

IFWA MEETING
Thursday, November 5, 2015, 7:00 PM
Sentry Box
Minutes

Information items: n/a
 New members: Peter Shokeir

Time	Topic	Person
7:00 PM	<u>Crits:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Crit 1:</u> Kale Haley's Fantasy Story critted by: Colin Maheu and Kevin Weir • <u>Crit 2:</u> Chris Jessop's SF Story critted by: Michael Gillett and Ed Wilson December's Crits: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ed Wilson "The Cursing" (Ch 19 novel excerpt) SF Crit by Brent Nichols / Peter Shokeir 2. Flash Fic Dark Fantasy Good Little Girls – Dani Atkinson Crit by Daniel Wright & Chris Jessop 	Shannon Colin / Kevin Michael / Ed
8:00 PM	<u>Skills:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amazon Serials – by Brent Nichols (self pub) • See attached Notes • See a list of all skills sessions here: www.ifwa.ca/skills 	Lesley Brent Nichols
8:30 PM	<u>Call for Agenda items:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	Michael
8:32 PM	<u>Braggs:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Randy McCharles – Brag 1 his book, "Much Ado About MacBeth" is #1 in Contemp. Fantasy and Brag 2 Amazon or Kobo Fantasy Book Bundle is released including his new book • Les Kuzyk - Self Pub Novel – Pinatubo II – • Rick Overwater – Wrote 6000 words to UBC Mentorship Program – got it back • Swati Chavda – her husband and her have written self improvement book series entitled IGNITE – reclaim inner fire • Ed Wilson – NaNoWriMo – maintaining targets – only short stopped one chapter with less than 40 lines – Nov 4 • Tommy Ng – Wrote 300 page report – he said it was boring • Justin Acton – taking courses at Mt Royal • Ann Cooney – taking editing courses Gale – free courses through library – finished on Grant Writing – wrote 4 short stories and 2 blogs – read at Rothney Observatory • Kevin Weir - Finished work on comedic play at full Circle Theatre 	Michael
8:40 PM	<u>Discuss / Decide:</u>	Michael

	<p>1. Writers in the House (Randy McCharles) Should IFWA support this as the new “write off” with financial help (ie money for pop). See article below.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report on last month’s Writers in the House • Booked another for January 16-17, 2016 • Boomtown Pub gave us really good discount on pop and provided coffee and tea • Boomtown Pub Hours - 11 am - Midnight • Noise? Didn’t find it overly bad, but some noise – curtain blocked out some of it • Where do we go from here? • Sponsor Write Off? • Suggested – donations – IFWA sponsors drinks and had donation jar • Sandra – problems – organized a fund raiser for IPB – IFWA pays for drinks and takes donations for IPB prize money plus sells IPB • Open to non-IFWits too • Motion to subsidize \$100 at January Writers in the House • Moved: Leslie Seconded: Ed Wilson • Opposed: 0 Abstain: 3 • Motion Carried 	Randy
8:50 PM	<p><u>Announcements:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bundoran Press is open for novel submissions, but get them in soon. Submissions close November 30, 2015. Guidelines here: http://www.bundoranpress.com/pages/submissions/ • The next Enigma Front anthology, Burnt, is now open for submissions. Submissions will be accepted until February 1, 2016. IFWAAnto – Tagline – Now, everything burns. If get stories within 15 days before can have yey or nay and submit other stories – looking for 60K words – 2-4K words per story • Ann Cooney – Trek is 50 years anniversary – annual convention July 9-10 Vulcan – Party – ST Museum – will have a dealers room there – IFWA can have table – Does IFWA want to do this? What is cost? YES – Will bring info to upcoming meeting • Renee Bennett – Harper Voyager has an open submission right now – tomorrow – if have novel length manuscript ready to go. Rare for major publishing house – Window closes tomorrow. • Angry Robot – 10,000 word Sci Fi fantasy – open submission – AND Gollancz – in January – novels • Aurora Award – want to start giving for visual presentation such as TV series etc. like Continuum – vote on doing this this week 	Michael

SERIALS AND SELF-PUBLISHING

WHAT IS A SERIAL?

