

Words of Paradise

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Take Five

**Cavemen, First Drafts,
and the Quest for Fire**
by Michael Little

The other day, while watching that insurance commercial where the sophisticated caveman, upset by Geico's slogan ("So easy a caveman can do it"), reminds modern man that he was the one who walked upright, discovered fire, and invented the wheel, I wanted the caveman to add storytelling to his list of great achievements, and was about to yell my request at the TV screen, but instead I began thinking about the caveman sitting around the fire at night with his comrades, telling the story of the day's great hunt, and how that telling must have been like a writer's first draft and would probably be improved upon, embellished no doubt, in later tellings around other fires. In my own caveman fantasies, of course, I am the one who invents the run-on sentence.



We all assume that the second draft will be better than the first, the third draft better than the second, and so on. Anne Lamott, in *Bird by Bird*, observed that even the best writers produce "shitty" first drafts, thus encouraging all those who are careful to stay upwind of their first draft to jump into a second draft, filled with courage and hope. Writing is rewriting, we are told. Who can argue with that? Ernest Hemingway said that he rewrote the ending to *A Farewell to Arms* 39 times because he wanted to get the words right. From shitty to sublime in 39 steps.

But what of our caveman friend? If we ride our time machine back to that Paleolithic night, which version of the hunt do we want to hear? If I'm driving the time machine, we're going back to the first telling, on the same day as the great hunt.

I want to sit at that fire and hear our ancient friend, still hot from the adventure, tell us what

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happened—beginning, middle, and end—even if his words are at times confused or redundant, his prose overrun a bit by adjectives and adverbs, his ending not revised 39 times.

I'll accept those imperfections in order to hear the excitement in the caveman's voice as he tells the story of the new adventure, and to see the fire reflected in his eyes, eyes that have so recently seen great danger and great success. Months, years later, after our friend has retold his story many times, we can revisit him and see how he has refined the telling, tightening the plot and smoothing the prose, embellishing the details of the hunt, employing dramatic pauses to thrill his listeners, wowing them with the 39th version of the ending. Will he still have the energy, the honesty, the truth of that first telling? Maybe. Maybe not.

We ride our time machine back to the present. We pick up a first draft and reread it, then the revisions. Has the rewriting weakened the energy, the honesty, the truth of the first draft? Whatever the answer, it's a question we need to ask. The first draft may be imperfect, is in fact guaranteed to be imperfect, but the excitement of telling a new story is usually there. We just need to bring that spark with us as we rewrite the story.

Oh yes, the spark. The spark that awaits our discovery and fires our imagination. We could call the writer's journey *The Quest for Fire*. Crank up the time machine one more time. This time we journey farther back, to a place where cavemen sit huddled together for warmth and protection on a black night, possessing no fire against the chill, missing one of their own. They hear footsteps in the distance, then closer. In fear they grip their weapons more tightly.

Then they see him. Their missing comrade has returned. They see his face illuminated by the large fiery stick he carries in his right hand. He has captured fire and brought it home. Tonight there will be a great campfire to sit around and an amazing story to hear. First draft. So easy a caveman can do it.

Aloha, Michael

Aloha Chapter News



Aloha Chapter's 2007 Workshops Begin in March

The 2007 Fiction Writers Workshops, presented by Aloha Chapter, kick off on **Saturday, March 3**, from 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., at the Aina Haina Library. **Steven Goldsberry**, Professor of English at the University of Hawai'i Manoa and author of *The Writer's Book of Wisdom: 101 Rules for Mastering Your Craft*, will be talking about hooks and critiquing your first page of fiction.



This is the first in a series of **six writers workshops** set to run from March through August. These hands-on workshops are aimed at fiction writers and are designed to benefit Aloha Chapter members as well as the writing community, and to attract new members.

The workshops, at the Aina Haina Library, will include sessions on bringing your characters to life, plotting your short story or novel, writing dialogue, using improv techniques to spark creativity, and conducting research. Mahalo to Aina Haina Library and all our workshop leaders!

Here are the future workshops in this series:

Saturday, **April 7**, 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. - "It's Alive!: Bringing Your Characters to Life" ...
Marie Hara (creative writing instructor, University of Hawai'i; author of *Bananaheart and Other Stories*).

Saturday, **May 5**, 10:00 a.m. to noon - "'Shut up!' 'No, you shut up!': Writing Dialogue" ...
Michael Little (author of *Queen of the Rodeo*).

Saturday, **June 2**, 10:00 a.m. to noon - "More Conflict!: Plotting Your Short Story or Novel" ...
Sally Sorenson (author of *All's Faire* and *The Whole Enchilada*).

Saturday, **July 7**, 10:00 a.m. to noon - "Think Fast!: Using Improv Techniques to Spark Creativity" ...
Melissa Dylan (award-winning playwright with a degree in theatre from the University of Washington; author of *Friends Like These* and *Voluntary Amnesia*).

Saturday, **August 4**, 10:00 a.m. to noon - "Research Tools for Fiction Writers" ...
Dr. Robert Mann (author of *Forensic Detective*) ... followed by a luncheon offsite to mark the end of the series ... visit www.rwaaloha.org for updated information.



