The Proof Angel Summary of

"How to" for Authors: December 2013

Learning from what you read

Reading is important for a writer. William Faulkner once said "Read, read everything & see how they do it. Just like a carpenter who works as an apprentice studies the master."

It has also been said that if you don't have time to read, you don't have time to write.

While we pick information about the subject matter, we also absorb how it is written. We pick up new vocabulary & spot new techniques. But what should you read? The list of criteria is endless, including:

- Good work to see how it is done.

- Bad work to see how not to do it.

- Work in your genre to see what is "expected by the market".

- Work unlike your own to see what else you could bring into your own work.

- Anything to expand your knowledge or inspire you.

Here is a useful list of things to watch for when you read:

http://ow.ly/sPJyC

And that is just the general theory - then you have to find the actual items to read.

Here is a reading list created for one aspiring writer in 1934 by Ernest Hemingway:

http://ow.ly/sObr2

Useful books on writing fiction

We all need something to fall back on from time to time.

Here is a useful list of books for fiction writers from Lawrence O'Bryan:

http://ow.ly/sPKty

Find plot inspiration

One of the great mysteries of literature!

Here are a few prompts, from "No plot? No problem" by Chris Baty.

Generate some ideas by observation

Get a newspaper, & sit in a public place with lots of passers by.

- Collect people by shutting your eyes & counting to 15. The first person you see is your character. Write down everything you can about them, including:
    - How they look.
    - What they wear.
    - How they are sitting/walking.
    - What they are holding.
- Pick up your newspaper, close your eyes. Open at a random page, point to something. Whatever you have picked describes (or is if it is a picture) your setting.
- Work a story round your characters & setting.

Remind yourself how plots work

Watch a TV show & analyse how they develop the plot. Pay particular attention to:

- When & how twists happen.
- How important ideas are introduced.

Organise a focus group.

Get a group of friends together & tell them about:

- The characters.
- The setting.
- The beginning of the story.

Then have them brainstorm ideas. Take notes, and ask them to elaborate if necessary, but don't share your ideas as:

- It is discouraging if they don't go down well.

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- The point is for you to get ideas, not talk about ones you have already.
- It spoils the story for when you have finished & they read the result.

Breathe new life into your plot

The best stories are full of contrast. There are various types of contrast - one is pace. It is as tedious to read a long car chase as it is when the author should have used that old fairy tale short cut: for a long time nothing happened.

Most of the time the next twist in the plot has been in your head for a while. But sometimes you realise that the plan won't work for some reason, and replacement ideas just will not flow. For those times, here is a list of ways to kick start your plot.

http://ow.ly/sOdmo

Tips from famous writers:

- CS Lewis:

http://ow.ly/sOdAE

- PD James:

http://ow.ly/sOdFb

- Ian Rankin:

http://ow.ly/sOdKC

How to...

- Plan a novel:

http://ow.ly/sOdT8

- Create a romantic hero:

http://ow.ly/sOdZL

- Create a villain:

http://ow.ly/sPLLU

- Write about body language:

http://ow.ly/sPM0s

- Experiment using short stories:

http://ow.ly/sOehH

- Write a ghost story:

http://ow.ly/sPOf2

- Change genres:

http://ow.ly/sOeED

- Use a pen name:

http://ow.ly/sOeJw

- Avoid bland pronouns and verbs:

http://ow.ly/sOeTz

- Learn by watching others:

http://ow.ly/sOf1H

- Cope with writer's block:

http://ow.ly/sOfaL

- Navigate through the writing process:

http://ow.ly/sPNce

- Revise your draft:

http://ow.ly/sOfkT/

- Create a theme tagline

http://ow.ly/sOfwI