quality material from our resident authors to work with.. How lucky we are to have such talented people in the San Gabriel Writers' League—that means **ALL OF US** !!!

I was one of the contributors who signed up to read and that was fun—ears of the passers-by were listening even if bodies didn't seem to.

The best part of being one of the readers was being able to get to know other members on a personal level, not just 'writing' talk. We are a varied, interesting, eclectic group of people and should celebrate our diversity constantly.

However, I must say two incidents with customers really stand out in my mind.

At one point, someone was reading and two little girls, anywhere from 8 to 12 years old, came to stand by me in the audience. The youngest asked "Who's the author of the book?" This question really surprised me because you don't expect a young person to ask that question first . . . I explained the book was by a lot of people and the cover and illustrations were by two of the authors in the book. They said we're going to tell their Mom and they'd be back. I said "OK" but didn't expect to see them again.

A couple of hours later, they did come back with their Mom and the kids and I had a wonderful "adult" conversation about what books they are reading. The Mom told me she is constantly having to go to book stores and the library with the kids, because they read constantly.

As the girls took their book and started in to the book store to pay for it, I asked the Mom, kiddingly of course, where she got such mature, knowledgeable girls; her replay was "I have no idea!" She went on to tell me that the youngest girl wants to be a reporter and she did a report on some scientific project at school and the teacher was so impressed she gave her 125 for a grade!

I asked the girl if she knows what makes a good newspaper article and went on to tell her about the who, what, where,

when, why, and how formula. You could see her "entering" that information in her memory bank.

Later that afternoon another young lady, 12—14 years of age rode up on her scooter and she and I talked about the book. She went back to her Mom who was looking at one of the vendors goods, and came running back to buy the book.

What fascinated me about all this is that it was the kids who were interested, much more so than any of the adults who stopped by.

## The First Thanksgiving

from Pat McNeely ca 1966/67

The table was laden, all heads were bowed,  
The tall man stood quietly there,  
And when the last little rustling stopped,  
Bowed his graying head in prayer:

"Lord, we thank Thee for this day,  
This land where we are free,  
We thank Thee that Thou brought us out  
Of the dark where none could see.  
We thank Thee for our children,  
Protected by Thy Love, —  
Strong and healthy, and well,  
Thanks be to Thee Above."



He sat among his people there,  
That day so very long ago,  
On that first Thanksgiving day.  
How few there are that know:  
The Jewish folk prepared that feast,  
Moses led the prayer.  
Thanksgiving was Passover.  
I know, for my soul was there.



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inkjet or laser  
cartridges  
for recycling and  
help  
SGWL

## Member websites

### Anna M. Bell

Website: <http://www.annamaebell.com>  
Author Blog: <http://annbell.wordpress.com/>  
Educational Technology Blog: <http://annamaebell.wordpress.com/>

### Margie Boyd

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

### Ross Carnes

<http://webstarts.com/RHCarnesStoryTeller>

### David Ciambrone

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

### Mary Fenoglio

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

### Joan Hall:

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

### Sam Holland:

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

### Melissa Leedom:

[www.forgive490.com](http://www.forgive490.com)

### Linda Lipscomb:

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

### Jason Minor:

[www.jason-minor.com](http://www.jason-minor.com)

### Helen Nardecchia

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

### Joy Nord:

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

### Jamie Roton aka Lillian Grey blog

<http://lilliangrey.wordpress.com/>

### Sylvia Dickey Smith:

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

### Jane Thompson:

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

### SGWL website:

[www.sgwl.net](http://www.sgwl.net)

## Old Dogs and Blue Leopards by Sylvia Dickey Smith

Not only can old dogs learn new tricks, but leopards can change their spots. You don't believe me? I've "seen it" with my own eyes, for I'm that old dog leaping backwards over an inflamed barrel. I'm also the blue leopard with the big orange polka dots.

In my bio, I describe myself as having been born backward—one foot first, and left-handed—and seem to have done most things backward ever since. At seventeen, and still a high school junior, I married a preacher and soon became "the preacher's wife." Today, it's difficult to imagine a girl, barely 17, take on that responsibility—a kid playing grown up. But I sailed along just fine, any answer I needed given to me by my husband. He even gave answers to many questions I hadn't even asked.

