

Enter the World of Thrillers

A CBA fiction has grown in popularity and its subgenres have proliferated, thrillers and novels of supernatural horror have seen their star rise," wrote Jana Riess in *Publishers Weekly*. Such thriller writers as Frank Peretti, Ted Dekker, Brandilyn Collins, and Robert Liparulo have sold millions of books.

How can you tap into this rising genre? Here are tips I picked up at ThrillerFest, a conference sponsored by the International Thriller Writers (ITW). This year-old organization with strict membership standards boasts more than 400 members who have sold 1.6 billion books worldwide.

Defining a Thriller

According to David Morrell, co-president of ITW, a thriller is a broad term that can be applied to many different types of novels, such as the legal thriller, spy thriller, romantic thriller, medical thriller, police thriller, historical thriller, political thriller, religious thriller, and high-tech thriller.

Morrell said, "What gives them their common ground is the intensity of the emotions they create, particularly those of apprehension and exhilaration, of excitement and breathlessness. By definition, if thrillers do not thrill, they aren't doing their job."

Writing a Thriller

Gayle Lynds, author and co-president of ITW, described the importance of setting this way: "A setting can help build suspense. Use your setting to enhance your suspense. I'll admit all of us love to write description, but we have to just get over it. Any description has to serve the story and is told for a purpose. If not, then it should not be there. Let your description reveal something about somebody, or it is not doing its job."

Also Lynds encouraged writers to find their own voice and not follow the thriller examples of others. "Teach yourself the craft of writing, so you can make your own mark in your own way."

According to Lynds, "The thriller audience

is sophisticated and educated; plus they tend to read more books and be more open minded."

For her own work, she emphasized the importance of fascination. "If you aren't fascinated, your reader will not be fascinated. I read three newspapers a day, and I find many different things which fascinate me. I will clip newspaper articles and put them into various boxes. Whether I return and go through that box or not, the process of creating these clips has sealed the information into my unconsciousness."

Jason Pinter, an editor at Three Rivers Press (a division of Random House) and new novelist, described the necessity of tight writing for a thriller. "It should read like a bullet shooting from a gun, as few grooves and nicks that slow it down as possible. Most often writers need to have an editor cut excess fat in the manuscript.

"When it comes to dialogue, I suggest you speak it to yourself or speak it aloud. If you can't hear your characters saying the words you've written, rewrite it until you can."

In order to get a thriller published, Pinter advised, "Every scene needs to both deepen the characters and advance the plot line. No scene should be isolated from the rest of the story. If it is in isolation, then it needs to be cut. I find this process of trimming helps the author streamline the plot and deepen the characters at the same time. I compare it to chiseling stone, cutting off the jagged edges; but you never want to make the cuts so deep that you hit muscle. An editor's job is to make a good story better, but never to leave his fingerprints. A good editor will teach the author how to make his own work better."

Pinter gave solid advice to help writers edit their thrillers. "As an author, when you read your story, do you start to skim it? If so, then the reader will skim in the same places. Make sure the first person entertained by your story is you. Every scene has to further the plot. Plant seeds early in your story, which will sprout for the rest of the book."

After an editor has worked over a thriller, according to Pinter, the overall novel is gener-

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