



Southern California Writers Association

Writers News

www.ocwriter.com

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January 16 Speaker

Dean Devlin

Executive Producer



The SCWA is proud to kick off its 2010 season with Dean Devlin, an acclaimed writer/producer of blockbuster films and highly rated television projects. Devlin also serves as chairman and CEO of Electric Entertainment, the full-service film, television and new media production company he founded in May 2001.

Over the last fifteen years, Devlin has co-written and produced some of the most successful feature films of all time. He co-wrote and produced *Stargate*, *Godzilla* and *Independence Day* (which grossed over \$800 million worldwide). More recently, under the Electric banner, Devlin produced the World War I action/adventure *Flyboys*, *Eight Legged Freaks*, *Cellular* and the critically acclaimed documentary *Who Killed the Electric Car?* Just prior to forming Electric Entertainment Devlin produced the Mel Gibson period drama, *The Patriot* which was nominated for three Academy Awards. He is currently in pre-production on *Ghosting*, a supernatural thriller which he will produce and direct.

In television, Devlin produced *Leverage*, the new action-packed TNT series starring Oscar-winner Timothy Hutton, *The Librarian: Quest for the Spear*, starring Noah Wyle (*ER*), which was the highest-rated movie on cable of 2004; its sequel, *The Librarian: Return to King Solomon's Mines*; and the third installment of the franchise, *The Librarian: Curse of the Judas Chalice*, which aired on TNT this past December 2008. With Bryan Singer he executive produced the Emmy-winning Sci Fi Channel project *The Triangle*, the channel's highest-rated miniseries since *Steven Spielberg Presents Taken*. Devlin made his directorial debut on the pilot for *Leverage*, which premiered on December 7, 2008. He also directed several additional episodes during the season. Devlin is currently executive producing Season 2 of *Leverage*, which will begin airing this summer

on TNT. He will also be directing several of the episodes. Last year Devlin teamed with TNT on the crime thriller *Blank Slate*, a microseries, starring Eric Stoltz, which debuted last fall on the network as well as TNT.tv, which will also be re-packaged and distributed on mobile devices, home video and broadcast television.

Recognized as a leader in digital

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President's Message

Relax into the Joy of Writing

In my experience, criticism is commonplace while sincere compliments are rare for a professional writer. So, what does a writer do to fill up his or her bucket with confidence? Remember that writing is its own reward. The act of writing feeds and fills the soul. It is a form of self-expression that requires bravery, commitment and endurance. Notice that I did



not say talent! Although there are many talented writers in the world, many less-than-talented writers see their works in print due to sheer gutsy determination. In point of fact, that's where most of us start!

Connect with your inner muse by thinking about something that you would love to write about, and then erase everything else from your mind. Put your brain on idle. Lean back, close your eyes and let your fingers drop the pencil onto the notepad in your lap. As you do, a rush of events, ideas, dialogue and actions will stream into your consciousness. When this happens, it's easy to act as a creative scribe. Pretend you're at the movies, that you're watching images from a great film flicker across the screen. Write down everything. This is the best way, the easiest way, to write!

"All my life," Anne Lamott said, "I've felt that there was something magical about people who could get into other people's mind and skin, who could take us back to ourselves. And...I still do!"

Let yourself relax and nurture your inner mind. Honest feelings, crisp prose and simple yet telling plotlines will pour out of you. Then, even if your work is not brilliant, it will ring true. Dialogue, character, plotline and conclusions will taste of universal feeling, possessing a "rightness" that would be missing otherwise. Tasting that sweetness is something every writer should experience.

The plain truth is that "Once upon a time..." is very, very real. Our lives are filled with "Once upon a time..." beginnings, middles and ends. If you want proof, just look out your kitchen window. You will see people rushing by in their cars, children playing with pets, utility trucks pulling up to disgorge repairmen. The warp and woof of everyday events makes marvelous backgrounds for poignant storytelling.

One of my dearest friends auditioned with me years ago. We were both selected to perform in the same musical, but she received many more parts than I did. She had a nice voice, but so did I. One day, I asked how she achieved her success. "Oh, I don't wait for the director to assign my solos," she said. "I decide which ones I want and go ask him to let me sing them."

Sometimes the best thing we can do is ask the universe for what we want, then sit back and allow ourselves to receive!

