

Pikes Peak Writer

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Volunteering for the Muse

By Jené Hanna

Where do you get the energy to keep facing that blank page? The inspiration? The guts? I have found energy, inspiration, and guts in volunteering for Pikes Peak Writers.

I have found, over the last few years of being too busy to volunteer for PPW and doing it anyway, that volunteering is like planting, then nourishing, a perennial herb.

It takes time and effort to get it started, to get it well-rooted and in just the right spot in the garden. But when it gets there, it is happy and productive. It feeds itself, it feeds others, and it is beautiful. It is part of an energy-rich, self-sustaining circle of creativity and productivity.

When I volunteer for PPW, I help other writers, they help me, and I am inspired. I am richer and gain far

beyond the surface rewards like discounted workshops and first crack at the cookies.

It feeds my Muse. She becomes giddy with the delight of being around Muses of fellow writers gathered around the pool of creativity, unafraid of sharing or running out of steam; she gains strength, determination, and persistence. She finds her most kindred spirits, her strongest allies, in writers who give of themselves to fellow writers. And when she is happy, my writing life flourishes.

I wish this for you. I wish for you to think of a place in the garden of PPW that might suit you. Where you will flourish. You might think you are too busy, that you don't have enough time or energy. But energy is renewable. And it always takes some energy—a spark—to set off the creative process. I have found so many sparks through volunteering for PPW!



The PPW volunteer form can be found at our Web site, ppwc.net. Think of it as a guide for the PPW garden. Do you see where you could flourish, where you could feed others and they could feed you? If so, fill it out, send it in (via mail or e-mail), and get ready to thrive!

“The Writer’s Life”—Giving Back

by Debbie Meldrum

The first column for The Writer's Life was about claiming time for yourself. I made suggestions of ways to find some of that extra time you give so

freely to others and take it back. While I still feel it is imperative that writers protect their time, I also believe they need to give some of it away to other writers.

The act of writing is a solitary pursuit. You sit alone at home or in a

coffee shop putting one word after another until they form a poem or short story or novel. By its very nature, the work forces you to spend a lot of time inside your own head. And

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“The page waits pretending to be blank...”

—Margaret Atwood

From the Editor



I am a volunteer. As you probably already know, Pikes Peak Writers is run by volunteers. And they are amazing.

The first Pikes Peak Writers Conference I attended was in 2003. Throughout the weekend I watched the people handing out registration packets, moderating sessions, acting as emcees and presenting awards on Saturday night.

Everyone was efficient and friendly. The thing I noticed most, however, was how well they all seemed to get along. They seemed to be very good friends. And that's why I didn't volunteer right away.

That may make no sense to some of you. But others are probably nodding your heads. It can be intimidating to walk into an already established group. Will you fit in? Will they accept you? Do they even want "outsiders" at their meetings? I can tell you that the answer to all three questions is a resounding "yes."

My volunteer experience started almost by accident. I showed up early for a Write Brain session and helped set up tables. Everyone was so grateful for the assistance. Then I did it again at another session. Then a person who was supposed to report on a workshop I attended had a

family emergency and couldn't make it. Chris Mandeville asked me if I'd do it. And so on.

You can commit as much or as little time as you feel comfortable giving. No one wants the volunteers to feel overwhelmed or to burn out. Chairs always need to be set up. Articles are always needed for the *NewsMagazine*. Committees—do you know how many committees there are?—need members as well as leaders. Stop by and talk with one of the officers. See what's needed. Decide where your talents will fit in best.

Then you can say, "I am a volunteer."

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The Writers Life—Giving Back

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for most of you, you're the only one in there.

In order to "fill the well" as Julia Cameron puts it, you need to get out once in a while. Attend a workshop. Chat with others of your kind. Reassure yourself that all writers go through the same ups and downs that you do. These workshops and discussions help you grow as a writer. You have those "ah ha" moments that make a huge difference in your writing.

**"Volunteer.
You'll be a better
writer for it."**

A typical two-hour Write Brain session takes hours of volunteer time to present. Someone thinks up the topics. Presenters have to be found. Arrangements for space need to be made. Refreshments are purchased. Notices and reminders are sent. Handouts are put together. The room needs to be set up and broken down. Someone has to greet the attendees and check membership status. The presenter is introduced and thanked. And I'm probably missing several other tasks.

Pikes Peak Writers loves being able to bring Write Brain sessions to the group. We get excited about a great workshop. The

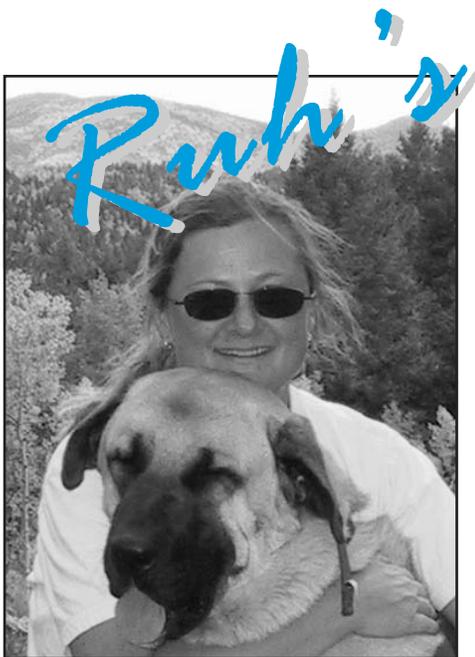
annual conference is our pride and joy. This is what we exist for.

I think each and every volunteer would tell you that they take great pleasure and pride in helping make all these things possible. That there is a real feeling of accomplishment. And that there is a camaraderie that develops between the volunteers. But there is another benefit of volunteering, at least for me.

My writing gets better. Because I volunteer, I attend more Write Brains and workshops than I probably would otherwise. And I've taken away something from each of them. Especially the ones I didn't think I needed. The ones on topics I thought I already had a great handle on.

But the best perk of volunteering is being around the other writers. Getting to know and work with the Chrises, Lauras and Barbs, with Martha, Pam, Beth, Ron, Charlie and all the rest. These are great people and wonderful writers. They inspire me.

They'll do the same for you. Volunteer. You'll be a better writer for it.



As told to Chris Mandeville

Ruh (pronounced "Roo") is a service dog and PPW/C mascot. He likes stories of all kinds, especially those involving good chase scenes. His favorite things are writers, children, his cat Loki, and provolone cheese.