- Short episodes, anywhere from 5,000-30,000 words each
- Each episode tells a satisfying story on its own, but it is clearly part of a larger story arc (like an episode of 24 or Dexter or Lost)
- The episode may end on a cliffhanger, but there should still be a satisfying arc to the episode (For instance, think of the cliffhanger ending of The Empire Strikes Back)
- Usually there is a larger story that concludes at the end of the serial, or at the end of one "season" of a serial. Some serials go on and on like a soap opera. Most serials either stand alone or break down into seasons.
- Serials have been pretty much dead for a hundred years, but they were huge in the 19th century. With the rise of ebooks, serials are a viable and popular option again.

WHY SERIALS?

- They're cool
- There is an audience that loves serials and will devour them voraciously
- Your writing becomes more visible when you release titles more frequently

SELF-PUB HOW-TO RESOURCES

Kboards Writers' Café - <http://www.kboards.com/index.php/board,60.0.html>

- like a master's degree in self-publishing
- Things change very, very quickly in the world of self-publishing. The Writers' Café is always up to date.

A Kboards thread about serials: <http://www.kboards.com/index.php/topic,216192.0.html>

Useful ebooks, some of them available in paperback

- Write, Publish, Repeat - <http://www.amazon.ca/dp/B00H26IFJS/>
- Let's Get Digital - <http://www.amazon.ca/dp/B005DC68NI/>
- Let's Get Visible - <http://www.amazon.ca/dp/B00CPQ6YYI/>

THE SELF-PUBLISHER'S CONUNDRUM

- Stand-alone titles tend to fail. Readers neither notice them nor buy them
- Series books tend to do much better
- Serials offer a way to get much of the marketability of a series for a much smaller word count

To a large degree, the success of a self-publishing venture comes down to visibility and rankings on Amazon. Sure, there are other markets, but ebook sales on Amazon are usually 60-90% of your total sales. I've gone exclusive to Amazon with my serials because it boosts my ranking slightly and sales on other platforms are generally inconsequential.

My serial strategy is all about making my titles visible on Amazon.

THE LILIANA HART METHOD

Liliana Hart pioneered an approach to book releases that hugely increased her visibility and sales. Essentially, she wrote six novels in a series without releasing any of them, then released five books in one day and the sixth book a month later, just as the visibility of the first five was beginning to drop. Other writers have copied her method with impressive results.

<http://www.hughhowey.com/the-liliana-nirvana-technique/> - Hugh Howey's take on the LH method

I use a modified version when I launch serials. I release every episode within a few days, along with an omnibus version, every episode in one volume. I keep the price of the collection very low to encourage readers to go with the collection rather than the individual episodes.

CASE STUDIES

THE DRAGON OF RALHORRAH

I dusted off my first novel, written circa 1989, polished it, and decided that I liked it well enough to release it. I knew from experience, though, that it would never sell as a stand-alone. So I carved it into 8 episodes (Don't do this. It's a bad idea.) and released it as a serial under a pen name. Each episode is 10-12,000 words.

For comparison, I've released similar stand-alone novels and earned less than an hundred dollars ever from each one.

- Genre: High fantasy
- Release date: November 17 2014
- Total earnings: \$574.20
- Most of those sales were scattered over the first seven months. Sales have been a tiny trickle since mid-June 2015.

For some inexplicable reason, Episode 2 sold better than any other episode by a huge margin.

STAR RAIDER

I wrote this one as a serial. There are seven episodes of about 10-12,000 words each.

- Genre: Space Opera
- Release Date: March 31, 2015
- Total earnings: \$10,895.03
- Of that, I made \$6944.15 during June and July 2015
- Sales tapered off by September or so. The high point was \$194 in one day.
- The series still pays me about \$12/day.

When the omnibus became significantly more popular than any of the individual episodes, I unpublished the episodes and raised the price of the omnibus from \$2.99 to \$3.99.

BLACK DRAGON BLUES

Again, designed as a serial. Seven episodes, 10-12,000 words per episode, and an omnibus.

- Genre: Steampunk
- Release date: October 13 2015
- Total earnings: \$10.22 (and I don't know what I did wrong)

It's dead in the water and I can't say why.

THINGS I DID THAT YOU SHOULDN'T DO

3 serials + 3 pen names + 3 genres = 0 momentum

I hacked up a novel into episodes and pretended it was a serial. Readers grumbled. It's part of the reason for the zero-momentum equation above – I kept that book to its own pen name because I didn't want to sully my reputation with something I knew wasn't right.

