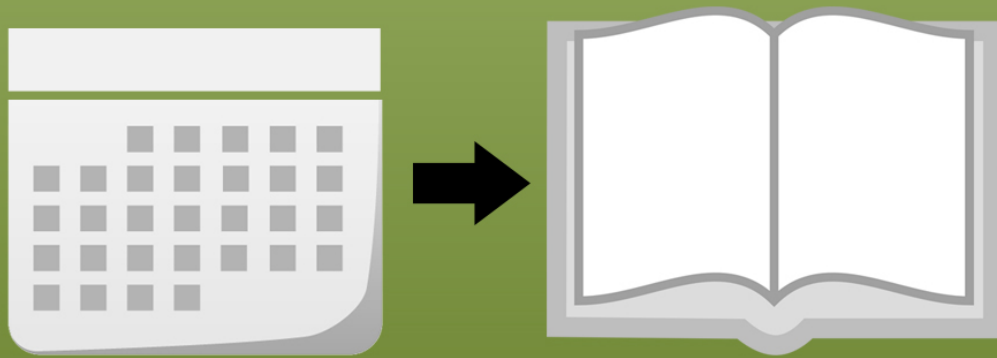


**JEFF GERKE
THOMAS UMSTATTD JR**



**HOW TO
WRITE A NOVEL
IN A MONTH**

Speakers: Thomas Umstatttd and Jeff Gerke

HOW TO WRITE A NOVEL IN A MONTH

Part 1: Where to Start

Part 2: Tools & Tips

Part 3: Q&A

Speakers: Thomas Umstattd and Jeff Gerke

Welcome. My name is Thomas Umstattd, CEO of Author Media. Today I'm joined by Jeff Gerke who is the editor at Marcher Lord Press and the author of over four books for writers. You could say that he wrote the book on writing and that he did it again three times. One of those, his most recent one, is entitled *Write Your Novel in a Month: How to Complete a First Draft in 30 Days and What to Do Next*. In this webinar we are going to be picking Jeff's brain and squeezing it like a sponge into this audio recording.

Thank you, Jeff, so much for joining us today.

[Jeff] Thank you for having me on, Thomas.

PART 1: WHERE TO START

[Thomas] NaNoWriMo is coming up and a lot of authors are looking at NaNoWriMo with a mix of fear and excitement. Dread maybe is a good word.

For those of you who don't know, NaNoWriMo is National Novel Writing Month where authors all over the country and in other countries too (we have multiple countries on this call) will write a novel in one month, specifically 50,000 words or 1,677 words per day to add up to 50,000 words in a month. That's what NaNoWriMo is. That's the easy part, knowing what it is.

How do we do it? How do we write a novel in a month? Specifically what can we do between now and November 1st to get started?

Before NaNoWriMo

[Jeff] Let me just take a minute to talk about NaNoWriMo. It's a terrific kind of country-wide and almost global effort to finally sit down and belt out a bunch of the words of your novel. Because there are a few things more intimidating than a blank screen and a little flashing cursor kind of taunting you. If you can get whatever help you need to get 50,000 words out, to get over that bump and get you started. That may not your complete novel. Some novels are that length; most are 70-100 thousand words or more. So once you get 50,000 under your belt you seriously have momentum going.

It's great to be able to be doing it with other people who are doing it at the same time and you can compare your word count lists and totals and encourage each other and receive encouragement. Even if you don't end up finishing it at that time or completing all your goals, it's still going to get you closer than you might have been if you had just been sitting on your own.

Not everyone has the ability to completely clear their schedule and do nothing but write a novel for a month. It's the rare person who can do that, so a lot of people are going to be writing at night and getting up at three in the morning to get a couple hours in. Some days you won't be able to do it at all. But again, it's a terrific emphasis to do this all together.

But if you're hoping to do this then you want to hit the ground running on November 1st. The book I wrote, *Write Your Novel in a Month*, you can't buy it on November 1st and start writing on November 1st having gathered enough from the book. Part 1 of this book is what to do before November 1st and it involves, well, I'm going to talk about that here for a few minutes. It involves getting your characters set, figuring out your genre, figuring out your main story, emphasis, figuring out your three-act structure so that when you hit November 1st you already know a lot. It's not cheating to do preparatory work before November 1st.

Anyway, who cares. There's no NaNoWriMo police out there. Whatever you can get done, do it! And however you need to do it, do it.

There are quite a few things to do before and I've picked a few things from the Table of Contents to talk about.

[Thomas] I just want to jump in real quick with a question.

This will be my first time to do NaNo. What is *the most* important thing to do before November 1st? Plotting or outlining or do as much as possible?

[Jeff] Good question. Part of it involves what kind of writer you are. I was just about to say that not everyone likes to have any kind of plot or any kind of work done before he or she sits down. We call that that seat-of-the-pants writer. If that's you then maybe you don't do anything before November 1st and maybe you just sit down with a bunch of ideas bubbling around, start writing, see what comes out, and come up for air a month later and see what has happened. If that's the kind of writer you are, that's fine. Don't let me try to tell you that there's only one way to be a novelist. That's not true.

Character-First Novelist vs. Plot-First Novelist

However, if you do like some kind of idea of where you're going then, again, it depends on what kind of writer you are. I believe that every writer, every novelist is one of two kinds. She's either what I call a character-first novelist or plot-first novelist. That means that the ideas that come to you first in your mind as you think about some new book you might write are either character ideas or plot ideas.

I'm a plot-first novelist. All day long I'm getting story ideas. "Ooh, we could have aliens invade just as the birth of a new artificial intelligence that gain sentence..." and I have all these story ideas.

But character-first novelists have character ideas. They're like, "Wow, I have this idea for this woman. I keep seeing her and she's looking for something and I don't know what it is and I'm really curious to find out what she's looking for and I really want to get to know that person." That's the kind of ideas that come to the character-first novelist.

My finding is that whatever kind of novelist you are, you're usually really terrible at the other kind. So if you come up with a great character idea, your plots probably are not very good or they're meandering. And if you're a plot-first novelist like me, your characters tend to be shallow and undifferentiated and it's just the girl or the Mexican. Not necessarily well drawn characters. The idea is to be as good as you can be at not only what comes naturally to you but what doesn't come naturally to you.

In prep work before November 1 if you're going to do any work at all, then spend some time writing down what you want to do. Your strengths. Write down the three characters that won't leave you alone and write down a couple pages in your journal about who this person is and try to get those voices going in your head. If you're a plot-firster then write down all the great ideas that you're thinking of and then you need to spend extra time on the thing that doesn't come naturally to you.

Both in this book and another book I've written for *Writer's Digest* called *Plot Versus Character* I give you a full system for how to create your main character, what the layers of that person are going to be, what the temperament is, what the history is, and then what the inner journey is going to be for the duration of this novel.

[Thomas] So just to clarify – if someone's doing it for the first time, has never written a book, your recommendation is to focus more on their strengths for getting that very first draft written and then kind of know what your weaknesses are in editing? Or are you saying to kind of work on your weaknesses ahead of time so you can be a more balanced going into the very first draft.

[Jeff] Well, it wasn't that the question was "I've never written a novel before," but the question was "I've never done NaNo before." If the person has never written a novel before then it almost doesn't matter. The act of sitting down and just going and seeing how many words you can crank out is very important. Every novelist has to have a first novel and mine was terrible, awful. But I figured some things along the way and I figured out that I like doing it. I found some tricks that I could do and the mechanics of dialogue and what a scene should feel like and so forth. So it was important that I wrote it even though it wasn't fun to read for anybody.

If you haven't written a novel before then just sit down and write. If you want to spend some time before November 1st thinking, then just start writing down and outlining if that feels right for you. Write down some notes about characters. Just whatever is going to make you feel like when November 1st comes you're ready to just go out of the gate.

If you've written novels before but you've just never done NaNo before then that's when I'm saying take some time to write down what comes naturally to you. But before you write I would recommend writing down some of the things, spending some time thinking about the things that don't come naturally to you so that you've at least forced your mind to think on those things and you don't hit November 1 and go, "Okay. I have this great idea for a character, but I have no idea what she's going to do first or what she's trying to do or what the villain is or what her challenge is in this story." You want to get as much of that figured out as you can before November 1st.

Thomas, does it sound alright for me just to go down our outline here?

[Thomas] Go for it.

Find Your Core Idea

[Jeff] Okay. The first thing that I'm recommending is for you to spend a minute to just write down, write as long as you have to in your notes until you have arrived at kind of the kernel of the idea of the thing that sounds coolest to you. You might have a novel idea in your mind and you feel like you're on assignment and "I have to write this one for NaNo." Okay, that's fine. But if you don't and you're kind of going, "I don't know what I'm going to write," then spend some time now to go, "If I could write the ultimate novel, the novel that for me would be the coolest thing ever written, what would that be?" Just keep writing until you get about a paragraph worth of a kernel, a core idea.

Keep playing with it until you have five or six kernels in it that really fire your creativity, either from the character point of view or the plot point of view or hopefully both.

I actually recommend that you write that out or print that out and tape it up on your monitor for November 1st-30th. Because every time you kind of lose steam and go, "What was I doing and why did I think this was a fun idea," you could look back and read that paragraph and go, "Okay. That's right." I guarantee that when you get in the midst of writing a novel it will begin to appear to you to be the worst thing ever written by a human. It will just seem terrible and you'll think, "What a stupid idea," and "Why did I think this was good?" and you lose objectivity and you lose the ability to go, "Yeah this is a great idea."