I started college as a forty-year-old freshman and in a few short years gained a degree in sociology, a master's in educational psychology, and then a divorce! Five years later, I got engaged, bought a house, took a honeymoon in Hawaii, and married in Las Vegas on the way home.



You still with me so far on this backwards thing?

After many years working in the human services field, I retired and took on a whole new career—I wrote a mystery book that soon turned into a series of three—so far—plus, I recently launched a historical novel set during WWII.

Now, I find myself in the midst of rebranding myself as *writing strong women*. Why? I've realized that writing is my passion, but writing strong women is REALLY my passion. So, I might write mystery, historical fiction, or something else, but whatever I write, it will feature a strong woman. Of course she likely won't start out that way, but by the time I'm through with her, I guarantee you she will be.

Think that's a reflection of my life? You bet your bottom patootie it is!

One thing I've learned is it makes no difference whether you live your life backwards or forwards, the important thing is that you LIVE IT! And never say never. Never not do something because you think you're too old, too dumb, too smart, too whatever. If you want to do it, go for it.



## Hurrah for SGWL's *Flashes of Fear* Anthology by Joan Upton Hall

A well-known publisher at a conference once said, "There's no such thing as a perfect book—no matter how many experts comb through it before it goes to print. However, any publishing house worth its reputation continues to try, and we lament any flaw that survives."

While all of us involved in the making of *Flashes of Fear* are terrifically proud of this book, I'm not claiming it's perfect, but it's ours and we love it. In fact, I think we're all a little baffled that it's really here—and really worth claiming.

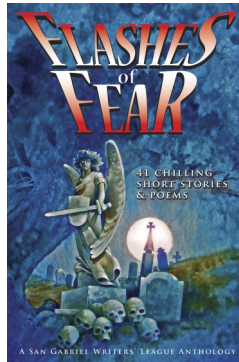
The only thing that troubles me is that the making of it has stirred comments about self-publishing as THE way to go.

"If that publisher will publish anything I send them, who needs a conventional publisher?"

"How much does it cost to simply publish

my book myself—and keep all the profits?"

CLANG! Go the alarm bells! Please don't simply give up on your own dream. For this anthology, none of us did it alone. We combined our skills.



- Authors each furnished original writing, uniquely their own.
- Artists, Ross Carnes and Jason Minor, are both professionals who have made a living with art careers.
- Both your editors, Sam Holland and I, used our respective skills too.

We created something to be collectively proud of, to stretch our skills, and to show our families and the public what SGWL members can do if we put our heads together. I, for one, have learned a few things, gotten acquainted with my teammates, and followed through on a worthwhile project. And that's what it's all about.

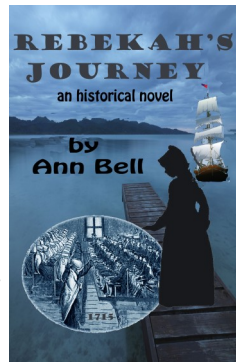
## Press Release/Review

### Review of *Rebekah's Journey* by

Ann Bell

From Amazon.com

Bettendorf, IA - *Rebekah's Journey* is a moving and inspiring testament to not only the faith and frustrations of Quaker immigrants, but also to the ability for us all to measure determination, revenge, and desire into one's reason for living. The reader is immediately drawn into Rebekah's life through a colorfully, descriptive narrative that creates a sincere interest to turn the page, complete the next chapter, and look for the resolution that the author has artistically woven into the plot and characters that make up the journey Rebekah is drawn to live.



The story is intriguing, fast moving, and based on the underlying support of the ability of faith to guide and provide for life's hardships and blessings. The characters are realistically drawn and completely developed through their interactions and the author's insight and subdued point of view.

*Rebekah's Journey* will be more than a summer read. It will leave the reader with a renewed sense of purpose and a wonder of the strength of faith in our own lives today. I strongly recommend *Rebekah's Journey* to be your journey and that you share the emotions that Ann Bell has created with this, her latest work. – Len Bruce

**Create a villain that captures the imagination of your readers and challenges your main character throughout your novel by using these three techniques.**

Today's villain is no Snidely Whiplash standing there twirling his moustache and sneering, a neon arrow blinking "BAD GUY" over his head. In a good contemporary mystery—and in a lot of other genres besides—any character who looks that nefarious is going to turn out to be innocent.