Lynnette Baum
President
lynnette@the-right-writer.com



JEFF MICHAELS

Tapping into Your Creative Spirit

When Jeff Michaels once asked sci-fi writer Gene Wolfe where he got his crazy ideas, the answer was “the Crazy Idea Store down the block.” But experience and success as an author, motivational speaker, and screenwriter have convinced Michaels that creativity is an inherent energy that we can transform this way or that—unless we’ve allowed ourselves to be shut down by those who would limit us. Michaels’s topic was “Tapping into Your Creative Spirit.”

The creative play of children with imaginary friends and toys that talk to each other comes from the same creative source that the antics of puppies and kittens do. However, the children are experimenting with narratives and different inner “voices.” Discovery in high school of the mimeograph machine led to Michaels’s publishing up to 30 stories in different “voices” and even a 20-page TV script for *Mannix*. (He quips that schizophrenia is a necessity for any writer. “You have to hear other voices.”) But slowly his drive to create was curtailed by friends who said acting and writing weren’t good career goals. “Life is an escalating series of limiting things,” Michaels says.

By age 26, Michaels worked in construction but was envious of a friend (“a contrary guy”) who was making his own dream of being a missionary come true. When Michaels asked how he had been accepted, the friend said, “Everyday I asked for it. Everyday I said, ‘I am a missionary.’” Immediately, Michaels began asking the Universe for “a year off with pay” to figure out what he wanted to do for the rest of his life. Within a few hours and back on the job, Michaels learned the profound lesson of “Be careful what you ask for.” While he was on 40-foot-high scaffolding working on a corner beam, it collapsed under him. Michaels remembers thinking as he was falling, “Oh, crap, this stuff really works.”

The next year brought five surgeries, but Michaels pointedly used the time for contemplation and “wrote honestly in a journal.” “All those who wanted to limit me went away.” He says to “claim your muse with childlike wonder. Recall the feeling of possibility.” During that difficult convalescence, he took inspiration through the window of his room from “a green leaf on a dead February tree.” Michaels says the Body is “what we walk around in,” the Mind is “the heart and the brain acting together,” and the Spirit is “where we connect to creative energy.” “Your life is the story you get to create.” After he embraced his creative goals, he found he “had grown—and couldn’t go back to the small pot.” However, he warns that if you have given yourself a year off to figure out your goal but at the end of the year you still don’t know — “that’s depression.”

“Trust your heart to express itself.” He asks writers what images they allow into their hearts. “Write something better than fear-based stories.” Michaels starts his stories with characters he cares about and notes that character-driven stories are more successful than plot-driven ones. After creating his characters, he names them. The next step is to “conspire with these people.” He points out that a path has two rules: begin and continue. So too, the creative path.

Again he quoted Gene Wolfe: “To be a good writer, read good writing. Read someone who knows their craft.”

For inspiration Jeff Michaels recommends www.earthalbum.com. For more info on Michaels, see <http://voicesinthesky.web.officelive.com/default.aspx>.

Glenda Brown Rynn
Reporter
grynn@cox.net

SCWA News & Announcements

Major Movie Producer to Share with SCWA This Month

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entertainment, Devlin created the first movie marketing website in 1994 for the theatrical release of *Stargate*; commissioned the development of a multi-player *Independence Day* online game, which was packaged with the 1996 film on DVD; and developed the first webshow in 1997, in partnership with Intel, for the Fox television series *The Visitor*. In March 2005, Devlin, along with business partner Nicolas Chartier, founded Voltage Pictures, which is a sales and financing operation. More recently, Devlin launched Electric Post Production, which includes in-house digital effects and post production facilities.

So be sure and join us for one of the most creative and talented individuals in Hollywood on January 16.

Neil Young
VP, Programming
programmer@ocwriter.com

Dean Devlin and Timothy Hutton on the set of *Leverage* (photo courtesy of tnt.tv)



Contact Writers News Editor Mary Michel Green at (949) 361-6581 or green.mary@cox.net.

SCWA Critique Committee Open to Members of SCWA

Nonfiction & Fiction

This position is open.