When you have that paragraph up there you can just trust yourself and say to your "now" self something from your "before November 1st self" who said, "This is a cool idea." And you just keep telling your "now" self that your earlier self was right and you trust in your instincts and you trust that if you write that book and come to the end of November or the end of your process and have written that book, it will still be cool. It will be cool to you again.

"Is that a premise?" It could be a premise. It doesn't matter what you call it. As long as you've got at least a paragraph. I don't like it to be three pages long because then it's hard for you just to get it at a glance. But also if it's just a sentence or a phrase like "man versus man" or something or "boy gets girl" or something, I don't think it's enough to fire your creativity. So a paragraph is what I recommend. When you get down your ultimate story mind, that's going to power everything else.

Decide on a Genre

Not necessarily the next thing, but the next thing I'm going to talk about (because I've got a bunch more in the book I'm not going to cover) is what genre are you going to write? Is this going to be a western? A science fiction? A romance? Some kind of a historical?

What I'd recommend is go ahead and write down the idea you had. Let's say it's going to be a contemporary military thriller. Okay great. Just write that down.

But I challenge you to take ten minutes and write down four or five alternate genres that you could do this book as. So you think it's going to be a contemporary military thriller. Great, but look again at that core idea, that premise, or that kernel of the idea and go, "What if it were a pirate buccaneer story? Huh. Would that work?" What if it were a far-future science fiction with alien creatures? What if it was a regency romance? A lot of times playing around with the idea in ways that you hadn't been anticipating will give you new ideas that will kind of give you the handle that maybe you were looking for because you want to get as many of these handles and these exciting things as you can.

Go ahead, Thomas.

[Thomas] We have a question. For those who've never written an entire novel, which genre, if any, would be the easiest or the simplest to start with?

[Jeff] I think the easiest genre is contemporary because you pretty much know your world and you know what vehicles there are, you know what government is like, you know what the society is like, what the level of technology is. You're not inventing a bunch of stuff.

The harder ones would be either ones that you know nothing about. Like if you want to set it in thirteenth century North Korea and you haven't done any research on it, then that's going to not be easy because you've got to go figure out that whole historical time before you even write. It might be awesome, but if you're trying to do it between now and November 1st, it might not work for you.

The other one that might be hard is a fantasy or science fiction where you are creating everything, where you have to invent an entire world. Again, you're going to have to figure out what the government is and what the economy is and what the languages are and what the species are and what the history is and what the weather is like, all the different things. Whereas with contemporary you know those things right away.

[Thomas] So you don't want to do a lot of research basically.

[Jeff] Well, I mean, I'm not saying if you're going to write a novel that you shouldn't write something that needs a lot of research. I'm saying if you're going to write a novel in three days or whenever you're hearing this and you don't already know about this period of history or whatever then I would say that's not the place for NaNoWriMo if you want to try to do it in

November. There's nothing that says that you can't do it in January by yourself or whatever. But if you're trying to do it with everybody and you only have a few days to figure it out then you might stick with something you already know.

Know Your Hero

Alright. So I will go on to your hero. You really really really need to know who this person is. That's coming from somebody who's a plot-first novelist. My very first heroes were all basically me. In fact, the villain was me and the female character was the female version of me and then there was a young me and an old me, the me-pirate, and the me with an accent. They were all pretty much me and it read like that. So the plot-first novelist has to sometimes be convinced that it's important to do this character homework. But it is.

You definitely need to know your hero because that's the person whose mind we're going to be spending the most time in. That's the voice we're going to hear the most, that's the person you hope that we begin to care about, and that's the person who's going to be driving the story.

I have a whole system that is in the book books, *Write Your Novel in a Month* and really all my writing books. But it begins with the Myers-Briggs temperaments. That's a system for dividing all of human personality into four main groupings and then four minor groupings within each of the four. So it works out to sixteen temperaments. Those are core character bases.

Because I'm a plot-first novelist I don't come up with characters very well. So we use Myers-Briggs to give us the core so they don't all sound like me. Now they're going to sound like sixteen other character types.

Then you layer things around the core. So you've got a person who grew up, who's got this temperament, but he grew up out West or he grew up on an outer planetary outpost or he grew up in a hillbilly family or very rich family or whatever. It starts affecting how that temperament would come out given these other things – level of intelligence, level of attractiveness, level of education, and so forth. So you start creating a character that is the temperament plus all these layers. You'll do that for your hero... Go ahead.

[Thomas] Should people feel friends and family and kind of characters in their life and put them in their novel? Is that a good idea or a bad idea?

[Jeff] Well, it depends on how affectionate you are towards those people. If you don't like them and you make that person your villain and it's very easy for the person to recognize himself and it's not a friendly thing, then you can actually be sued for liable. We all role people that we know into our characters, but just be cautious and make sure it's a positive thing.

If you are a plot-first novelist then I really wouldn't recommend abandoning the Myers-Briggs or some sort of other personality system and just going with what you think you know about somebody else. Because if you're a plot-first novelist you probably don't know about what makes people tick as much as you think you do (because I know I don't) and you'll just end up

with characters who all sound the same or they're all stereotypes. The Myers Briggs thing or some other personality system will help prevent that.

[Thomas] We've got another question. How important do you think character names are?

I'll try to submit that for NaNoWriMo I wouldn't worry too much. I'll keep it to Jeff to talk about character names in terms of writing. But my recommendation is don't worry about it and you'd find the place to change the character names into something. Just get the book out and don't be like, "Oh, I want to change a person's name," halfway through the story. You can easily use technology to fix that.

[Jeff] Yeah. I wouldn't worry too much in a draft phase on what names they are. One thing to keep in mind about names is to try to not make them seem too similar, especially if you have a couple of characters who are basically the same type – like two young women and you call one Laura and one Laureen or Lauren or something. It's going to be too problematic for the reader. If you have to, just go down your baby name book. When you come up with a new character then go to a new letter in the alphabet and pick a name from that one and try to vary the number of syllables, starting with a vowel or not, and that sort of thing.

We'll go on past that. You've got to figure out your hero and all the layers of that and what this person's voice is.

The Hero's Inner Journey

Then you need to figure out what I call the hero's inner journey. I think that the best kind of fiction is fiction about someone who's changed, someone's who's transformed during the course of the book.

One of the greatest examples of this in our literature is *A Christmas Carol* which is a beautiful story. Boy, there's a person who starts really low and despicable and is transformed during the course of the book and by the end he's become something else.

That is fascinating to watch as a reader because we're all going through changes and we like to find out about other people going through changes. That's one of the reasons that daytime talk shows are attractive because there are people in various weird situations. That's kind of interesting to us because they're different and they're changing and we like to watch people transform.

I suggest to you and I urge you for your NaNoWriMo novel to write a novel about someone who is going to be changed. In fact, I submit to you that at least 75% of your plot, 75% of your book is the character's transformation. I really believe that is what your book is about. And this is coming from a plot-first novelist guy who really likes the plot and I'm sitting here saying that a character and the change of a character is what is really best about fiction. I really believe that. The inner journey is what's really going on. That's the engine that's powering this story. The plot's purpose and the purpose of the genre and the purpose of the setting and the purpose of the

villain and the purpose of the conflict and the stakes and everything else is simply to force the character to go through this transformation.

So yes, about the awesome alien invasion we're going to have, but really it's about this guy letting go of his bitterness or whatever. It's about a person changing and everything else is to be in service of that transformation because that's what we really want to watch.

It would really be great for you if you could figure out what the hero's inner journey is going to be before November 1st. If you do nothing else in terms of outlining then figuring out the phases of the inner journey is going to be probably the most interesting thing.

I see a question coming in.

[Thomas] So we talked about the hero. What about the antagonist? What about the villain of the story? Do we need to have that before November as well?

[Jeff] This is definitely something I have in my Part 1 of the book, figuring out who the villain is. Because what is the hero going to be going up against? What is going to be the challenge? Why can't he just immediately get the thing that he wants? What's standing in his way, what are the obstacles? These are the things that bring about the pressure that cause the inner journey to happen.

I think you need to create, if you can, create before November 1st your hero, your villain, and then if you know you're going to have a couple other major characters, like a love interest or a co-protagonist or a best friend. Probably not more than seven or eight characters.

You can create others as you go, but it would really be good for you to have done that character homework before you start, especially if you're a plot-first novelist because if you are feeling in a hurry and you haven't done your character homework and you need a new character to walk on stage, you're just going to default to a you type and it's just going to sound like you all over again. That's going to cause you to have to do a bunch of rewriting later as you get to the end and you go, "Oh my goodness. This person wouldn't do that now that I know his personality more. I'm going to have to rewrite." So the more you can find out about these characters before, the better.

Let me go back to the phases of the inner journey. If I'm saying that's the main thing I want you to do before November 1st then I should talk about that for a little bit.

Hero's Inner Journey: Initial State

I talk about inner journey in term of a problem that the hero has. Internal problem. I call it a knot. Something that is tied up inside him. You can think of it as a tumor or a poison or a sin, if you will, that is inside the person and even though he or she may or may not know about it, it's something that is poisoning his life.