Readers are delighted when the bad guy turns out to have been hiding in plain sight, an innocuous-looking character who cleverly conceals his true self, luring trusting victims and then snaring them in a death trap. "The butler did it" won't wash in a modern mystery. Minor characters who are part of the wallpaper for the first 28 chapters can't be promoted to villain status at the end just to surprise the reader. And you can't give a character a personality transplant in the final chapter. Disbelief will trump surprise unless you've left subtle clues along the way.

### TAKE THE TIME TO PLAN AHEAD

Some writers know right from the get-go which character is guilty. They start with the completed puzzle and work their way backward, shaping the story pieces and fitting them together. Others happily write without knowing whodunit until the scene when the villain is actually unmasked. Then they rewrite, cleaning up the trail of red herrings and establishing the clues that make the solution work.

Which way is better? That's a question only you can answer. I personally need a plan. I have a friend, a many-times-published mystery writer, who boasts that she never plans. The identity of the villain comes as a complete surprise to her and the reader. In the next breath, she says she ended up having to dump the first 200 pages from the draft of her latest novel. Thus, having a plan up front can save a whole lot of rewriting in what should be the home stretch.

### CREATE A VILLAIN WORTH PURSUING

You can't just throw all your suspects' names into a bowl and pick one to be your villain. For your novel to work, the villain must be special. Your sleuth deserves a worthy adversary—a smart, wily, dangerous creature who tests your protagonist's courage and prowess. Stupid, bumbling characters are good for comic relief, but they make lousy villains. The smarter, more invincible the villain, the harder your protagonist must work to find his vulnerability and the greater the achievement in bringing him to justice.

Must the villain be loathsome? Not at all. He can be chilling but charming, like Hannibal Lecter. Thoroughly evil? It's better when the reader can muster a little sympathy for a complex, realistic character who feels her crimes are justified.

So, in planning, try to wrap your arms around why your villain does what he does. What motivates him to kill? Consider the standard motives like greed, jealousy or hatred. Then go a step further. Get inside your villain's head and see the crime from his perspective. What looks to law enforcement like a murder motivated by greed may, to the perpetrator, be an act in the service of a noble, even heroic cause.

Here's how a villain might justify a crime:

- Righting a prior wrong
- Revenge (the victim deserved to die)
- Vigilante justice (the justice system didn't work)
- Protecting a loved one
- Restoring order to the world.

Finally, think about what happened to make that character the way she is. Was she born bad, or turned sour as a result of some early experience? If your villain has a grudge against society, why? If she can't tolerate being jilted, why? You may never share your villain's life story with your reader, but to make a complex, interesting villain, you need to know.

By understanding how the villain justifies the crimes to himself, and what events in his life triggered these crimes, you give yourself the material you need to get past a black-hatted caricature and paint your villain in shades of gray.

### MAKE THE CRIME FIT THE VILLAIN

There are many ways to kill off a character. You can have him shot, stabbed, poisoned or pushed off a cliff. You can have him run over by a car or bashed in the head with a fireplace poker. You get the picture.

The first issue to consider is: Would your villain have the expertise and capability to commit this particular crime you've conceived for him?

Here's an example: Suppose there's a novel about a surgeon who, up to Page 302, has been the soul of buttoned-down respectability. Suddenly, on Page 303, he leaps from a hospital laundry bin and mows down his rival for hospital director with machine-gun fire. Never mind that up to this point in the novel the guy has done nothing more than attend board meetings, get drunk and obnoxious at a cocktail party, and perform heart surgery. Now suddenly he's The Terminator? The behavior doesn't fit the character. If he stabbed, poisoned or pushed his rival off the hospital roof, the reader might swallow it. The author might get away (barely) with the shooting if hints were dropped earlier that this surgeon once served in military special forces.

Choose a modus operandi that your villain (and all your suspects) might plausibly adopt, and establish that your villain has the capability and expertise required. A murder by strangling, stabbing or beating is more plausible if your villain is strong and has a history of physical violence. If your villain plants an electronically activated plastic explosive device, be prepared to show how he learned to make a sophisticated bomb and how he got access to the components. If a woman shoots her husband with a .45 automatic, be prepared to show how she learned to use firearms and that she's strong enough to handle the recoil of a .45.

The second issue to consider: Is the rage factor appropriate for the character's motivation? The more extreme the violence, the more likely the crime is to be fueled by hatred and rage. A robber shoots a victim once; an enraged husband pumps bullets into the man who raped his wife until the ammunition runs out. A villain may administer a quick-working deadly poison to a victim he wants out of the way, but a villain who loathes his victim might pick a poison that's slow and painful—and hang around to watch.