Ruh's Adieu

I'm sad to say that several of my dear PPW friends will not be seeking re-election to the Board of Directors. They'll still be around for pats and advice, but I wanted to acknowledge that their BOD service is coming to an end (at least for now).

Chris Olson, my big-dog-loving pal, has been a mainstay of PPW and PPWC for more years than I've been around. She's served as Secretary, Marketing/PR Coordinator, PPWC Faculty Director, member of the Hotel Committee, Member-at-Large, and most recently as coordinator for our WriteChat events and online classes. She promises to continue to advise us, but more importantly we hope to see her participate in PPW/C events while working on her own terrific women's fiction writing.

Jennifer Webster-Valant, Treasurer and Transportation Coordinator extraordinaire, has such a level head on her shoulders. She's decided that, for this year at least, volunteer work must take a back seat to being a full-time mom to her incredible young children. Any spare time and energy will go toward working on her riveting mysteries, participating in improv writing, and devouring the

Muse of the Month

latest releases from Jodi Picoult and Dennis Lehane. If not, she'll have a very large, very unhappy dog to answer to.

Laura Hayden, the first lady of PPW, the Queen of the Universe, the apple of my eye, what will we do without her? I for one certainly hope never to find out. PPW staffers are counting on Laura to remain in the wings while on sabbatical from Board service. The entire history of PPW and PPWC is locked in that remarkable brain of hers, and since she's got no time to write it down because she's hard at work on a new series, she simply has to stick around. You won't see her as Emcee, Conference Director or Prez—at least not for a while—but if you look closely we hope you'll see her behind the scenes, sharing her knowledge, ideas, smiles and doggie treats.

Thank you ChrisO, Jen and Laura for your years of service to PPW. Know you are deeply appreciated and fondly missed.

Ruh's Muse of the Month

AUGUST

Remember my buddy **Pat Kennelly**? She was one of my muses for March, back before summer had me lamenting the heat and the shedding. Oh, the shedding. Don't get me started. Anyway, after a year as our stellar *NewsMag* editor, Pat will be passing the editorial reins. Now I know what you're thinking. You're saying to yourself that the PPW *NewsMag* chews up and spits out editors about once a year. But you'd be wrong. Well, mostly wrong. We do seem to go through more than our fair share of editors, but as Pat would tell you, there's no chewing or spitting involved. *NewsMag* editor is a rewarding—though demanding—job and she's only leaving because she's answering a higher call. Okay, maybe not technically higher, but one involving higher math. She's going to be the new PPW Treasurer. The PPW staff and I are thankful beyond words that she's come to the aide of a BOD in need. So I'm sending a big Ruh salute to Pat as I introduce you to our new editor, Debbie Meldrum, my Muse for August.

Debbie Meldrum always has a smile on her face. I know I'm a handsome, cuddly guy and folks can't help but smile at me, but I'm telling you, it's not just me Debbie is smiling at. Maybe she's grinning because she's a closet banjo player, but something tells me that's not

the whole story. As I've gotten to know her I've come to believe that she's a genuinely happy human who radiates support and approval to two-leggeds and four-leggeds alike.

As D.B. deClerq, Debbie writes a mean cozy mystery, while her mainstream fiction is penned under her own name. She blogs under both names and admits to feeling a bit schizophrenic when D.B. comments on Debbie or vice versa. She reads across the board with favorites ranging from James Joyce to Neil Gaiman to Agatha Christie to J.K. Rowling. And though some of her inspiration certainly comes from reading these greats, she credits her circle of writer friends for motivating and inspiring her in her writing and also for the tremendous improvements she's made in the craft.

Debbie has already made her mark on the PPW *NewsMag* reporting on events and contributing her regular "The Writer's Life" column. I can't wait to see what she has in store for us as our new editor. I'm not sure I'll ever understand the secret to Debbie's happiness, but I hope to glean years of inspiration from her friendly smile and the exuberance for life that emanates from her person and her writing.

SEPTEMBER

My muse for September is none other than the incredibly foxy **Karen Fox**. I have to say that if it weren't for Karen, I wouldn't be writing this column. It's true. Karen was the "old hat" on the PPW Board who brought my ChrisM under her wing and into the organization, so I definitely have a soft spot for Karen. Even though she's a cat person.

Karen says she's had stories taking place in her head for as long as she can remember. 'Round about the age of twelve she started writing them down. Her tales began as science fiction with a hint of a love story, then evolved into romance laced with the paranormal. In 1996 she sold her first book, *Sword of MacLeod*, a futuristic romance. Soon after, her second book *Somewhere My Love* went on to become a finalist for RWA's prestigious RITA award as well as a finalist in several smaller contests. Many of her other titles have gone on to final or win contests for published books. In 2002, *Buttercup Baby*

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Ruh's Muse of the Month

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won the Booksellers Best Award awarded by booksellers from around the country for the Best Paranormal Romance.

It may be hard to believe, but our sweet, down-to-earth Karen has led a bit of a jet-setting life, having lived and traveled all over the U.S. and abroad. I'm so grateful that she's decided Colorado is home. She settled here in the early nineties after discovering and joining Pikes Peak Romance Writers and the Wyrd Sisters critique group. Now she's thoroughly ensconced in Colorado life with her husband of 26 years, her three young adult children, and a full-time job as a technical assistant for The MITRE Corporation.

As far as Pikes Peak Writers goes, Karen has been involved every year since the conference began in 1993 when she volunteered in the book store. Though she's contributed in many capacities, she really made her mark as Faculty Director, bringing "big names" to PPWC like Donald Maass and leading the charge with the first of PPW's non-conference events. She was on the original Board of Directors after being part of the group that formed Pikes Peak Writers as a non-profit organization, and that was no small feat, from what I've heard.

For the past couple years Karen stepped back from PPW while she served on the national Board of Directors for Romance Writers of America (RWA). It's with great pleasure that PPW welcomes her back to our BOD to grace our conference once again as Faculty Director.

So, Karen and Debbie, welcome to the PPW Board of Directors, and congratulations on being selected the August and September Muses by yours truly, the Ruh-meister. May you inspire affection, camaraderie, doggie kisses and writerly goodness in all you meet. Well, maybe not the doggie kisses. Can't picture that from Donald Maass, can you? Let's leave those to me.

