

The Story of My Art: A Study in Fiction Writing

Victoria Steelman

A Senior Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for graduation
in the Honors Program
Liberty University
Fall 2014

Acceptance of Senior Honors Thesis

This Senior Honors Thesis is accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation from the Honors Program of Liberty University.

Mark Harris, Ph.D.
Thesis Chair

Nicholas Olson, M.A.
Committee Member

Jacqueline Johnson, Ed.D.
Committee Member

James H. Nutter, D.A.
Honors Director

Date

Abstract

This creative thesis examines the several aspects of the author's study and experience on the path to become a fiction writer. The author's writing theory is addressed, utilizing research from a variety of authorities on the subject and focusing primarily on the nonexistence of rules for crafting fiction, the role of education in the life of the writer, and the importance of the practice of writing itself. The second section details the writer's personal method of crafting fiction, focusing on the key elements of character, plot, and setting. The third section contains a full marketing plan for the author's intended novel, including all sections typically required to meet standard business expectations. Finally, an excerpt of the first chapter of the author's novel is included at the end of the work.

The Story of My Art: A Study in Fiction

Writing Theory

According to celebrated novelist Stephen King (2000), becoming a writer simply requires one to establish two habits: “If you want to be a writer, you must do two things above all others: read a lot and write a lot.” Yet in an age of information where education is king, writing has become a very complex practice indeed. Those who wish to write find themselves bombarded with endless courses, books, websites, and lists filled with rules and advice that will supposedly transform them into a literary success.

However, the trouble with relying on such resources when beginning a writing career is that, due to the subjectivity central to the art of writing, much of the information given to budding writers is inaccurate, contradictory, or very limited in perspective. One cannot possibly hope to become a successful novelist if she clings to such resources as the basis for her writing. In order to write well, an author must understand the nonexistence of rules, the role of education, and the importance of practice.

On the Nonexistence of Rules

As famed British novelist and playwright W. Somerset Maugham once put it, “There are three rules for writing a novel. Unfortunately, no one knows what they are” (Bell, 2009, p. 72).

The idea that there are no rules for fiction writing may at first sound strange and nonsensical. How can one judge writing to be good or bad without the standard that rules provide? Some fiction is clearly very good while some is so poorly constructed that it is quite painful to read. The answer to this question is that writing is not a science but an art.

The creation of good fiction is not a formulaic process but rather an intuitive one. In his book *The Art of Fiction*, author John Gardner (1983) writes:

Art has no universal rules because each true artist melts down and reforges all past aesthetic law. To learn to write well, one must begin with a clear understanding that for the artist, if not for the critic, aesthetic law is the enemy. To the great artist, anything whatever is possible. Invention, the spontaneous generation of new rules, is central to art. And since one does not learn to be a literary artist by studying first how to be something different from a literary artist, it follows that for the young writer, as for the great writer he hopes to become, there can be no firm rules, no limits, no restrictions. Whatever works is good. He must develop an eye for what—by his own carefully informed standards—works. (p. 15)

This notion, however, has not stopped writers from attempting to dictate to the masses what does and does not work in a story. Indeed, over the millennia of human existence, many have tried to set down rules for what constitutes good writing. One such famed attempt that remains popular to this day is crime novelist Elmore Leonard's "10 Rules of Writing," a list of dos and don'ts concerning various aspects of fiction writing for the budding novelist. *New York Times* bestselling author Steve Hockensmith (2013), celebrated for his *Holmes on the Range* series as well as his contributions to the *Pride, Prejudice and Zombies* saga, addresses the problematic nature of this list and others like it in one of his blog posts:

Here's the thing: Leonard's list is misnamed. It's not 10 Rules of Writing. It's 10

Rules of Writing Like Elmore Leonard. If all you want to write are *Get Shorty* pastiches, well, this'll give you a great head start. But if you have any interest in your own voice as a writer—indeed, having any sort of voice at all—keep in mind that Leonard's commandments weren't written in stone by the finger of God.