Adjust the violence quotient to match the amount of rage your villain has toward his/her victim.



**What you call your characters could influence your readers' perceptions of them. Here are some factors to consider in finding the perfect match.**

"Once upon a time," I begin my story, "there lived a king whose name was ..." Here I stop. Henry? No, too common. John? Too short. George? Nah, I keep misspelling it while typing fast. Besides, why am I limiting this to English names? The story certainly doesn't require it

Let's begin again. "His name was ..." Mbwango? Hmm, a bit of a tongue twister. Kwon Yun Ming Chan? Too long. Muhammad? Not exclusive enough, too prolific and popular. Dmitri? Suddenly I'm trying too hard—and am still stuck on the first page of what was supposed to be my masterpiece.

One of my major problems when writing any story isn't the plot, the personalities, the setting, the tone, the language. No, the point at which I stumble is far more superficial: names. With stories based on incidents from my life and the real world, I like my characters to have ordinary names—but not names so common they take away the unique flavor of the work. I confess that most times I solve this problem by, well, procrastination: I write in a first-person narrative so that I don't have to worry about naming the narrator until the fifth page or so. By this time the story has usually come to life and taken the decision out of my hands. But when a story lends itself to third person, I'm nearly always stymied.

"There's really no simple answer," author Jonathan Kellerman says. "Rarely, I engage in a pun—for example, the manic-depressive Richard Moody in my novel *Blood Test*. But more often, names just float into my head. After 32 novels, I've 'created' thousands of characters, so the challenge is not to duplicate."

Bestseller David Baldacci says he doesn't have a set formula. Author Debby Holt doesn't, either. "I don't find it difficult to choose names for characters. They seem to arise quite naturally," Holt says. "I suspect many of them are influenced by people I've known. For example, in my latest novel, *Recipe for Scandal*, there is a young woman called Hannah who is not unlike an old school friend, Hannah, of my daughter. On the other hand, another character in the same book is called Alberta to illustrate a quirk of her mother, who named her after Albert Camus. So there are no hard and fast rules."

Other authors opt for more methodical approaches. Jeffrey Archer, for instance, watches the credits at the end of films. "Or I might see a surname I like in a newspaper. I keep them all on a list," he says. "Then, when the time comes to begin writing, I'll look back at that list and pick out the ones that best suit the characters."

British comedy writer David Nobbs employs a similar technique. "I occasionally use, for surnames, names of places I've been to, or of people I know, or of names I've seen on businesses and shops, and once or twice I've used a few names from the worlds of football and cricket—two sports that I love. But in the main they just seem to come to me, and people seem to think that I have a good feel for them." Nobbs admits, though, that he sometimes has trouble with given names. "Christian names are more difficult. In books you have to be careful not to give the wrong impression of a person; the Christian name will be part of the information the reader uses to form his or her own picture of the character. Also, Christian names are heavily influenced by fash-

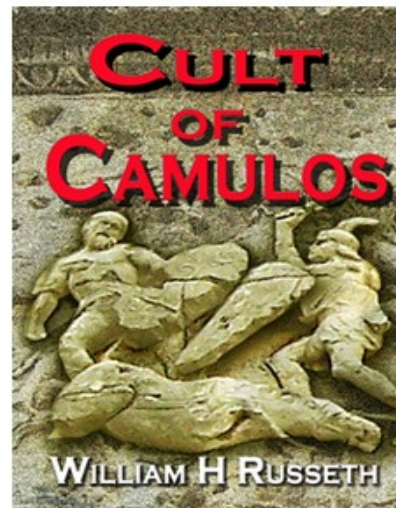
ion, and one has to get that right for the age of the person."

Beyond advice from some of the most popular names (pardon the pun) in the writing world, another avenue worth exploring is the breed of websites like [babynames.com](http://babynames.com) and [babyhold.com](http://babyhold.com). You also might try adding the suffixes "-son" and "-man" to common nouns to create passable Anglo-American surnames. (For example, "car" and "-son" makes Carson.) If all else fails, pick the first name of your favorite author and the last name of your most hated editor and combine the two. (Anyone for Tom Kest?)

