VERACITY

The Magazine from Verulam Writers

Edition 55

Summer 2025

www.verulamwriters.org

HOT SUN AND WARM WORDS!



This time, in VERACITY…
How to collaborate with a fellow scribe!
Take off your thinking caps and get your **running shoes** on!
A **small but heroic act** in a synagogue!
Our intrepid ghost hunters face a **formidable enemy**!

Wow! Nearly the end of the VW year already!

Pray the recent baking hot weather returns in earnest and stays all summer through. Let's make sure it doesn't lull our creative brains to sleep, though.

It's incredible how much has happened since the welcome departure of winter. There have been two competitions with fascinating themes run and judged, in which newer members are starting to shine. Only the Howard Linskey competition remains before the summer party.

We've had a very stimulating workshop on public speaking in March and author Pernille Hughes brought us all great joy with her visit in May. In between those was the annual quiz, which at long last was challenging without being excruciating!

Author Geoff Price has visited in the last meeting, as did fellow Home Counties author Pernille Hughes in May. And you can bet by then the committee will prepare a brilliant schedule for the 2025/26 VW year.

As ever, the schedule can be found on the Verulam Writers' website (www.verulamwriters.org). When the committee knows, you'll know.

If you have someone you know who wants to visit, please invite them along and make sure they know non-members pay £3 for the privilege of visiting on ordinary evenings. This goes up to £5 for workshops and talks.

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From the Editor…

Greetings, fellow scribes! Those of you who've waited until now to see their articles in the newsletter, this is the time people see how you shine! Better still, in the autumn, a whole new set of fresh articles will be following on!

We've got two competition-winning stories in this edition of Veracity. The Howard Linskey competition came a smidge too late for it to be three, but that's something else to make the autumn edition worth waiting for!

There's plenty of good advice and fascinating viewpoints within these pages, not least from our two most recent guest speakers, and while summer isn't as good a time as winter for reading ghost stories, I hope you enjoy part 2 of our little collaborative horror adventure from February's workshop.

I wish you all fun in the sun, whether reading this newsletter or not!

Robert Paterson, Editor
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One Last Thing Before We Dive In

The VW committee are always after fresh ideas for meetings, comments about their format and news of any connections you may have to useful guest speakers. Please send all such information to the committee at the e-mail addresses on page 35.
Our co-chairman also has an important request on page 3.

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From the Chair…



By Co-chairman of Verulam Writers, Philip Mitchell

Ed. ATTENTION! THE V.W. COMMITTEE NEEDS YOUR HELP! SEE BELOW.

The sun's out. I'm in the garden. And as I squirm against the glare on my laptop screen, thinking about what to include in this article, I realise creative people like us are very much like this beautiful summer day. We're often warm and bright, unpredictable, perhaps a little dramatic at times—and if you hang around us for too long, you may become slightly singed.

A summer's day begins with soft light, slow vibes, and a feeling of great possibility. I reckon that's your average writer in the morning. Head full of ideas, sipping coffee like a sacred ritual, and thinking maybe today's the day to finish that stubborn chapter, the one that's been rewritten more times than possible to count. Like sunshine through the blinds, hope trickles in.

Fast forward to late morning, and things are heating up. Words are flowing. Characters are yelling. The plot's twisting down strange and exciting new roads. Ask us around 11 a.m. how it's going and we'll beam; 'I'm a genius.' But check in twenty minutes later and it's; 'What was I thinking? Why did a troll crash from the sky and eat my protagonist?'

That's the creative thunderstorm rolling in. Out of nowhere, the sunny skies of inspiration turn grey. Like a summer afternoon's surprise rain, self-doubt pours in. One moment, we're channelling literary greatness, the next, we're pacing around the house, thinking whether it might be the right time to do some vacuuming.

And let's not forget the summer heat. We sweat over dialogue, burn under deadlines, giving off an intensity making anyone nearby a little nervous—especially partners who dare to ask, 'Still working on that book?' Yes. Always!

So, yes, writers are like a summer's day. And just like summer picnic with family and friends, writers are best enjoyed in groups. We've had a great season so far at Verulam Writers with just a couple of sessions left until our summer break to return refreshed in September. Thanks to everyone who has entered and judged our competitions. Thanks for attending our workshops and manuscript evenings. And thanks for being lovely people.

Finally, some sad news. My brilliant co-chair, Mandy, has landed herself an amazing new job which involves her travelling to Glasgow every week. Great news for Mandy, but it sadly means she won't be able to join us on Wednesday nights and unfortunately has to resign from the co-chair position.