"I love writing. I love meeting other writers and hearing their stories. I love the success stories that come out of conferences or knowing that a workshop we presented helped someone."
—Karen Fox

Get Ready for the Paul Gillette Writing Contest

By Dawn Smit Miller

The 2008 Paul Gillette Writing Contest opens to submissions on September 1. We have a few changes to announce, and a new volunteer to celebrate.

New Assistant

Please give a warm welcome to Laura DiSilverio, who has volunteered to help with the contest this year. She will be my assistant and gets to test drive the contest database—is it as simple to use as I hope?

Changes to Eligibility Rules

First, we've added the following rule: "Anyone whose book-length work has appeared or currently appears on any Internet site or physical location where it was or is offered for sale is ineligible for this contest." This is a clarification of the rule about receiving any monetary compensation. If a book is available for sale, then we assume that the writer intends to make money on the book, and that means the book is published for the purposes of this contest.

Second, published nonfiction no longer makes a writer ineligible for this contest. We've tried to make this rule black and white. If you have received monetary compensation for anything that's considered nonfiction—how-to books, memoirs, cookbooks, textbooks, articles for magazines

and newspapers, even creative nonfiction—you are eligible to enter the contest. If you have received monetary compensation for any book-length work OF FICTION—and that includes children's picture books, because the industry counts these as book length—you are not eligible to enter the contest. If you have received monetary compensation for short fiction only, you are not eligible to enter the short story category but are eligible to enter the book-length categories.

Contest Schedule

Writers may submit their entries from September 1 to November 1, 2007. Entries postmarked after that date will not be accepted. Qualified entries will be processed and judged over the following five months, and winners will be announced by early April 2008.

- November 1—Last day for entries to be postmarked
- Early November—Entries are processed
- Mid to late November—Entries are mailed to the first-round judges
- January—First round of judging ends; second round begins
- February—Second round of judging ends
- Mid February—VIP judges receive the finalist entries
- March—Entries are returned in their SASEs
- Late March/early April—Winners are announced
- April 26, 2008—Winners' banquet at the Pikes Peak Writers Conference

A few tips for entering the contest:

- Use the checklist found in the brochure to make sure you've done everything.
- Submit early. You don't have to submit as early as September, but if you plan to submit a week or two before the deadline, you won't find yourself rushed for time when delays invariably come up. And you'll have time to fix the typo you notice on page one when you're standing in line at the post office.
- Double check every page of the manuscript and synopsis or target market to make sure your name does not appear. One past entry had the writer's name in the header on pages 3, 7, and 8.
- Read the scoresheet(s) on the Web site for the category or categories you wish to enter.
- Come to the Contest Write Brain on Tuesday, October 16. There you can ask specific questions about your entry and hear more tips on how to make this a great contest experience.

If you think your novel or short story is award quality, or if you want to get impartial feedback on your work, this contest is for you.

—Dawn Smit Miller is the Contest Director for the Paul Gillette. She is also the creator of the Rainbow Editing™ technique for self-editing.

Pikes Peak Writers is pleased to announce a new benefit for members—PPW’s Craft Book-of-the-Month program.

Each month a PPW staff member will recommend a book on the craft or business of writing. PPW will then sell it to members at a discount.

The September recommendation is for *Self-Editing for Fiction Writers: How to Edit Yourself into Print* by Renni Browne and Dave King. It lists for \$13.95, but the PPW member price is only \$10.24 plus tax. October’s selection is *Characters, Emotion & Viewpoint* by Nancy Kress. List price is \$16.99; PPW member price is \$13.04 plus tax.

These books—and many other books for writers—are available for purchase at PPW events. **The member discount applies during the month in which the book is featured, so read the recommendations and then come to the Write Brain Sessions on September 18th and October 16th to pick up your discounted copies.**

Enjoy!

Craft Book-of-the-Month

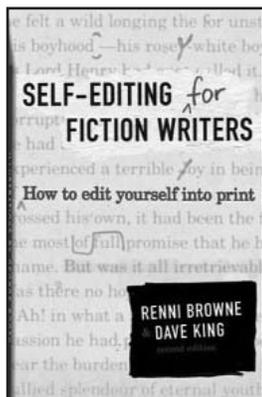


Self-Editing for Fiction Writers:

How to Edit Yourself Into Print

by Renni Browne and Dave King.
(Second Edition)

Recommended by Barbara Nickless



Writers hear, frequently enough, that writing is rewriting. We compose in a passion, revise when the storm has passed. The value attached to rewriting is shown in the care with which we archive Hemmingway’s scrawled-in margins and Faulkner’s scribbled-over lines.

Browne and King’s excellent book, *Self-Editing for Fiction Writers*, makes manageable a task that many writers approach with the same fear we’d experience entering the lair of a man-eating tiger. With rewriting, our heated passion is given a douse of cold water. And, like a cat, the creature never looks as attractive wet.

It’s good to have someone arm us as we enter the tiger’s den.

With a friendly, let’s-sit-down-at-the-table-together voice that speaks directly to the reader, Browne and King offer 12 different areas to focus on while revising our manuscripts. The authors tackle the usual offenders: inappropriate point of view shift (distances the reader); poor dialogue (‘nuf

said); and long, dreary paragraphs filled with exposition (zzzzz).

Sophistication, characterization, and voice are dealt with in solid strokes, imploring us to avoid dependent clauses as much as possible, to let our characters speak for themselves (or let other characters speak for them), and to take comfort in the fact that even Herman Melville struggled to find his voice.

There are also some surprising takes on old adages, such as suggesting the writer both show and tell. Just make sure to do each in the right place and in just the right amount.

Some problems bedevil the best writers. Long technical descriptions like those found in some Tom Clancy novels encourage us to follow Browne and King’s advice: look for proportion not only on individual pages, but in the book as a whole.

Browne and King use excerpts from American fiction to illustrate their suggestions. Elmore Leonard, Alice Sebold, John Le Carré and a variety of other notables are held up as examples—with the added benefit that many of us are familiar with their work.

Self-Editing’s greatest strength lies in its organization. By breaking down the process of revision into 12 discrete units, the authors give writers solid foot- and hand-grips with which to negotiate the cliff of revision. Each chapter includes several exercises designed to let you hone your razor’s edge on someone else’s writing, and a checklist to use against your own manuscript. George Booth’s cartoons—featuring a series of wanna-be writers foiled by the very things that threaten all our manuscripts—enliven the text.

