

CLARENDON HOUSE PUBLICATIONS

'The world is better with all this beautiful work seen at last.' – A. Delf, author

This week from Clarendon House



Issue # 76 of
*The Inner Circle Writers'
Magazine*



*Galaxy # 22: An Inner Circle
Writers' Group Science Fiction
and Fantasy Anthology*



Welcome!

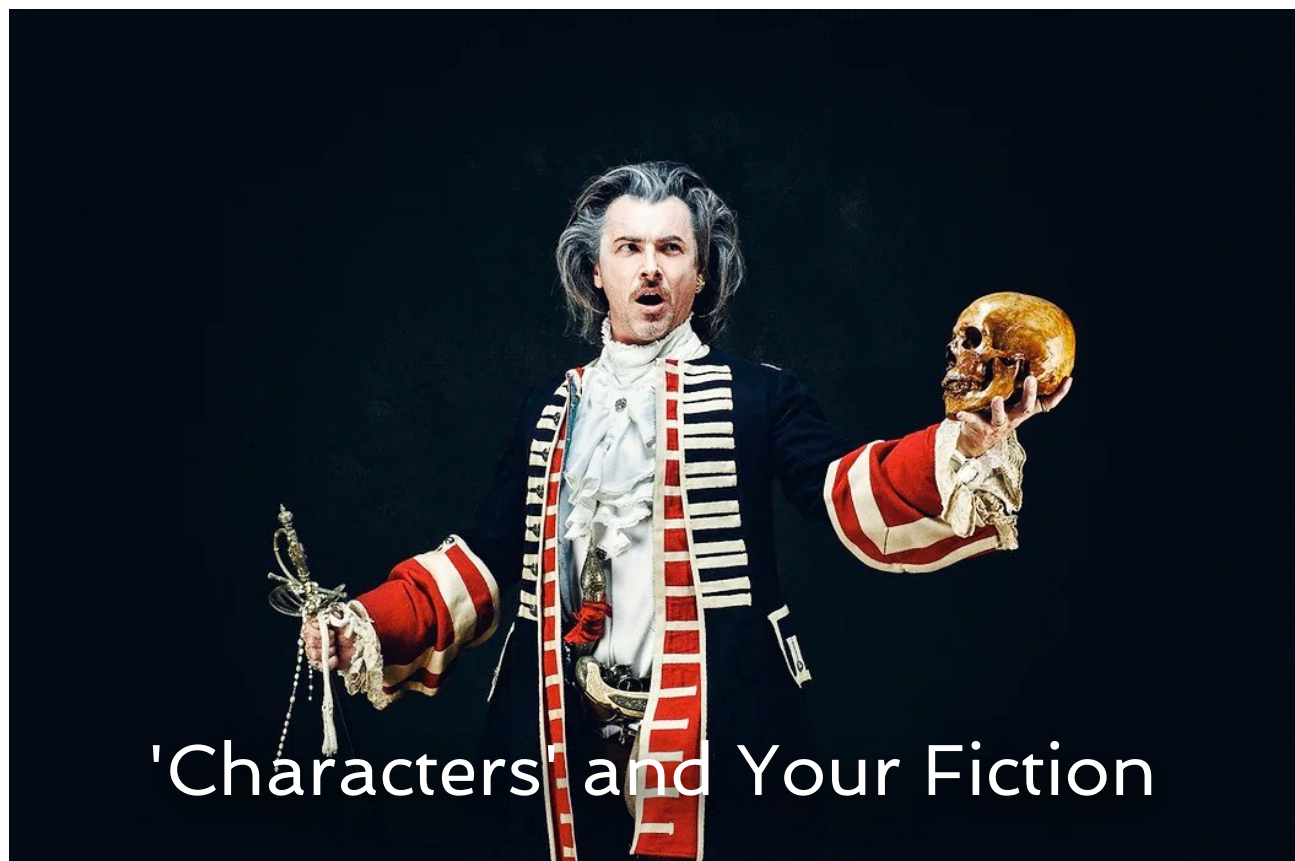
Welcome to the Clarendon House Newsletter for week ending 16th May 2025!

This week: Issue # 76 of *The Inner Circle Writers' Magazine* containing the five entries you voted for in the first round of the **Great Clarendon House Writing Challenge 2025!** Five authors now go on to the second round: the dreaded Technical Challenge! [Subscribe now](#) so you don't miss out! Also: *Galaxy # 22: An Inner Circle Writers' Group Science Fiction and Fantasy Anthology*: An origin story for a mighty barbarian, asteroid strikes, slipping into the world of Faerie, a mysterious butterfly, the end of the human world, peculiar monsters in the forest, the vast crimson waters of Mars, dragons and spaceships in the Thames, time paradoxes and deals with the Devil, plus two special bonus features: a story of an accidental alien revolution from *Noman's Land* author Mel Lee Newmin and a tale from the world of *The Sword Sundergost* from Alexander Marshall - enjoy another glittering journey into the realms of science fiction and fantasy!