Tina, also steps down as our secretary, and Wendy has also decided it's time to leave the committee.

Thanks to all three for their enthusiasm, ideas, and hard work in organising Verulam Writers over the years. They'll be missed.

This means we're desperately in need of fresh faces on the committee. If you'd like to be more involved in the group and have ideas for future Verulam Writers activities, please consider joining. It doesn't take up much time, attending just a few friendly Zoom meetings a year, and everyone's contributions are incredibly valuable. So, let me know if you're interested.

Anyway, enjoy the summer and chase a bit of sunshine with your pens.

Phil

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President's Competition Report 2025

By Ben Bergonzi

General Comments

Eleven people entered the competition. The theme was 'Print the Legend'. There was a great variety of themes and styles. What I really wanted was an entertaining story inspired by a well-known legend. Though all the stories were perfectly clear and legible, I was surprised to see several errors in spelling and grammar; sentences starting without capital letters, or dialogue not correctly preceded with commas nor correctly paragraphed.

Humps by Dave Weaver

This is a *Jaws* parody using the Loch Ness Monster instead of a shark. Quite a few details from the famous film are included, e.g. characters' names and some dialogue. As the story progresses, we are rather drifting from legend into a pastiche of the film. I would have liked more of a twist ending. An enjoyable conceit.

The Legend of the Calafate Berry by Cecile Keen

A tragic romance long, long ago has led to the creation, by a shaman, of the purple-berried Calafate plant, to be found in Patagonia in Chile and Argentina. A chief's daughter and a young warrior fall in love but they are from different tribes. I would have liked some more detail about why this proto-Romeo and Juliet are prevented from being together.

New Seas and Lands by Robert Paterson

A tale of the discovery of New Zealand, with two brothers Malie and Mosi, an antipodean version of Romulus and Remus. A positive and life-affirming tale which could have benefited from more detail in its world building. Another eye-opener.

The Legend of Wormenhert by Clare Lehovsky

When rebuilding St Albans Abbey in the 10th century, Abbot Ealdred disturbed a sleeping dragon at a rocky place called Wormenhert. The story is told from the point of view of the dragon, in a cynical world-weary tone. The way he allows the building of the city, and then decides to hide out in Loch Ness amusingly combines two legends. There is some repetition. An aspect of St Albans known by few.

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President's Competition Report, page 2

Tom the Rhymer by Austin Best

Ambitious but with an uncertain tone, this story alludes to Queen Guinevere, though here her paramour is not Lancelot of Arthurian legend but a character named Thomas the Rhymer. Many of us are familiar with this legend in which Thomas is abducted by the Queen of Elfland. In places the language used took us out of the mood. Still, an admirably imaginative story that packs a lot in.

The Goatherd's Pot of Never-Ending Water by Joan Crooks

A story reminiscent of The Magic Porridge Pot but in this case set in Spain. There are some commonplace expressions such as 'aches and pains' and 'the inevitable happened'. It would have been good if the author had rounded the story off by telling us that, to this day, the goatherd's orange tree is growing in a remote mountain village in Spain. Another story I had never heard of before.

The False Messiah by Tina Shaw

With a lovely opening of a family gathering at the end of the week, this story could have benefited if the author had specified the time period at the outset, because it is essentially historical fiction. I found that Sabbatai Zevi, the Rabbi who converted to Islam, was a real figure who lived between 1626 and 1676. Something of a heretic within Judaism, he did have many followers who for a time believed he was ushering in the messianic age. Some of the dialogue is rather stilted or almost a direct quote from the current Wikipedia entry for Zevi. I could not quite find anything of legend here.

Robin Hood and the Shirewood Rebellion by Steve Seaton

A political satire in the form of a Robin Hood legend, the writer takes aim at the privatised water industry and the premiership of Boris Johnson, who appears as Prince Johnson. With good attention to detail, changing names to make them more relevant, this is a story with plenty of mordant humour. Robbin Hood with his betrothed Maid Carryon appears here in opposition to the king. I felt this cynically nuanced account was a little too complex for such a short story.

Ed. Steve was also the winner of the Gnome de Plume, for his pen-name D.S. Calaishan. As for the winning stories, please turn over!

