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INDIE WRITERS' DIGEST



Edited by Bryony Petersen

FOREWORD BY THE EDITOR



Welcome to the early summer issue of the Indie Writers' Digest. I hope you enjoy the stories and articles within.

2026 is proving to be a most challenging year for me. I come from a generation brought up to face challenge and change face on. We were taught not to shrink back, whine or complain, and instead to accept it as Life and 'crack on' as we would say in our local dialect.

Today, it's different, and complaining, for the younger generations, or the idea of having something to complain about is something of a badge of honour!

When I was preparing to re-launch my free online magazine in the current imprint, I did so making a personal vow to my fellow independent writers and creators that I would do my best to provide a worthy platform for them to promote and advertise their work.

I do not intend to renege on that promise. Whatever else I pause or postpone in my writing journey, the Indie Writers' Digest will not be among them.

As many reading this will know, becoming a writer is as much about evolving as it is about getting words onto a page. Through practice and experience, we all learn and grow, and the same applies to writing.

I try to learn through experience, by asking questions and keeping my mind as open as my ears.

In this issue are two new featured contributors, Mikhail Threecrow, who has provided an article on promotion which is both fascinating and thought-provoking, and Zachary Wayne Lavender, who has contributed a very different piece of fiction writing. I hope you enjoy both.

One of the biggest supporters and most regular contributors to the Digest is the wonderfully prolific and gifted story writer Martin Dixon. If you want to find out more about Martin's short stories, or leave a comment, please check out his blog page:

<https://www.shortstoriestoentertain.com>.

For this issue, Martin has provided a very beautiful poem written for the occasion of his niece's wedding.

Martin has contributed the poem and asked that if anyone should wish to use his poem, he is happy for them to do so. All he asks in return is for the person using his poem to contribute a donation to any cancer charity.

Since Martin was kind enough to submit his poem for reproduction within this magazine, I have made a personal donation to Prostate Cancer UK.

Finally, I have included two of the stories from my first short story collection (Kill Plan) to give those reading a flavour of my own writing style. I hope you enjoy them.

In one of the forthcoming issues, I will be featuring one of the stories from my second short story collection, The Last Day, which I hope you will enjoy reading.

Hopefully, at least for those based in the UK, British Summer time is upon us, bringing with it sunshine and flowers, fun and laughter and here's hoping you find yours. In the meantime, take care, and please remember to be kind!

Bryony Petersen

CONTENTS

FOREWORD BY THE EDITOR.....	2
CONTENTS.....	4
INTRODUCING MIKHAIL THREECROW	5
GIVE IT AWAY	6
TEARS.....	9
SISTERLY LOVE!.....	10
INTRODUCING ZACHARY WAYNE LAVENDER	12
A RESTLESS EVIL: DENTAL DANGER	14
THE PASSIVE VOICE.....	21
KILL PLAN	23
THE FINAL WORD.....	28

INTRODUCING MIKHAIL THREECROW



Mikhail Threecrow has lived a life fit for fiction, working as an international soldier of fortune, a litigator, and even delving into civil engineering before finally embracing his true passion: storytelling. A lover of aviation, horses, and the thrill of a well-aimed shot, Mikhail's adventures across the globe have fueled his vivid imagination that he now uses to pen gripping tales that he hopes will captivate readers.

With a heart set on making the world a better place, Mikhail turned his attention from writing law reviews to crafting mysteries and epic fantasies. He's currently hard at work on the first entry in the Jack Slade Mystery series, along with his labor of love, *The Justice Files*, a fantasy saga years in the making.

GIVE IT AWAY

By Mikhail Threecrow | threecrowbooks.com

I want to be clear about something before we go any further: I'm not an expert. I haven't been in this industry for decades. I haven't hit a bestseller list or landed a six-figure advance. I'm a new author who has been doing a lot of reading — not just fiction, but research — and I have some thoughts I want to share with you, fellow indie writer to fellow indie writer. Take what's useful and ignore the rest.

The thing that keeps coming back to me, from survey after survey and income report after income report, is this: the authors who are actually making money aren't necessarily the ones with the best books. They're the ones with the most loyal readers. That sounds obvious once you say it out loud. But the implications of it are less obvious. One of the most counterintuitive ideas you may have encountered recently is the idea that the path to earning more might start with giving your work away for free.

Here's the market reality as I understand it. Fewer people are reading casually than at any point in recent history — only 48.5% of American adults read a book for pleasure in 2022, the lowest figure since tracking began, and Gallup put the average at just 12.6 books per year, down from 18.5 in 1999. YouGov's 2025 survey found the median at a sobering two books per year, with 40% of adults reading zero. And yet U.S. publishing revenue hit \$32.5 billion in 2024, up over 4% year-over-year. Adult fiction revenue alone surged nearly 13% to \$3.26 billion. The UK saw fiction cross the \$1 billion mark for the first time. The industry is growing while the casual reader disappears. What that tells you is that a smaller, more dedicated pool of readers is spending more than ever — and those are exactly the readers worth reaching.