For those writers who prefer to polish as they create, *Self-Editing* is best consumed before beginning the process. The authors warn against editing while writing. But if you can internalize some of their suggestions before you sit down at your desk, you may

save yourself time with future revisions.

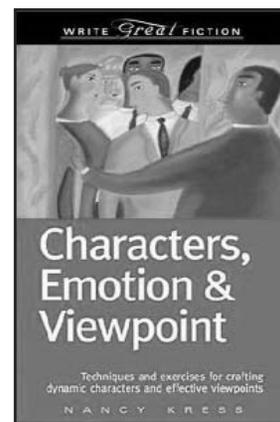
And there will be future revisions. Because no matter how good you are, you’ll still need to enter the tiger’s lair.

At least now, you’ll be armed.

Characters, Emotion & Viewpoint

by Nancy Kress

Recommended by Laura DiSilverio



Do your critique partners complain that your protagonist is “too perfect?” Do agents send your manuscripts back with notes about your characters’ inconsistent

motivations and actions? Do you get feedback from readers saying “I couldn’t relate to the main character?” I heard all that and more when I first exposed my mystery to my critique group and started subbing it to agents. Nancy Kress’s book, *Characters, Emotion & Viewpoint*, helped me breathe life into my characters and land a top agent.

Divided into the three title sections, the book leads you through creating characters (including naming them, understanding their motivations, and backstory), to developing their motivations (with a special emphasis on loving, fighting, dying and frustration), to choosing the best point of view. A variety of

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“What’s the secret to writing perfect dialogue?” she asked.

July Write Brain: Writing Effective Dialogue

featuring Kay Bergstrom aka Cassie Miles

Article by Chris Mandeville

Kay Bergstrom is a gem. Her Write Brain workshop gave us a treasure-trove of information and exercises geared toward helping new and seasoned writers craft effective dialogue.

“Dialogue has three basic functions: providing information, showing characterization, and advancing plot. If a line doesn’t do at least one of these, cut it,” Bergstrom said.

When we speak, words often fly off the tongue. Sometimes they hit the mark and sometimes not. But when you write dialogue, “it’s the one time you can say the perfect thing.” Bergstrom was referring to your character having the perfect come-back, but as she showed throughout the session, “perfect” also means that you, as the writer, can layer your dialogue with a wealth of information beyond the surface meaning of the words.

Bergstrom discussed why writers should use dialogue and how to do it effectively. She shared some important what NOT to do and was generous with her tips. The meat of the workshop was demonstrating how to weave the essential elements into dialogue. Group and individual exercises cemented the lessons.

She divided us into impromptu writing teams, then tasked us with a down-and-dirty collaboration on several lines of dialogue. The challenge was to create a brief two-person conversation where directions are provided, a past event is mentioned, and one physical trait for each character is revealed. The results ranged from surprising to humorous to thought-provoking.

One team had Americans in Ireland asking directions to crop circles, while another featured a one-eared maestro. Attendees cracked up when a short cowpoke requested directions to the rodeo from a lanky stranger. Each team—in only eight minutes—selected a genre, created a storyline, developed two characters, and then managed to convey the required information. Sometimes the dialogue popped, sometimes it fell flat. Sometimes it was stilted and sometimes music to our ears. Ms. Bergstrom

found positive aspects in each effort.

Next the teams were asked to add complexity to their scenarios: add a conflict plus physical action, and move the plot forward—all using more dialogue. The timer was set to a daunting five minutes.

One team revealed that a woman was about to pee her pants while walking down the red carpet. Another team shocked us when a man pulled a gun on his egotistical blonde lover from long ago. A gun was also pulled on the short cowpoke who



knew a line of dialogue could do all that? Bergstrom did and was kind enough to tell us—and show us—how to do it ourselves.

turned out to be riding a horse stolen from the lanky stranger. The crowd laughed when one of the flirting mallrats turned out to be an undercover cop who then arrested her fork-tongued beau. Conflict, check. Action, check. Plot moving forward: Bingo.

But Bergstrom wasn’t finished with us. Even more information can be conveyed in dialogue. She dispensed with teams and delivered an independent assignment. In just four lines—without any tags or narrative—develop a conversation that shows both something external (physical) and something internal (emotional) about the two characters. In only five minutes. Go.

Sound difficult? There were no groans from attendees. Armed with the tools Ms. Bergstrom shared, we jumped in. The results included a botched nose-piercing that had us wincing and laughing. The one-eared maestro scenario was developed into a story of jealousy and revenge. With the delivery of just a few well-designed lines, we felt we knew these characters. And we wanted to know more.

Bergstrom’s casual and accessible manner made the lessons easy to understand. The evening was peppered with her laughter and improvised lines of dialogue, the kind that imparted information, revealed characterization, and moved the plot forward. Who

TIPS and ETC.

- Dialogue can show something succinctly in place of descriptive, explanatory narration.
- It helps to break up the narration in terms of flow and pacing, as well as visually on the page. Quick back-and-forth lines can pick up the pace, driving the reader forward in the story.
- Dialogue creates a sense of immediacy to a story, allowing the reader to have a more visceral connection.
- Characters’ words can be a useful complement to narrative description when conveying setting. How a character speaks can immediately give a sense of time or place. “Adjust the thermo-coupling on the quantum flux capacitor” sounds futuristic. “That’s, like, totally awesome,” could convey a Valley Girl type from the 1980s.
- Use caution when writing slang dialogue to show a contemporary setting. Modern slang changes so rapidly and can “date” your story rather than convey the feeling of being in the present day.
- Dialogue can be used to set, or to alter, the tone and mood of a story. For example, it can be effectively employed to bring comic

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Jim Butcher: Livin' On Television

By Bret Wright



Jim Butcher

Jim Butcher is an overnight success. He sprang from nowhere, and has taken the fantasy world by storm with two book series, a *Spiderman* novel, and a popular cable television series called *The Dresden Files*. Yep, overnight. You know, if, by “overnight” one means long years studying and perfecting his craft, several novels that will never see the light of day, and the frustration of receiving rejection after rejection. If that’s the case, then, yes, Jim Butcher is the latest wunderkind to spring forth from virtual vapor.