For instance, if a person is just consumed with bitterness over this thing that happened years ago, that's going to be affecting his life in certain negative ways. If nothing changes then in a few years this person is going to be truly consumed with bitterness. No one is going to want to be around him. He's going to be alone, he's going to cut off every tie that he has, and it's going to start affecting him in his health and in his finances and in his happiness for sure, until in the end he's this dried up bitter old man who has nobody to even know that he died for three months.

Even if you're going to write a romantic comedy or something you can still come up with a knot or a problem for your main character that, if left unchecked, would resolve in a negative outcome. Then the purpose of the inner journey is this isn't your only alternative. I can show you a happy door number two that your life could become. If you're consumed with bitterness, I could show you how to be forgiving and enjoy your life and forgive yourself or forgive the other person and begin to open up and create new relationships again and have friendships and care for them and let other people close and all those things. So the core of the inner journey is this middle phase. I call it the escalation between these two alternatives.

The old way, Scrooge's old miserliness and bitterness and selfishness, and this new way that would show him interacting with people and caring for other people and giving some of his wealth and being kind – these two ways are battling with one another and that becomes really the heart of your story in the middle section of your book. It coincides with Act 2 in a three-act structure.

[Thomas] Before we go onto the three-act structure though, we have a bunch of questions about the inner journey.

[Jeff] I'm not done with all the phases yet.

[Thomas] Okay. We have a couple folks asking about secondary characters or does every character have to have an inner journey or just the main players?

[Jeff] Well let me just finish the last couple of points on the inner journey and then I'll come back to that.

So the first point is what I call the initial state. That's just how is the person's knot or problem affecting him, how is it poisoning him as the curtain opens.

Hero's Inner Journey: Inciting Incident

Then the next step is what I call the inciting incident and that's the thing that comes into life that sends him on this journey.

For Scrooge it would be the visit of the ghost of Jacob Marley. It's going to be a night of supernatural things and this is the inciting event that sends him out on his journey.

In the movie *Cars* (it's an animated film), our hero is the stuck up racecar driver who's stuck on himself and doesn't think he needs anybody else. That's kind of how he's going and he doesn't

have any friends, nobody will work with him. But he's winning and so he's kind of stuck in this dysfunction. Then he's riding along from one race to another and he gets kicked out the back of his transport truck and disoriented and stuck in this Podunk little town away from the paparazzi. That becomes the inciting event, the thing that begins him on his inner journey.

For your story you're going to need an inciting event too, something strong that comes along and knocks the hero into a direction and into a detour that he didn't expect to go to. That's when it's going to start introducing that plan B, that happy alternative.

Hero's Inner Journey: Escalation

The middle phase is what I call the escalation and that's the big fight, the big tug of war, the big fifteen round boxing match between the old way and the new way. The hero keeps wanting to go back to the old way.

Scrooge wants to get away from these ghosts and get back to just counting his money and firing everybody he can.

Lightning McQueen, our *Cars* hero, wants to go back to the racetrack and start winning races and get away from all these hicks. But in the escalation he can't get back to what he wants. The thing is strong enough that it forces him to begin dealing with it and the more it goes the more he begins to realize that his old way is poisoning him. There is a different way of living that is open to him.

Scrooge begins to be scared by what he sees and seeing what they think about him and alarmed that no one cares for him if he dies. Lightning McQueen begins to see the advantages of living in a community and having friends and not being so focused on winning all the time at the expense of somebody else.

So in this escalation, that's the most important phase, the character begins to see that there is another alternative.

Hero's Inner Journey: Moment of Truth

It all drives up to the big crucial point that I call the moment of truth. That's when the character understands what the alternatives are. I could go back to my way of being miserly or selfish or I could change and be involved with others and be generous, be not so selfish. They have to choose.

It's a picture of the character's on the fence, straddling the fence. The purpose of the story and the purpose of the moment of truth is to make him choose, to make him jump off that fence one way or another. In the story he's either going to jump back toward his old way and become much more selfish or whatever negative thing he was at the beginning, or he's going to jump off the fence towards the positive way and find a new way of living. But either way, he can be off the fence and that's what happens at the moment of truth. So you bring him to that moment of truth.

We'll talk about three-act structure here in a minute. But right after the moment of truth where he says, "Okay. I'm going to decide to be not so selfish. I'm going to decide to help others," the plot comes along and what I call the climactic moment in the plot line (which is parallel to the inner journey line) that forces him to test it. It's like, "Okay, you said you chose this; now prove it. Now's your chance to live it." Because the crisis is upon us and how the person behaves in the crisis in the external plot depends on what he chose in the moment of truth in the inner journey.

Hero's Inner Journey: Final State

The final wave point in the inner journey is what I call the final state. That's just what does he look like at the end of this journey? He's off the fence now one way or another. What does that look like? You need to give us a scene where we see him in his new more relaxed or even more vicious state based on whatever he chose in his moment of truth.

Now back to the question, do all the minor characters need inner journeys? No. Primarily it's going to be your main character's inner journey. That's what the story is going to be about.

It is often done to have more than one going on. For instance, the villain might be on his or her own inner journey and in some cases you might have a kind of shadow character for the hero, whether it's the villain or just a third character, who is on the similar journey of the hero's but he makes the other choice.

As we look at *Lord of the Rings* we have the great journey that Frodo is on about whether or not he's going to embrace the power of this evil ring and become evil himself or if he's going to do the right things and dispose of the ring so no one can use that evil power. So he's on that journey, but meanwhile there's another character named Gollum who's also on that same journey. Both of them flirt with the idea of being good and doing the right thing and going with the good part of that person; and both of them flirt with the idea of going with the negative, evil part of their personality and the wrong choice, if you will. One of the characters makes the right choice and one of them makes the wrong...actually both of them end up making the wrong choice, but anyway that's a different setup.

[Thomas] Spoiler! No spoilers!

[Jeff] Yeah, right. Typically if you've got ten major/minor characters in a novel, they don't all need to be on their own inner journeys. Especially if you're going to be writing a trilogy, for instance, you might want to do one character has an inner journey in book one and then that causes another character to go on another inner journey in book two. Or you might want to spread one inner journey out over three novels and so forth. There's a variety of ways to do it, but your focus is going to be on one journey, on one person, and all the different aspects of that journey.

That journey becomes your theme. If you've got a person dealing with unforgiveness and the alternative is forgiveness, then all through your novel you're going to be finding the ways to kind of talk about that theme. That is your theme now. Forgiveness and unforgiveness. Whether you meant to do that or not, that becomes your theme. So you can create characters and situations and

events and minor characters and spin off themes and all these other things that speak to some aspect of forgiveness and unforgiveness. All of those serve to amplify the inner journey going on in the main character.

[Thomas] So we have the question what about a romance? Do both characters need an inner journey?

[Jeff] I've never written a romance. I've written novels with romantic elements and all the women who read it say, "You totally write this like a guy."

What I did is I do have both characters having inner journeys. I think a straight romance would do that because you're typically trying to give both characters equal kind of treatment and equal ways to balance in the story. So then you have all kinds of fun with they're at different places in their inner journeys and maybe their inner journeys are complimentary but maybe they're not. Maybe they're going in different directions on their inner journeys. So I don't know if there's a rule about it, but I think it would be fun to play with that both of those characters would have an inner journey.

[Thomas] Alright. So we have some questions about the timing of the different phases inside the inner journey. Should they be spaced out evenly or how does that work?

[Jeff] Well, there's a lot of flexibility. Some of them are going to be obvious. Your initial condition, that's going to be at the beginning. But how long do you go before you do the inciting event? I don't know. I tend to be somebody who likes to do what I call establishing normal before I violate normal. There's some teachers out there saying you better start the main story on page one or you'll never get published or whatever. I think that's not true. If that's the way you want to do it, that's fine. But if you'd rather wait a while and kind of establish what the person is like before the journey begins, like they do with Scrooge and almost every other well known movie or bit of literature. They give us what the person before was, what the context was before the change comes or else we won't understand the context of the change.

I would wait a while, just enough, whether it's twenty pages or sixty pages to get us in the feel for who this person is before bringing on the inciting event. But again, it's up to you. Whatever works for you. And then the biggest phase would be the escalation, but I'm not going to give you a percentage or anything. That would definitely be – well I guess I will give a percentage. More than 50% of the inner journey will be that escalation phase because that's really what the story is about.

Scrooge's story really is about those three ghosts and what he's going through as he sees what the ghosts show him. That's the core and the heart of the story. The moment of truth just comes at a moment and the final state comes just after that resolves. So really the biggest part is that escalation.

We've got a bunch more to talk about, but we're still stuck on this. I don't want to skip questions. Maybe we should hold off on questions until the second hour, if we go to a second hour? Or what do you want to do?

[Thomas] You tell us. Vote with the meeting temperature slider. We can keep talking really craft type things (you can also vote in the chat) or we can go on to really practical tools like tricks on how to find the time to do the writing. You tell us. This is the benefit of being live on the webinar.

The slider is the meeting temperature slider. It slowly slides to the center, but if you pull it to one side or another you can tell us.

We have a lot of folks saying tricks and tips; we have a lot of folks saying questions later; there are some people saying questions now. You are all voting against each other on the slider.

[Jeff] Here's what we'll do. Let's do this then. Let me just go on with my outline, but everybody write down their questions. We'll just keep going until every question is answered or my voice runs out, one or the other. But we can go into a second hour. We can do a whole second hour if we need to. Does that sound okay?