Romance readers average at least one novel a week. Nearly 80% read more than one per month. Thirty-five percent have been fans of the genre for over twenty years. Fantasy readers binge series that span thousands of pages across years of publication. These aren't people who stumble onto a book at an airport and forget about it before their flight lands. They are committed, voracious, and, most importantly, loyal. When they find an author they love, they follow that author. They buy the backlist, they pre-order the next title, they leave reviews and tell their friends and join the mailing list. Seventy-five percent of book sales, according to the Alliance of Independent Authors, are series titles.

A reader who buys a \$0.99 Book 1 and reads through a five-book series generates more than five times the value of that first purchase. The math of loyalty is staggering once you see it.

So how do you find those readers? This is the part where most marketing advice gets complicated in a way that feels exhausting. And I get it — the thought of learning SEO or running Facebook ads or decoding TikTok algorithms is enough to make anyone want to go back to just writing. But I think the core principle is actually much simpler than any of that, and it's this: if your marketing doesn't reach your target audience, there's no point in doing it. Everything else is downstream of that one rule.

What I've landed on, for myself and maybe for you, is that giving your book away might be the most direct path to finding those readers. Not as a gimmick, not as a desperate last resort, but as a genuine strategy. Think about what Kindle Unlimited has done for genre fiction authors: over 4 million titles, somewhere between 3 and 5 million subscribers who can sample Book 1 at zero cost and then binge an entire series. Amazon pays out \$520 million annually to self-published authors enrolled in that system. The free-entry model works because committed readers, once they're hooked, don't stop.

My own approach is simpler and more direct: I post my books on my website at threecrowbooks.com, where anyone can read them for free. No ads. No pop-ups. No distracting noise pulling your attention somewhere else. Just you and the story. The goal isn't to undermine the value of the work — it's to remove every possible barrier between a potential reader and the moment they realize they want more. Once they want more, the relationship has started. And the relationship is everything.

Author branding is really just the practice of making that relationship feel coherent and trustworthy over time. What do you want people to think of when they think of you? That question is worth sitting with. Not "what's my logo" or "what's my brand color palette" — but what is the actual experience of being a reader of yours? What do you stand for, what kind of stories do you tell, what can someone expect from you that they can't get anywhere else? The answers to those questions are your brand. Everything else is decoration.

There's more opportunity to build that identity directly with readers now than at any point in history. Email newsletters — unfashionable as they might sound — achieve a 43% average open rate in the publishing space, compared to around 33% for e-commerce in general. Well-maintained author lists can hit 50-60% or higher. Authors with active lists report two to five times higher first-week sales compared to those

without. The infrastructure for direct fan relationships has never been more accessible or more effective.

None of this is quick. Building a brand is a marathon, not a sprint, and I say that as someone still very much in the early miles. Brandon Sanderson didn't raise \$41.7 million on Kickstarter, the most-funded campaign in the platform's history, because he got lucky one afternoon. He spent years posting manuscript progress bars on his website, shooting YouTube updates, communicating transparently with readers about his process. His 2020 "test run" raised \$7 million; the 2022 campaign broke every record; a 2024 follow-up raised another \$16 million. That's the compounding return on sustained relationship-building. Most of us won't reach that scale, and we don't need to. The same principles operate at every level — which is exactly the point.

I'm also drawn to the idea that giving a book away doesn't have to stop at reaching genre readers online. My website can facilitate real-world partnerships with community organizations, with libraries, with programs that get books to incarcerated readers. A book in the hands of someone who's never had access to it, whose life it might actually change, is also a reader. Maybe the most loyal reader of all.

There are readers out there, concentrated, committed, and spending more than ever on the authors they love. Your job — our job — is to give them a reason to choose us. Sometimes that starts by simply letting them read your work without spending a dime.

TEARS

A POEM WRITTEN FOR THE NIECE OF THE AUTHOR ON HER WEDDING DAY

I dreamed about a dream I had
In which I stood so close to you
I spoke the words that were meant for you
And meant those words I said to you
I thought the thoughts I felt for you
And felt the love I had for you
The tears I felt, I shed for you
they showed my depth of love for you

Yesterday, I dreamed the dream again
Standing, speaking, shedding tears for you
I hoped, I prayed, to be with you
To share my life and love with you
The life I want to have with you
To grow, to build, get old with you
A life to give and care for you
Where days are warm, and full of you

Today, the dream I dreamed came true
The words I'd say, I've said to you
The love I'd feel, I've felt for you
The tears I'd cry, I've shed for you
I've danced, I've drunk, I've laughed with you
Said cheers to a world so filled by you
And dreamed the life I'd make with you
A life so long, it will end, with you

WRITTEN BY MARTIN DIXON

If you want to find out more about Martin's short stories, or leave a comment, please check out his blog page: <https://www.shortstoriesentertain.com>.

