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Book Review: HOW to Write Fiction Like a Pro; a Simple-to-Savvy Toolkit for Aspiring Authors

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Book Review

HOW to Write Fiction Like a Pro; a Simple-to-Savvy Toolkit for Aspiring Authors.

By Robert Newton Peck.

Maupin House Publishing, Inc. 2006. 136 pages. \$15.95

Have you ever wondered HOW writers actually create and publish so successfully? What techniques do they use to develop enthralling plots and scenes that keep a reader eagerly turning the pages? After reading this witty, unique, simple but savvy toolkit, you may be inspired to create something of your own.

A prolific author with over 60 books published in poetry, fiction, and nonfiction, Robert Newton Peck has followed his own advice in this small practical guide. With analogies and examples from his books, he clearly demonstrates HOW he selects names, builds characters, and develops believable dialogue and action. Peck points out HOW a comic or dramatic character's name describes personality and predicts action in the plot. HOW about a football coach named Bulkhead Beefjerky or a fullback named Tank Tarzanski?

Action is a simple law of physics and HOW "stuff behaves." A character can display her personality and love forged over a lifetime through dialog and HOW she manipulates a needle. Action verbs deliver the punch in a fast moving plot. Peck says, "If you are an upstart writer with a desire to be published some day, please allow my warning you to STOP before you plunge pell-mell into a puny and pathetic pit by using the verb to be." It carries no punch and leads to a boring description of the character and dull scenes. Excitement is not what our hero is but what he does.

HOW offers solid advice such as being a "spot remover" and eliminating clichés. A writer must originate something new and fresh from the beginning to end. Clichés may be useful in everyday conversation, but they are a tiresome yawn in a novel. HOW advises not to strain for fancy words when simple but powerful ones will convey a more expressive thought or message.

An effective writer engages the reader's imagination through the characters and how they interact. Anchoring a viewpoint and envisioning actions through one or more characters' eyes determines how the story unfolds. If the reader sees, feels and smells through a character's vantage point the entire scene springs to life. A character's description will be imagined through interaction with others in a scene.

And don't forget the title! Inspiration may come by accident (stepping on a tack in the dark), or by the drop of a phrase, or through a shared conversation. Peck advises to buy a golf pencil and little notebook to keep track of ideas and thoughts. Choosing ideas for memorable book titles should inspire readers to be "title droppers". Although you may never have read the book, you will remember a catchy title. Wouldn't you want to know what happened in a book titled Horse Thief or A Day No Pigs Would Die?

This brief, but highly effective guide shows you HOW to build a better story by focusing on bold and basic techniques that strengthen your writing. This is a companion to Fiction is Folks; How to Create Unforgettable Characters which Mr. Peck published in 1983. That book, of course, elaborates on crafting memorable characters, while this latest volume provides the basics on the foundations of creative writing.

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