Hockensmith makes an excellent point: no two authors are alike. Each author has his or her own unique writing style, and as a result, some authors can successfully utilize a particular approach in their stories that others cannot. Thus, many authors may put forth advice they find helpful, sharing the rules that have significantly impacted their own writing success, but this does not mean the advice will necessarily be of benefit to another individual. In addition, one author's advice may entirely contradict another's. A single method is highly unlikely to be a perfect fit for two different writers. In her book *Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft*, author Janet Burroway (2003) states:

Know thyself. The bottom line is that if you do not at some point write your story down, it will not get written. Having decided that you will write it, the question is not "How do you get it done?" but "How do *you* get it done?" Any discipline or indulgence that actually helps nudge you into position facing the page is acceptable and productive. (p. 3)

The process of writing is very personal matter, and the disciplines and techniques one chooses to use need not be the same as those any other writer. As poet Mary Oliver states, "No one can tell you how best to make the writing happen" (1994, p. 119). Indeed, some writers can succeed in using writing techniques that are generally frowned upon. Hockensmith addresses one such instance in his blog, citing Larry McMurtry's Pulitzer

Prize-winning novel *Lonesome Dove*. Regarding the novel's abrupt transition between points of view without page or section breaks, nor any other form of distinction to mark the change, Hockensmith (2013) writes:

This is a no-no grande -- a technique that would simply be labeled "incompetence" if you or I tried it. And it works beautifully. The book also breaks some of Elmore Leonard's Rules for Writing Like Elmore Leonard and is none the worse for it. The only rules the author followed were My Rules for Writing Like Me. These are the rules I follow, too. I figured out what they were by breaking them, a lot, and realizing that what I'd produced wasn't good. I won't bother mentioning what my rules are, because they're my rules. I need Steve Hockensmith's Rules for Writing Like Steve Hockensmith, but nobody else does. If you want to be a good writer, you need Your Rules for You.

As Hockensmith expresses, whatever rules exist for one's writing are rules meaningful only to the writer who created them. This is why much of what teachers, books, lists, and other references state in regards to writing well is, in the words of notorious pirate Hector Barbossa, "more what you'd call 'guidelines' than actual rules" (Bruckheimer, 2003).

On the Role of Education

In his book *The Guide to Writing Science Fiction and Fantasy*, author Philip Athans states, "Teaching writing is relatively easy, but teaching storytelling is close to impossible" (2010, p. 16). Because there are no true rules of fiction writing, what remains to be taught is quite limited. However, in order to succeed, there are a few things an aspiring writer ought to learn. First, a writer should thoroughly understand composition,

as this is the foundation of meaningful written communication. Second, she should gain a strong comprehension of the elements of craft, because all stories share these common elements, and it is quite difficult to do them justice without first recognizing what they are. Finally, she should hone her analytical skills, because the ability to discern the intangibles that separate a well-written story from a poorly-crafted one does much to help a writer in discovering and shaping her own style, as well as in revising her work. While it is possible to attain the above skills without classroom experience, formal study may be of great benefit in the learning process.

A working knowledge of composition is absolutely vital for the writer. Gardner (1983) states, “No one can hope to write well if he has not mastered—absolutely mastered—the rudiments: grammar and syntax, punctuation, diction, sentence variety, paragraph structure, and so forth” (p. 17). Without a good understanding of composition, an author cannot convey her story in a meaningful, intelligible manner. Though much may be gleaned from extensive reading, due to the complexities of the English language, it is nearly impossible to master these fundamental elements of written communication without formal study.

In contrast, while it is certainly of benefit to study them in a classroom setting, the elements of craft are often natural and may be grasped without formal study. Any storyteller utilizes these elements regardless of her education or skill level, whether she realizes it or not, because these elements are all embedded in life itself. The writer’s own self, as well as the friends, family, and strangers a writer encounters every day may serve as the basis for her characters. The twists and turns, joys and pains, and blessings and

courses of life in the real world inspire her plotline. Dialogue, mood, time, place, and the like are all very real parts of everyday life. Each of these things can be learned from careful observation and taking care to pay attention to them during the writing process. Whether or not one studies the elements of craft formally, it is essential for a writer to have a solid understanding of them. The Gotham Writer's Workshop's guide to writing fiction explains:

Good writing comes down to craft far more than most people realize. True, anyone can write a story without training, which separates fiction writing from such activities as performing heart surgery or piloting a helicopter. But a working knowledge of craft is almost always necessary to make a story really good, worthy of being read by all these strangers. (Steele, 2003, p. 19)

In short, a good story requires good use of the elements of craft. If the writer is observant, she will easily understand the important role the elements of craft play in the creation of her story and will give each detail proper attention as she writes.