SISTERLY LOVE!

Susanne's head was firmly rooted in the past as she drummed beautifully manicured fingers on the desk and waited for the next to arrive. Her memory returned to the final trudge down the winding main road. A backpack filled with books dug a cruel ridge on top of each shoulder as it sagged ominously over her barely there behind.

The memory fragmented to show her the mass of ex-pupils flooding the pavement either side of the designated road crossing. She watched them cross as the 'green man' blinked and the alarm beeped their turn to cross was temporarily over. Her eyes took in young lads battling each other to be the first to press for the right to cross again.

One of the girls intervened and the boys parted yelping as she delivered a stinging slap carefully aimed for maximum effect. Nicole was renowned in the district; notorious even! No-one messed with her!

The click of a door catch jerked Susanne back to reality and she prepared to watch the proceedings unfold from the comfort of her observation room. She made notes as she watched the whole ramshackle sordid story unfold through a parade of young and irresponsible misfits.

Finally, the last one filled through. Susanne sat up straighter in the chair. The unruly mop of dark brown hair was vaguely familiar? The young male rubbed the side of his nose and glanced down to his boots. Susanne squinted as she continued to watch.

The object of her scrutiny shuffled in the plastic chair, rubbed his nose again, then finger-combed his hair out of his eyes. Dark brown and surmounted by thick brows, Susanne's hand covered her mouth. She phoned through to the small office.

“Dismiss the last one – it's just a repeat of what we already have!”

The young man walked with the easy grace of an athlete. Susanne checked over the sheaf of notes before stapling them and thrusting them into a wire basket.

Later, she hosted a meeting with other local companies with premises in the city centre precinct. They agreed unanimously prosecutions were the only way forward.

It took a full three months before their efforts bore fruit in the shape of multiple arrests and charges.

The crowning moment came as Susanne presented the collated evidence in front of the Magistrates'. Coolly, she recounted the surveillance, CCTV evidence and the collated

statements before a packed courtroom. The room waited with baited breath as the court official read the charges, along with the request for the defendant's plea.

Susanne waited in the little ante room for the Magistrates to deliver their verdict: guilty on all counts.

The newspapers reported the case in the late evening editions: local party girl Nicole Smith, famous for falling out of local nightspots and skimpy clothing in equal measure had been convicted of a raft of offences including drug dealing, handling stolen property, conspiracy to commit criminal acts, counselling, aiding and abetting criminal offences, shoplifting, and running a house of ill-repute.

Susanne knocked on the door of an unprepossessing mid-terraced property and stood back so the street lighting enveloped her in a cone of glowing yellow. One of the newspapers tucked up under her arm.

It was the home of Mrs Eileen Smith, mother of Nicole, formerly of the same address, now a guest of H.M. Prison, Doncaster.

An elderly woman with a bun of frizzy grey hair escaping in tufts answered the door.

Susanne blinked as the elderly woman looked her up and down, a cigarette glued to her lip gloss.

“You: I never thought you'd have the nerve!”

Susanne blinked away a tear, her voice croaky with emotion.

“I brought someone with me.”

“I'm not interested in anything to do with you!”

A freckled face and a shock of brown curls poked around the door.

“My boy!” followed by a harsh “I'm still not interested!”

“At least I'm not going to jail mother!”

WRITTEN BY BRYONY PETERSEN

INTRODUCING ZACHARY WAYNE LAVENDER

Musician • Composer • Author

Born in Monroe, Louisiana, and raised in Chicago, Illinois, Zachary Wayne Lavender embarked on his musical journey at the age of 10. Under the mentorship of some of Chicago's finest choral and church music educators, he honed his craft, eventually



pursuing advanced vocal training at Roosevelt University's Chicago Musical College, where he studied voice pedagogy under Robert Long and Ruth Ann Bishop.

A graduate of Whitney M. Young Magnet High School in Chicago, Zachary now serves as the President and CEO of Sanctuary of Refuge, an organization he founded in 2018. This support ministry assists individuals who may be struggling with same-sex attractions and seeking to align their lives with God's Word. As a self-publisher, Zachary has successfully distributed his work to diverse music departments nationwide, impacting choirs of varying sizes and compositions.

With decades of experience as a church musician, Zachary is known for cultivating singers and musicians who thrive in ministry roles. His deep passion for church music and his commitment to developing the next generation of musicians have earned him widespread respect. He is skilled at helping musicians reach their full potential, enabling them to minister with excellence and purpose.

Zachary's dedication to music has been recognized with awards for outstanding musicianship and creativity from The Thurston G. Frazier Memorial Chorale in 2014 and 2015. He has collaborated with children's choirs in Chicago and music ministries across Illinois, and GIA Publications has published his choral compositions. In December 2016, Zachary debuted his original work, *Bethlehem's Joy Christmas Cantata*, adding to a catalog of over 30 choral pieces, ten compositions for children's choirs, and works for various soloists.