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President's Competition Report, page 3

Third Place

Legends and Blessings at St Ippolyts by Wendy Turner

An informative and lively piece of historical writing, focusing on the legends that surround a Saint, Hippolytus, that has provided a village with a quaint name. Well structured, the story grasps the attention at the beginning before widening out to pose a question. The author ranges back from the Middle Ages to the early Church and then up to the present day with references to the blessing of horses, and country walks. The shortest of the entries, but possibly the best-organised.

Second Place

The End of Boredom Era by Mellie Neville (Not present)

This story is told in an exceptionally strong, vivid voice. The situation is not original but is interesting – an angel (or Devil) falls in love with a mortal. We are in a café with our two characters, 'Adam' the God of Death and Nia a beautiful Black woman. The lack of true legend was the main fault of a fine piece of writing.

First Place

An amusing riff on the legend that aliens constructed Stonehenge. Here the aliens are not builders, but project managers. I liked the way that these aliens, requiring the stone structure as a launch pad for their stranded spacecraft, could have provided technology to help the humans with the exhausting effort of construction, but decided not to. A funny and thought-provoking tale, reminiscent of Toby Frost.

Ben

Ed. Now turn over to read the winning entry…



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The Completely Accurate Story About The Construction of Stonehenge

Jake Pirrie's winning entry for the 2025 President's Competition

The vessel from Schedar hit an emergency stop after just narrowly avoiding ploughing straight into Uranus.

For ease of writing (and reading), conversation has been translated into English (United Kingdom). There were two aliens on board. Their names are difficult to express through the Roman alphabet. The author will call one Gregory and the other Francis.

Gregory and Francis come from a civilisation extremely libertine and capitalistic. Their homeworld craves a constant confluence of commodities to satiate its consumptive needs.

Gregory initialised the device that scans the geological/atmospheric makeup of planets through means that the author does not have a sufficient word count to describe. The results are in within seconds, as they will later be known.

"Hm, a little disappointing," Gregory says. Communicating for this species involves colour change, tentacle signs and secretion of smelly fluids and gas. However, 'says' is still a perfectly adequate word.

Francis replies, "Don't be like that Gregory, old chum. There's hydrogen in that sun and atmosphere on the planets. Not to mention all the metals we could mine. They're a little spread out, but with a bit of elbow grease we could gather a nice bundle in a few centuries or so."

"Shut up Francis, you stooge. Look at that on the third planet. Oceans, atmosphere, evidence of neolithic technology. I think we just found ourselves some workers."

Francis compliantly shut up and began pottering about the vessel as Gregory made his approach to the third planet from the sun. Keen to look like he was doing work but having no actual work to do, Francis' pottering was mostly shuffling tools back and forth across the cabin while doing the alien equivalent of huffing and puffing. Some things he took out of storage and placed in a great big pile near the cockpit so Gregory could reach them. Francis wasn't entirely sure what Gregory needed so he gathered quite a bit into one big, structurally unsound pile.

It was the inclusion of a device that removes excess cutaneous mucus that caused the pile to tip over the navigation console, activating the light speed engines. While there was not sufficient space before colliding with earth to reach light speed (if there had been it would have ended all life on the planet and in the vessel), the situation was far from ideal. It is generally not considered to be in a falling object's best interest to accelerate before hitting the ground.

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The Completely Accurate Story About The Construction of Stonehenge, page 2

The vessel, incompetently manned as it was, had a surprisingly sophisticated set of safety systems. Their species buys rather than builds. Gregory and Francis were not harmed in the slightest as the ship hit what would become Wiltshire and the ship only suffered damage to its land/take off system. The damage to Wiltshire-to-be was also not something that a few centuries wouldn't put right.

Francis flopped elegantly out of the vessel, Gregory rolled clumsily with his tentacles akimbo.

"We won't be taking off anytime soon." Gregory said as he surveyed the diagnostics readout the vessel was sending him.

Francis chipperly replied "We better get started on repairs them." Francis was setting off towards the ship to pile up the tools he thought Gregory was going to need when they heard movement in the bushes around them.

"Who's there? Come out!" Gregory shouted turning purple to add emphasis.

Armed with bronze axes and bows, men and women emerged from dark woods. They lit torches and recoiled in horror when they saw Francis and Gregory.

An older woman, the local priestess, stepped out into clearing ahead of the terrified warriors. "Be you gods or monsters?"

The translation device struggled to parse the words 'gods' and 'monsters' to the aliens. It expressed the divine concept through combining their words 'Ancestor', 'Corporate mission statement' and 'CEO'. The monstrous concept was simply 'taxman'. Also, worth noting the neolithic language here has been translated to English (United Kingdom) too.