More Good News from Sally Sorenson

Congratulations to Sally Sorenson, who sends the following great news:
"My long short story, *Picture Perfect*, won second place in a contest and a publishing contract from Amira Press. Shauna, I owe you chocolate hugs and kisses for your frequent posts to the chapter loop notifying us of submission opportunities. This one was an 'Around the World' contest, and my setting of Istanbul, Turkey evidently made for a good fit. Amira Press is an e-publisher that specializes in multi-ethnic stories. Certainly made my February bright. Hope you all had a wonderfully romantic Valentine's month, too.

Aloha from snowy Utah,
Sally"



Jill Marie Landis Signs Two-Book Contract with Harlequin

Here's the latest big news from Aloha Chapter member Jill Marie Landis:
"After a couple of years deciding what to do next, I've signed a contract with Harlequin to write two books for their Steeple Hill imprint. Two *Inspirational Western Historical Romances*. First one is due out August 2008. The title is *Homecoming*. I've also been invited to write a short story for a Wedding anthology for Harlequin."
Congratulations, Jill!

2007 Aloha Chapter Meeting Dates

Saturday, 10 a.m. to noon
Aina Haina Library (except February and November)

January 6	May 5	September 8
February 3	June 2	October 6
March 3	July 7	November 3 (luncheon, Hale Koa)
April 7	August 4	

You've finally done it – sold the novel! So you search for it online, and you find it at a dozen bookstores. Unfortunately, you also find several places that are giving it away for free. In ten seconds, you can download an electronic copy of the novel that took you a year to write.

This is happening today, right now, to hundreds of writers, and it's a problem that's getting worse. Technology allows us to write and edit our texts more quickly and efficiently than ever before, but it also allows others to electronically scan your novel with terrifying ease – or to duplicate e texts like you'd tape a television show.



This is illegal as well as immoral. But even when hundreds have detected this kind of piracy, it's almost impossible to remove the texts. Why?

- **Cost** – because this is a white-collar crime considered low priority, law enforcement rarely initiates proceedings, and most writers can't afford the crippling cost of retaining a lawyer to sue the site, generally with little or no financial compensation.
- **Crossing Jurisdictions** – If you're in California, the server is in China, and the person infringing your copyright is in Mexico, where do you file suit? Even if all parties are in the U.S., you may have problems working between states.
- **Differing Laws and Enforcement** – Every time a new Harry Potter book comes out, the countdown begins for a counterfeit Chinese translation to be released. With the last book, the illegal Chinese version was out 48 hours before the English version was released! China, however, will not enforce the few copyright laws they have on the books.
- **Internet Caching** – Ever hear of the Wayback Machine? This Internet site allows you to dig up data from 1996 and earlier because its servers maintain a cached copy of all public-access websites and their changes throughout the years. Even if you get your book taken off a site, it may still be accessible via these sorts of sites.
- **Website Duplication** – Once a book is “out there,” it's awfully darn hard to remove every single copy of it from the Internet (remember the Wayback Machine?), and like a vampire that hasn't been staked, it may come back again – and again.

Scared yet?

What You Can Do

You aren't helpless in this war.

- **Awareness Above All** – Google yourself monthly or weekly (with quote marks around your full pen name) to see if your name pops up. Most ripped-off books are posted under the original author's name. You can also Google your book titles if your name is common. (Side note: I always publish articles and stories under my full married name with my initial, “Jamie K. Wilson,” because I've found way too many Jamie Wilsons out there. This is something to think about if you haven't chosen a pen name yet. And yes, I have caught some of my work being used in an unauthorized fashion.)

- Don't Just Google – People have duplicated the work of others and then sold them cheap on eBay. What if you could have the complete works of Sidney Sheldon for only \$50, or all of the Woodiwiss romances for less than \$20? This can be an exceptionally lucrative small business. Look everywhere, and ask your agent to do the same.
- Follow Up – If you have found your work posted illegally, write to the person who posted it as well as the webmaster of the site, asking them to cease and desist. There are templates online at <http://www.utsystem.edu/OGC/INTELLECTUALPROPERTY/contract/cease.htm>. You can find out who the site belongs to by going to Internic's Whois site (<http://www.internic.net/whois.html>); this gives you a means for contacting the individual who owns the site, *even if they are anonymous*.
- Follow Up Again – the first time rarely works, alas. If the site is ignoring you, contact the web host of the site; they will often block it.
- Complain – If you belong to a professional organization (which you do, of course – the RWA), email their legal or membership department and let them know what's going on. Chances are good that you aren't the only person with this problem. Also contact the Author's Guild if the infringement is against major works; they have been exceptionally proactive about this issue, and not just for their own membership.
- Retain a Lawyer – If you have a stolen work of some value that is of recent publication, get a lawyer now, or talk to your agent about doing so. It's expensive, but if you don't pursue it now, your inaction can nullify future litigation. You may lose control of your own book forever.

There Are Legitimate Free Sites

If your work is more than 75 years old (not likely with a living author!) and you have not renewed copyright, anyone can legitimately duplicate it and post it online. Project Gutenberg has done this since 1970, starting with the Declaration of Independence; and Google Books and Google Scholar are both following suit.