An accomplished author, Zachary uses his writing to inspire spiritual growth and meaningful dialogue within the religious community. His works include *Victim of*

Circumstance: Help, Hope, and Healing from the Struggle, In 5 Days: Faith and Grace on Display, An Audience of One: The Seriousness of Worship, and A Restless Evil: Dental Danger.

Through his music and writing, Zachary Wayne Lavender leaves an indelible mark on worship communities nationwide, fostering creativity, faith, and dedication to ministry.

A RESTLESS EVIL: DENTAL DANGER

By Zachary Wayne Lavender

A Restless Evil challenges the reader to begin taking inventory of their tongue. The book of James teaches us that our words are not just sound waves caused by air traveling through our larynx. Our words have power! Our words are so powerful that the Bible announces they can cause “*life or death*” (Proverbs 19:14). The power of our tongue can destroy another person’s spirit in many ways. Mentally, spiritually, and in some cases physically. A judge or jury’s verdict can cause someone’s life to travel a path they never imagined. A weather reporter can predict the degree of weather we can experience by their words. God spoke the world into existence by the power of His words (Genesis 1:3-29).

A Restless Evil will convict, captivate, and catapult you into another dimension of discovering that your tongue is a “*restless evil*,” full of venomous poison that cannot be tamed in your “*own strength*.”

I chose this chapter because it shows how something so disproportionate can cause so much damage.

DISPROPORTIONATE

Chapter Two

“A bit in the mouth of a horse controls the whole horse. A small rudder on a huge ship in the hands of a skilled captain sets a course in the face of the strongest winds. A word out of your mouth may seem of no account, but it can accomplish nearly anything—or destroy it!” (James 3:3–5)

Disproportionate – too large or too small compared to something else.

As I write this book, our nation is in chaos, conflict, and confusion. The Coronavirus (COVID-19) has strained this nation and torn its fabric as it experiences an unprecedented health crisis. People all over the country are struggling to understand the effects and medical terminology needed to manage and maintain the safety guidelines set forth by the Centres for Disease Control. Medical professionals are scrambling and labouring tirelessly to keep the nation informed as the virus wreaks havoc in the country, states, cities, communities, homes, families, lives, churches, and the economy.

Racism has a long, complicated, and controversial history in this country. Unfortunately, the American poison has once again raised its hideous head to an all-time high degree of anger, aggression, hatred, and malice. This evil spirit has caused an even greater divide among people of every ethnicity, generation, and culture. There are protests, rioting, looting, killings, vandalizing, robbing, fighting, and disrespect of every kind filling the streets, highways, and neighbourhoods. The Coronavirus and racism are spreading like wildfire, destroying lives at an alarming rate. Yet another virus spreads uncontrollably, causing damage along its path, known as *“the tongue.”*

When God created the universe, He spoke, and what He spoke came to be. He *said*, *“Let there be light,”* and there was light. God *said*, *“The light was good.”* God *said*, *“Let the waters below the heavens be gathered into one place and let the dry land appear,”* and it was so. Adam was given the authority from the Father to *name* the animals. His authority was accomplished through the power of *“words.”* God brilliantly changes Abram’s and Jacob’s names to reflect their *“new things.”* This process came about through the use of *“words.”* Matthew 17:20 tells us, *“If we have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain.”* This move of faith involved the use of *“words.”* Peter betrayed Jesus three times, the Pharisees conspired to kill Jesus, and Judas sold Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. These three incidents involved *“words.”* Words have power! Words have meaning! James, the author, looks more closely at the use, results, and application of our words.

The Master Switch

Several years ago, I purchased a condo, and the HOA decided to upgrade the wiring. Unfortunately, the electricians interrupted the mainline, which triggered the circuit breaker to shut down. The lead electrician entered my condo and inspected my circuit breaker. *“Sir, it looks like you have two lugs that have burned out. They’re drawing power from the main utility source after they run through your meter. These lugs are extremely hot, so please be careful. They feed the main panel, distributing it to the smaller breakers. You can flip this lever to shut off the power in the kitchen. This lever is the master switch. When you flip this one, everything turns off.”* What he said next was profound. *“I wish my supervisor had a master switch.”*

We could all benefit from having one!

James 3:3–5 challenges us to *“examine our tongue.”* When I make an appointment for my annual physical, one of the first exams my primary physician conducts is to have me stick out my tongue. During one visit, I asked her, *“Why do you have me stick out my tongue?”* She explained, *“The tongue indicates signs of illness, coupled with other health issues that may be dormant in the body. It can also help me to determine and offer a precise diagnosis.”* James’s examination *challenges, tests, and displays* our faith. God will use the examination to

expose our faith's validity, integrity, and maturity because a “*transformed heart produces a transformed tongue.*” This revelation should prompt every Christian to examine what’s spoken from their lips.