With my king still nameless, the go-to method I eventually invent for myself is somewhat more unconventional. Eyes closed, I randomly open a dictionary. Then I run a finger down the middle of a column while mentally keeping a beat, and stop at the count of six. (Why six? Because on this occasion, my story has six characters.) "Macamba: [n] Tropical American feather palm having a swollen spiny trunk and edible nuts." Interesting.

I repeat the process and come up with "Tabes: [n] Wasting of the body during a chronic disease." Ah, just sublime. Then I switch the last letters. Et voila! Tabea Macambs. Pretty exotic, eh? Satisfied, I concoct five more names similarly. My foolproof system of nomenclature works perfectly each time. I return to my story and go on to spin a complex yarn involving cryptic clues, mysterious missions, dangerous villains, beautiful damsels, deceit and daredevilry. I'm so elated with the outcome that I lose no time in submitting the manuscript to a magazine.

Back comes the prompt reply: "We like your story and could potentially use it. Would you be open to making a few minor changes—specifically, the names of the characters?" Sigh. Sometimes you just can't win.



***"A warrior with no heart for war decides to return home ... too late. Roman captors send him to die slowly, digging salt. Will his fight for survival and arduous journey transform him into a noble chieftain or murderous monster?"***

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## Chapter V: In which the hero escapes.

"I repeat, send out your hostage, safely. We can still work this out Mr. McGavin." Officer Vincent Burke shouts into the megaphone. There is no answer but he knows his sister is in the burnt out house.

*Keep it together, Vincent,* he thinks to himself.

Margo hears the subtle tremor in Vincent's voice. He's worried. Her captor stands by the window with his gun at the ready, cool as a cucumber. She remembers Officer Richards, Vincent's partner, whispering in her ear as she left Mr. McGavin's hospital room, "Your patient's a dangerous guy. We think someone smuggled him in a gun. Give me five minutes to sweat him then come in with an excuse for me to leave. Maybe we can catch him trying to dump it." But Margo was pulled into another patient's room and asked Jenny to help Richards instead. A few minutes later, they were both dead and Margo was a hostage.

Carl McGavin is bruised and bleeding from his fight with Richards. His burned leg is flaring up and the cast on his left arm feels like an anchor. Outside, Burke is waiting for him to say something. The rookie's scared but not fooling around. *Jesus, what a mess!* Carl looks over his bedroom. The fire left it untouched but, across the hall, sunlight pours through the ceiling of the guest bedroom. The collapsed plaster and rafters form a rickety ramp to the roof. He looks at Margo and sighs.

"You need to go before things get worse."

"What?" Margo asks in disbelief.

"I'm sorry I got you involved but I didn't have a choice."

Margo slowly stands up but doesn't leave.

"Go on, I won't shoot you." Carl says quietly. Then he shouts to Burke outside. "Hold your fire, Officer Burke. Your sister's safe and I'm sending her out." She slowly walks backwards to the door, still not trusting Carl. "Margo," he says making her jump. "Don't tell them what I said about being set up. When they ask, you tell them I killed that girl. Tell them Richards tried to stop me."

"Why?"

"Richards needed an excuse to kill me, that's why he had two guns. Killing the girl and framing me would have worked but people would still have asked questions. If I had, on the other hand, killed the sister of a fellow police officer then he could fast-track the case and nobody would raise an eyebrow." Margo turns white. "I think he planned on killing you instead of that girl. If the people who sent Richards think you know something, they'll come after you too."

"Oh..." Margo doesn't know what else to say. She turns and walks to the stairs as if in a trance.

"She's comin down, Vince old pa! Safe as can be" Carl yells again and shoves the gun in his backpack. He runs to the stairs and listens as the officers move in to grab Margo. She's telling them not to shoot and Vincent asks if she is okay. Carl runs across the hall and into the guest

bedroom. The debris ramp doesn't look very secure but there's no time for second-guesses. The scorched rafters creak under his weight as he climbs up but they hold. On the roof, he crouches low and works his way to the east side of the house. It always irritated him how close his neighbor's house was built to his, now it might be his only chance. He gauges the distance. Can he jump it? Does he have a choice? Hopefully, Margo is distracting the cops. Carl takes off running, waiting for the last second to jump. He makes the other roof with an inch to spare but lands on his wounded leg, losing his footing. He rolls down the steep roof, off the edge, and into his neighbor's shrubs. The pain is awful but he's made it. The tall fence hides him from the cops. He pulls himself out of the bushes, limps to the back fence, and hoists himself over. Beyond the fence is a large, undeveloped field with a small wooded area in the center. Carl runs for cover. He can hear Burke on the megaphone again, calling for him to come out, but the police are already moving in. He makes it to the trees and pauses to catch his breath. Any minute now, they'll realize he's gone. On the other side of the wooded area, at the corner of Howard and Metric, a large green bus is pulling up to its stop. Carl's in luck, he grabs the lock box from his backpack and pulls out a couple of dollars. Carl limps on board and pays the driver. As he sits down, two police cruisers speed by.