Galaxy # 22 features the work of the Birch Twins, Marlene Fabian Stiles, DJ Elton, Gabriella Balcom, David Painter, A. L. Paradiso, Linda Sparks, Justin Tuijl, Jacek Wilkos, Justin Wiggins, Allan Tierney, Tony Fyler, Mel Lee Newmin and Alexander Marshall.

Feedback is welcome. Drop me a line at grant@clarendonhousebooks.com

Below is a popular blog item.



There can hardly be a work of fiction without this thing called a 'character'. But there is a great deal of false and misleading information out there about what a character is and how to devise a successful one. The construction of characters or viewpoints turns out to be much simpler - and stranger - than you might think.

Answering the following questions will guide you towards a better understanding of this building block of fiction.

1. Are you finding it difficult to develop convincing or attractive characters?

What is a 'convincing character'? Your first thought might be 'Someone who appears realistic to a reader'. That thought could lead you astray.

'Realism' when it comes to character is not a case of building a convincing life-story around someone who you have made up, at least not in terms of facts and figures. You may have composed a detailed biography of a character in your story, or you may have simply created him or her 'on the fly'.

Whatever the case, if the person you've ended up doesn't possess certain very distinct characteristics, your story will falter.

Characters are fundamental tools used by writers to engage and guide readers. If you have the world of ideas under control, those ideas need vessels and those vessels are the 'made up people' that inhabit your fiction. But how do you make those figures recognisable and appealing?

[How Stories Really Work](#) gives you an outline of the mechanics involved.

2. Do characters often seem weak or ineffective?

Most stories, even simple ones, require a set of characters, not just one. But how can you be sure that the reader's attention will be on the character who is central to your story? What makes one character senior to another? Are you introducing characters for the sake of it? Do you know what it takes to have the alchemy of characters functioning properly?



3. Do you have solid, realistic characters?

Strangely enough, the thing that makes characters truly solid and realistic is their emptiness. The precise nature of this hollowness is described in great detail in [How Stories Really Work](#) but for now you can rest assured that a thick file of character 'facts' will not particularly help you to attract readers.

'Realism' means 'Do they behave realistically?' To grasp that fully, you need to have some understanding of why real people behave as they do.

4. Are your characters generally working out?

Then again, you might be happy with your fictitious people. It's possible that you can picture them clearly in your mind and have even grown to 'like' them as though they were real.

A word of caution though: one of the most common problems that would-be writers run into is that their characters are almost entirely derivative. The number of wizards who resemble Gandalf in many attempted works of fiction is vast. Even some of the most successful works of modern fiction have wizards that resemble him. There are reasons why these resemblances occur - and even reasons why

they are largely unavoidable - but if you don't know what those reasons are and have ended up with someone frustratingly like a character in a book you admire, it's time to step back and see if you can find out what is going on with character development.

5. Are you confident that your characters have appeal?

Please note that a character you have created may have an appeal to you, but they may not have an appeal to anyone else.

It's an unfortunate truth that to be considered a successful fiction author, there have to be other people involved: readers. Another gaping trap that many would-be writers fall into blithely and blindly is that they write what they consider to be engaging and entertaining material, including creating characters whom they think of as warm and wonderful, but find to their horror that no one else sees it like that. Determining whether or not a character has appeal means actually exposing that character to at least one other reader to test him or her out. If the character is a winner, great. But be prepared to be disheartened when your most beloved creations seem lifeless or awkward or 'unlifelike' to another.

6. Do you have a method of keeping track of your characters' motivations?

Stories can be character-driven or plot-driven, or a mixture of both.

But what is it that actually 'drives' stories forward? Oddly enough, there is a distinct and manageable force which lies behind both character-driven and plot-driven fiction, and you can read much more about that in [How Stories Really Work](#). For now, you probably have some kind of idea of why your main character behaves as he or she does. Does this motivation change in the story? Does it grow in intensity? Or does it fade? Are your main characters simply 'going through the motions' that you have seen similar characters go through in other fiction?

7. Do you understand your main characters' motivations entirely?

See # 6 above. Understanding your own character's motivations entirely is one of the

keys to writing a story which is not just derivative or shallow but actually capable of generating meaning and satisfaction for readers.