The tongue resembles the lugs connected to the circuit breaker. *It’s sweltering!* It has an unceasing reserve and storage of sin and can spin out of control. When the tongue spews its venom, the body readily follows, responds, and reacts. We cannot deny its power and destruction. James gives us insight into the power of this organ by spotlighting two explanations that hit us where it hurts.

“Now, if we put the bits into the horses’ mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well. Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, they are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot desires. So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things.”(James 3:3–5a)

The Bit

The bit is a piece of metal or synthetic material that fits between the horse’s incisors and molars, where there are no teeth, and aids in the communication between the rider and the horse. The bit is part of the harness, which allows the rider to connect with the horse via the reins.

The massiveness and power of a horse can be recognized by all who have sight. I was selected to attend a summer camp for boys at the age of twelve. One of the many activities offered was horseback riding. This is my first time seeing a magnificent creature. Because of their sizeable physique, I revered this large animal and aggressively kept my distance. I could not imagine a 100-pound preteen holding two leather straps as an exact match for the power of a 2,200-pound creature. It’s from this perspective that James invites our imaginations.

“Now, if we put the bits into the horses’ mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well.”(James 3:3)

James makes the opening of this verse straightforward. The bit is small, and when placed in the mouth, it controls the horse's strength. Likewise, the small rudder can turn and guide a large ship. Now James turns the corner. If we have control over our tongue, it indicates that we can control ourselves. Whoever can hold their tongue can bridle (restrain, curb, rein) the whole body. James’s point is that the tongue is *disproportionate* to the rest of the body. His point is more specific. The rest of the body is controlled by

controlling, checking, and correcting the tongue. If we cannot control, check, and correct the tongue, everything will manifest into chaos, confusion, and catastrophe.

So, it's not just difficult to control our speech; when we do the work, we can discipline our whole mind, body, and soul. When we control what we say, we can control how we see everything. We can see life through God's lens. We can see who God wants us to be. We can see where God wants us to go and what He wants us to do in advancing His kingdom. After all, our thoughts are just "*unarticulated*" words. James's point is this: If we want to live in a God-fearing manner, we must master the beauty of speaking in a God-honouring way.

The Bridle/Harness

The bit, bridle, and reins function together to give control of the horse's head to the rider. Finally, the harness is the most fundamental part of the horse's headgear. Its function is to direct a horse.

In chapter three, verse three, James paints a startling illustration.

"A bit in the mouth of a horse controls the whole horse."

How in the heavens can something so small control something so massive? Both the horse and the bit are "*disproportionate*." The horse is too large in comparison to the small bit. The animal outweighs the bit, yet it controls the horse. When James speaks to us about the Christian tongue, he wants us to consider "*control*." A *small* bit in the mouth of an *extensive* animal controls, manoeuvres, directs, and guides its entire body. A small tongue in a human being's mouth controls and directs the whole body. Who holds the *bit* and *bridle* of your *tongue*? Who controls your words?

Let's take a look at some measurements:

The human tongue

Average length – 10 cm

Adult male – 70 grams/3.3 in/8.5 cm

Adult female – 69 grams/3.1 in/7.9 cm

The bit

Average length – 5 inches

Weighs 1–2 pounds

The horse

Average weight – 900 to 2,200 pounds

There are two points I would like to bring to our attention. First, the weight and size of the tongue do not dismiss, diminish, or disregard its significance and importance. The horse is a large animal, yet the bit is small. It controls movement and direction and “*obeys the animal's rider.*” If I’m controlling a horse and want it to perform a specific command or action, I apply enough pressure on the reins to get it to respond. In other words, the large animal is under the control of the small bit in its mouth. Let’s link this same concept to our tongue. If I’m controlling my tongue and I want my words to perform a specific command or action, then the Holy Spirit acts as the bridle to put enough pressure on my tongue to create and construct my words. When the Holy Spirit holds the bridle, our tongue will not spew poison into the lives of others. It will not speak words of death and destruction. It will not cause others to feel inferior or less valuable. Second, James says, “*The tongue cannot be tamed.*” In other words, on its own, the tongue cannot break from ungodly habits of speech. The writer seems to have a bleak perspective on the tongue and our ability to get this *restless evil* under control.

The Rudder

An underwater blade positioned at the stern of a boat or ship and controlled by its helm. Turning causes the vessel’s head to turn in the same direction.

The rudder is introduced to the same essence. Instead of a one-pound bit, it is a small rudder. In other words, “In addition to the bit, I want to take a look at the rudder of the ship as well” (James 3:3). He doesn’t identify any details regarding the kind of ship. He wants us to use our imagination. James only gives enough information for us to envision large ships. His lack of details might suggest that the size of the vessel is just as big as our creativity and imagination.

A rudder’s size can vary depending on the type of ship. Instruments today are more complex due to advances in modern technology. For example, cruise ships have GPS devices. This device can hold cruise ships, yachts, and even small fishing boats in place and tell them where they are and where they are headed. A GPS on a cruise ship is about the size of a laptop computer. This device can be as small as a postage stamp.

