

# WRITER'S INK

## THE WRITER'S WORKSHOP OF

### BLOOMINGDALE

#### MAY 2008

#### MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Our May workshops will be on May 10<sup>th</sup> and May 24<sup>th</sup>, from 9:00 a.m. until noon.

Format rules are: Minimum, 12-pt. font and double spaced with one-inch margins on all sides.

#### INSIDE WRITING & PUBLISHING:

I, your editor, attended Writing Commercial Fiction: Why? How? by Lindsay Longford, at the Bloomingdale Library on February 13<sup>th</sup>. There was a free door prize consisting of Lindsay critiquing a manuscript submission of the winner.

Lindsay began by differentiating between commercial fiction and literary fiction. The techniques of literary fiction include:

- ❖ Promotion of “deep thoughts”
- ❖ Theme of the “idea of loss”
- ❖ Unhappy endings
- ❖ Great critical reviews

The speaker likened commercial fiction to storytelling and comedy. The rest of the seminar focused on the techniques of commercial fiction:

- ❖ Convincing reality
- ❖ Controlled endings
- ❖ Theme of redemptive force
- ❖ Point-of-view character

Lindsay then touched on the techniques and the inherent myths of several different genres. Even if your writing focus is not on a specific genre, it is helpful to understand it when critiquing another member's submission. The genres covered in the seminar include:

- ❖ Sci Fi
- ❖ Westerns
- ❖ Mysteries
- ❖ Thrillers
- ❖ Techno thrillers
- ❖ Legal thrillers
- ❖ Paranormals

**Science Fiction** is divided into two categories: Hard science and soft science. The main premise of sci fi is the “what-if expectation”. The plot involves “things that don't exist” and how they affect mankind and how humans will react to the technology. The author uses a hook question, “What if this technology existed, how will the humans react?” For example, the question behind Ray Bradbury's classic, Fahrenheit 451,

is “What if you had no right to read?” The reader must wait for the answer. One technique is to include believable details, wherein the reader should be able to feel the textures and see the colors.

Science fiction reflects the feelings about the current times. In times of fear, the science fiction will reflect dystopias, as in Blade Runner. In times of prosperity and peace, the aliens will be friendly, as in ET. Science fiction is a strong, steady market.

**Westerns** are not popular. The hero is always a white male loner, living by a code. In my opinion, any potential audience for this genre, young males, are probably playing violent video games and not reading novels. Furthermore, whenever an author tries to introduce minorities into a western, with a black sheriff or a female doctor, it doesn't ring true.

**Mysteries** are big commercial sellers. In literary mysteries, “justice is not possible in an unjust world”. In commercial mysteries, there is either a resolution of justice or a hope of justice.

The techniques of mysteries include:

- ❖ Excellent pacing – not a lot of long sentences
- ❖ A likeable hero – maybe an underdog
- ❖ Delineate what resources the point-of-view character has

**Thrillers, legal thrillers and techno thrillers** are also popular. Their techniques include:

- ❖ Writing at a break-neck pace
- ❖ Short sentences
- ❖ Not a lot of dialogue
- ❖ Complicated plot
- ❖ Multiple characters
- ❖ Reader involvement – tension
- ❖ A point-of-view character that readers will root for

An example of a techno thriller would be a Tom Clancy novel, in my view, long on engineering, short on characterization. His audience consists mainly of males. Legal thrillers are legal procedurals rather than police procedurals. In legal thrillers, justice is portrayed as a “nest of snakes” in a “secret world”. The reader roots for the little guy. The authors understand the audience's fears and takes them away. Authors writing in this fashion include: John Grisham and Scott Turow.

**Paranormals** are currently the hottest sector of the publishing market. Examples of paranormal plots include:

- ❖ Vampires
- ❖ Time-travel
- ❖ Cults

Lindsay was the second speaker in this series who only gave examples of male authors, which I find unenlightened. However, she was a energetic presenter. She has written seventeen romance novels. Her personal style includes not writing about “bitchy” female characters or unhappy endings. She strives to make her romances

credible. It was a very enjoyable evening, and I hope I have done justice to her material.

### THOSE CONFUSING COMMAS

Use a comma to “separate two or more adjectives that modify the same noun.”

For example: “We need to mount an exciting, hard-hitting ad campaign.”

(I hope you noticed the compound adjective in that example.)

Source:

The Gregg Reference Manual, 9<sup>th</sup> Edition, by William A.Sabin, Glencoe/McGraw-Hill, p. 15.

### COLUMN TWO PERSONALS:

(This space available.)

### SIMILE SPOTLIGHT:

“Police cars with blue flashing lights wheeled around in the cul-de-sac, like a covey of grounded UFOs, and stopped in front of their house.”

Source:

Mulch, by Ann Ripley, St. Martin’s Press, New York, 1994, p. 60.

“Suddenly, like a flight of birds or a school of fish, the mob formed into a single line and started moving in one direction.”

Source:

The Cemetery Yew, by Cynthia Riggs, Thomas Dunne Books, 2003. p. 111.

### HAPPY CINCO DE MAYO!

From Mary Ann Lufkin  
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