In order to give proper attention to the details of one's story, it is of great importance to sharpen one's analytical abilities. In *The Art of Fiction*, Gardner (1983) points out:

No one can hope to write really well if he has not learned how to analyze fiction—how to recognize a symbol when it jumps at him, how to make out themes in a literary work, how to account for a writer's selection and organization of fictional details. (p. 13)

In analyzing fiction, a writer learns to turn a careful eye toward her own craft. From such

study she can glean insight into what works and what does not, taking note of the styles and techniques of various authors before her and determining which elements she would like to utilize in her writing. Gardner (1983) notes:

All great writing is in a sense imitation of great writing. Writing a novel, however innovative that novel may be, the writer struggles to achieve one specific large effect, what can only be called the effect we are used to getting from good novels. (p. 11)

Analytical skills are vital not only to the writing process, but also to the process of revision. In order to effectively catch errors and weaknesses in one's writing, one must know what to look for. This ability is honed through practice and the study of good writing, and through such learning good judgment is produced. Dr. Andrew Kern (2009), president and founder of the CiRCE Institute, a leading nonprofit corporation dedicated to classical education, writes on the matter:

Writing, like every art, requires judgment. That is why people often say, "There are no rules." They are almost right. The one rule is propriety. This directs the teacher's and students' attention away from rules to purpose and nature, because propriety is determined by the nature and purpose of the act, the actor, and the other participants in the act. And propriety requires judgment. And judgment takes awareness of principles, understanding of the nature of the act, process, and artifact, knowledge of the thing represented in the writing, wisdom, and clarity of purpose.

On the Importance of Practice

Understanding that there are no true rules for the fiction writer and that what can be taught on the subject of good writing is quite limited, it remains to be said that the most essential and effective preparation for becoming a writer is the practice of writing itself. Steve Hockensmith (2013) writes on the matter:

I'm not a big believer in writing advice from anybody. As that noted literary thinker James. T. Kirk once said, "We learn by doing." Taking a class isn't going to teach you how to write. Reading a book isn't going to teach you how to write. Writing and writing and writing is going to teach you how to write. ("Elmore Leonard")

A person can spend her entire life studying good writing, learning about theory, technique and style, but without firsthand experience with the pen, she is not a writer. In order to become good at any craft, practice is necessary. The very best way to learn writing, as Hockensmith says, is to write. Many other authors and resources echo the sentiment. Children's author Gail Carson Levine (2006) notes, "Writing is a skill, and the more we do it, the better we get at it. I expect to be learning to write till I die" (p. 86). Novelist E.L. Doctorow states, "Writing is an exploration. You start from nothing and learn as you go" (Weber, 1985). Bestselling novelist Daniel Handler, more widely known as Lemony Snicket, also advises:

The way to become a good writer is to write. In the years before publication I managed to find a series of measly part-time jobs which paid enough to allow me to write the rest of the time, so I never went for an advanced degree. In my

experience, the most valuable thing an MFA can provide fiction writers is the time to write, if they cannot find it by another method. (Rooney, 2008)

Indeed, the most valuable contribution a writer can make toward her career is not to earn a degree, but to write and never stop writing. John Gardner (1983) writes on the matter, “...in order to achieve mastery [a student] must read widely and deeply and must write not just carefully but continually, thoughtfully assessing and reassessing what he writes, because practice...is the heart of the matter” (p. 9). Practice is indeed at the heart of what makes a good writer. Through writing, a writer discovers much about herself—the manner in which she naturally writes, thoughts and feelings she may often suppress, topics she likes to write about and those she doesn’t. In many ways, writing shapes the writer.

In order to become truly great, to master the art of writing, a writer must dedicate herself to the task. The author must cultivate perseverance. In *The Art of War for Writers*, novelist James Scott Bell (2009) advises, “Finish your novel, because you learn more that way than any other” (p. 65). When a writer sees a work through to its completion, she gains a sense accomplishment and fulfillment greater than the sum of all the triumphs found in the process of writing the piece. Such achievements as these strengthen the writer and spur her on to greater projects and new challenges.

Method

Since I was very small, I have been captivated by myth and fantasy, both of which frequently find their way into my stories. Because of this, the most natural genre classification for my work would likely be fantasy. I have always been particularly drawn

to books for middle-grade children and young adults, and it is my intention to write primarily for these audiences. Given the age of the main characters and the themes of the story, the novel I am currently writing is best suited for young adults, but it will be written with a level of maturity that an adult audience may appreciate as well.

While all elements of craft are necessary for the construction of an intriguing novel, stories are often distinguished as being character-driven, plot-driven, or world-driven. Because the creation of characters comes most naturally to me, my stories tend to be primarily character-driven. When I begin to write, I typically begin with a character in mind.

For me, character creation comes quite easily. I am very observant and empathetic, and I naturally have a good understanding of the quirks, flaws, strengths, and passions that make up a person. When I create a character, I typically have a handful of traits in mind, and then I begin to build the character's personality by placing the character in a brief scene involving a somewhat stressful scenario. Bringing the character through such situations allows me to come to a better understanding of that character and to be consistent in the way I portray that character throughout the rest of the story.