I didn't follow up on my one significant success. I should have written a second season to Star Raider just as quickly as I could and gotten it out there while the first season was still visible on Amazon's charts.

COVER ART

This may be the single biggest obstacle to serials for self-publishers. Covers are expensive, and one serial might require eight of them. Options include:

CUSTOM ART

- DeviantArt is the best place to browse for artists. Expect to pay anywhere from \$100 to crazy amounts for good custom artwork.
- 3dfantasyart.co.uk/ - excellent custom digital artwork for the fantasy and steampunk genres, and she'll do the cover text too. All for less than \$100, and she's great to work with.

PROFESSIONAL COVER DESIGN

- Uses stock art rather than custom artwork
- Cheaper than custom art. Still an expensive option, but you could come away with excellent covers.
- One way to keep expenses down is to commission one cover for the serial and just make small changes for each episode – different text and maybe a colour tint. It keeps the series branded and it should keep the cost low. Negotiate with your designer.
- The cheapest option might be to choose a premade cover and negotiate with the designer for a bunch of slightly modified versions.
- Remember, just because a designer charges money, it doesn't mean you'll like the cover or be treated in a professional manner. Look at samples. Google the designer and look for complaints. The Writers' Café has threads about specific designers.
- **Always look at the cover in thumbnail size.** That's how most shoppers will see it first. Sometimes a gorgeous full-size cover turns into an illegible smear when it's 175 pixels wide.
- CoolSeriesCovers.com – I apologize for the self-promotion, but I do cover design and I charge a token amount to IFWITs.

FIVERR DESIGNERS

The adage that you get what you pay for has some merit, but it's not an absolute rule. Plenty of terrible designers charge exorbitant rates, and some very good designers hang out on Fiverr. **Be careful!** Some of them use images they have no rights to, just stuff they grabbed off the Internet.

- Mnsartstudio – I haven't worked with him, but he comes highly recommended on the Writers' Café
- Writers' Café thread about fiverr designers: <http://www.kboards.com/index.php?topic=224692.0>

DESIGN YOUR OWN COVER

- Don't.
- Seriously, don't do it. Good cover design takes years to learn, and it's very difficult to be objective about your own designs. They will suck, and you won't know.

STOCK ART

- I use Deposit Photos – depositphotos.com
- There are many others, with wildly varying prices but mostly with all the same images
- The cost of individual pictures is so high you might find it worthwhile to get a month's subscription – just make sure you opt out of recurring before your month is up. They make a lot of money from people who forget to cancel their subscriptions.
- There are public-domain images out there, but it's quite a chore to find the right image.
- Fight the impulse to steal images. It's wrong, and it will eventually come back to haunt you.

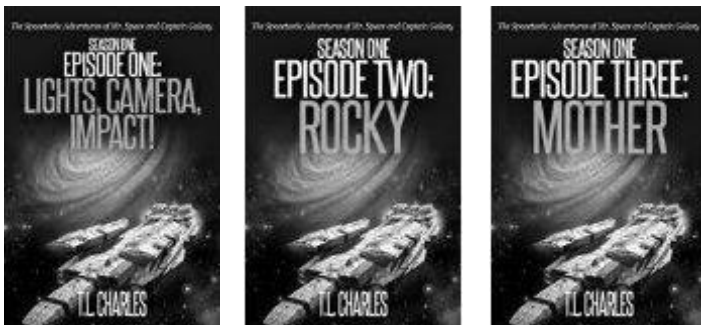
IMAGE EDITING SOFTWARE

Photoshop is the top of the heap. You can't buy it anymore. Now Adobe rents the latest version for \$9.99 US per month.

Photoshop CS6, released in 2012, is more or less available for free. For a time Adobe made it available to download at no charge. Now it's a bit hard to track down.

The Gimp is free. It's the equivalent of Photoshop, and available at no charge.

There are many, many tutorials and how-to guides online for both applications, including tutorials specific to cover design.



An example of a serial using the same cover art and design for the entire season



A sample of cover art and text from 3dfantasyart.co.uk. Each cover cost 30 GBP.



This is why you always check how your cover looks in thumbnail size. Can you read the title? Do you know what it's a picture of?