[Thomas] Sounds good.

[Jeff] Okay. Let me just briefly touch on three-act structure, then we'll go into actually writing the novel. I'll skip one over one of my points there and then we'll move on from there.

Three-Act Structure

Three-act structure. Some of you may start breaking out in hives if you hear somebody say three-act structure because you're like, "I don't want to be bound by this. It's just a formula. I want to be spontaneous and discover as I go." That's fine. If you don't want to use the three-act structure intentionally then that's great. I will say that if your novel does end up having a good shape and movement to it, it will be because you have discovered three act structure without trying to.

Three-act structure is not a method of restricting your creativity, it's a way of making sure that everything that needs to go into a novel gets in there. I have a very painless way of talking about three-act structure which I'll do right now. A simplistic way of understanding three-act structure is to have a beginning, middle, and end. That is simplistic. It doesn't quite do it, but it gets you into the right ballpark.

I like to talk about three-act structure by talking about Act 2 first. Let me just step back a second and say remember this is talking about your plot. These are the external things that are going to force that inner journey. The plot is the stage that the inner journey is going to be acted out upon. It's the crucible that forces the inner journey to happen at all and to happen now instead of later. As much as I love being a plot-first novelist and thinking it's really about the plot, it really isn't. The plot needs to be in service of the inner plot, the invisible plot of the main character's inner journey.

Everything we talk about in plot is going to be does this help illustrate something or move forward the inner journey? Does it make it happen or does it make it more clear to the reader?

And so when we think about genre, when we think about the villain, when we think about three-act structure, all these things are in service to what is going to be the thing that best helps us look at our theme and get our character through this transformation.

I'd like to talk about Act 2 first because once you understand Act 2, Act 1 and Act 3 are very easy. In your plot your Act 2 is simply the heart of the story. It is the reason you wrote this book. It is the main event.

In *A Christmas Carol*, Scrooge's story (Act 2) is the time when the ghosts are showing him his life. That's the heart of *A Christmas Carol*. That is the core of it. That's Act 2.

In *Raiders of the Lost Ark* the heart of that is when Indiana Jones is going after the ark. He's traveling, he's looking, he's digging, he's finding, he's chasing all those things. That is the heart of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.

You get the idea of what I'm talking about. In *Jaws* it's the battle between our heroes trying to get rid of this shark.

So your Act 2 is the heart of your story. As you're sitting there thinking about your novel that you're going to write, go back to that core idea, that paragraph that you wrote at the beginning and go, "Okay. Right here in this paragraph is the heart of my story. It's the reason I want to write this book." Just write that down or write a form of it down as your Act 2. And go, "Okay. These are the awesome things I want to do in the heart of my book."

Once you understand that, then you know what Act 1 has to be. Because you can't start the novel with the heart of it. You can't start with a bunch of guys trying to defeat a shark because we don't know that the shark is attacking and we don't know what the danger is and we don't know who these people are.

You can't start *Raiders of the Lost Ark* with Indiana Jones going after the ark, flying off on an airplane to try and find the ark. We don't know who he is. We don't know what the situation is. You can't start Scrooge's story with the Ghost of Christmas Past arriving because we didn't know that he was a jerk at the beginning, we didn't know what the situation was, and we didn't know what the Cratchits were. So you cannot begin with your Act 2.

You have all this set up to do and introductions to do, and that's Act 1. Very simply, Act 1 is everything you need to do so you can do Act 2. Who do we have to meet? Who do we have to see? What information do we have to know? What situations do we have to understand? What's the backdrop? What's the setting? What's our genre? So that when all of that is out of the way, all of our major characters are introduced, we can start having the fun that we wanted to have.

It's fun too to introduce all of those things and to begin a novel. I wrote another book for *Writer's Digest* called *The First Fifty Pages* and more or less that's covering Act 1. So there's a lot of things going on in those first pages and in Act 1. It's very fun to do and a lot of good craft and fun things happening there. You can do it wrong and you can do it right and so forth. But really all of it is just to get you to Act 2 which is the fun of your book.

My first novel was a futuristic novel about a serial killer who was killing people by sending electric spikes over the futuristic internet and killing his victims. My hero was just this family guy, computer programmer who thought he saw that these deaths weren't accidents after all and he had the theory that somebody was behind them. The FBI recruits him to try to find out who this man is. So the core of that story is these two guys going at it in the futuristic version of cyberspace. Tracking each other down, sparring, trying to find out where each other is, trying to eliminate one another.

But I couldn't start the novel that way. That was the heart of my novel, why I wanted to write it. I couldn't start it right there. I had all this introduction.

For your novel too. When you see what your Act 2 is going to be then you know what you have to do so that you can do that. What you have to set up. That will be your Act 1. You'll write down all those things, all the introductions you have to make and so forth so that Act 2 can happen.

Act 2 can't continue forever. You can't forever be chasing the ark. You can't forever be fighting the shark. You can't forever be going after this guy in cyberspace. Eventually the thing's got to come to a head. Act 3 isn't just end (beginning, middle, and end); it's the climactic moment, it's the high point of the plot. It usually involves the moment of truth of the hero's inner journey. It's that moment when the hero and the villain are locked in a strangle hold on the highest yard arm of stormy sea and the ship is on fire and all that stuff. It's that big climactic moment.

Then it does have the end, what's called the denouement or the falling action. It's tying everything else off after the climax is resolved. For your book that's going to be your Act 3. Eventually that stuff in Act 2 has to come to a head.

One of the things that are the immediate lead up to that climax. And then what does the climax look like? And then who wins? And then how do things look at the end? You have to have that party scene at the end where the heroes get medals and the Ewoks dance. Your reader's been through a lot with you and deserves a party.

That's three-act structure. We don't have the ability to show it right now, but in all my books pretty much there's a graph that shows the hero's journey lined up on the left side of the graph and the three-act structure lined up on the right side. There's a lot of interesting overlaps.

The core thing that I'll point out now is that the escalation in that hero's inner journey phase in the inner journey coincides more or less with Act 2 of the plot which is the fun you wanted to have in the middle. So keep those things in mind.

[Thomas] We have some questions about falling action. Could you explain the denouement a little more?

[Jeff] Yeah. Some novelists choose to end their novel right after the climax. The Death Star blows up and the credits roll, basically. That's very unsatisfying to a viewer or a reader. They

open up the lost ark and all these angelic creatures come out and everybody dies and the hero lives and the credits roll. No, no, no, no. There's more. There's something else that needs to happen.

This is a journey even speaking of the plot and there needs to be an end to the journey. It's not simply that we crested the mountain, we have to come down too or whatever.

That falling action is just that nice scene that you have at the end that shows that so-and-so lived and so-and-so hooked up with so-and-so and this person is going to be okay and now they're rebuilding the town center. It's just a snapshot of how things are now that all the fireworks have ended, how the dust is settling and what things are going to look like from here on out.

Again, the reader has been through a lot with you and with your hero and deserves a little bit of a party. Because there's a lot of stress. If you did your job right you've stressed out your reader. So this is when you all get to have a party and they pop the champagne and everything is happy and we're glad we went on this journey. That's a reward for the reader as well as for the characters.

PART 2: TOOLS & TIPS

[Jeff] Do you want me to move on to writing tips?

Tools

[Thomas] Yes. But before we go to writing tips (I know we're closing up on the first hour), I want to give some super practical NaNoWriMo tools that you can use that will help you during these thirty days. I know we've been talking very much craft and I think that that's really good. We're going to get back into the craft in a moment, but we're just going to take a break from the craft and give you some practical tools that you can use.

The first is Dr. Wicked's writeordie.com. Jeff, can you tell us a little bit about Write or Die?

[Jeff] If you wanted me to go into tips and tools then that's one of the ones I was going to talk about.

It started off as a web page. Now it's an app that you have to buy. It's not very expensive. It started out as this web page and it was designed to be a thing to get you past a time where you feel like you just can't write anything. It forces you to write words on the page and to keep writing. To not write down the word 'the' and sit there for an hour looking at it.

What it does is it provides a little text window for you to type in. At least this is how it worked when it was a web page. You would begin typing and everything was happy and as long as you wanted to type it would let you scroll around and give you as much window as you wanted. But as you stopped and kind of sat there for a minute things would begin to change. The screen color would begin to change, there would begin to be these unsettling sound effects, there would be bad music happening, the thing would start to go to black. On the worst setting if you sat there for too long it would start erasing the last words that you had written. And so you lose it. As soon as you start typing again, all of those things go away and it goes back to normal.

The idea is that you would write and write and write and not stop. The hope is that after a while you've gotten past your block, you're moving forward, you've gotten some momentum. But yeah. That is Dr. Wicked.

[Thomas] Another tool for you is something that we just launched called the Novel Marketing Podcast. The episode that came out today is all about how to put your marketing on autopilot, how to put social media on autopilot so that you don't have to worry about it. So imagine if you could just put social media on autopilot for a month so you can focus on your novel. We walk you through exactly how to do that. That's completely free. You can find that at novelmarketing.com.

Another cool tool that a lot of authors like is called Scrivener. If having the screen go red and bloody is too intense for you, Scrivener is a very popular tool for writing.

Microsoft Word was not created for authors. It was created for managers and companies to write memos back in the eighties. They kind of added features for writers as an afterthought.