\*\*\*

Carl woke the next morning with his leg on fire and his whole body in pain. He had ridden the bus as far south as he could and then crashed for the night in a motel more accustomed to hourly rates than nightly. The room had two bullet holes through the front door and a pair of soiled panties in the corner but he didn't care. Carl dry swallowed two of the Hydrocodone he took as they fled the hospital and started going through Officer Matt Richards's belongings. There wasn't much, his keys, some receipts, and a wallet holding forty dollars in cash, ID, and some credit cards. He found a business card for the "Yellow Rose" with a phone number written on the back. From the area code, Carl could tell it was a Chicago number. Then he came across a picture of Matt's wife and two children and paused. He rubbed his eyes to keep the tears away. Why would Matt try to kill him? Why didn't Katarina tell him about his daughter? Why send the Ellington woman? And why was she killed?

Carl needed answers and could only think of one place to find them. Katarina and her husband, Igor, had disappeared without a trace. That was a dead end. But he might be able to track down Saffron. She had introduced him to Katarina and had always been the link between them. Although Saffy denied it, Carl suspected they had kept in touch. If she did know where Katarina was, he needed to find out. The only problem was he hadn't seen her since he left New Orleans, sixteen years ago. Saffy had no family and few friends but there was her AA sponsor, a woman named Lorena Collins. Finding Ms. Collins turned out to be a task in itself. After several hours on the phone, Carl discovered she had gotten married and was now Lorena Woods. She remembered him and said Saffy had moved to Chicago with some friends six years ago. She didn't know who these friends were and hadn't seen Saffy since. Then, about a year ago, Saffron called her. She was clearly using again and mumbled something about being fired from a strip joint called "The Player's Diamond." She wanted

Continued on the next page . . .

## Chapter Play continued

money but Lorena refused. Saffy got angry and hung up. That was the last anyone heard from Saffron James.

Carl replays the conversation with Lorena in his mind. He feels like he's been kicked in the gut. The idea of Saffy back on drugs has shaken him to his core. Would she be using again if he hadn't left? He doesn't know. All he does know is that everything points to Chicago and that's where he's going. His leg starts to hurt again. He stands up to get

more pain meds but stops when he hears footsteps outside his room. The sun is setting and two solid beams of sunlight shine through the bullet holes in the door. Suddenly one goes dark, then the other. Carl hears whispering on the other side. He grabs his gun just as the door is kicked in. He spins around, aiming the Walther PPK, and sees Officer Vincent Burke aiming his revolver at him.

To be continued...

Catch up on the story at: <http://www.jason-minor.com/journal>

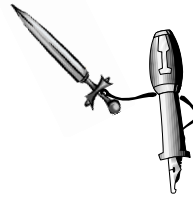
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## Penn and the Mighty Sword By Sam Holland

*Penn is busy saving the World and will return post-hastily!*

*Next: The Enemy Revealed!*

Catch up on what you missed at [smh4@wordpress.com/penn](mailto:smh4@wordpress.com/penn).



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## Deja Vu by Tracey Skeen

She took the key ring down off the hook and fumbled frantically looking for the right key. "How on earth could I let this happen?" She scolded herself over and over while she kept one eye on the door and the other on the set of keys. She could hear their voices down below in the kitchen. She regretted her decision to come. If only she hadn't opened the door. Why didn't she just stay on the path?

She dropped the keys and they landed with a loud thud on the hardwood floor. She knelt down to retrieve them and saw movement out of the corner of her eye. She could feel her heartbeat in her throat but she determined she must be brave. She slowly stood to her full height and stared at the girl with the large hazel eyes looking back at her. Unconsciously, she reached up and brushed away a stray lock of her hair. Her golden tresses were tangled and her clothes were as wrinkled as grandfather's well-used handkerchief.