"Gods" They replied unanimously. Their translation devices imparted the meaning of their tentacle movements and colour changes directly into their mind.

"What do you require, oh divine ones?" She asked as she and the warriors behind prostrated themselves.

Gregory read the diagnostics. The vessel needed to be placed on a raised platform in order to repair itself and take off. For navigational calibration purposes, the structure had to be aligned along cosmic lines of the local star's solstices. He communicated this to the woman ostensibly in charge.

She nodded. "Your will shall be done." The humans left the clearing.

As they departed, Francis asked Greogry, "Should we have given them the device that charts the movements of astrological bodies?"

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The Completely Accurate Story About The Construction of Stonehenge, part 3

Gregory did the equivalent of a shrug. His novel understanding of divinity was that it would be undercut by them racing after these tool-using apes. He'd let them struggle before giving them the tools they needed, subtly implying his disappointment.

The humans returned to their settlement and the priestess divulged the will of heaven.

She said, "I've charted the passage of the stars all my life. The stars tell us when to travel, sow seeds and to harvest crops. This part of their will presents no issue. I have no idea how to build such an edifice though."

A stout and stocky man rose up. His job in the community was analogous to that of an architect. "The stone of this land is soft and unsuitable for such purposes. We need harder rock to appease the gods."

A young woman from the other side of the hall rose up. She was a multilingual trader that had travelled all across the island. "I know of a place in the west of this land that mines hard rock. I can guide us there and barter with the locals for it."

The priestess gave the young woman leave to lead the expedition for the stone. Meanwhile she and the architect began to design the monument along the astronomical lines which were easier to observe before the existence of Amesbury or Salisbury.

Francis and Gregory idled the time away back aboard their broken vessel consuming the sacrifices the locals brought them.

"Should we have given them the teleportation device? It probably would have made it easier for the locals to transport the construction materials."

Gregory did the equivalent of a shrug as he continued the hard work of swallowing a boar whole.

The expedition finally made it to what would become Pembrokeshire. The transaction with the quarrymen for the stone was simple. Since it was difficult to transport, market demand was low. The quarrymen taught the trader how they moved the stone for free as they were not natural merchants. They cut down trees, shaved the branches and lifted the stones onto the logs. In this way they could drag the stones with relative ease. Once one log was cleared by the stone, it could then be moved to the front.

The return journey was hard for the expedition. They had to pick their route more carefully as gentle upslopes they'd passed easily coming westward became insurmountable obstacles but it was not impossible. With ingenuity and incredible effort they managed to take those tons of rock along that two-hundred-mile journey. On their return to Wiltshire the plans were ready and construction began.

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The Completely Accurate Story About The Construction of Stonehenge, part 4

When Francis and Gregory were informed about the construction along with their daily sacrifice of meat and fruit, Francis asked Gregory, "Should we give them our antigravity device? It might speed up construction somewhat."

Gregory had found that he'd quite enjoyed his little vacation so, unhelpfully, he just did the equivalent of a shrug again as he selected the ripest apple from the most recent sacrifice.

The architect had prepared for the arrival of the stone. He'd constructed pulleys and levers and wooden cranes. He'd raised temporary earthworks to help the builders reach up to the top of those tall stones. His brother, the local mason, had engraved joints and grooves into the rock to hold it firmly in place.

The monument was complete. There was feasting and prayer and celebration. Francis and Gregory were the guests of honour.

Francis whispered to Gregory, "So we'll be taking some of these apes with us. Look at this celebration, they'll view toiling in Venusian mines as an honour."

Gregory paled (which for their species, ironically means going a vibrant shade of purple). He'd seen what these land apes had done with simple tools, ingenuity and community. 'God' only knows what they would do with nuclear fusion generators. What if they discovered theories of labour organisation?

They took off the next morning with a hold full of bronze workmanship rather than local workers. They passed out of the solar system in a hurry, never to return.

So, while the legend propagated by fringe scholarship about extraterrestrial involvement in Stone Henge's construction is not completely inaccurate, they give far too much credit to the aliens for the actual construction.

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Publishing Paths

Personal Experiences with traditional and self-publishing
By Pauline O'Connor

Hullo there. I am a new member of Verulam Writers, having joined after attending the 2024 AGM. Regular attendees may recognise me by my Kiwi accent—and my terrible memory for names! I apologise in advance and ask for your forbearance.

