

Fiction Craft Column: An Introduction

by

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As a beginning novelist 20 years ago, I knew writers who worried about choosing a premise, writing to the market or obtaining an agent.

I, on the other hand, thirsted for knowledge of fiction craft.

Novelists build stories from blocks, just as workmen build houses from bricks. To build our story house, we must know the materials, tools and techniques of our craft. I gained knowledge the hard way: by attending classes, writers conferences and workshops. I learned from published authors. I joined writing groups. I read novels and instructional books. Most importantly, I completed eight novels and started several others. Every level in the New York publishing industry rejected me, from associate editor to executive publisher.

NEVER QUIT

How did I avoid quitting? By feeding "the critter" inside me. The beast subsists on the words I write. Salvation arrived in electronic publishing. E-book editors ignore marketing niches and gobble fresh, well-crafted stories. Barbara Quanbeck and Lesley Ehrhart at Word Wrangler Publishing heard my creative voice. They accepted the books, "The

Witchery Way," "Dear Mr. Kapps" and "The Virtual Guard."

How do you separate your work from the slush that floods publishers' desks? By knowing and using fiction craft – the building blocks of story.

In the coming months, I will share the techniques I've learned over two decades. Supplement this knowledge with your own writing, reading, study and professional relationships. Then feed your creative side and feel the rush of writing from your heart.

SCENE GOALS

In this column we begin by exploring the engine which drives all commercial novels: Scene. Later columns will cover sequel, viewpoint, characterization, plot structure, dialogue and voice.

Scene: A unit of conflict experienced moment-by-moment by the reader through the character's viewpoint. The elements of scene include goal, conflict and disaster. A scene goal represents something that a character wants or needs to achieve the story quest.

Examples include, but are not limited to:

- * Possession (such as a clue, a piece of information, victory in a confrontation)
- * Relief (from danger, fear, domination, loneliness, poverty or revenge) from loss, betrayal or injury.

Scene goals must advance the viewpoint character's story quest. For example, here's the scene goal from Chapter 3 of "The Witchery Way" -- Josh Wade must convince Joe Buck to give him a job on the Choctaw railroad, thus providing a secret opportunity to learn who is sabotaging the line.

Scene goals force the viewpoint character to take immediate, specific and concrete steps, requiring both decision and action. These goals loom large in the character's story quest. In other words, something vital must be at stake.

Suggested Reading:

* "Techniques of the Selling Writer" by Dwight V. Swain

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0806111917/inscriptions>

* "Scene and Structure" by Jack M. Bickham

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0898799066/inscriptions>

* "Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting"
by Robert McKee

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0060391685/inscriptions>