But if you're really wanting to draft a first draft of your novel, Scrivener is designed for the novelist in mind. It's got a whole research setting where you can put research and character bios and all of those things that are related to your novel but not in your novel. It has this great focus mode that blacks out the entire screen including all bold and italic buttons. I think it even turns off spell check where you can just write. It just gets rid of all of the distractions. It has a whole bunch of other cool features, specifically for authors.

I know we've all got our teeth in Microsoft Word. Microsoft Word will work. But Scrivener, there's a reason why it's so popular with authors.

Another tool, of course, Jeff's book, *Write a Novel in a Month*. We were covering as much as we can in the seminar, but we only have so much time. If you want to go deep you can get that in depth information in the *Write a Novel in a Month* book.

Then finally I recommend that you get the voice recorder app for your phone. So iPhones now have this built in by default. There's a gazillion voice recorders that you can buy or download for free if you're in the app store.

If you're living in your book for this month – this is an intense month – you're going to have a lot of ideas that are going to come to you while you're driving, while you're working out, while you're out and about. You need an easy way to capture those ideas so that when it comes down to sit in front of your computer again, you can play the ideas that you have.

How the app works is tap right on your phone, you hit record, and you talk, and it records the audio. So you're able to capture those ideas while you're out and about and while you're driving.

Jeff, did you have any other technical tools you wanted to recommend?

[Jeff] Well not necessarily tools, but tips for getting in a month.

[Thomas] Great. Let's do it.

[Jeff] You want me to go on?

[Thomas] Go for it.

Tips

[Jeff] Alright. Let's say that you've done whatever work you're going to do before November 1st and November 1st dawns – and again not everybody, in fact probably most people doing NaNoWriMo aren't going to be able to just have November off to do nothing but this. So you're going to have to find time and what times and what places you're going to try to try to get your word count.

Let's just talk a minute about word count. The goal for NaNoWriMo is 50,000 words in a month. That sounds like a lot, it is a lot, but if you break it down into thirty days, as Thomas was saying earlier, that's just 1600 words a day. Which really isn't that long. That's probably only four pages or something like that double-spaced. So you can do it and once you hit your rhythm you'll be able to do it better than that.

I've written several novels now and if I don't hit 4,000 words in a day I feel like I don't know what I was doing. You can get there too. At that rate you could write the whole novel in twelve days or something.

The main thing I want to say about NaNoWriMo is don't get discouraged and don't stop. You may not be able to spend Saturday writing like you had hoped because the water pipe breaks and you spend all day at Home Depot and whatever. Life is going to happen in November like it happens every other month, especially if you're trying to do a big project. But don't worry if you're getting behind on your own goal.

Don't worry if you're not going to hit 50,000. Just keep going. Don't let anything stop you. That's the worst thing is that you just get discouraged and you just stop. So even if you can eke out 100 words a day some days, I bet you some days you're going to be able to hit 2,000, 3,000, 4,000, maybe even more. Just don't get frustrated.

One of the great parts about NaNoWriMo is that you're having to go so fast that you don't have time to think about why this is a bad idea or whatever. Because writing a novel is all about fear. I know this. It's the fear that you're not really what you thought you were as a writer or fear that what you wrote is really stupid or it's a terrible idea or you're afraid of what somebody's going to say if they read it.

When you have to do it this fast, you almost don't have time to think about such things. But it's not quite that, so you will have the chance and you've got your subconscious working on you making you think about all these other things. "I don't know why, but for some reason I have this overpowering desire to go clean out the cellar and trim my toenails and do all those things." That's all based on fear. Don't let it stop you. Just force through it. Don't worry that this is not beautiful. Don't get paralyzed trying to work on and massage every sentence. You're almost vomiting the thing out in November. Just write it. Don't even look back.

If you know you made a mistake, you decided you wanted to change something, just write it down on a list. Even if it's something like the character Marlene needs to be Michael and so in chapter 23 I'm just making him Michael and when I'm done with this I'm going to come back and make him Michael all the way from chapter 1-23, don't stop. Just keep running forward. Keep your eye on that prize.

A very good tip for you, if you're like me, is to turn off the email, turn off the social media during your writing time. Because if you get that little "badink" of Facebook and you're like "ooh somebody wrote to me" and so you don't write for a while and then you're like "ooh a tweet" and "ooh an email. This must be really important. Oh, if I have less than 625,000 left on

my mortgage I can get a good deal,” whatever. Those things just eat your time and they break your concentration.

I recommend whenever you’re in this writing period, whenever that is every day, turn that stuff off and turn on some music that helps you write, if you can write with music. I can write with music if there’s no words. I can do a soundtrack or instrumental. Whatever helps you go and focus, do that.

Then at the end of your writing period or however you want to do it, reward yourself. If you have made whatever goal you set for yourself and you do it, then reward yourself. For instance, if you do have a Saturday and you have a goal of writing 2,000 words on a Saturday and you’ve got eight hours to do it, if you can get 750 words written by lunch time then at lunch while you’re eating your sandwich or whatever then you can turn on the email, then you can do Facebook for a while. And then turn it all back off again and write the rest of it until you hit your word count goal and then reward yourself in some other way.

Several years back I had the chance to be at a relative’s cabin just by myself, just to try to write a big portion of my first novel that I was working on. I wasn’t there with anybody. I had it all to myself. They didn’t have a TV, but they had a TV monitor. I took a DVD player and a bunch of DVDs. I told myself that if I hit my word count goal for that day, I would watch a movie. I wouldn’t let myself watch a movie until I hit my word count goal. I wanted to watch a movie every night, so I just would keep going until I hit that stupid word count goal and then I’d watch a movie!

So whether it’s chocolate or a walk outside or to watch some funny videos about kitties playing piano or whatever it is, that is your reward, give that to yourself. But only after you’ve hit your word count goal.

[Thomas] With this reward, feel free to work in your friends with this as well. You can have your friends hold you accountable or you can buy yourself that movie and give that DVD to a friend and be like, “Only give this back to me if I make the word count and we can watch it together.” Or if anything, have a reverse goal. You give a friend a hundred dollar bill and he only gives it back to you if you’ve hit your word count goal. Otherwise he keeps it or he burns it or something like that.

[Jeff] Yeah. I wanted to say I’m going to offer a free service to anybody listening to this recording that if they send me a thousand dollars I will hold it for them till the end of NaNoWriMo and if they don’t complete their goal, I will just keep the thousand. I will offer that to anybody. You can find me online.

Alright. Another thing to do is to tell your family that this is your job. That you’re not there during these times. You need to be allowed to do it. If they think, “Oh, Mom’s just in there playing with her silly book, I can go in there and show her my boo boo,” or whatever, then you’re not going to be productive. So as uninterrupted as you can be, do it.

If you have the ability to be mobile with your writing, whether it's on an iPad or netbook or anything, take that thing with you wherever you go because you're always going to be sitting there waiting in line at the bank or waiting at a doctor's office or whatever. You're always going to have these odd moments and if you're as motivated as I know you're going to be during this month, you're going to be kicking yourself if you didn't bring something to advance your story with during that lost time. Even if you have to borrow something or rent something for the month, do it so that you can keep advancing.

[Thomas] Another tip with the kids: Feel free to set a goal for the family where the children get rewarded if you hit your writing goal. So be like, "Hey kids, if I can hit my writing goal at the end of the month, we're going to go putt-putt golfing" or "we're going to go to the zoo" or anything. Your children will help keep you accountable because they really want that thing. They'll be like, "Mommy, have you hit your goal today? I really want to go to the zoo!" and it helps them rethink your month. They see it as a short period of time and then they're on your team instead of your enemies. They will (those of you who have kids at home) fight for your time.

[Jeff] Another thing that I'll urge you to do is make multiple backups of your story and progress. What if you're on Thanksgiving and you're at 42,000 words and then your hard drive has a hiccup and it's gone? That will not be good for your health or the safety of anyone around you at that time.

So make multiple backups. I don't just mean call it "Save A" and "Save B" on your hard drive. Put one on your external drive. If you've got MoviePro or CrashPlan or one of those things, put one there. You might even start sending one to your cousin in St. Louis once a night or once every couple of days. Because if your house burns down or your state is nuked or something, you'll always have a copy somewhere.

Take this from a guy who lost 30,000 words of a novel. The hard drive crashed and was irrecoverable and the CD-Rom I had it on backup with was corrupt in that subdirectory. Those were the only two backups I had and they were gone gone gone. So don't do that.

You can use a critique partner, a critique group to help spur you on. Not necessarily to read things and report back to you during this month, but to give you encouragement and be brainstorm partners for you.

You can say no to things that drain your time. You know what those are. You can stop cooking. You can stop cleaning. You can just put everybody else in charge of those things or eat a lot of frozen dinners. That's okay.

Stock up on necessities. If you have a favorite drink that you like then have a month's worth of it in the house before you start writing because that procrastination part of you would like nothing more than a half day errand run out to get more of your favorite Mountain Dew's.

[Thomas] We give you permission to hire a maid.

[Jeff] Yes. Or to conscript a maid.

One thing that will be a very practical tip is figure out for you what is the best way to start the writing day. It may be that today you can reach the end of a chapter that is the end of Part 1 and you got a big precipice right there and a big stopping point. Tomorrow you're going to come to the desk and you're going to have to spend quite a bit of time figuring out what to do next. I'm going to have to create a new location and some new characters. That can be a momentum killer for you in the morning or whenever you begin your new writing time.