In the real world, however, the road to success began as a game trail that only Butcher could see, and evolved into the superhighway that it is today, only through hard work, tenacity, and the support of his immediate family. His television series grew out of many years of trying—and failing—to get published. In a recent presentation at the Pikes Peak Writers Conference, Butcher told the writers about his road to being published. “I wrote my first book when I was 19,” he said. “It was horrible. Really bad. I wrote another one...which was also bad. The third... okay, that one sucked, too. Then I used all of that novel-writing experience and rewrote the first novel, which was...still bad. So, I branched out into this paranormal thing on the next one, and it...well, it was a real stinker.”

After the presentation, the author was more candid about his eventual success. Butcher had been writing and banging his head against a wall with all of his efforts until he decided to attend the writing program at the University of Oklahoma. To his great surprise, it opened up his writing in a way that no amount of independent study had previously. The real difference in his writing, he says, is when he found out about writing sequels. This isn’t the type of sequel one gets when writing a novel and then writing another based on the first.

This kind of sequel has to do with the way an author tells the story. Think of it as the reaction to a setup. “In a book, there are scenes, and then there are sequels. The difference is reaction. When you write a scene, you’re providing the characters with a situation. The sequel to the scene is the reaction you get from the characters to the situation you set up for them.” This kind of story telling provides for more solid, viable characters, and it carries the story, and the reader, into the realm all writers want readers to enter: suspension of disbelief; that state where everything that occurs in a story is perfectly reasonable and explainable. It took a while for the lessons to sink in, however.

“I like having the television on in the background. Either a good movie that I’ve seen, or a not so good one that I haven’t.”

The road to realizing his writing mistakes was a humbling one for Butcher. Because he was an old hand at novel writing, he decided to show his instructor in Oklahoma that what she was telling him was fine in theory, but didn’t hold water in practice. “Besides,” he thought, “I have an English Lit degree. I’ll show her!” He proceeded to write an urban fantasy novel because the teacher had suggested it due to Butcher’s admiration for Laurell K. Hamilton’s work. “I did absolutely everything she said to do, down to the smallest detail, just to prove she was wrong.” The result? *Storm Front*, the first book in the *Dresden Files* series. He also wrote the second and third books in the series while he was at it. The series is up to its ninth installment now, with another in the works.

The series centers on one Harry Blackstone Copperfield Dresden. He’s a detective of sorts, living in Chicago. He’s also a wizard. Oh, and he fights the minions of black magic and basically ticks off the high council of wizards who oversee things. Harry has a bad relationship with anything that involves technology to boot. There’s an irony of sorts in this last, as Harry Dresden was essentially born from technology.

When Butcher writes, he turns on the television. “I like having the television on in the background. Either a good movie that I’ve seen, or a not so good one that I haven’t.” Alone in the wee early morning hours, with the television providing its accustomed companionship, the author thought about what he wanted from this new book. He knew he wanted a character who tracked down the supernatural, like in the old *Nightstalker* series, but he wanted the detective to have supernatural powers. He was to be sort of a blend between Tolkien’s Gandalf, and Conan-Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes. “Gandalf isn’t shy about letting people know what idiots they are,” he says, “and Sherlock is the same way; both exist in the murky world of shadow.”

While he was building his main character, the show, *Cast a Deadly Spell*, was playing in the background. The story on the television followed the adventures of H. Phillip Lovecraft: PI. Butcher continued to think. Then *Babylon 5* came on. Between the two shows, Butcher came up with the name of his main character. “I had these two lines bouncing around in my head from each of them, ‘Harry wants to see you. Harry wants to see you,’ and ‘Dresden. Dresden. Dresden.’ Suddenly, there was the name I’d been looking for.”

One might think that Butcher’s success followed soon on the heels of his writing program. Not true. He began attending writing conferences and conventions because a friend had suggested that he concentrate on the people he wanted to sell his manuscript to. Doing it in person seemed like a natural way to approach them with his ideas. On top of that, he continued to send out his manuscripts, and the rejections piled high. The low point for him came early one morning as he was trying to catch a plane to another writing conference where an agent he’d been trying to meet would be speaking. “I’d been trying to get published for almost 10 years at that point, and I was going to this conference that cost a lot of money. It was oh-my-God-early in the morning, in March, 20 degrees out, and my tire blew in the middle of nowhere. I had oil and gunk all over my convention clothes, and the lug nuts on the wheel would not move. I was going to miss my plane.” He sat on the side of the road and kept thinking about missing his plane, not being able to reach his wife so she

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The Business of Writing

Self-Publishers Beware

By Linda Rohrbough

Psychological studies universally assert that when a person takes an action and is frustrated a few times, the person simply gets discouraged and gives up. It's no wonder then, given the amount of rejection we all face as writers, that so many pre-published authors skip the traditional publishing route, opting instead for self-publishing. But instead of a panacea, self-publishing, also known as subsidiary publishing or vanity publishing, has its own set of pitfalls. Here are a few that have recently come to my attention.

First, let me say that the drive to be in print is fueled by the lack of respect shown amateur writers. If you paint as a hobby, no one will ask you what gallery your paintings are in. Instead, strangers and friends alike will ooh and aaaah, pointing out to others how talented you are.

But if you announce you're a writer, people narrow their eyes and start an inquisition into your publishing credits. And for better or worse, everyone starts with amateur status before they make it. Others publish a few things and spend the rest of their lives explaining why they didn't do more. This is definitely a "what have you done lately" kind of business.

That being said, it's no wonder some writers become absolutely desperate about seeking recognition for the art they love. So desperate they become easy prey for a new set of cons and rip-offs, all perfectly legal. The basis of these new schemes feed on people who won't, or don't know how, to read contracts.

One new scheme, and one of the cleverest I've heard so far, is to pay the author an advance and royalties. Sounds like a regular publishing contract, doesn't it? Well, if you read the fine print, (and most don't until it's too late) the author will discover they've obligated themselves to buy 10,000 books. The advance is usually low, like \$200, and the royalty rate is low as well. And, of course, the publisher only prints 10,000 books, sending them all off to the author with congratulations. Then the deal is done, at a substantially higher cost to the author than if they'd found a more honest subsidiary press and simply

paid to have the book published.

What these publishers feed on is the author's ego. Despite the cost, the author now can say they got an advance and are getting royalties, which sounds real to their friends. For some, the social status is enough to justify the financial loss.