She heard a crash on the floor below and their voices were growing louder. She brought her attention once again to the keys in her dainty hand. Her tiny frame and small features would suggest she was five instead of eight. She knew her grandmother would be very angry if she found out what she done. Again.

Finally she found the key and unlocked the shutters. She could easily climb out the window and onto the limb of the huge oak tree and make her way safely to the ground be-

fore they reached the door. If only the shutter weren't stuck. She clasped the handle with both of her tiny fists and braced her foot against the wall. But it would not budge. In desperation she tried the key again and found that it was only partly turned in the keyhole and therefore, only partly unlocked. She made certain that this time it was *entirely* unlocked and she pulled the shutter open, raised the window, and carefully placed one leg outside the window.

She could make out their words now and knew they had reached the hall outside the door. She tossed the keys to the floor and swung her second leg out the window. She leaned over and grabbed onto a limb just as a strong gust of wind blew, but she managed somehow to catch the limb and crawl to the center of the tree. She heard shouting behind her and glanced up to see three brown heads sticking out of the window where she had been only moments before.

By the time they spotted her she was already to the ground and running through the forest straight to her grandmother's house where the aroma of warm oatmeal cookies met her at the door. But her tummy was full so she gave her grandma a hug and went and sat on the floor by the fire where she picked up her favorite doll and began to sing her a song.



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# Have you signed up for the workshop? See page 11 . . . .

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**Who  
"said" ?**

"The great thing about human language is that it prevents us from sticking to the matter at hand."

# Ask the Book Doctor: 3 Meek Writers Become a Three-headed Dragon

by Joan Upton Hall

Dear Doc

Recently when our critique group entered flash fiction stories in an anthology collection it seemed we became a three-headed dragon in that all of us picked up different tips to bring to the group. Overnight, we all felt more confident in our knowledge.

When certain skill-building was brought to each member's attention, it became "community property." Here are a few instances:

One caught on to the weakening effect of a boring verb instead of a just-right, vivid one.

Another realized you don't need to keep saying "she *thought*" if the reader is already in the point of view character's head. As our editor, you said, "That puts a bit in the reader's mouth to rein her back from getting fully involved in the story."

The other learned to "kick the *as* habit" (without eliminating it altogether). The words "when" and "while" work fine—not to mention the usually better choice of letting two happenings each have their own sentences.

We just wanted to tell other writers' groups that every tidbit a member of your group learns strengthens all of you. It's made us a three-headed dragon, ready to conquer the previously baffling world of creating powerful books.



—signed: Three headed dragon

Dear Dragon,

By George, you've got it! You can help each other as you mentioned above, but in other ways as well.

If one of you attends a conference, she/he can bring back the best kernels of wisdom learned (Hmm, do dragons eat kernels?).

If one hears of a contest, tell the others. (Warning here: best to all write very different subjects and genres, so you aren't competing with each other and thus, sacrificing trust.)

It's also fun to go to the same conference or workshop together, sharing expenses of the trip. Besides, it's good to discuss what you learn together—and to develop new friends and connections along the way.

Keep on feeding that awesome dragon of yours!—Doc Joan

Have a question to share in this column? Email me at: [jmuHall@aol.com](mailto:jmuHall@aol.com) with "Ask the Book Doctor" as your subject line. If you want to remain anonymous, I'll address you by whatever pseudonym you sign. To see previous issues, go to: <http://www.joanuptonhall.com/books.htm>. Scroll past the book covers and click "Ask Doc" Q&A's.

## Special Interest Groups

**Story Spinners** critique group is now closed to membership. When a spot becomes available, we will again have information in *The Gabriel Writer*.

**The Williamson County Coroners** is a mystery/suspense group and participants must have novels in progress. The meetings are held at the 10:30 a.m. at the Red Poppy Café in the George-town Library.

### Last Writes Critique Group—Full

Meets (usually) at 7 PM, 2nd & 4th Wed. each month, at Oaks at Wildwood Clubhouse. Novels in progress, varied genres. Membership currently full. Contact: [jmuHall@aol.com](mailto:jmuHall@aol.com)

### Novel Crafters is Full right now, but welcomes a Waiting List

Meets every other Thursday on the second floor of the Georgetown Library in a private room. Contact is Mary Stafford at [marylynn@mstafford.net](mailto:marylynn@mstafford.net)

**Quixotic Quills** critique group represents varied interests. Our group writes historical novels, short stories and memoirs. Meetings are usually on the second and fourth Thursday of each month unless we reschedule because of holidays. We meet at 7:00 p.m. at the Monument Café. Contact is Sharon Lyle, 512-639-1162, [iwritecozies@gmail.com](mailto:iwritecozies@gmail.com). Currently, we are closed to new members.

