

ON WRITING

By Timothy Freriks

“Writing is a solitary sport”, somebody said. (I like writing better, though: I don’t usually sweat when I write). However, to me, writing is anything but solitary. I have so many characters visiting me in my house-brain that I never seem alone. Sometimes characters are good friends, and sometimes I just wish they’d go away. It’s true: some characters I just don’t like. Some, I love. Some are just there to move the plot along or give the reader insight into a real character. Some come and go and some stick around, continually surprising me.

“Surprising you?” you might ask. “Yes,” I would reply. If your characters don’t surprise you, they don’t grow. If the characters don’t grow, the story doesn’t grow. If your characters don’t twist you and tempt you and keep you guessing and wondering, they won’t intrigue the reader. “But don’t you direct them? Aren’t they *your* characters?” you ask again. Actually, I think that if you consider them to be just *your* characters, it will show and the reader won’t take ownership—and isn’t that the ultimate goal of writing? You have to share; you have to bring your readers into your head by getting your characters into theirs.

I am continually amazed how much of a third-party I feel when I’m writing. More often than not, my fingers cannot keep up with my characters and their antics. I feel like I’m reading a great book which just happens to be unfolding before my eyes. That’s the beloved “zone”, where I have no idea what’s going to happen next and typing is the only way to find out.

Outlining vs streaming. I’m a streamer. People ask how I start a book. Actually, a single sentence will involuntarily pop into my head. “*The bent old man stood at the end of the runway in the dead of night, the pins of the chilly wind pricking him through his threaded coat.*” No human can resist the question: what the hell is a bent old man doing at the end of a runway in the middle of the night? When that happens, I just keep writing. Frankly, I want to know the answer, too! Every story or novel I’ve ever written started with a surprise sentence. Where it goes, I generally have no freaking idea until I have a few chapters under my belt, but then it’s way subject to change. I never outline a book until I start to get confused with all the twists and turns. Frankly, I did start with a

hard outline once, and the result was dull and predictable; I felt like I needed to follow the outline more than create energy and an engaging story.

In the dark and strange recesses of my mind, however, there *must* be an outline of some sort; I'm certain there is. Something drives me forward. Some Tim/Gremlin is in there feeding me ideas and helping me keep it all straight. I know he's there. I feel him. We have an agreement: I won't bother him and he'll keep to the shadows, spurting out ideas when I need them. I love that... whatever it is.

Anyway, my characters—my reader's characters—are with me all the time. They create themselves; they are created by other characters; occasionally I create them. But I'm never alone. Which is good: If I ever do get bored, I can just sit down and talk amongst myself.