In some cases, the publisher sets the price for the book with no input from the author, despite the fact the author is paying for the book's publication. As you'd suspect, these publishers are setting the price at two or three times the price of similar books on the market. So if you're in a market where similar books sell for \$14.95 and your publisher sets the price for your book at \$35.95, you're at a substantial competitive disadvantage. Since the retail price is not specified, most authors get fooled by a clause that allows them to buy the books at deep discounts of 40 to 50 percent. Even a 50 percent discount in our example puts you paying \$17.48 per book, still a problem when other titles are priced at \$14.95. And that doesn't figure in the author's shipping or promotional costs.



“It’s no wonder then, given the amount of rejection we all face as writers, that so many pre-published authors skip the traditional publishing route, opting instead for self-publishing.”

Shipping is another place where would be authors get ripped off. The publisher sets a reasonable cost for the book, a decent discount and so the author thinks they're OK. Until they order a single box of books, say 20 paperback copies of their novel, and are

billed \$200 for shipping in addition to the cost of the books.

There are other, less obvious problems. I know a guy who lives in a two bedroom apartment that planned to have 20,000 copies of his book shipped to him. I asked him where he was planning to live, because that many books would take up his entire living space, not to mention the weight could be an issue in a second story apartment. I recommended he opt for a drop-shipping deal, meaning the publisher houses the books and ships copies to buyers. This cost a little more, but he wouldn't have the storage problem. I also recommended he print fewer books, because books yellow after six months to a year. If he can't move the 20,000 before they yellow, he'll be stuck with books he can't even give away. He didn't listen there and as far as I know, he sold a couple hundred to family and friends while the rest lived in the warehouse.

By far the worst problem I've heard is unscrupulous subsidiary publishers who write into the contract they own all the rights to the book. So if the book does well, the publisher owns it, not the author. This seems almost criminal, but again, it's legal.

What to do? If you're going to insist on taking the self-publishing route, the best reference I've seen on the subject is *The Complete Guide to Self-Publishing* by Tom and Marilyn Ross. Also, if you're reading this, you're part of one of the best writing groups in the country. So ask questions. Get advice. Show the contract to someone in the group who is knowledgeable. Get referrals to people who specialize in going over publishing contracts. It may cost you a couple hundred bucks, but this investment in yourself will keep your bacon out of the fire.

—Linda Rohrbough has been writing professionally since 1989, has more than 5,000 articles, seven books and awards for her fiction and non-fiction. Her latest book, *Stepping Out of the Shadow of Obesity: The Comprehensive Guide to the Adjustable Gastric Band* will be released this fall. Visit her updated website: www.lindarohrbough.com.

“What’s the secret to writing perfect dialogue?” she asked.

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relief following a dark, serious scene, like the banter of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*.

• A significant benefit of dialogue is that it gives the writer a way to impart information that the point-of-view character would not say or think. For example, a character might not think of herself as curvaceous or sexy (or if she did think that, it might not produce the effect the writer intended). So having another character tell her, “You are one voluptuous, sexy mama,” might be just the tactic to convey that information.

Things to avoid:

- Static dialogue—people sitting and talking with nothing else going on.
- Fragmented dialogue—exchanges with a long narrative passage in between a question and the answer.
- Redundancy—don’t have characters say the same thing several times, several different ways; instead choose the best one and omit the others.

• Long monologues—if you don’t want to bore and lose readers, avoid these like the plague unless they are an accepted part of the genre. (e.g. “Yoda speeches” in Fantasy where a sage adviser explains “what it all means.”)

• BEWARE: Dialogue is different from genre to genre. For example, in a thriller, dialogue in action scenes should be quick and to-the-point, only providing “straight information.” If your characters have a conversation while fleeing a murder or having a fist fight, it will rob immediacy and realism from your scene. Good thrillers won’t do that. (Of course rules are made to be broken, but at least know the rules.) Read exhaustively in your genre to learn the unique requirements, expectations, and customs. Know what works and what doesn’t.

• TIP: Use one line of dialogue to provide a “motivational conclusion”—after a long internal monologue, put the character’s conclusion into a line of dialogue. It breaks up the narrative visually and emphasizes the character’s decision.

• When setting up tags for two talking heads, make them count. Don’t settle for having them show busy work just to break up the dialogue. Use them to illustrate something significant about the character. For example, “*You’re late,*” *Suzy said, picking up a pencil,* doesn’t show much of anything in the way of Suzy’s character. But “*You’re late,*” *Suzy said, doodling a peace sign in the margin of her Statistics book,* gives three tidbits of information about Suzy.

PUNCTUATE IT RIGHT:

- An ellipsis “...” at the end of dialogue indicates the character’s voice is trailing off.
- A dash “—” at the end of dialogue indicates the character has been interrupted.

This is just one example of the fabulous Write Brains PPW has to offer. Write Brain staffers Barb Nickless, Beth Groundwater, and Martha Lancaster create a welcoming environment in monthly Write Brains, where writers can commune and even commiserate while absorbing practical information and techniques.

Jim Butcher: Livin’ on Television

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could come get him, and having cars splashing by, getting more and more mud on his good clothes.

“I thought, ‘If you were a character in a book, you’d erase this entire scene,’ because I was doing exactly what my teacher told me a character should never do.” He says you can have your characters do a lot of things—heck, they can get away with murder, but if you want certain death for your character, and your novel, just have him or her wallow in a little self-pity. With that in mind, Butcher got up off the pavement, screamed at his tires at the top of his lungs, got the lug nuts off, changed the tire, made the conference, and landed an agent. A perfect story arc.

Since that time, Butcher has kept up a steady stream of writing. He’s produced *The Dresden Files* series, in addition to a fantasy series called *Codex Alera*, of which the latest installment, *Captain’s Fury*, is due for release in December of this year. “That’s the main thing,” he says, “Write, write, write. Don’t loiter over the same project, just keep going. Don’t wait for the world to stop and acknowledge you.”

That advice is pretty basic, we’ve all heard it, and Butcher swears by it. “You have to remember the basics, and you have to understand that writing is a business,” he says. “Keep the emotion out of it.” He says that this last is hard for him. “It’s a cold-blooded point of view, but agents are professionals, and they understand that it’s a business. I think I could have avoided a falling-out with my first agent had we communicated better. Read and understand your contracts, keep in touch with your agent.”

Another bit of advice is this: Get used to chopping away at your manuscript when it’s necessary. “I’m a minimalist,” says Butcher, “Actually, I’m more of a Japanese brush painter who sits and stares at a blank page and then makes a single stroke—there! It’s a horse.”