There are also cases in which authors have released older works to which they have rights, either to the public domain or to sites to carry as free downloads until the author decides to remove them. For instance, the Baen Library has been very successful; its hundred or so fantasy and science fiction books have gained new fans and new contracts for the authors who have posted them.

Ultimately, this may be part of the new face of publications – fast, cheap, and efficient. But right now, the Internet and electronic copyright law are also the equivalent of the Wild West. It behooves you, the writer-cowboy, to develop a fast draw and a keen eye.

Sites With Great Copyright Law Information

<http://www.sfwaweb.org/epiracy/> – The Science Fiction Writers of America have a great site on piracy.

<http://www.authorsguild.org/> – No direct copyright law info, but tons of news about what's going on with our copyright rights.

<http://www.copyright.gov/> – This is the US Copyright Office, and has surprisingly understandable information.

Sites That May Be Infringing on Copyright

<http://www.ebay.com> – Though it is specifically warned against in their usage and removed when caught, the sale of in-copyright work is fairly common.

<http://www.esnip.com> – This relatively new site uses YouTube technology to deliver whatever its users want to share – including pirated electronic copies of new novels.

<http://books.google.com> – Though Google tries to keep in-copyright books mostly inaccessible, yours truly figured out 18 months ago how to hack their “security.” I didn’t steal anything, of course – but I could have, and I’m not very good at hacking.

** Though there are hundreds of sites that do this much more blatantly, even directing you to these places online can be considered copyright infringement.

Sites That Offer Free Out-of-Copyright Books

<http://www.gutenberg.org> – The granddaddy of online libraries, Gutenberg has thousands of classics and older books.

<http://books.google.com> – If it’s out of copyright, you can search for it and get the full text. No kidding.

<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/> – One of the first online college libraries, and my favorite.

<http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/> – One of my favorites, with thousands of easily-read ebooks available for free.

<http://www.archive.org/index.php> – Not only the home of the Wayback Machine, Archive.org carries a library of nearly 200,000 ebooks of varying quality.

<http://www.baen.com/library/> – The first free online library for books still in copyright, as far as I know, and growing every day.

Copyright Facts

As soon as something is written, the author owns the copyright. Simple web publication has been accepted in court as adequate proof of copyright ownership (because the date can be checked on the Wayback Machine and other cache repositories). Of course, that also counts as First Electronic Rights. . . and maybe First World as well.

Questions?

This will become a regular column addressing writing and publishing using new technologies of all sorts. If you have a technology question, email me. And while you’re online, check out my online serial about Golden Age pirates, <http://www.heartofapirate.com!>

Jamie

The Last Word

All I Ever Needed to Know About Character, I Learned at the DMV

by Lynn Raye Harris

Aloha, friends! Life here in the American South has been busy and storm-filled, and I plum near forgot that I had a column to write (see, that's local lingo for ya). Since last month, I've gone to Florida on a whirlwind trip, shopped for a new house here in Alabama, and booked my plane ticket to RWA National in July.



But nothing has been as fun as the Alabama DMV. I learned—in one trip to the tags and title office—that you just can't take research for granted. The South isn't the Southwest; the Southwest isn't the Pacific Northwest. And none of those places is the East Coast.

Where a character comes from has an effect on how he or she behaves. People are not universal, and when we try to give a character a cultural background without knowing much about the region we've chosen, mistakes are inevitable. The simplest way to avoid mistakes, I think, is to talk to someone from the area. You won't get everything perfect, but you'll avoid obvious mistakes—and you might just get a fascinating tidbit that makes the difference between adequate and interesting.

So now it's time for me to give up the goods and tell you just what the heck was so fascinating at the DMV. Would you believe me if I told you that I've never had a more pleasant experience transferring tags in my life? Or that the county commissioner personally greets everyone, filters them to the appropriate place, and even offers coffee while you wait? (She also says Huh-WHY-yuh for Hawai'i, but that's another story.)

You're probably thinking that I went to a teeny tiny office in an itty bitty rural town. Nope, it was the county courthouse, a big industrial building that houses all the county offices and the sheriff's department. The title office had about twenty busy people typing away at a bank of computers. Everyone smiled. Everyone was polite. The commissioner said she was very glad we'd come to Alabama and then introduced us to other people who came in (a local reporter, a police officer, a guy from her church). I felt like I was in Mayberry 2007, only much bigger and more modern.

What did I learn from this experience? That Southern hospitality applies at all times, even in the midst of a busy office. A character from the South is going to be imbued with this friendly politeness, even if he or she is rebelling from it (and wouldn't that be an interesting character?). Hawai'i has aloha; the South has gentility. The East Coast has a certain briskness about it that you don't find in other places. It's our responsibility, as writers, to get the details right. Sometimes, *character* really is in those details. Now isn't it just amazing what you can learn at the DMV?

From the land of genteel Southern ladies and bow-tied old gentlemen sitting in rockers on front porches, waving howdy, I'll say aloha, y'all. Until next month.

Lynn