Imagine something as small as a *postage stamp* can control a cruise ship weighing up to 225,000 gross tons.

Like the bit and the rudder, our tongue is small compared to the horse and the ship. Yet the bit and rudder in the hands of a “*skilful person*” can control the horse and the ship, whereas our bodies cannot control our tongues. This is undoubtedly “*disproportionate*.” James states that it seems hopeless for us to control our tongues.

“*For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed as has been tamed by the human race. But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison.*”(James 3:7–8)

Why Is It So Difficult to Tame the Tongue?

So that we understand what James is saying, we must examine one word in particular. That word is *tame*.

Tame – to make less powerful and easier to control; to cultivate restraint and resistance; to become less dangerous or threatening.

James has a lengthy dialogue regarding the tongue and its decorative and dooming qualities. We’ve established earlier that the tongue is a small body part that reveals some negative character traits.

- It is a small part of the body, but it makes a *great boast* (James 3:5)
- It is a fire and a world of evil that *defiles the whole body* (James 3:6)
- It is set on *fire by hell* (James 3: 6)
- It is a *restless evil* and full of *deadly poison* (James 3:8)

Is it any wonder James declares that taming the tongue is almost impossible?

When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, God assigned and credited sin to all humanity. Whether we want to believe it or not, all humanity is born with an evil and sinful nature (Rom. 3:10–18). Crouching beneath our layers of flesh are varying degrees of pride, jealousy, greed, hatred, bigotry, lust, anger, and bitterness. Satan is in the vicinity when the tongue gets out of control and lashes out. We experience this behaviour daily among our families, co-workers, friends, and church.

I’ve heard the saying, “*Whatever comes up, comes out.*” Oh, how reckless!

This character flaw displays a person's level of "*spiritual maturity*." Speech such as this indicates that the person has no hands on the reins or rudder; therefore, they say whatever comes into their mind. Then some have used their tongue based on their emotions, mindset, and circumstances.

So that we govern our tongue appropriately, James gives us the model to keep the tongue from slipping and sliding toward destroying lives. He points us toward the Holy Spirit, who works and develops through the new man, steadily manoeuvring His hands on the reins and rudder.

"Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature, the old (tongue) things passed away; behold, new (tongue) have come."(2 Cor. 5:17)

THE PASSIVE VOICE

In the first issue for this year, readers may recall I alluded to the passive voice when discussing the differences between factual writing and fictional writing.

Before launching into my views, I want to clarify the basis of my views is the experience of becoming an independent writer. I am in no way any kind of expert. I read every day, and I have (over many years) read a lot of books.

In fact, reading is my first original hobby. Others have occupied me for a time, then either waned or stayed with me, while reading has remained constant since I first learned the skill. I wrote my first published book back in 2019. However, I wrote a great many unfinished pieces, short stories and bits of poetry for years leading up to that point. This is the experience and learned knowledge I have acquired to allow me the luxury of my opinions and observations on the passive voice.

Every independent writer learns through experience, reading and life itself, and our unique ‘take’ is based on our individual perspective gleaned from our individual experience, reading matter and the way we interpret all of that.

To be clear, the passive voice can be a valuable tool in the right setting. Factual writers may find it useful to describe the surrounding circumstance, environment or context.

For the uninitiated, the passive voice is a method of presenting in written form an objective version of events or a situation by removing the personal, subjective element.

For example, it could be a piece to describe a football match, or perhaps the first night of a play. If a writer wanted to present a written piece in the manner of a journalist, the writer might describe how each team played to their strengths, how well one of the teams worked together to win the match, or perhaps how the losing team were disadvantaged by the late arrival of their coach to the venue, thus losing them valuable training time.

The passive voice is a way to describe the surrounding situation and avoid personal attack. Mainly used within the corporate setting of business reporting, a lot of factual writing forms employ the passive voice.

In fact, the passive voice only becomes “the enemy” within fictional writing, and ultimately solely because this method of writing avoids the concept of direct, immediate action.

This is where fiction differs from factual writing. Fiction writing is the process of relaying the creation out of imagination.

In order to convey that imagination, the writing must grab the reader's attention, and hold it firmly in the story from the first to the last word. It therefore follows that the writing must convey action, advance characters and the whole must move towards a conclusion. It is almost impossible to grasp and retain the reader's attention if the writing wanders into passive descriptions.

This, by the way, is not my opinion. It is the sum of everything I have read, every piece of advice and what I have learned through the experience of writing.

If you read Stephen King's 'On Writing', he makes exactly this point. In fact, he takes it further by adding if any sentence in your story does not advance the story, or add to character or the character's story arc, it has no place in the story (and I am paraphrasing here).

KILL PLAN

Verity Chalmers flounced her way through an open door to plonk her neat little body in the centre of her son's squishy sofa.

