The Proof Angel Summary of

Authors: March 2014

Lost the plot?

Sometimes after you have been working on any project for a while you lose your way. You get bogged down & struggle to keep motivated, & however hard you try, things don't seem to improve. It can help to look at the fundamentals of what you are doing, and think about how you are going to achieve your objective.

So here is a nice reminder of basic plot structure to get you back on track:

http://ow.ly/vFP2l

Getting past writer's block

Is writer's block spoiling your New Year Resolutions? If so, this analysis might help:

http://ow.ly/vFQbT

Writer's block

Here are some interesting thoughts on writer's block, which is only to be read by those not currently suffering:

http://ow.ly/vFUim

If you are suffering, take some exercise & come back when you are feeling more cheerful.

How to build your online writing profile

Do you want to start writing on websites where there is a lot of traffic, & a chance of getting paid for your trouble? If so, the range of places to try in this post might interest you.

http://ow.ly/vFOL3

How to have a hit on your hands

An Assistant Professor at Stony Brook University thinks she can predict a hit book. By analysing a sample of books, she has identified some key characteristics of the writing in successful books. These factors have been worked into a formula, which she claims can be used to predict whether a book is a success, with 84% accuracy.

So the implication is that there is a formula for writing a successful book, isn't it? Use large amounts of the success factors and stay away from the marks of failure. What could be easier?

Those who want the easy version can read about it in the Guardian:

http://ow.ly/vFPHu

Anyone keen to learn the details can find the full report here:

http://www.aclweb.org/anthology/D/D13/D13-1181.pdf

There are lots of tables & charts, with very intelligent jargon liberally sprinkled about the place.

Regular readers may have gathered that I'm a bit suspicious of statistics. This one certainly sounds too good to be true. One of the reasons you may want to treat this with a pinch of salt is the definition of success. I'm sure no one will be surprised that, as it is easier to analyse electronic information, the sample has been selected from Project Gutenberg at http://www.gutenberg.org/. Good plan. Good range of material there. The easiest data about "success" is therefore the number of times a book has been downloaded from that site.

- Now I can only speak for myself here of course, but I've downloaded a wide range of things from Gutenberg. I was a regular train traveller at one stage, so a good supply of eBooks was very useful. Out of curiosity, I downloaded all sorts of books I'd heard of but never seen, like Machiavelli's *The Prince* and various other hugely influential books of their time. I never spent long on them, as they were very much of their time, & not really modern casual reading.

- I wonder how many of these "successful" books would be best sellers today? Even when costume dramas are popular, how many of us are actually tempted to read something else by that author? How many viewers are trying to remember whether this bit really happen in the book? The style of Victorian authors like Dickens & Trollope is certainly very different from the average best seller today. My bet is that most of us haven't read much of this sort of thing since school, although I think Trollope takes a lot of beating as a standby for long journeys when you don't want to run out of book.

- If some of the sample are successes, then the rest must be failures. That seems harsh. They had enough merit to be chosen for the project & turned into electronic format by volunteers. That probably means that most of us would be quite pleased with the sales achieved by the author.

On the other hand, it is noticeable that the success factors echo familiar writing tips.

Coincidence? A useful study? What do you think?

How to plan a novel using the snowflake method

Opinions vary about whether & how much you should plot out any piece of writing. Planning can save a lot of problems, but it can also kill the spark of originality. If you over plan the project you might find that by the time you come to make a start you are bored with the whole thing.

After all, a novel is a work of art, not a practical thing like a trip to Ikea.

The snowflake method sounds like an interesting approach:

<p align="center">http://ow.ly/vFQNr</p>

If you have tried it, I'd be interested to know what you think.

Planning a series

If you have ever toyed with the idea of turning your idea into a whole series of books, this post might just kick start you into action:

<p align="center">http://kindleauthors.blogspot.co.uk/2013/03/be-serial-killer.html</p>

For a slightly different perspective, try this post on the pros & cons of writing a series:

<p align="center">http://allindiewriters.com/writing-fiction-series-pros-cons/</p>

Taking care of important characters

A weak main character lets a story down. But it is sometimes hard to see what is missing from yours.

Have a look at this checklist to help solve the problem:

<p align="center">http://ow.ly/vFSFG</p>

Are you struggling with your children's book?

Writing for children can be very difficult.

They make a very critical audience. Adults read a book once & move on. Children read the same book again & again, so they know it well and spot any inconsistencies.

If you are stuck, try this cheat sheet:

<p align="center">http://writerswrite.co.za/writing-childrens-books-a-cheat-sheet</p>

Have you tried Scrivener?

Some writers find Scrivener very useful. If you are tempted to have a go, this cheat sheet might help:

http://beyondpaperediting.blogspot.co.uk/2014/03/scrivener-cheat-sheet.html

Reminders about writing for all 5 senses

I expect this is something we all know. Getting under the skin of the characters & letting the reader know what they are experiencing brings a story to life. But that is so much easier to say that than it is to do. It is a knack that needs some experimentation to acquire.

Here are some exercises for developing the skill:

http://writerswrite.co.za/how-readers-remember-stories

Some common sense for writers

This post from Meg Rosoff has some common sense comments about the writing process. Particularly the parts of the process that are difficult to hear:

http://aerogrammestudio.com/2013/07/23/meg-rosoff-how-to-write/

Collaborative writing

Have you ever wondered whether it would be a good idea to have a writing partner? This post sets out some of the benefits:

http://ow.ly/vFUb3

Rules for writing a synopsis

We all have tasks we hate. There are some tasks hated by most people. One of those seems to be writing a synopsis.

If you are facing the problem, try Bridget Whelan's rules for writing a synopsis:

http://bridgetwhelan.com/2014/02/28/10-rules-for-writing-a-synopsis/

Why is revenge a good plot line for a beginner?

Are you a new writer? Are you indecisive about you plot line? Have you thought about revenge?

It gives you a lot of scope to play with. Find out why revenge is a good plot line for beginners here:

http://writerswrite.co.za/why-revenge-is-such-a-brilliant-plot-for-beginner-writers

How to mix voice

Mixing voice is difficult to do well. Done properly the reader doesn't notice what you've done, but get it wrong and you have a confusing mess.

Here is an analysis of the problem from Aerogramme Writers' Studio:

http://aerogrammestudio.com/2013/09/24/how-to-mix-voices-like-annie-proulx/

Writing dialogue

Many people find it difficult to write good dialogue, but it is an important part of fiction. This post explains why it is so important, and how to avoid some common pitfalls:

http://www.thecreativepenn.com/2012/10/04/dialogue-mistakes/

Thoughts on being edited

A post on how difficult the editing process can be:

http://www.ragan.com/WritingEditing/Articles/47244.aspx

And another on the benefits of editing:

http://blog.pubslush.com/why-authors-should-care-about-editing/