### Bard Masters Critique Group

We meet at 6 p.m. on Tuesdays at the Georgetown library. We have 6 members and we feel that 6 manuscripts is all that we can handle and do the process justice. Until further notice Ross Carnes is the contact: [graphicsrex@hotmail.com](mailto:graphicsrex@hotmail.com)

**If you are interested in joining a critique group**, contact Joan Upton Hall ([jmuhall@aol.com](mailto:jmuhall@aol.com)) or Sylvia Dickey Smith ([sds@suddenlink.com](mailto:sds@suddenlink.com))

## Who "said" Answer ... Lewis Thomas ...

**Lewis Thomas** (November 25, 1913–December 3, 1993) was a physician, poet, etymologist, essayist, administrator, educator, policy advisor, and researcher.

Thomas was born in Flushing, New York and attended Princeton University and Harvard Medical School. He became Dean of Yale Medical School and New York University School of Medicine, and President of Memorial Sloan-Kettering Institute.

He was invited to write regular essays in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, and won a National Book Award for the 1974 collection of those essays, *The Lives of a Cell: Notes of a Biology Watcher*. He also won a Christopher Award for this book. Two other collections of essays (from NEJM and other sources) are *The Medusa and the Snail* and *Late Night Thoughts on Listening to Mahler's Ninth Symphony*. His autobiography, *The Youngest*

*Science: Notes of a Medicine Watcher* is a record of a century of medicine and the changes which occurred in it. He also published a book on etymology entitled *Et Cetera, Et Cetera*, poems, and numerous scientific papers.

Many of his essays discuss relationships among ideas or concepts using etymology as a starting point. Others concern the cultural implications of scientific discoveries and the growing awareness of ecology. In his essay on Mahler's Ninth Symphony, Thomas addresses the anxieties produced by the development of nuclear weapons.<sup>11</sup> Thomas is often quoted, given his notably eclectic interests and superlative prose style.

The Lewis Thomas Prize is awarded annually by The Rockefeller University to a scientist for artistic achievement.

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If you have illustration, send it and I will try to use it


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## You Want to Get Published? SGWL Workshop Now Accepting Registration . . .

The SGWL is proud to announce our Fall workshop, "You Want to get Published?" presented by award winning author Russ Hall. The workshop is **Saturday, November 6 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Georgetown Public Library** in the Friends Room (next door to our usual meeting room). Registration is \$35.00 (\$25.00 if you're a member) and you can do so via mail with the attached form, at the monthly meeting or online at

[www.sgwl.net/workshop](http://www.sgwl.net/workshop).

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Do demons bedevil your writing? Similar, confusing words? Grammar, punctuation, or capitalization rules? "The Demystifier" will clear up the mystery (primary reference unless otherwise noted: Garner, Bryan A. *Dictionary of Modern American Usage*. N.Y.: Oxford University Press). Address questions and comments to freelance editor, **Joan Upton Hall, PO Box 179, Hutto, TX 78634**, or email: [jmuHall@aol.com](mailto:jmuHall@aol.com). More problems like the one above are demystified in the booklet, *50 Writers' Tips*. Find a few of them at "books, etc." on website: [www.JoanUptonHall.com](http://www.JoanUptonHall.com).

Demystifying Writers' Demons©

**Spelling Tips: Adding suffixes to words ending in silent "e"**

Drop the silent e before a suffix beginning with a vowel: admire - admiration; believe - believing; allure - alluring; imagine - imaginary; move - movable

Keep the silent e before a suffix beginning with a consonant: care - careful; arrange - arrangement; notice - noticeable; outrage - outrageous

**Doubling consonants when...**

Double the final consonant when adding a suffix:

- if the word has one syllable: bragging, mannish, stopped, getting,
- if the word is accented on the last syllable: occurred, deferring, conferred

(But notice if the accent shifts, don't double the consonant) conference, deference



## The Gabriel Writer

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