"Anthony, darling – you do see there's no alternative?"

Resisting the urge to sweep his mother from the sofa and banish her from his house, Tony Chalmers visibly cringed.

"Mother, please? You make Anthony sound so snooty!"

"Don't change the subject!"

Verity aimed a swipe at her son's arm.

"What a pity I'm not still 8 – I could have you charged with assaulting a minor!"

"I knew the library job was a bad idea!"

"You know very well I love it!"

"I had hopes of you going into the armed Forces, darling."

"So you could flirt with my superior officers, no doubt!"

"What a horribly bourgeois opinion!"

"I would have said it was accurate!"

"Your father left us far too soon!"

"Not a blessed relief, then!"

"Don't be so awfully rude!"

Tony merely raised his eyebrows and rolled his eyes.

"We must do lunch – come on, darling; my treat!"

Tony found himself propelled by an elbow towards his own front door.

The Lowry Sweet was in the centre of the combined city library and art gallery. The play on words gave away it was no longer part of the building's original 'withdrawing' rooms. It now formed a central tea room, with pared back decor and two or three small obligatory Lowry paintings.

“You do realise this is a busman’s holiday for me?”

Ignoring her son’s point, Verity breezed into the reason for the change of scene.

“So what are you going to do?”

Tony studied his feet and realised he was still wearing the robust pair of house slippers he’d treated himself to. They bore thick hardwearing soles, perfect for when he took the rubbish from kitchen to outside bin without thinking.

“Anthony!”

Verity rolled the middle letters, knowing how much he hated her doing so.

“I will – but in my time, and my way!”

“Oh Anthony – stop dithering! If you don’t do something soon, they’ll take over and you’ll just give in; I know you!”

“Mother – I am not 8 years old! I will get rid – but in my own time! Now stop nagging and order!”

Verity studied her son’s demeanour as he bent his head to examine the menu. She was not entirely satisfied, but (unless she wanted an all-out row, and she didn’t), it would have to do – for now!

“Good morning Tony!”

Tony Chalmers smiled back at Clive, a neighbour two doors from his own.

Inside his kitchen, he swung the plastic carrier onto one of the tops and emptied the contents. He was pleased with his forethought in taking an innocuous supermarket’s own carrier. He knew it would have caused comment, from Clive for example, if he’d had to go with a bag from the shop he’d really visited.

From the counter, he selected one of several packets and read the instructions. Banded across the top of the container in glaring yellow letters against the black background popped the word: POISON.

Careful to keep the packets per instructions, he loaded them in a top cupboard, away from light and water.

Tony eyed the last item from his shopping: a heavy duty padlock and clasp, with appropriately sized screws. From the bank of drawers, he selected a medium size screw driver and hold-punching tool and set to work securing the cupboard.

As he finished working, a voice rang out behind him.

“Good morning handsome!”

Tony deftly avoided an embrace.

“How’d you take your coffee – or do you prefer tea?”

“We are in a bit of a mood, now, aren’t we?”

“I am perfectly fine, Roger; you know what the deal is here! I’m due in work soon, so you need to leave!”

“Fine – don’t phone me – I’ll phone you – if I ever want another one night stand!”

A few weeks later, on one of those hazy hot days common to late summer, Tony manipulated barbecue tongs and chatted happily with neighbours and guests. A darkly brown pint of beer sat by his elbow as Tony scanned his back garden, thronged with people. He smiled as a familiar figure swished towards him, one hand clutching at an elaborate hat.

“What a charming party! Lots of lovely Pyms!”

Clive arrived for sausages and another beer.

“I see all the hard work you put in earlier in the year has paid off! The garden’s looking wonderful!”

Tony looked around; a smug smile dimpled his cheeks.

“It’s a question of cutting away enough of the dead stuff!”

Clive nodded.

“Yes – I can see you’ve ripped out the climbing ivy and replaced some of the shrubs!”

“Yes – replace what’s not growing – rip out the clinging ivy; get rid of the rot!”

Tony watched his mother’s face scrunch.

“Whatever happened to the nice young man I met before – what’s his name Roger, I think?”

“You are so last year! Roger was a passing phase; it was never serious, was it Tony!”

“I had no idea you were such good friends with my Tony?”

More amused than put out; Tony fixed his hand on one hip and waggled the tongs:

“Too clingy, mother – and you did tell me to get rid of all the rubbish!”

Verity scanned the garden. It was clear Tony had completely transformed everything. In early spring, when she had whisked him off to the Lowry Sweet, it was a plain expanse of patchy grass. The hedge was old and barren in places; it had no form as it edged the boundary lines.

Old ivy clung to the fall pipes, walls and windows, bleached of colour, with withered leaf fingers appearing to burrow into the mortar. Even to her untutored eyes, it looked lifeless and lacklustre.