The plot in my stories typically develops from the personalities of my characters. As I analyze their needs, desires, and weaknesses, interesting scenarios arise in my mind that would further develop the characters and bring growth. As I work on my characters and weave these scenarios together, my plotline is born.

When I write, world building, or the setting in which my story plays out, is often the slowest element to come together. While I often have a loose grasp on the setting in

which I want my characters and plot to develop, bringing that setting to life within a story requires more effort than plot and character development. Knowing this is my weakness, I give special attention to including details and descriptions of the characters' surroundings.

Marketing

1. Executive Summary

The enclosed marketing plan details a program designed to encourage a successful launch of the novel *Nexus*, the first of what is likely to become a series by first-time novelist Tori Steelman, should Random House, Inc. decide to accept her contract. A summary of each segment of the marketing plan is included below (Kerin et al., 2012).

About the Book

This marketing plan begins with a brief section which summarizes the plot of the novel, clearly displaying the distinctive qualities of the storyline. Additionally, this section features a brief biography of the author, highlighting her experiences in the writing and publishing industry and noting her talents as an author.

Situational Analysis

In order to best understand the marketing elements necessary for *Nexus*'s success in the market, the author has completed a SWOT analysis, assessing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats regarding the publication of *Nexus* thoroughly and providing solid marketing ideas to make up for any areas that are lacking.

Market-Product Focus

This segment starts with a list of objectives for the marketing of *Nexus*, namely: excitement for story, knowledge of author, and potential for series. Next, the author addresses the issue of target markets and discusses her aim of gathering readers of various genres and from widely varying age groups. Exceptional aspects of the novel are noted, differentiating the book from others of a similar nature. Finally, the author explains her intended positioning for the book, in essence that it will be a story for all to enjoy regardless of age or genre of preference.

Marketing Program

Here the four elements of the marketing mix are addressed. The author lists and expounds upon the most important elements of novel as a product, namely: cross-genre plotline, characterization, and visual elements. The pricing strategy that follows include both print and e-book versions of the novel, as well as formatting information. The book's extensive promotion strategy includes a vast array of ideas to spread awareness and encourage purchase. Methods include: blog tour, social media, local media, festivals and conferences, book clubs and release parties. Finally, the author discusses placement of the book, noting her desire to allow distribution through as many outlets as possible.

Implementation Plan

The author chronologically details the projections for setting the marketing program into action, beginning with current pre-publication efforts and ending with plans for a sequel and potential series. This section concludes the marketing plan.

2. About the Book

This section contains story information about *Nexus*, as well as a brief biography of the author.

Plot Summary

Set partly in modern-day America and partly in a fantastical realm called Alura, the story focuses on the experiences of an average teenage girl who is thrust into a magical world. Eighteen-year-old Fiera Jameson is the victim of a freak accident that leaves her with an intense, uncontrollable level of magical powers. She doesn't even have time to learn the names of her rescuers before the man who caused the accident, a villain by the name of Fergusen, is on her tail. Whatever happened that day has left Fiera with something that he wants, and he'll stop at nothing to get it.

Author Information

Tori Steelman has had a passion for reading, writing, and fantasy for as long as she can remember. Her talents were recognized in primary school, and she used the rest of her educational years to hone her writing skills. She has experience in the publishing industry as an editor and a literary agent. *Nexus* will be her first full-length novel publication.

3. Situational Analysis

In order to best understand the situation at hand, a SWOT analysis of issues concerning the author and the book itself is included in this section.

Strengths

Perhaps the single greatest strength of *Nexus* is its distinctive storyline. The plot

of the story, as detailed above, stands in contrast against traditional story arcs through its focus on a strong set of characters whose lives are anything but normal.

The characters themselves are a strength of the book, for the author has brought them to life in a gripping, realistic manner, which significantly adds to the value of the novel.

Another element in *Nexus*'s favor is its basis in classic myth and fairytale. While its plotline varies from the norm in some ways, the classical references in the story will easily attract an audience and increase the book's success in various markets.

Finally, *Nexus*'s solid marketing program will draw audiences through multiple outlets, creating widespread interest in the book and many opportunities for sales.

Weaknesses

The greatest weakness that *Nexus* must deal with is the fact that its author is a relative unknown. As of yet her publicity endeavors are still only in the beginning stages. Therefore, the author has created a strong marketing program to increase public knowledge not only of the book, but also of the author.