Poetry

Dr. Joyce Wheeler

Joyce will critique up to five poems.
Please mail your work to Joyce at:

3801 Chestnut Avenue, Long Beach, CA 90807

Executive Committee

PresidentLynnette Baum
VP, ProgrammingNeil Young
VP, Membership
Secretary..... Charla Spence
TreasurerLarry Porricelli
Publicity DirectorLarry Porricelli
Webmaster Tony Stoklosa
Meeting Coordinator..... Sonia Marsh
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Tape Librarian.....Sharon Walters

Membership Information

membership@ocwriter.com

Meeting Reservations

Sonia Marsh, meeting@ocwriter.com
or message (949) 309-0030

**NEXT MONTH'S SPEAKER:
February 21, 2010**

Michael Cassutt

Why We Write? (Especially When We Won't Get Rich)

Please join us February 20 for "Why We Write? (Especially When We Won't Get Rich)" by Michael Cassutt. Cassutt is a writer of fiction and nonfiction for print and broadcast. He has been a story editor or producer on thirteen different primetime television series, from *The Twilight Zone* and *Max Headroom* to *Eerie, Indiana* and the Showtime revival of *The Outer Limits*. More recently he was executive consultant for USA Network's *The Dead Zone*. He has written freelance episodes of *Stargate SG-1* and *Farscape*, among many others.



Cassutt's fiction includes the novels *Tango Midnight* (2003), *Red Moon* (2001) and *Missing Man* (1998) as well as *The Star Country* (1986) and *Dragon Season* (1991). He is the author of thirty published short stories.

Cassutt's other works include *Deke! From Mercury to the Shuttle, the autobiography of astronaut Donald K. "Deke" Slayton* (1994), *WE HAVE CAPTURE: Tom Stafford and the Space Race* (2002) and the biographical encyclopedia *Who's Who in Space* (third edition 1999).

His monthly column about science fiction television, *The Cassutt Files*, appears on *SciFi.Com*.

Born in Minnesota and raised in Wisconsin, Cassutt received a B.A. in Radio-Television from the University of Arizona.

Neil Young
VP, Programming
programmer@ocwriter.com



New Mailing Address!

Please note:

The SCWA Post Office box has changed to:

SCWA
P.O. Box 861
Lake Forest, CA 92609

Member News

Darlene Quinn announced that SCWA members can get \$75.00 off the San Diego Writers' Conference to be held Feb 12th weekend. When registering use the code QUINN to get the discount.

Darlene Quinn also was a finalist at the '09 National Best Books Award for general fiction.

Sue Beem's poetry: *solitude* will be published in the Spring issue of *EKphrasis*; "Eleven A.M." published on *verdadmagazine.org* (LBCC); "Points North" published in the upcoming *Tanglehank Anthology* (Australian)

Victory Crayne & Brennan Harvey: In January 2010, a story in the round written by 14 science fiction authors including Victory & Brennan, will be published in the print magazine, *Golden Visions*.

Lynnette Baum was given the 2009 Award from the La Jolla Writers Conference Organizers for a non-professional writer who makes a difference in the writing field. Antoinette Kuritz specifically mentioned the effective SCWA organization itself in relation to the award given to Lynette for her many years of leadership.



Kathy Porter received a quote in writing from Ray Bradbury to be included in her book: *Earth Ultimate Conflict* (a Gray Guardian Series). Dean Koontz has agreed to read Kathy's book, and may also provide a quote.

Janet de Marco
Reporter
goodnews@ocwriter.com



Writer's Corner

The Role of Critiques

By Kirt Hickman

My first point about critiques is: You need one. Something you think is interesting, exciting, and clear might not be. You've worked on your story for too long, and invested too much of yourself into it, to judge it objectively. You need someone to save you from yourself. Furthermore, even the best writing leaves opportunities for improvement that the author can't or won't catch. You owe it to your readers, and to yourself, to take advantage of those opportunities.

Methods for acquiring critiques vary widely in terms of cost, speed, and required effort. In general terms, you have two choices: critique groups and critique services. Whichever you choose, don't give work that you haven't revised and proofed to a critiquer. If you do, the critiquer will spend her time commenting on problems you're already aware of and should have already corrected. Don't let this happen. The value of a critique lies in its ability to reveal the things you can't catch for yourself.