One thing that I found for myself is that I don't like to end at a natural stopping place because it makes the momentum really hard for me. So what I like to do is either stop short of an ending or go beyond it until I've begun the new one. That's typically what I like to do because I'm pointing toward the end of a scene or whatever and I just want to get this thing accomplished so I can feel good about what I did. But I can't stop there because tomorrow it will be a killer. So I will sit there and do the thinking.

A lot of people don't understand that a writer staring out the window could actually be doing work. Because you're thinking and you're going, "How am I going to get this character over here? And where do I even want to have this thing?" Spend that time.

One thing I do is I spend that time on the day before. Before I end my writing day, I will go out and find the image on the internet (not spending too much time doing that) but the image that will be the location. Okay, so I've got my location. I'll even try to get a paragraph or so into the scene because the actual work of figuring out the opening line and opening paragraph can be really hard. I get this much done and then I stop so that tomorrow when I sit down I'm already going. I already jumped over that crevice. And I'm started.

Another thing I will do to get going in the morning, I'm not going to edit while I'm writing, but I'll probably go back a page, the last page I wrote yesterday. I will go over that and just kind of do a polish on it. I will inevitably catch a typo or something and that gets me back into that headspace of where I was. If I can jump over that gap and start in the next scene of what I already wrote yesterday then, between those two things, I'm well and truly moving when I'm ready to go.

[Thomas] I know some authors who will end mid sentence so that that's lingering and finished all day so they can pick up and finish that sentence that they already got things going.

Another idea is Morning Pages. Some authors will just write in the morning to kind of get the bad writing out of their system before they'll start on their morning's work so they can hit their novel with a running start. You can google Morning Pages if you want to learn more about that.

[Jeff] That's a good idea.

Some writers I've talked to like to use a variety of help. Some of them make little index cards for each one of their characters. They write down the crucial facts and appearance of each one. They keep them by the desk so you don't have to go back and go "what scene was he in and what did

he look like” and so forth. Scrivener has a built in way to have little cards like that in the program. So that would be a cool thing to do.

Some people use a calendar and especially if you are doing something that takes place over a span of days and you can actually get the correct year and month and week for what you’re doing, that will really help your chronology. I don’t know about you, but I have a terrible time unraveling what I’ve done if I don’t take the time while I’m writing to keep track of what day is what.

You can keep track of your subplots. Some people print it out as they go and have this big collection of pages so they can start seeing it pile up and start feeling awesome.

It’s cool to take breaks now and then to stop and think. Sometimes you just want to go outside and walk around for a while.

Accountability tool, who will really help you.

[Thomas] Speaking of accountability partners, that leads right into the tool I was going to recommend. Go to [meetup.com](https://www.meetup.com) (I’ll post a link in the chat) and do a search for writing groups. In pretty much every town there’s a Meetup group of people that meet in person in that town. Sometimes there’s a Sit Down Shut Up and Write group. I know in my town that meets every day during NaNoWriMo. All the authors in that group will go to a coffee shop, will just chat for fifteen minutes, and then will sit down, will shut up, and they’ll write. Maybe it’s just a weekly group where everyone checks in and encourages each other.

I know the [Writing Excuses Podcast](#) has a lot of extra stuff to encourage you.

One of the differences between writing during NaNoWriMo and writing during say the month of October is that you know that everyone else is doing it with you. Kind of like running a marathon and having the folks around you help with the emotional side of things. Because writing’s very emotional. So find some friends.

And just to give a shout out for this – I know many of you are in the Bestseller Society. Feel free to chat with each other in the fiction forum. Post your word count. Feel free to put that on the forum and you can hold each other accountable there. It’s a great place to have that online community with other authors who are taking it seriously.

PART 3: Q&A

[Jeff] I could talk a lot longer on tools and I haven't talked at all about revision and craft issues like show vs. tell and point of view and dialogue and description and beats and so forth. But I think what we might want to do is just open up for questions. What do you think, Thomas?

[Thomas] I think that's a great idea because we have a lot of questions that you all have been asking, not just here in the chat but people are also asking questions on Twitter. So feel free if you have a question hit the "Ask a Question" button. These questions are kind of going to be all over the place. So we're going to kind of change the pace.

This one's for you, Jeff.

As a publisher, what do you look for? What makes a submission stand out?

It's kind of a post NaNoWriMo. Once the book is written, what makes it pop?

[Jeff] Well, assuming that the book is of the length that I require and is of the genre that I require. By the way, some of you don't know, I'm the publisher at Marcher Lord Press. We do Christian science fiction and fantasy novels, so all the weird stuff. I look for weird stuff in my categories that are of the length I like, but then I do have an idea for what constitutes good craftsmanship so I look for that. I'm very careful about that. And then I want to be carried away. I want to have this awesome wow factor in the novels that I acquire.

Next!

What tools do you recommend for better dialogue?

[Jeff] What you're looking for in dialogue is not accurate transcripts. What you're looking for is a fancy word called verisimilitude. What that means is you don't really want it to sound like actual conversation. You want it to feel like actual conversation. If you were to write down a transcript of a conversation that two people were having or one side of it on a phone call or something, the thing wouldn't make sense at all as sentences and it would be all these fragments. It would be a ton of voice and body language and all these things that really wouldn't necessarily play very well in a dialogue scene in fiction. So what you're after is something that sounds real, but is a little more polished than real.

One tool to make this work and to make your characters sound realistic when they're speaking is to say the dialogue out loud. The best way to do it is to bring over four of your friends and hand out scripts and assign parts and have them read the parts in the dialogue scenes. Because then you will hear it when you go "oh that doesn't sound realistic at all." They'll start changing it slightly from what's written to make it sound more realistic and those are the changes you want to make in the actual manuscript.

Those are some quick tips for dialogue. I've got a whole chapter on it in the book.

What about passive narrator heroes who don't change? Like Ishmael from *Moby-Dick* or Nick from *The Great Gatsby*. I'm working on a story now where the hero is boring compared to the dynamic supporting characters.

[Thomas] This is about hero's journey.

[Jeff] Well, yeah. Maybe if that's the way you want to go where it's an observer only, then that's fine. You might decide that you want to make your narrator the person who actually does change.

There is a category of fiction in which the main character does not change. Some of them are pure action stories like *Indiana Jones* and the early James Bond movies and so forth. The character's not changing; it's just about the action.

Then a sub category of that is stories where the main character is already changed and so perfected in this change that he or she is out of step with everyone else. Everyone else tries to make this person change, but they end up finding out that that person has something that they don't have.

For instance, *Wall-E*, animated movie about a little robot. Everybody tries to change him and make him different, but he ends up providing for them the innocence that they have lost. And *Forrest Gump* is like this. And Inspector Clouseau kind of character. *Mary Poppins* is like this. *Anne of Green Gables*. These are all characters who are fully realized but seem so different from everybody else that everybody tries to change them, but they find out that those characters really have got it right.

So if your character's just an observer then that's fine. He doesn't have to do a lot of changing for himself, especially if he's chronicling somebody else's change. But I would submit that you could have even that character on a journey. Maybe he just makes one phase of it. He learns something by watching the other character explode or whatever. He makes one bit of realization that moves him on his journey a little bit more.

[Thomas] We've been giving a lot of advice in this webinar and these are all guidelines. You can find the very effective book that has broken any one of these rules.

[Jeff] Yeah.

[Thomas] I would submit that if you're just getting started on your writing journey, especially if this is your first novel or your second novel, this is not the time to start breaking rules. This is the time to write the best novel that you can that conforms with the follow of the guidelines. As you get better, as you get more experience, then you can start to do the more exotic things.

[Jeff] I don't know, Thomas. I might disagree with you.

[Thomas] Okay!

[Jeff] I'm under contract to write a new book for *Writer's Digest* and it's basically going to give permission to break all the rules. And here's why: Because there is no one set of rules and fiction teachers don't agree with one another. To tell a writer "you need to just stick with all the rules," that's like saying you kind of need to obey the traffic laws of England and America and Venezuela all at the same time. It's kind of impossible because they're not perfectly reconciled with one another.

I would almost say for NaNoWriMo just almost forget about the rules and just get stuff out on the page. Once it's there you can mess with it and fix it and improve it. But until you've got something out there, there's nothing at all you can do.

In the book *Write Your Novel in a Month* I do have a few craft things, show vs. tell and point of view mainly, that I would urge you to get a little bit of a handle on before you start writing if possible. Because if you do those without paying attention to some best practices, then you can end up with a lot of rewriting you have to do. But again, that's better than looking at a blank page. So if you're going to err on the side of anything, I would almost err on the side of whatever helps you not be paralyzed and get a bunch of words on the page.

[Thomas] Well the entire room definitely agrees with you, Jeff. They're giving you applause. It's deafening.

I will go on to the next question. When you were talking about the three-act structure we had some questions coming in regarding romance. I know this is not your favorite genre, but could you walk us through kind of a classic three-act structure in a romantic story? We had a specific question.

The struggles of falling in love, is that the thrust of Act 2?

[Jeff] Yeah. I don't know if it would be the struggle to fall in love but the journey toward it and the actual act of falling in love.