Opportunities

Because of its cross-genre aspects and mature but uncomplicated writing style, *Nexus* has the potential to become a bestseller in a number of markets. Its young adult protagonist and main characters will appeal to young and old alike. Readers who enjoy fantasy, science fiction, adventure, and romance will find something to love in this book.

Additionally, *Nexus*'s solid marketing program will create the necessary book and author awareness to open the doors for the novel to grow in popularity. By emphasizing

the story's exceptional qualities, the marketing program will draw potential readers to the novel and open many doors for new opportunities in the future.

Finally, if *Nexus* reaches expected levels of success in its markets, new opportunities for a sequel and potential series will arise. The author is eager to continue the story begun in *Next*, and plans for a sequel are already in the works.

Threats

The most significant threat *Nexus* faces is the highly competitive field it is about to enter. Paranormal and fantasy books are quite common among young adult publications, and due to the nature of the story, *Nexus* will most likely be placed alongside these novels on the shelf. However, *Nexus*'s non-traditional story elements, as found in the "Points of Difference" section, will help to set it apart from other novels in the genre, and its marketing program will prevent it from fading into the ever-growing sea of young adult fantasy books.

4. Market-Product Focus

Included in this section are the author's goals for *Nexus* following its publication, as well as information on target markets, points of difference, and positioning of the book.

Marketing and Product Objectives

Listed below are the three primary goals of the marketing campaign for *Nexus* over the coming months and years prior to and following its publication:

- Excitement for Story. Extensive marketing campaigns will encourage anticipation among potential readers, leading to an increase in sales.

- Knowledge of Author. The aforementioned marketing campaigns will also increase knowledge of the author, creating a good reputation that will lead to a promising literary career.
- Potential for Series. By stirring reader excitement and spreading knowledge of the author throughout the reading community, *Nexus*'s marketing program aims to create value for the book. Actualizing this value will enable the author to expand her endeavors with *Nexus* by continuing the story in a series.

Target Markets

As previously mentioned, one of the strong points of *Nexus* is its cross-genre appeal. Fans of fantasy, romance, action and science fiction will find something to love about the book. Marketing efforts will reach out to readers in each of these genres.

Regarding age, *Nexus* is suitable for adults and children alike. However, due to the organizational structure of the typical bookstore, the novel will be categorized in either the Young Adult or New Adult section.

Points of Difference

Though the topics mentioned below are far from rare, *Nexus* stands out from other books in its category in several notable ways:

- Modern Fantasy. The majority of fantasy stories are set in the distant past or in a world completely disconnected from reality. In contrast, *Nexus* takes place in the modern age, allowing the reader to connect more easily with its fantastical elements.
- Alternate Universe. Many stories take place in made-up worlds that excite the

imagination and leave the reader hungry for more. *Nexus* stands out from the majority in that it takes place in both the real world and an alternate one, providing an interesting connection between the two.

- **New Take on Classics.** Modern authors often try their hand at retelling traditional myths and fairytales, sometimes meeting with success and other times with criticism. *Nexus* seeks not to retell the classics, but rather to draw elements out of the stories and to create a new world entirely, reshaping typical races like elves and dwarves into something new and interesting while at the same time maintaining enough likeness to the original to be recognizable and to be respectful to the tradition.

Positioning

Most stories severely lean towards one genre or another in terms of classification, giving them a very specific target audience. *Nexus* has been designed to challenge that manner of classification. While an age and genre label are an important part of book marketing, *Nexus* seamlessly combines several genres in order to provide a variety of readers with an enjoyable experience in which they can appreciate the aspects of their favorite genre while at the same time experiencing other genres that they may never have read before. The aim of the author is to position the book as a well-written, exciting story in the readers' minds, regardless of their genre of preference.

5. Marketing Program

Attending to all four elements of the marketing mix, the author has developed a marketing program aimed at spreading awareness and excitement among potential

readers before, during, and after the publication release of *Nexus*. Details of the plan are listed below.

Product Strategy

The two key product features of *Nexus* are the aspects of the story itself and the professional artistic design of the finished publication.

Cross-genre plotline. As previously described, *Nexus* is a distinctive story idea with classic elements that will enthrall readers of varied age and genre preference.

Characterization. *Nexus* draws readers in through its array of dynamic characters and their individual story arcs. This vital aspect will create long-term interest in the characters, opening the opportunity to turn *Nexus* into the first book of a successful series.

Visual elements. *Nexus* will feature a professional design with captivating cover art that will draw readers to pick up the book with interest and curiosity.