8. Are your characters hard to motivate?

Characters - whether they are central to a story or secondary figures - can be terribly hard to motivate if you don't understand # 6 above. If your characters seem a bit 'dead on the page' you will find that they fall into the 'going through the motions' patterns above. Your story will read like a rewrite of someone else's tale.

Characters who are, on the other hand, easy to motivate not only seem to leap off the page but also take control of the story and can lead you in unexpected and usually more exciting directions. That's because a correctly-motivated character has tapped into the underlying power of the story, about which there is more on this blog.



9. Do you write fiction easily?

Writing fiction - developing characters and then structuring a plot, writing chapters and scenes and having things crafted to a fully satisfying conclusion - is often hard work. If it's coming easy to you, you are part of a rare breed; if, however, you are struggling to create something that reads as authentic or meaningful, getting Ideas and Characters right will form the basis of a rejuvenation for you.

10. Do your characters work well together?

It's a very strange thing that characters as a group fall into a pattern. This pattern is described at length in [How Stories Really Work](#).

For now, you should recognise that there is such a pattern and that it probably applies to your fiction in much the same way as the use of words and grammar applies.

If your created set of figures is 'meshing together' well, it probably means that you have stumbled upon this pattern accidentally. On the other hand, if you are having difficulty with this, you will need to find out more about that pattern. It may be a case of having one or two characters missing from the complete set; it may be that your characters are not fulfilling their set role quite as well as they should. Either way, a homogenous and coordinated set of characters can help your fiction even more than a recognisable set of letters and standard punctuation.



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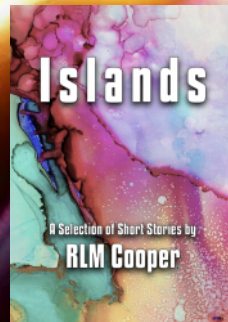
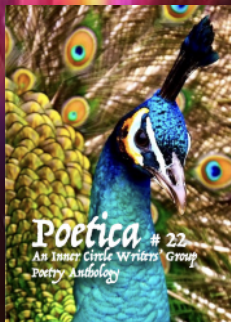
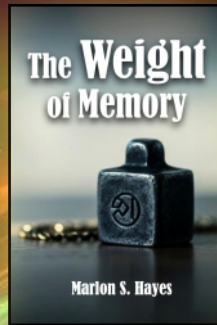


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2025 so far!



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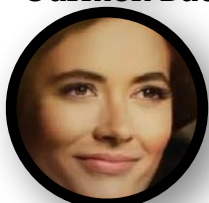
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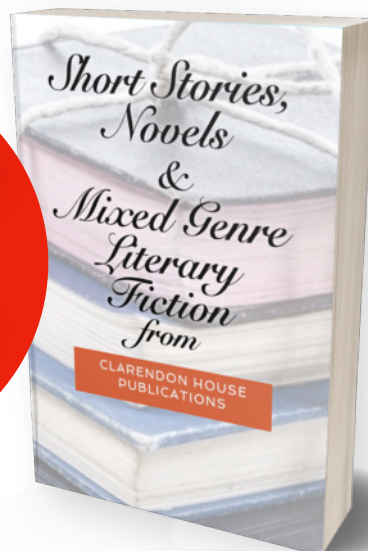
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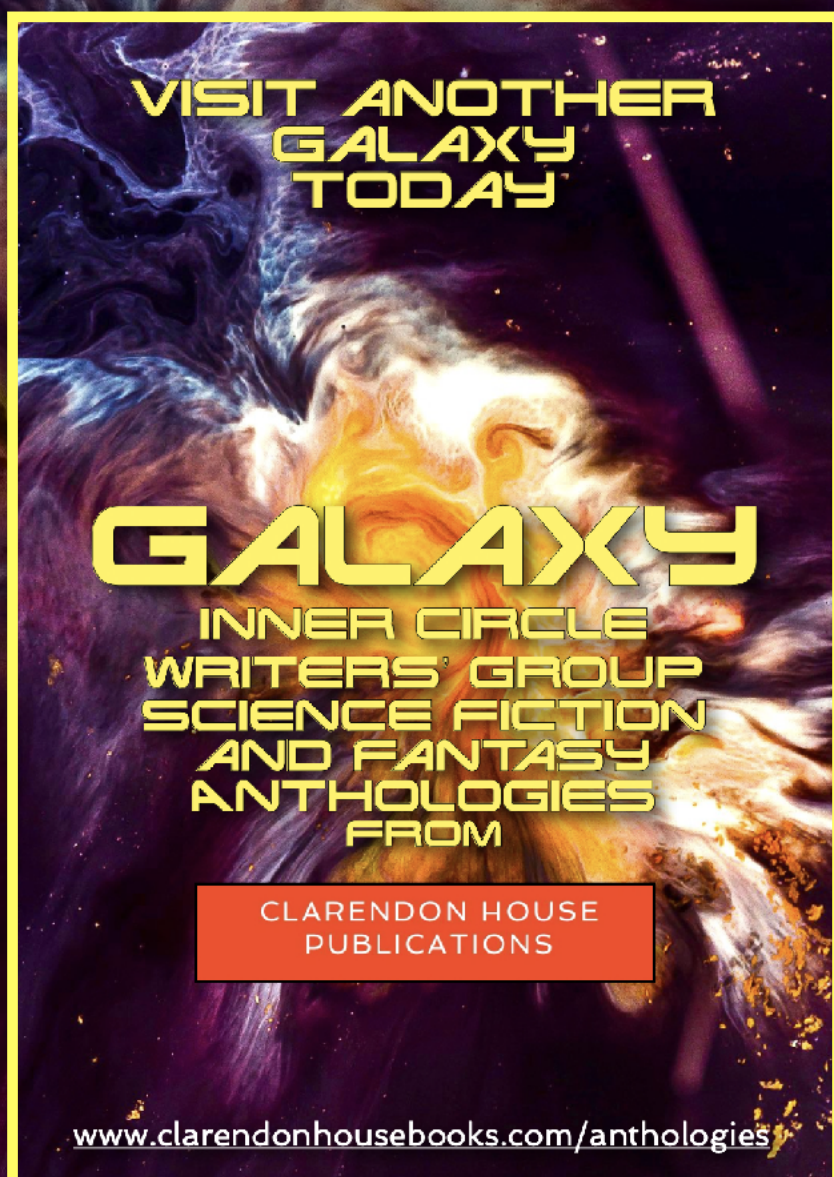