One of my favorite movies is a little known movie called *Music and Lyrics*. It's Drew Barrymore and Hugh Grant. The premise is that Hugh Grant is a washed-up eighties pop star from the Bee Gees or something. He's trying to revitalize his career and he gets this opportunity that if he can write a new song that this pop star takes and performs that he can revitalize his career. He's great with music, but he doesn't have a lyricist.

He has this guy he's working with and it's not really working out. Into his life comes this girl, Drew Barrymore, who's just there to water the plants. She's listening to what they're trying to rhyme out and she ends up just kind of naturally providing these excellent lyrics. So Hugh Grant fires the other guy and says, "You've got to help me right this song." That's kind of Act 1.

Then Act 2 is the story of them writing a song together, starting to make beautiful music together, if you will, and falling in love. So that is the heart of *Music and Lyrics* and that's the Act 2.

Then Act 3 becomes this moment where it's (I'm not going to give it away because I want you to go see the movie), but it's this moment where the Hugh Grant character has the opportunity to take all the credit for writing the song just for himself or not and it's a big defining moment, his moment of truth. That's in the Act 3.

So I would say the heart of the story, the thing you wanted to write the romance about (which would be the growing romance between these two characters) would be happening in Act 2.

[Thomas] Could it be simplified to just "guy gets girl" (Act1), "guy loses girl" (Act 2), "guy gets girl back" (Act 3). Or is that too simple?

[Jeff] No, I don't think so. I think guy gets girl and guy loses girl and guy begins trying to get girl back, that's all Act 2. Act 1 is introducing guy, introducing girl, introducing them to each other, and so forth. The stuff you mentioned, most of that would be in Act 2.

[Thomas] Alright. Another question about Act 2, getting away from romance a little bit.

Do you have any suggestions on how to come up with plot points for Act 2 and avoid a sagging middle?

[Jeff] That's why I start with Act 2 and say this is the fun of your story. That's why I had you start with this core idea that is inspiring your imagination. That essentially becomes your Act 2.

I don't think there should ever be a problem with a sagging middle if you come at it from that perspective because you're almost going to be saying, "I'm sorry, I have to leave this part because this is my favorite part." This is where these two characters *are* falling in love and this is where we *are* going after that crazy shark and this is where we *are* trying to prevent the guy from assassinating the President. It's the chase. I don't know. To me that's really the fun part.

In the original *Star Wars* movie, the whole time when – essentially, there's a little bit of overlap – the whole time that they're stuck in the Death Star trying to escape is Act 2. That's when they rescue a princess, that's when they forge their friendship, that's when Luke Skywalker finds that he's strong, that's when he loses his mentor and has to do some things on his own. That is the core of the story and the most fun part of the story.

I think that if I were to talk to each individual writer listening to this, I think I would be able to just get them so excited about that middle part that they wouldn't have any worries about a sagging middle.

But anyway, I did talk more about it in the book. There are whole chapters on each one of these.

Do you need to worry about dividing the book into chapters during NaNoWriMo or should you just write and then divide the story up at the end?

[Jeff] That is a great question. No. I personally wouldn't worry about chapter breaks at all. I do scene breaks. I just put a couple little blank spaces and some asterisks in the middle and then start a new scene. I do that even when I'm not doing NaNoWriMo. I'll just write scene after scene after scene after scene and then later I'll come back through.

I like to have chapter breaks every fifteen to seventeen pages. That's just what I like. There's no right or wrong about that. So I'll just count and start around page twelve, after a chapter break, or up to about page eighteen I'll start looking for a scene break. If one falls right in there then I'll say, "Oh! That's where my chapter break is!" So I wouldn't worry about it at all.

Now occasionally you will know this is the end of a chapter or this is the end of part one or whatever. You'll just feel that it really is a chapter break and in those you can just write the word 'chapter?' or whatever so you'll arrange the other chapters around that one. But a lot of times it'll be a scene that could be the beginning of a chapter or it could be the middle. It doesn't matter. You can figure that out later.

What should be focused on more? Scene description, dialogue, or the mechanic's description of action?

[Jeff] There's no right or wrong about that. Probably each writer has a strength of those, the dialogue or the description or the actual action of what's going on. A lot of people aren't naturally going to want to describe something so what they'll do is just write the scene and then they'll write a little note to themselves "need description here" or something like that. That's a good way to go if you're not excited about describing right now.

It can come back and bite you a little bit because once you write the scene and in your mind it's taking place in a helicopter high above Los Angeles and then later you come back and go, "You know, it would really be cool if it were on a submarine or something," and you've written it all one way, then you're going to have to come back and change some of it.

Don't get stopped. Don't get paralyzed. Just do whatever you're going to have to do to keep moving forward. You're going to be compiling a list as you go of things that you know that you're going to have to go back and fix. Just keep a little document that says "go back and establish that Freddy is left-handed" and "go back and give the description about the office building" and all those things that you can do later.

How does this relate to show don't tell? What if the description's getting boring?

[Jeff] One thing that I'm going to say in this new *Writer's Digest* book that I haven't written yet is that I want to give you permission to write a novel that is like that kind of novel you like to

read. So if as a reader you hate description then don't put a lot of description in your book. Okay? Just give yourself permission to do it that way. If you love description then write it in there.

You're not responsible for what readers you get. You're going to get some readers who hate description and you love it. Okay. Who cares? You're not responsible for that. You just put it in if you like it and don't put it in if you don't.

I have a whole hour and a half talk on show vs. tell. Telling is when you simply explain something to somebody. "Jim was a jerk," for instance. And showing is when you illustrate it – when you show Jim come in at the end of the day and he kicks his shoes off, and kicks the dog out of the way, and the toddler son comes up to him and he palms the kid in the head and makes him fall down and cry, and sits down and puts his feet up on the counter and says, "Woman, where's my dinner?" That's showing because the reader feels it. The reader goes, "Man, Jim was a jerk." So that's showing. I think it's much more effective.

There are some people who confuse description with telling and they say, "Well, you're just explaining what a place looks like, so that must be telling and not showing." I disagree. Description is showing me what the place looks like and what is there and who is there. But if you don't like description then don't put it in.

[Thomas] We have a question about Scrivener.

Is there an easy, fast way to learn Scrivener?

The answer is yes. They have tutorial videos on their homepage. And I just found out that they have a special trial version. So you can actually get a free version for NaNoWriMo. If you win NaNoWriMo you can get a 50% off discount. So Scrivener is super NaNoWriMo friendly. That can actually be a nice motivation for completing NaNoWriMo. You get 50% off of Scrivener when you need to go back and edit it.

[Jeff] Tell them what you mean by "win" NaNoWriMo.

[Thomas] So "winning" NaNoWriMo means completing the 50,000 words by the end of November. This has to be an official win. You go to NaNoWriMo's website and you register.

NaNoWriMo actually has a lot of tools to help you do NaNoWriMo, a lot of encouragement. So I'd encourage you to check out the NaNoWriMo website. Don't just sort of do it. If you're going to do NaNoWriMo, go to the website, sign up, do it for real. Then you can get 50% off of Scrivener.

Alright. We have a couple other questions.

Any tips on keeping your dialogue from being on-the-nose? What does on-the-nose mean?

[Jeff] On-the-nose dialogue in my terms just means unrealistic dialogue where the two characters are responding to what each other actually says. It's usually very polite and complete. It's things like:

"Jim, you are here."

"Yes, Don. I am here."

"What do you want?"

"What do I want? I want you to go to the car."

Just awful turn-taking and complete and talking about exactly what the other person is saying.

There's a great technique that I learned in theater and it's a term called subtext. It's the idea that we aren't really communicating word to word; we're using words to communicate meaning to meaning or thought to thought. So when somebody comes in and says, "Oh is *that* what you're wearing?" the character doesn't necessarily mean, isn't looking for the answer, "Why yes. That is what I'm wearing." The person is meaning something. It's meaning like "you're going to embarrass me again" or "you're going to look trashy." So when the person responds, the person doesn't respond like, "Why yes. That is what I am wearing." The person comes in and says, "Is *that* what you're wearing?" And the other person says, "Look. She's not even going to be there." Right? Because now she is responding to what I think you mean.

A great way to have realistic dialogue is to use subtext. In theater just for ourselves we actually had to write out each one of our lines what we were meaning by each of those lines, what we were thinking when we uttered each one of those lines. Which not only helped us deliver it in a way that was textured, but if we happened to forget our lines, we would usually remember what we were thinking and so we could adlib a line that amounted to the same thing. But anyway, that's for theater.

I also already gave the technique of reading the dialogue aloud, having other people read it aloud. Something that just sounds terrific in your head when you're sitting there pounding it out on the keyboard can sound really stupid when you say it out loud. Don't let silence woo you into thinking the dialogue is great. Put it to the spoken test and see what happens.

[Thomas] That's good. And if you ever need inspiration just watch something made by Joss Whedon. I love his dialogue.

What's the tip on finding common effects if the book isn't so episodic?

[Jeff] I don't understand the question.

[Thomas] I guess the question is about unrelated scenes or little episodes. How do you connect the episodes into an overarching story?

I guess the answer is just use the three-act structure or the hero's journey.

[Jeff] Well yeah. You've got one story that you're trying to tell. Every scene in it has to be contributing and doing double duty and triple duty toward accomplishing your goal.

In a sense, scenes are going to be episodic because this is the scene at lunch and this is the scene in the car and this is the scene when they get to the airport. And so they're going to be like different locations and it's going to feel like set pieces a little.