Price Strategy

Nexus will be released in both print and digital format at its first publication. Details on pricing and formatting plans are included below¹.

Print copy. For its original publication, *Nexus* will be released in octavo-size hardcover format at a reasonable price of \$17.99. After its first year on the market, the book will also be released as a C format paperback at \$8.99.

E-book. An electronic version of *Nexus* will also be available upon its first release at a starting price of \$12.99.

¹ The prices that follow are based on the average list prices for titles of similar genre published by Random House.

Promotion Strategy

Promotion for *Nexus* will be conducted in true multimedia fashion. Online programs include blog tours and social media. Other promotions will be conducted through local media coverage, literary festivals and conferences, and book club reading plans. Several release parties are also being negotiated.

Blog tour. During the weeks prior to and following the release of *Nexus*, the author will serve as a guest blogger on a number of prominent literary blogs and other popular blogs whose audiences are interested in learning about the novel and its author.

Social media. Much of the marketing campaign for *Nexus* will utilize social networking websites with which the author is heavily involved. A Facebook page has been created in anticipation of the book's release and continues to update its growing fan population on developments in the publication process. Other social networks used include Twitter, YouTube, and the author's blog.

Local media. Following publication, the author plans to have several interviews with local newspapers to increase regional awareness of her novel. Additional interviews with several radio stations in the region will be negotiated as well.

Festivals and conferences. Already an active participant in numerous book festivals and writer's conferences, the author intends to reserve space to display and sell her novel at as many of these events as possible in the months following the release of *Nexus*.

Book clubs. The author intends to promote her novel through a number of book clubs and in reading groups throughout the country. These events may also include

personal visits with the reading groups or video call interviews with the same purpose.

Release parties. Several book release parties are currently in planning stages in order to spread word of the novel in the days and weeks immediately following its release. The festivities will include food and drink, drawings for a free copy of the novel, meet-and-greets with the author and book signings.

Placement Strategy

In order to get the best reception and widest audience, the author plans to distribute *Nexus* at any bookstore that would like to carry the novel. Distribution through larger chains such as Barnes and Noble, Books-A-Million, Wal-Mart, and other locations is also planned. The author also wishes to make e-books available through Amazon.com, Barnes and Noble, Books-A-Million and the like.

6. Implementation Plan

Nexus marketing endeavors will begin with the most cost-efficient yet effective methods of advertisement. With the use of various social networking sites and blogs to advertise the upcoming publication, *Nexus* will become a common name in various literary circles.

Also in this stage, interviews with local and online media sources will increase knowledge of both the book and the author, further generating interest in the story. These efforts, as well as online blog and social media efforts, will continue during and after publication to promote the book and increase sales.

Following publication, a number of release parties will celebrate the publication, enticing readers and encouraging book interest and author awareness. Meet-and-greets,

giveaways, book signings and the like will stimulate excitement and sales during these events.

Additionally, the author will promote her book through numerous book clubs across the country, making personal appearances or video calls at club meetings when possible. This will significantly increase awareness and sales of the book.

Nexus will also be displayed and sold at various literary conferences and book festivals across the country. The author will meet personally with potential readers, spurring on further sales.

Given the continuation of these marketing efforts over time, the likelihood of *Nexus* achieving bestseller status is significant. This will create more publicity and consequently cause a rise in sales.

Finally, once a notable degree of success has been reached, the author will announce her plans for a sequel as marketing endeavors continue.

Story Excerpt: Nexus, Chapter One

The crystalline waters of the brook rolled melodically down the hillside, glistening in the sunlight that illuminated the clearing. The birds chirped a harmony to the rivulet's song as a gentle breeze cut through the heat of the summer air.

It was her favorite place in the world, her secret place. She swore it was filled with magic, or at least the closest she would ever come to it. She was an artist, and this little hollow was her greatest muse. In its leaves and flowers she found pixies and elves. The melody of the creek became the music of her songs, the rhythm of her poems. With pencil and paper she had recorded many a battle unfolding among the trees, a scout

surveying an enemy camp from the boughs of the ancient oak on the east side of the creek, an archer skillfully taking down a foe from his position behind one of the three massive boulders that formed a near perfect triangle on the western side of the waters.

For years she had come here, spending her free time lost in her own little world, living fantastical adventures the real world could never afford her. It was the first day of summer, and she was ready for a new adventure. Eagerly she set her satchel on the ground next to the old oak, leaned her back against its massive trunk, pulled out her notebook, and opened it to a clean page.