Critique Groups

Critiques groups are generally the cheapest way to get your writing critiqued. They require a significant time investment, however, because you'll be expected to critique other writers' work in exchange of their critique of yours. Yet this has its own benefits. It's easier to identify weaknesses in other people's writing than it is to find them in your own. Critiquing others' work will give you practice.

Critique Services

Critique services are usually the fastest way to get a critique. If you want professional feedback quickly, this may be the option for you. Prices vary, however, so shop around. If you can't afford to submit your entire manuscript, send an excerpt. You can learn a lot about your writing from the critique of twenty pages.

Accepting Criticism

Accepting feedback, especially critical feedback (the kind your critiquer is supposed to give you) can be difficult. You worked hard on your story. You poured your heart and soul, not to mention many hours of your life, into it. Having someone criticize it can be devastating.

Keep these important things in mind as you listen to, or read, your critiquer's comments. First, they're not personal. They're intended to make your writing better. Your critiquer is genuinely trying to help you. Second, you asked for, and possibly paid for, her *honest* opinion. Don't get upset when she gives it to you. Third, no matter what problems she finds, you can correct them, and the result will be well worth the effort.

If you receive spoken, rather than written feedback, don't defend your work. If you justify your writing with statements like, "The reason I did that was..." or "I disagree because..." you'll shut down your critiquer. She doesn't care why you wrote your story the way you did, she's just stating her observations. Whether you agree with her comments or not, just say, "Thank you." Doing so will keep the feedback coming. After all, that's what

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Improving Your Work with Critiques

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you're there for. In the end, if you disagree with a particular comment, don't make changes based on it.

If you have the opportunity, ask questions to clarify your critiquer's comments: "Can you give me an example?" or "Do you think it would help if I made this change?" These kinds of questions are productive. They show the critiquer that you're listening and that you welcome her feedback. And her answers will help you make the appropriate revisions.

Revise

If you receive more than one critique of the same piece of writing, you're likely to get contradictory feedback on many specific points. Different people have different tastes and expectations. You can't please them all.

So what do you do with contradictory feedback? First, recognize that whatever other people think, *you* are the author. Only you can decide what works for you and for your story. Having said that, consider each comment carefully before you decide whether to accept or discard it. Recognize that you do *not* have an objective viewpoint.

Here's my rule of thumb: Get feedback from as many sources as possible. If two critiquers mark something as a problem, it warrants some change. I also consider comments that come from only one source. If I agree with these comments, mine becomes the second condemning opinion and I change the passage.

Kirt Hickman received a masters degree in electrical engineering from the University of New Mexico. He has worked with high-energy laser optics, microelectronics, and other technologies relevant to science fiction, and leverages his knowledge and experience to enrich his stories. *Worlds Asunder* is his first novel. His first nonfiction book, *Revising Fiction: Making Sense of the Madness*, was released in June, 2009.



**January Meeting:
Saturday
January 16**

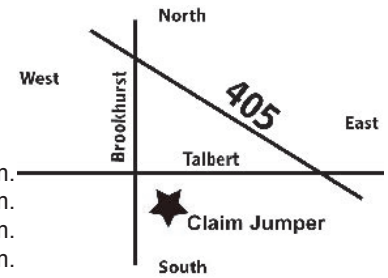
DEAN DEVLIN EXECUTIVE PRODUCER



LOCATION: Claim Jumper Restaurant

Banquet Room entrance, rear of building
18050 Brookhurst St., Fountain Valley, CA
Restaurant telephone: (714) 963-6711

Registration & Networking:	9:30 a.m.
Meeting:	10:00 a.m.
Lunch:	11:30 a.m.
Afternoon Program:	12:30 p.m.



GUESTS ALWAYS WELCOME--\$34.95 AT DOOR; \$29.95 WITH RSVP
MEMBERS WHO DO NOT RSVP PAY \$29.95 AT DOOR
MEMBERS WHO DO RSVP PAY \$24.95



BE SURE TO RSVP WHENEVER POSSIBLE!

RSVP before January 12:

Sonia Marsh, Meeting Coordinator, P.O. Box 861, Lake Forest, CA 92609 Check payable to SCWA must accompany reservation. Our PayPal online account is temporarily out of commission.

After January 12: E-mail Sonia at meeting@ocwriter.com or message (949) 309-0030