Recently, I came across Jane Friedman's updated chart on "The Key Book Publishing Paths" (2025-2026). It highlights the many routes to publication, some of which may be new to readers of Veracity.

The Reality of Publishing Today

Publishing is a tough industry, and the average author's income is declining. The ALCS survey of primary occupation authors (those who spend at least 50% of their time writing) found that earnings dropped to just £7,000 per year in 2022—well below minimum wage. This makes understanding all publishing options even more important.

I have experience with both traditional and self-publishing. My first book was picked up by an academic publisher, while I self-published my second due to its niche subject and my established presence in that field. This mix of approaches makes me a hybrid author (not to be confused with a hybrid publisher, which, as reported in the last summer's issue, is often a scam.)

Lessons from Traditional Publishing

My first book was published by Routledge on December 30, 2020—right in the middle of a Level 4 lockdown. Not an ideal time for a launch! Unfortunately, I had no control over the timing. This was my biggest lesson from traditional publishing: as a new author, you have very little say in the process.

Navigating the Publishing Contract

Knowing my inexperience, I joined The Society of Authors for contract advice. Their team counselled that academic publishing contracts offer minimal control and low royalties. They advised me to focus on why I wanted my book published, rather than on any financial rewards. This was disheartening but realistic.

This book was a memoir, written during my recovery from a brain injury. I had searched for a book which might help me to understand the experience, but found none. So, I wrote my own. I wanted to help other patients, and their families, and to offer clinicians insight from the patient's perspective.

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Publishing Paths, page 2

Academic publishing seemed like a good fit due to its reputation and global reach. However, the contract allowed the author little control, and the royalty percentage was in single digits. Again, I was assured that this was standard for an unknown author negotiating an academic publishing contract.

One key piece of advice from The Society of Authors proved invaluable: they helped me remove a "first refusal" clause. Had I left it in, I would have been contractually obligated to submit all future books to Routledge first, limiting my options.

Beyond the Manuscript: The Author's Responsibilities

Another lesson I learned was that submitting a manuscript was just the beginning. As the author, I was responsible for:

- Collecting copyright permissions
- Ensuring bibliography, references, and footnotes were correct
- Producing the index
- Formatting the above to the publisher's specifications

While I could hire help for these, any costs spent on these were mine to bear.

Routledge provided a copy editor, and I checked the files over several days. However, during copyediting, the book's formatting was altered. It took multiple rounds of edits to fix—a time-consuming process.

The Marketing Burden

On publication, my book was listed in catalogues, and I received a promotional flyer and an email signature. Everything else—PR, networking, pitching articles, applying for awards, and social media marketing—was up to me.

It is important that all authors, whether traditionally or self-published, realise they will have to do some marketing.

Why I Chose Self-Publishing for My Second Book

Born with a rare disease, I naturally gravitated toward writing a second memoir on that subject. After years of advocacy, I was well known in this community, and had been producing content for the national magazine in this area for nearly a decade. This made self-publishing a clear choice.

If my first book was a crash course in writing a non-fiction book, the second was a steep learning curve in publishing itself.

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Publishing Paths, page 3

The Self-Publishing Learning Curve

I spent months researching:

- Book printing (bleeds, file formats, cover requirements)
- Distribution (catalogues, trade publications, library hubs)
- Analytics (metadata, publishing trends, royalties, and pricing models)

Meanwhile, I still hadn't been paid for my first book. It took 15 months to receive my first royalty check from Routledge. In contrast, my self-published book earned the same amount in just 15 days, with the money in my account within weeks.

Comparing the Financial Realities

My traditional publishing royalties are paid annually. This means if my book sells during the New Year's self-help boom, I won't know until 15 months later. In contrast, self-publishing provides real-time sales tracking. I can analyse trends, evaluate marketing strategies, and adjust my approach accordingly.

Multiple Pathways, More Choice

While the learning curve for self-publishing is steep, I've found the transparency invaluable. Having control over sales data, marketing, and royalties has been empowering. My third book was published via crowdfunding, another form of self-publishing. Book number four is an open question! Obviously, I would welcome an offer from traditional publishing. However, I am exhausted by the submissions process. Why wait for months, when this book could be in readers' hands within weeks?

In truth, all publishing path have their challenges, and their rewards. As writers, we should be aware of the publishing opportunities available. The key is to choose a path which aligns with your goals for that particular book.