Samantha Hamilton

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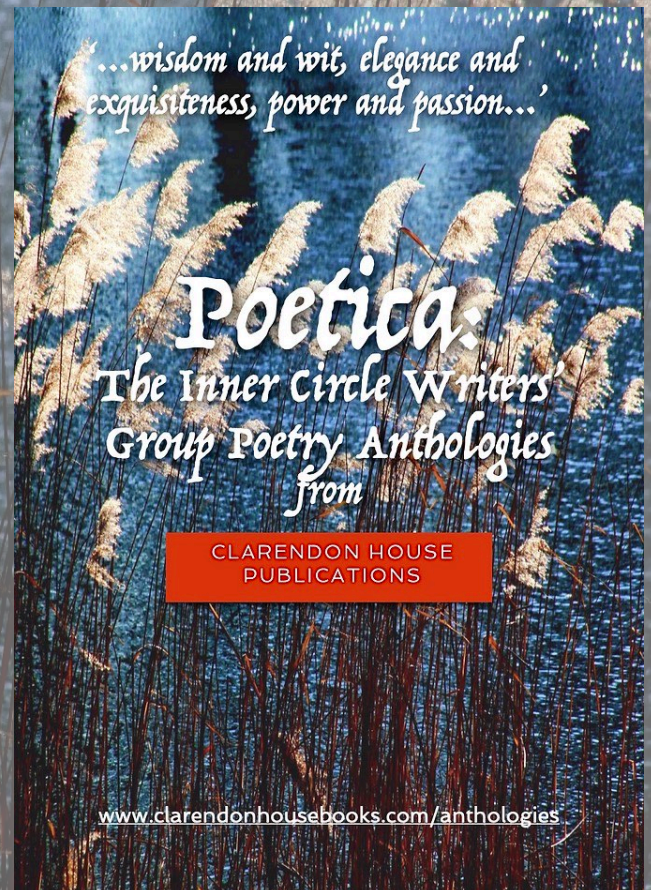
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The

Poetica

anthologies

*Poetry should surprise
by a fine excess and not
by singularity—it should
strike the reader as a
wording of his own
highest thoughts, and
appear almost a
remembrance.
— John Keats*



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CLARENDON HOUSE AUTHOR

ALEXANDER MARSHALL



THE PHANTOM SWORD OF RONDAR

Annua Larkswing once studied to be a Herald of Raendu in the Hall of Ramsgarden high in the hills of Rondar - but she abandoned the ways of peace and went to fight in the War of the Sword, becoming one of the fabled Crimson Company...

Fearful Fretravorn is home to the Bloodseekers, vicious raiders who seek the downfall of the kingdom of Rondar across the sea; they will stop at nothing to utterly destroy that realm...