“All right,” she said, excitement lighting her eyes, the tip of her pencil just meeting the page. “Tell me your story.”

* * *

Deep in the heart of the mountains, a lonely Victorian mansion stood atop a steep hill. Its bricks were crusted with dust and dirt, and its paint was chipping and peeling from years of harsh weather. A middle-aged man in a charcoal Italian suit stood at the large back window of a mahogany-paneled study, gazing over the mountains shadowed by storm clouds gathering on the horizon. He was tall and thin, with small, intense eyes that matched the darkening sky. His chestnut hair was streaked with grey, and his features were sharp, cunning. His eyes read an invisible message written in the foreboding cloud formations, and his lips curved slowly into a crooked, ominous smile.

He retreated to a computer in the far corner of the large room. He keyed in a lengthy passcode, and the large monitor on the wall flickered on. A male figure in a charcoal cloak appeared on the screen, eyes concealed in shadow beneath the slouch of

his hood.

“My lord?” the figure said, his voice low and rough.

A darkness flickered in his eyes. “It’s time.”

* * *

Her pencil danced across the paper, the magic of the hollow weaving a tale of enchantment in her mind. Hours passed like mere minutes while she filled page after page, her handwriting turning into barely legible scrawl as she tried to capture the myriad scenes unfolding in her head.

The sky above her grumbled, disrupting her focus. She looked up, for the first time noticing the approaching clouds that had been slowly stealing the sunlight from her little haven. She sighed, her eyes returning to her unfinished page, a conflicted look passing over her face. A drop of rain struck her cheek and slid slowly down to her chin.

“All good things must come to an end,” she muttered, reaching for her satchel.

* * *

“My forces are in place and are ready to proceed, Master Ferguson,” the hooded figure announced.

“Excellent, Stallarin,” the stormy-eyed man replied. “What news from Earthside?”

Stallarin looked away and keyed something in at his own computer. Ferguson’s display divided, and a round-faced man appeared on the right half of the screen.

“Ellison, are Earthside forces in position?” Ferguson asked.

“Ready and waiting,” he confirmed. “According to our data, the storm will reach

sufficient power in two minutes' time."

Fergusen nodded. "Prepare all—"

"Excuse me, m'lord," Ellison interrupted, eyes wide as he looked at a secondary monitor. "Earthside is no longer clear."

* * *

It was a small, cramped office, filled to the brim with computers, every wall covered ceiling to floor with a wide variety of screens displaying a seemingly endless amount of data. A worn brass sign on the door read "Supernatural Interference Tracking Department." The young man was seated in front of a weather radar monitor, so still he seemed not even to be breathing, brows knit as he analyzed the coming storm.

"Simeon!" he called, eyes locked on the rapidly-moving cloud formation. A middle-aged man appeared in the doorway.

"Cale?"

The young man closed his eyes for a moment and rubbed the bridge of his nose with his thumb and forefinger. "Look at this storm."

Simeon stepped closer. Cale replayed the data from the past five minutes.

"I know I'm new at this, Sim, but tell me that's not energy manipulation."

Simeon carefully observed the record and gave a solemn nod. "Certainly not a natural storm. Good work. Bring this to Hyperion immediately." And with that the older man quickly left the room.

* * *

"No longer clear?" A spark of rage lit Fergusen's eyes. "How is that possible?"

“I—well...,” Ellison trailed, desperately sifting the data on his screens in hopes of finding an answer.

“Spit it out!” Ferguson barked.

“I don’t know, sir. We secured the area hours ago.”

“Is it SAGE?” Stallarin asked.

Ellison bit his lip. “It’s...no, it’s a girl.”

“A girl?” Ferguson repeated, exasperated. “Proceed as planned.”

Ellison’s brow furrowed, jaw dropping slightly. “But she’ll die, sir.”

“Proceed as planned!”

Ellison sighed and gave a solemn nod. “As you wish, m’lord.”

“Excellent,” Ferguson said, his expression now calm. Without another word, he disconnected the call and returned to his place at the window.

* * *

The clouds moved furiously overhead. Without warning the light summer breeze picked up, the wind whipping her long auburn locks violently about her face. Stuffing her notebook into her bag to protect it from the oncoming rain, she rose to her feet. She turned her wide questioning eyes to the heavens as if sizing up a foe, another raindrop landing on her arm. The rising darkness began to cast its shadow over the haven.

“What are you?” she whispered.