He says he likes sparse writing and has been known to go back and chop two weeks worth of work to get at what he really wants to say. “Savagely edit yourself. You have to. It’s easier to go back and flesh things out than it is to cut. I’ve actually had an editor tell me to expand this, expand that, cut 50 pages and—oh, hurry, we’re on a deadline here.”

For Butcher, it’s all led to some pretty big

“wow” moments. “One of those moments came when I got the news that the T.V. show was coming out. They told me I couldn’t tell anybody yet! So, my family and I jumped up and down in the kitchen, and then we went to Burger King to celebrate.” Another was getting to meet Stan Lee, the founder of Marvel Comics and creator of *Spiderman* among other comic book heroes. Butcher had written a *Spiderman* novel for Marvel, and was to appear with Lee on stage. They met in the green room, and Lee shook his hand. “I’m a big name dropper,” Lee informed Butcher, “I’ll be able to use yours now.”

The formula for overnight success varies from person to person. There are few who actually do it in the literal sense. Somebody once asked Henri Matisse how long it took him to draw a simple line profile on a piece of paper, and the artist famously replied, “My whole life.” In Jim Butcher’s case, it took almost 10 years, a whole lot of tenacity, a smidgen of luck, the television, and lots of failed attempts in order to say that he’s just getting started. “There are some writers who just appear on the scene, they’re true overnight sensations, but that’s rare. Mostly it’s a lot of hard work and knowing what your goals are.

Upcoming PPW Events

October, November

October Write Brain

An Insider's Look at the PPW Writing Contest

featuring Dawn Smit Miller
FREE for PPW Members!

Tuesday, October 16
6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

Location: Cottonwood Artists' School (click here for a map)



PPW Contest Coordinator Dawn Smit Miller will talk about contests in general, the rules and guidelines of the PPW contest, how to make this a successful contest experience, and judging your judges.

PPW Fall Fundraiser Booksigning

Thursday, November 1, 6:00 p.m.

Location: Poor Richard's Bookstore,
320 North Tejon Street

Participating Authors and Titles:

Ronald Cree, *Desert Blood*

Frank Dorchak, *Sleepwalkers*
Beth Groundwater, *A Real Basket Case*
Linda LeBlanc, *Beyond the Summit*
Charlie Rush, *One Turn of the Cards*
Robert Spiller, *The Witch of Agnesi* and *A Calculated Demise*
Sarah Vigil Swiger, *The Divine Plan: A Novel of Obsession*

Fall Workshop

Scaring Your Readers

featuring Tom Piccirilli, Melanie Tem, Steve Rasnik Tem, and Carrie Vaughn
Saturday, November 3, 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m.

Location: TBD

Cost: TBD

Are you missing that page-turning quality in your thriller manuscript? Worried that the only suspense in your horror novel is the reader wondering if they'll bother to continue? Let a slate of experts give you tips, tricks, and techniques for making sure your reader keeps reading. Topics to be discussed may include:

- Creating visceral horror, fear, or worry in the reader
- What's new and what's not in horror/thriller/suspense fiction markets
- Monsters for the New Millennium:

Creating new horrors and antagonists and putting a twist on the old

- Horror/thriller/suspense short stories and anthologies

More info coming soon!

November Write Brain

Show, Don't Tell

featuring Mario Acevedo

Tuesday, November 13, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

Location: Cottonwood Artists' School

More info coming soon

All Write Brains are FREE for PPW Members! Nonmembers may attend one Write Brain session for free. For more information and a map, go to ppwc.net.

The meetings are held at Cottonwood Artists' School, 25 Cimino Drive, Colorado Springs, Colorado.

If you would like to participate in any Write Brain sessions, PLEASE RSVP AND INCLUDE YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION. Note that this does not commit you to attending, but does enable us to prepare enough materials for expected attendees, and importantly, it gives us a way to contact you if we have an emergency change to the Write Brain session, such as a postponement due to weather. We will make every attempt to post changes to the PPW Yahoo loop and the Web site, but to be ensured of notification you must RSVP to rsvp@ppwc.net.

Craft Book-of-the-Month

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useful exercises at the end of each chapter gives the reader an opportunity to improve a work in progress by experimenting with some of Kress's techniques.

Having created my first protagonist by figuring her out as I wrote the book, letting plot needs dictate her actions and personality, I decided not to make that mistake with my next project. Kress's book helped steer me in the right direction. She suggests creating a mini-bio for all your key characters and fleshing out the protagonist's bio with more in-depth questions: What does her bedroom look like? What's the last book/magazine he read? Not all of the information in the mini-bio will end up in

the book, but your better understanding of the character will shine through.

The section on emotion and motivation was equally helpful. My favorite chapters were "The Motivationally Complicated Character" and "Showing Change in Your Characters." Kress discusses everything from how to depict specific emotions using metaphor and simile, dialog, and internal thoughts to how to punctuate emotionally charged scenes. She devotes a chapter to genre characters, taking into account the requirements of mystery, romance, thrillers and westerns, and SF and fantasy. Readers have specific expectations for these genres, and Kress shows you how to create and motivate characters that satisfy those expectations.

The last section of the book, Viewpoint, not only defines the various point of view options, but gives examples from published

fiction and "how-tos" for implementing the POV you've chosen. She talks about choosing your POV characters, introducing them, organizing your scenes/chapters, and the pluses and pitfalls of prologues (always good for a lively debate). For the ambitious, she includes a sidebar on which POV is most likely to win the Nobel Prize for Literature.

For those who don't have time to read the entire book, don't let that put you off getting it. Kress has a Recap section at the end of each chapter that highlights the main points and an Appendix (Checklist—Critical Points) to refer to when drafting or revising. The recaps are followed by the exercises (four-five per chapter) which, if you do them, will truly help deepen your characters and the reader's emotional engagement with your story. If you have room on your shelf for only one craft book on characterization, this is the one you want.