*When a savage raid upon the coastal village of Tagavorn results in the cruel death of Krisain, Annua's adopted daughter, a wild and vengeful power is unleashed which neither the lord of the Bloodseekers nor the queen of Rondar could have foreseen: it is time for the **Phantom Sword of Rondar** to strike again...*

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NOW IN ONE GIANT VOLUME

'From the fertile mind of Alexander Marshall comes a complex world of Gods, legends, dragons, ancient evil and unlikely heroes... I predict that in years to come, The Sword Sundergost will be hailed as a classic.'

-David Bowmore, author of *The Magic of Deben Market*

The Sword SUNDERGOST



ALEXANDER MARSHALL

www.clarendonhousebooks.com/alexander-marshall

5 Reasons to Hire Me as Your Editor

I work with you, not against you.

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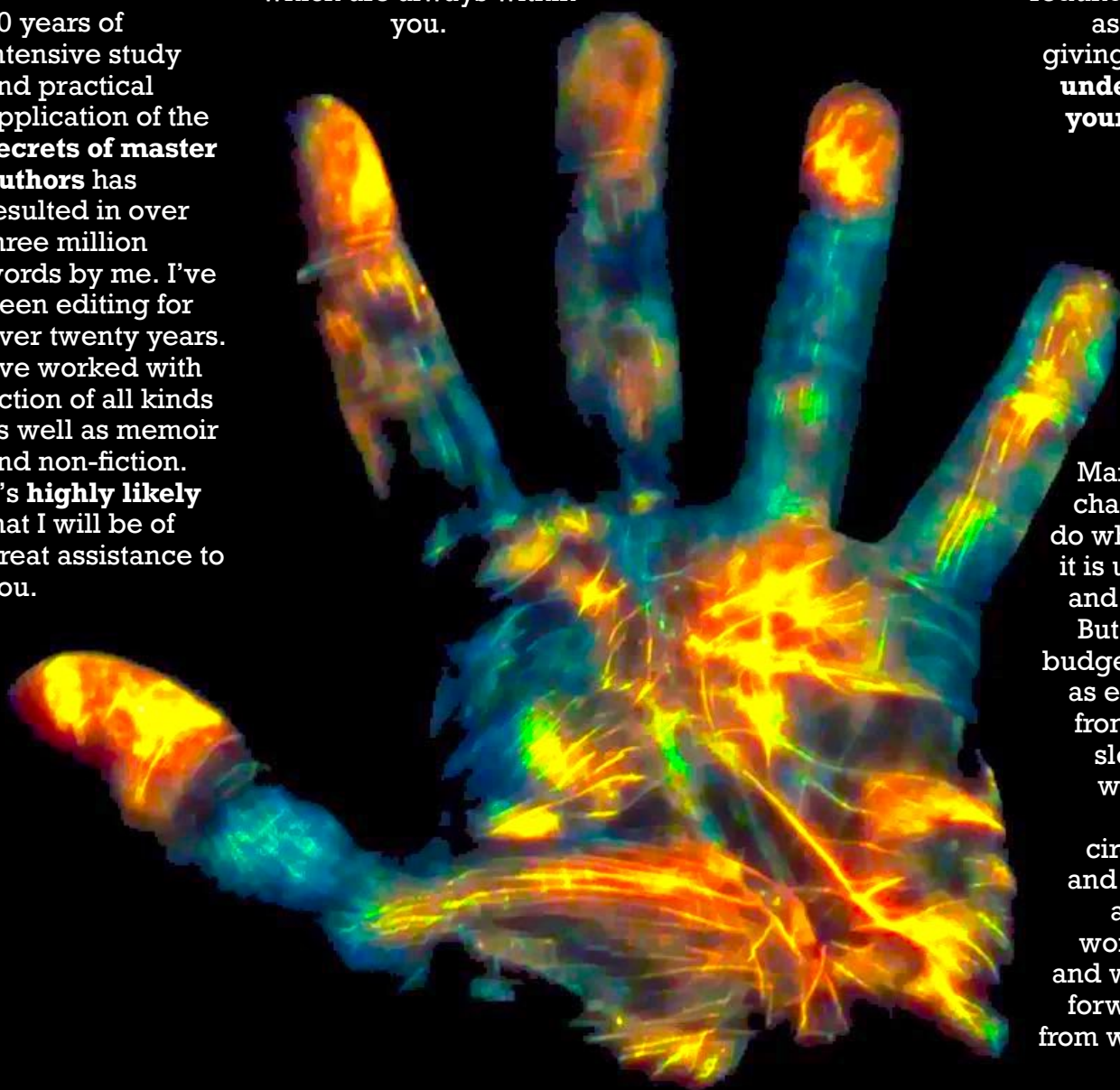
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