She smiled. The difference was astounding. To the side, a kitchen garden offered up lettuce, carrots, onions, swede and sweet potatoes. A crazily paved path led to a greenhouse teeming with produce. Beyond an apple, pear and plum tree budded with the promise of the fruit to come. She looked around herself. Paths intersected beds of blooming flowers. Beyond the new lawn, table and chair sets peppered a paved seating area where guests and neighbours chatted amiably.

“When you told me you’d bought this place, I was concerned. I thought it’d leech money and cause you heartache. It looks stunning and you’ve proved me wrong!”

“A man needs something to challenge him. I found this place and I do love it! Nothing and no-one is getting in the way!”

Clive returned for more supplies from the barbecue to hear the tail end of his remark.

“I’ll say you’ve worked wonders. You were at it every spare minute – even into the night!”

Verity turned to face her son:

“You did this all by yourself?”

“Certainly, mother! It’s just a question of getting rid of all the rubbish. I did what you told me – cut away the deadwood, ditch the clingy unwanted stuff.”

Clive bustled back to the barbecue with a question.

“Is there any more tonic – the ladies have run out and there’s no more bottles over there?”

Tony smiled:

“Try in the kitchen – one of the wall cupboards – opposite side from the sink!”

Clive trotted off, happy to act as garden party waiter. Inside the kitchen, he checked each wall cupboard in turn till he found what he was looking for. As he passed by the barbecue, he called out:

“Found them – thanks! One of the cupboards seems to have holes in the door. It’s not woodworm or something sinister?”

“No; I had to lock some stuff away for a while. There’s no need now – so I removed the lock.”

Verity looked slightly worried. She didn’t like how things were adding up. She shook off a shiver and turned to her son.

“It seems funny not seeing your friend Roger here. I thought he was becoming a permanent fixture!”

Tony looked a little exasperated.

“He’s gone to pastures new, mother – it’s all you need to know!”

Clive wondered back, several empty bottles clutched in each hand.

“Hey – Tony, I meant to ask; did you manage getting rid of the giant wasps’ nests in the attic?”

THE FINAL WORD

Well! I found this issue one of the most interesting yet! With a very different story and perspective from Zachary Wayne Lavender and the most thought-provoking article from Mikhail Threecrow, it started an idea!

I don't know if you have ever researched the background to novel-writing? Depending on where you set the bar, the first novels emerged in the 1600 or 1700s, with the Pilgrim's Progress (which some argue it isn't really a novel, more a series of parables), or Robinson Crusoe.

If you're interested to know more, there are a number of books (obviously!) that discuss, for example The Rise of the Novel, and Aspects of the Novel in far greater detail than here.

Obviously, the 17th and 18th Centuries are very pre-social media, so how did they develop readers and people to buy their book?

What you also need to understand is that the world was a very different place back then, especially in the United Kingdom.

For one thing, there was a very clear class structure. Only the better-off had disposable wealth to be able to afford luxury items such as books.

Indeed, only the better-off had the ability to read them! Schooling was another luxury the poorest of society could not afford.

One of the reasons why the poor tended to have large families was not the lack of entertainment in the evenings (no TV or digital devices); it was because more people in a household equalled more potential wages coming into the household.

Since there was no NHS, medicine and medical treatments were also a luxury few poor people could afford, so their children rarely made it to adulthood.

So, although the pool of potential readers and purchasers of books wasn't large, it could nonetheless be a profitable way to earn a living. With the advent of the printing press, growing numbers tried their hand at writing fiction.

Would-be writers would try their best to attract the attentions of a patron to help fund them whilst they tried to sell their writing, usually in small pamphlet format, among the friends of the said patron. Patronage became an established route for writers as early as the late Middle Ages through to Tudor times, so this was a well-worn track.

What the advent of the printing press did was accelerate the journey because the writer's words could be available to would-be readers en masse much more quickly on the printing press. This led naturally to a new phenomena – serialisation.

For the printing presses produced yet another phenomena – newspapers, which needed to fill column inches.

By the time of Charles Dickens, serialisation was the best route to instant fame, fortune and renown.

This quick summary of around 400 years of writing history has a point: serialisation could be a way of getting your earliest writing in front of an audience, readers and building the potential loyalty Mikhail Threecrow has highlighted in his article.

Mikhail makes a very valid point: as independent writers, we are responsible for everything. We are all learning “on the job” as it were, often on our own, with no mentors or back-up. We are in a real sense novice writers, so much of what we try is on the trial basis of see if it works.

I started The Indie Writers' Digest as an innovative, open-minded publication. I intended it to be 'blind' to everything except the independent writer's ability to put over a good story or produce a thought-provoking information piece.

So, I throw it open to every indie writer; if you are writing your first books and you want the opportunity to serialise it, the Indie Writers' Digest could be an avenue for you to explore.

As always, I hope you enjoy this issue of the Indie Writers' Digest. I wish everyone a wonderful Summertime ahead, and please remember to be kind!

BRYONY PETERSEN