OUT OF BOOK EXPERIENCE

Robert's Rules of Writing— 101 unconventional lessons every writer needs to know

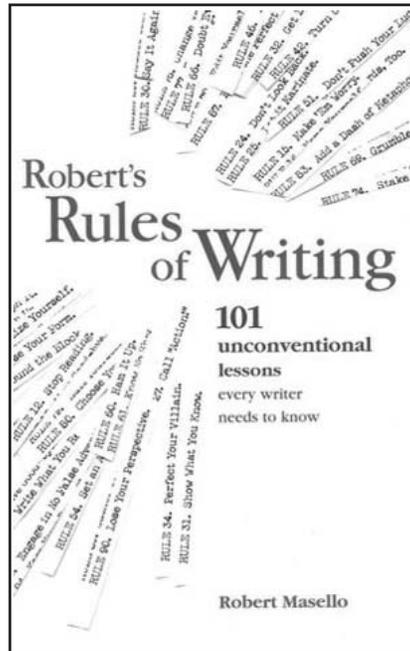
by *Robert Masello*

Review by *Barbara Dyess*

Author Robert Masello has a long list of credits to his name. They include television scripts, journalism awards, teaching at prestigious universities, guest appearances in many venues—it goes on. Masello is qualified to the teeth. He can certainly write, as you will see if you pick up *Robert's Rules*, or his horror novels *Vigil* and *Bestiary*.

He swears he is not also a psychiatrist. You could have fooled me.

When I chose this book, I was badly in need of inspiration and to laugh at myself and the writing world I have chosen. *Robert's Rules* gave me all three—and therapy, to boot.



Masello delivers his wisdom with a quirky but grounded humor, well sprinkled with self-abuse, based in his divergent but powerful experiences. The two-page long chapters are easily administered in small doses, too.

And yet, he can really zing it to you. Many of his “rules” rang so true with me that I tortured my critique partners with reading excerpts (they didn’t seem to mind and even laughed at all the right places). Masello takes your expectations and turns them right on their heads at every turn. There are too many examples to do justice, but here are a few of my favorites:

Rule 8: Take the Prozac. “Writing, in case you haven’t noticed, can be a very depressing occupation. You have to sit alone for hours on end, just brooding. If you weren’t depressed when you started—trust me—you will be by the time you’re done...

“It’s lonely in there. Even the dog goes downstairs.”

Rule 24: Map That Route. “Plan your journey any way you want...schematics, weird diagrams, cryptic notes that even daVinci could not crack.”

Then “**Rule 25: Wing It.** Now that I’ve convinced you to make your plan (map)...be prepared to scuttle it.”

From **Rule 30:** “If an adverb is the worst crime a writer commits, I’d say he’s still worth dating.”

And from **Rule 26: Don’t Look Back** (regarding first drafts of a novel): “As my mother used to say, ‘A job worth doing isn’t necessarily a job worth doing well.’ ...it was enough, in her view, that it was done at all. The same holds true for first drafts.”

From somewhere: “All art is a lie.”

Rule 84: “Writing is like a shark. It must move forward.”

Rule 64: “Take the Long Way. Many readers...enjoy a big, fat wallow. A big book is like a sunken tub.”

Get yourself a copy of *Robert's Rules of Writing* and read a page or two while waiting for your dentist or when your brain is fried from toiling over words. From Rule 1 to 101, it’s worth the read. Don’t forget to see Rule 102. No, I’m not going to tell you... .

Grammar Gremlins

By *Pam McCutcheon*

Problem sentence: *He tried to diffuse the situation.* I’ve seen this one a lot lately in published novels. “Diffuse” means to scatter or spread around, so this says he’s

trying to spread the situation out thinly. While it almost makes sense, you should use “defuse” which means to make less tense or harmful (as in defusing a bomb) and say it like this: *He tried to defuse the situation.*

Problem sentence: *She eluded to the problem.* “Elude” means to evade or avoid,

so this sentence says she’s trying to “avoid to” the problem. Doesn’t make sense, does it? If you want the sentence to be logical, use “allude” which means she is making an indirect reference. The proper way to write it is: *She alluded to the problem.*



PIKES PEAK WRITERS
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Colorado Springs, CO 80918

Sweet Success

Compiled by Janice Black

Lynda Hilburn: This new member of our illustrious PPW sold her urban fantasy w/romance elements manuscript, *The Vampire Shrink* to Medallion Press (www.MedallionPress.com). In this novel, a Denver psychologist gets pulled into the vampire underworld. It will be released as a trade paperback in October, 2007, but you can pre-order at Amazon.com.

That's not all...Lynda has also signed a contract for the second book in the series, tentatively called *Dark Harvest*, which will be released by Medallion Press, October, 2008.

And...writing under nom de plume Hera St. Aubyn, our Lynda sold a novella, "Undead in the City," to publisher Loose Id (www.loose-id.net). "Undead in the City" was released May 15, 2007 and is available through the publisher.

For more, go to any of five Web sites:
www.lyndahilburn.com
www.paranormalityuniverse.blogspot.com
www.myspace.com/lyndahilburn

www.herastaubyn.blogspot.com
www.myspace.com/herastaubyn

Ian Healy: Here's one you gotta read. I would like to announce the publication of Ian's first book, *The Milkman*. This is a zany adventure about a sword-swinging milkman, a reporter needing a hot story, alien abductions, the real reason behind anal probes, and how an army of bikers might just save the world. It is available from www.iUniverse.com/bookstore.

Maggie Sefton: The latest in her Berkley Prime Crime mystery series, *A Killer Stitch*, was the #10 Bestselling Hardcover Mystery on both the Barnes & Noble and the Bookscan Bestseller lists following its May 1st release. Maggie's last Colorado signing was on July 28-29 at Barnes & Noble, Centerra (Loveland) location. If you missed it, please check her Web site for other signings: www.maggiesefton.com. Or, you can blog at www.cozychicksblog.com.

Jan C.J. Jones: Work by this writer, who also researches and is co-executive producer of a travel-adventure reality series, has been selected as a finalist in the 2007 Moondance International Film Festival. *ArtSafaris: Everglades* follows rugged adventurer and

wildlife artist of renown Ray Shaw into rarely seen, out-of-the-way locations that inspire his finished, wildlife paintings. "Driving the program is the piecing together of Shaw's painting, like a jigsaw puzzle, to eventually reveal the completed masterpiece." For video segments, go to www.youtube.com/watch?v=E7loLop66Ow.

There will be a screening during the Moondance Film Festival this September. The festival promotes, encourages, educates and rewards non-violent conflict resolution in writing, the theatre, arts and film. (Go to www.MoondanceFilmFestival.com.)

Peggy Swager just had her mystery *Murder Was a Stranger* released by WhoooDoo Mysteries, a division of Treble Heart Books. The book is available at bookstores or online at TrebleHeartBooks.com.

Peggy's Web site is www.peggyswager.com.