I think as you're pursuing the character's goals and pursuing the theme and pursuing your three-act structure I think that's going to take care of it. But I wish I could hear a better explanation of what that question is.

[Thomas] Okay. A couple more questions. We're going to move into the rapid fire mode of questions because we're almost out of time. It's time for the lightning round.

Do you have any suggestions for how to improve or interject description of a scene without sounding like head-hopping or too unnatural?

[Jeff] That's a couple of questions put together. Head-hopping is a term that refers to point of view. In other words, whose eyes are we seeing through as we go through this scene.

How do you do description without head-hopping? Well, the best way to do that is to describe only what the viewpoint character would be noticing. If the viewpoint character is unconscious – well they wouldn't be a viewpoint character – semi-conscious then maybe only what he's going to notice is a bright light in his eyes and a feeling of pain in his shoulder. But then as he gains more awareness he would start noticing more in the room – who is there, where is he, and so forth.

But if you're going to go with a traditional point of view which is described as first person or third person and those kind of terms, the traditional way of doing it is to take a head. Decide this is the scene I'm going to be in John's point of view and I'm going to see through John's eyes and hear through his ears and I'm privy to his thoughts only. So whatever John would notice in the scene is what you would describe. And then how John would notice it is how it should be described. If you do it that way then you're not head-hopping.

I'm not sure I got all the questions. Did I?

[Thomas] That's fine. This is the lightning round so it's faster.

[Jeff] Oh. I'm going slower than lightning.

[Thomas] You're fine.

Do you favor a pleasant ending or a happy ending?

[Jeff] That's an interesting question. I favor a satisfying ending and that's going to mean different things. It will mean different things for different characters even within your story.

I love the *Lord of the Rings* and in the movie there's a king, Theoden, who feels that he has embarrassed himself in battle in previous battles. He's in a new battle where he has a serious gut check and he has his moment of truth and he proves to himself and everybody around him that he is courageous and he is worthy. But he is mortally wounded in this battle. And in fact he has this great Shakespearean death scene...

[Thomas] "Now I can stand in the holes of my fathers and I now no longer will stand ashamed."

[Jeff] No, you're close. You're close.

[Thomas] I know it's not quite it. But it's such a good line.

[Jeff] "I go now to my fathers in whose mighty presence I am now no longer ashamed." Something like that.

[Thomas] There you go.

[Jeff] And so he dies. So that's a bad ending. But it's a satisfying ending in his storyline because he's redeemed himself and he's proud and he doesn't mind going on to the next thing.

Satisfying can mean different things for different stories, but the reader wants things tied off, the main thing dealt with, the main questions answered. So I don't care if that's not a happy ending or even a pleasant ending as long as it feels like the right ending.

[Thomas] That's a good answer. I really like that.

Your questions are just coming in, which is great.

As a publisher, how do you feel about chapter breaks and a pick up where the previous one left off as opposed to a scene change?

Some books leave you at a cliff hanger and then take you to a different character and you just hate the author the entire way through the book. But you keep reading because you want to know what happens next.

[Jeff] That doesn't bother me at all. Wherever the writer feels like he or she would like to make a break, that's okay with me. Some of my authors have chapters that are one page or half a page long and I have some that are thirty-five pages long. I don't really care. As long as the reader will keep reading then it's all good.

Flowery language versus simple language. Which do you like?

[Jeff] This is one of those great issues where there is no right or wrong. I'm very much mellowed on this topic compared to what I was a few years ago. I personally ascribe to a philosophy of fiction that I call the invisible novelist. That is where I prefer that it is the characters and the story that occupy the reader's attention, that the reader gets so enthralled by the characters in the story that it feels like it's happening right there. The mechanics of the delivery, the words on the pages, all those things disappear and you have what's called the fictive dream or this illusion that it's actually happening.

Last year, not this year, but last year in the Academy Awards, Cirque du Soleil did a number in the Oscars. It was this couple and they had gone to a movie and they're sitting on the front row. As the movie begins or as the theatrical production begins, their seat rises up until it's right in the middle of the action. Everything is going on all around them.

That's a great picture of what I like to do for the reader of a novel. I want that person to feel that everything else has vanished and he's right in the middle of the action.

Having said that, there are other novelists who are beautiful writers and write excellent fiction and have a different philosophy and that is what I call the painted paragraph philosophy. That's when the writer and the reader are in love with the actual words. It's poetry. There's a texture and a substance and an elegance and a luxuriousness to the words.

I used to not really dig that and I used to think you shouldn't write that way, that you were just throwing attention to yourself and "look how clever I am as a writer," but I've seen it done so well now and I understand that there are readers who won't read a novel unless it's beautifully composed and that's why they come to fiction. So I'm quite happy saying it doesn't matter to me if it's flowery so long as you find your reader and so long as it works for those readers. It's not what I personally prefer, but I think that it's a great way to work.

[Thomas] Isn't it somewhat of a genre thing? Like if you're writing literary fiction there's a higher expectation for the painted paragraph, whereas if you're writing a thriller they're looking more for the invisible novelist? Or is that not true?

[Jeff] Yeah, I think so. But I also think there's a spectrum within each genre. I think you can write thrillers that are beautifully composed and each word is beautiful. I think it is largely that, but I think there are possibilities within every genre.

[Thomas] Nice.

Final question. The last one comes in very quickly. I'm going to cut it off in five minutes one way or the other.

Regarding narrator voice, can you reveal information like back-story through the character's thoughts as long as you stay true to his or her point of view? Or is that still telling?

[Jeff] This goes back to what you like as a reader. In my new book I'm going to write I'm going to talk about this. Because I'm big on showing and not telling. But we can all point to wildly successful books, novels that are full of telling. It doesn't matter what some elitist like me thinks you ought to do for show vs. tell. What matters is what's going to get the generic reader to keep reading.

If you can fill a book with telling and yet still win your reader and you become a bestseller, then you obviously didn't do anything too terribly wrong.

But the question is how can you reveal back-story within a character's narration. It's up to your preference and what you like as a reader. If you just want to get pages and pages of back-story within the character's voice and "that reminds me of the time when," then go for it if that doesn't bother you as a reader. If it does bother you as a reader and you don't want that telling then you're going to have to find clever ways to reveal back-story without just telling.

I don't necessarily like it to come out in character monologue/character narration because that tends to just be an information dump. I would prefer it to be externalized and find a scene and a mechanism and a combination of characters that will give reason for this information to come out and be dramatized and put on stage. Because if you're going to try to avoid telling then a page of him remembering about how "so-and-so always used to do this and this used to make him think that" is going to be telling. It's not avoiding it at all.

I don't know if I answered the question.

Closing Remarks

[Thomas] Well, as you know, Jeff, we've been talking now for two hours.

[Jeff] Yes, I do know.

[Thomas] That's a classic thing not to say in the narrative. "As you know, Jeff. You just walked into the room."

[Jeff] Just call me "Bob."

[Thomas.] Yeah. "As you know, Bob."

I just want to say how thankful I am of how many of you stuck with us through these two hours. Part of the reason we kept going is that you all are still here. It really has been two hours and has booked from all over North America and maybe other places as well. We'll know when we see the report at the end.

We've gone over a lot of material and I just want you to hear this one final encouragement and then I want to kick it to Jeff for his last words.

You don't have to follow all of this advice to write a novel in a month. If you only take one tip out of tonight, out of this recording, I would like it to be to write. Just sit down and write the best novel that you can write and enjoy it.

If the whole point of your writing is to finish and the whole point of finishing is to do the whole thing, there's always a carrot in front of you. It's like, "If only I get published. If only I could get an agent. If only I could become a bestseller." And if you have destination fever you will be miserable and you will be unsuccessful and you will die a shriveled person.

You are on your own hero's journey. Before you hit the decision point, are you going to embrace the journey of writing and enjoy the journey or are you going to be so focused on the destination that you're miserable the entire way through and end a sad old man or old woman?

I encourage you because the destination is itself also a journey. Getting published and dealing with agents and publishers, that's a journey. Editing is a journey. If you can learn to find the beauty in the fun in the journey in writing, this is going to be an exciting adventure and you will live your own novel.

Is that a little too much of a painted paragraph?

[Jeff] It's awesome.

[Thomas] Jeff, final words?

[Jeff] I just want to encourage you to take part in NaNoWriMo. Don't worry if you can't hit a word count, don't worry if everybody else is getting ahead of you. Whatever you write will get you closer to your goal and will be words on a page that weren't there before.

But I agree with Thomas to enjoy this. This is supposed to be fun. And if it isn't fun then go do something else in your November that is fun.

Writing a novel, completing a novel, publishing a novel will not make you a good person. It will not be the thing that finally proves to everyone that you're a worthwhile human. Those things have to come from God and they are not things that can be found in a novel. So if that's what you're looking for here, you're not going to find it. Let me save you a month.

But if you're here to have some fun and see if you can spell out this story or these characters that won't leave you alone, then I hope you do it and I hope you tell us about it when you do it.

[Thomas] Alright. Well, blessings all of you. Currently 123,453 signed up for NaNoWriMo. So if three of you will sign up, it will be exactly 1-2-3-4-5-6 and then the sixth person who does it, take a screenshot because I think that would be really cool.

And with that, we will let you go! Thank you all for coming.