The wind grew stronger. She lifted her foot to take a step forward but instead fell back against the trunk of the tree. The ominous shadow had nearly filled the small clearing, its edge just a few yards away from her. She watched as it crawled closer and

closer. Her face grew pale. Once more she tried to move, but again the relentless gale foiled her efforts. She turned and clung to the old oak as the sky broke open and raindrops pelted her body, driven sharply by the fierce winds. Her eyes closed as she began to whisper prayers of desperation to the ears of heaven.

* * *

Cale quickly copied the data and walked swiftly down the hall toward the office of SAGE's Commander in Chief. He slowed as he approached the old wooden door, the only one of its kind in the long beige hallway.

"One would think they'd remodel at some point," Cale mumbled, then he raised his hand and gave the door three strong knocks.

The sound of a sliding bolt scraping out of its slot echoed down the empty hallway and the door opened, revealing a broad-shouldered man with neat black hair and a short beard.

"Cale," he said, a wide smile stretching across his face and forming creases at the corners of his eyes.

"Commander Wingate," Cale said with a nod of respect.

"Please, call me Hyperion. I've never been one for fancy titles," the commander laughed. "Now to what do I owe this pleasure? Surely it can't be good news."

Cale shook his head and handed his jump drive to the commander. "I believe we're dealing with a group of energy manipulators."

Hyperion's smile faded. He plugged the drive into his computer and quickly reviewed the data. "Spot on. Did you catch this yourself?"

“Yes, sir.”

“Excellent work.” Hyperion walked to the opposite side of the room and retrieved two deep indigo cloaks from the wall. He tossed one to Cale. “You know, you’re the finest recruit SAGE has ever seen. I think it’s time you got some field experience.”

Cale’s eyes lit up as he caught the cloak. “Do you mean that?”

Hyperion cocked his head to the side and arched a brow playfully as he fastened the hood around his neck. “You’ve completed both arms and medic training, haven’t you? At the rate you’re progressing, you may get Simeon’s position before the year’s out.”

* * *

She heaved an uneven breath as the darkness reached her toes and slowly began to cover her body. Soaked through with rain, she shivered against the old tree, desperately clinging to whatever small protection it offered from the raging storm.

With a sharp crack, a bolt of electricity lit up the sky. Savage thunder erupted in the heavens, shaking the very bones of the little hollow, which was now fully shaded by the ominous dark.

A bolt of lightning struck the center of the clearing, and the ground cracked open between the rocks, completing the lines of the triangle they formed. A blinding blaze of light burst forth from the fissures, its heat and fury consuming the hollow as it spiraled into a powerful vortex and meshed with the furious winds. She screamed as its violent grasp ripped her away from her sheltering tree and pulled her into the swirling depths.

* * *

References

- Athans, P. (2010). *The guide to writing science fiction and fantasy*. Avon, MA: Adams Media.
- Bell, J. S. (2009). *The art of war for writers: Fiction writing strategies, tactics, and exercises*. Cincinnati: Writer's Digest Books.
- Bruckheimer, J. (Producer), & Verbinski, G. (Director). (2003). *Pirates of the caribbean: The curse of the black pearl* [Motion picture]. United States: Walt Disney Pictures.
- Burroway, J. (2003). *Writing fiction: A guide to narrative craft*. New York: Longman.
- Gardner, J. (1983) *The art of fiction: Notes on the craft for young writers*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Hockensmith, S. (2013, March 11). Elmore leonard rules! But elmore leonard's rules...? [Web log]. Retrieved from <http://www.stevhockensmith.com/2013/03/elmore-leonard-rules-but-elmore-leonards-rules.html>
- Kerin, R., Hartley, S., Rudelius, W., Steffes, E. (2012). *Marketing: The core*. New York: McGraw-Hill/Irwin.
- Kern, A. (2009, October 8). Your theory of writing [Web log]. Retrieved from <http://quidditycirce.wordpress.com/2009/10/08/your-theory-of-writing/>
- King, S. (2000). *On writing: A memoir of the craft* [Kindle DX version]. Retrieved from Amazon.com
- Levine, G. C. (2006). *Writing magic: Creating stories that fly*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.

Oliver, M. (1994). *A poetry handbook*. New York: Harcourt Brace & Company.

Rooney, K. (2008, July 4). Interview with Daniel Handler. *Redivider: A Journal of New Literature and Art*. Retrieved from <http://www.redividerjournal.org/interview-with-daniel-handler/>

Steele, A. (Ed.). (2003). *Gotham writer's workshop: Writing fiction: The practical guide from new york's acclaimed creative writing school*. New York: Bloomsbury.

Weber, B. (1985, October 20). The myth maker. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/books/00/03/05/specials/doctorow-mag85.html>