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The Writer Who Runs

By Robert Paterson



Writing is a passive activity, so one hardly associates it with athletic prowess. That's why my fellow Verulam Writers naturally felt a touch of surprise when they found out I am a keen runner in my spare time! So why am I a Writer Who Runs?

Well, I didn't use to be. As recently as 2021, I had little interest in fitness. Back in school, I was on no sports teams and didn't get picked until later during PE. I went through bursts of interest in fitness in early adulthood but it never stuck. My late mother had always wanted me to do more to get fit, since she had faced the consequences of it in middle age. Yet she wasn't as persuasive as she thought and she passed away knowing me only as a keyboard warrior.

That all changed in 2022. The spur was (rather amusingly) the actress Bonnie Langford, who fooled the whole *Masked Dancer* panel into thinking she was a celebrity half her age through her rubber-hipped flexibility! Far from being jealous, I found myself intrigued. *How does one achieve such an ability*, I thought, *and why don't I strive to be the same myself*?

So I took up Pilates and yoga, two activities I used to think were faddish and a bit "hippie", but ended up cultivating a real affinity for. While I haven't achieved rubber hips yet, I can still bend considerably further than 4 years ago, and have added cardio and resistance training to the mix.

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The Writer Who Runs, Page 2

My first milestones were completing the Couch to 5K challenge in summer 2022, then at the end of the same year, a special 10-kilometer Reindeer Run in Clacton to raise money for the RNLI (shown below). Since that year, I've done a few more fun runs, including the Richmond Park half-marathon (previous page). A full marathon is my aim in the next 2-3 years.

Yet the physical and psychological benefits aside, why do I think writers should run? The first and most obvious benefit is that it helps you break away from the sedentary practice of writing. Your brain may be engaged while writing, but your body's telling you to get up and go! (At least mine is these days.) Taking a run or some form of active exercise enables you to refocus your mind and engage with writing more avidly when you return to your desk.

Exercise can even help you create a more believable hero for your story. Challenging yourself physically can put you inside the hero's mind, giving you insight into the trials they are facing. However fit you're not, you can still picture the painful challenges a hero is facing, whether that's slaying a dragon, climbing a mountain or simply facing their past.

It has certainly helped me form the personality of Molly Dawson, the unlikely heroine of my story *Enter the Star Mama*, who starts out as a hotel chef but then attempts to become a wrestling champion in middle age! For a while, I tried some recommended exercises for wrestlers myself, although in hindsight those exercises were more likely to train for Olympic Greco-Roman style wrestling, rather than the freestyle wrestling which WWE stars practice.



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The Writer Who Runs, Page 3

If you're inspired to become a Writer Who Runs yourself, here's some advice.

1. Assess yourself. Your body might not be up to running yet. You might consider a losing a little weight first, while taking milder exercise. Of course you should wait for any serious medical conditions to pass, and/or seek medical advice about them.
2. Start slow if you're not ready. Power-walking is a good lead-in to running and jogging; that or intermittently running and walking, as was the case with the Couch to 5K Challenge I originally took up.
3. Plan your runs around your life. On some days, you might take a run back from the shops after buying something light, or back from work if it's only on the other side of town. Don't do runs when you don't have the time.
4. Don't be too ambitious. There's a reason only a handful of people in the world will ever win an Olympic medal. Even if you decide to take part in a race competitively, the race is chiefly with yourself.
5. Think of the benefits. You'll get more fresh air if you run, there's no strain that comes from lifting weights, you'll achieve things you didn't think possible and there's no need to worry about what the team think about you.
6. Choose something else if you want something else. Play tennis or badminton if you want good hand-eye co-ordination. Lift weights or do HIIT exercises if you want greater strength. Take up a martial art or combat sport if you want to feel safer and respect yourself. Running is rewarding but (despite the overstatements on certain posters) it isn't for everyone.

Good luck, and if we're lucky you'll be jogging with me on the bridleway sometime.

Robert



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Collaboration in Writing; A Dialogue

By Joan Crooks and Steve Seaton

Joan:
We would like to be able to say that we always discuss ground rules and come up with an informal "contract" about any specific piece of collaboration. However…

Steve:
….the bottom line is: to never rubbish the other's work and ideas, to be as positive and supportive as honesty allows, and to not be too thin-skinned about constructive criticism…..

Joan:
…. and never to interrupt the other's train of thought.

Steve:
Actually, what works best in a collaborative writing partnership is the same formula that works best in any long-term relationship. A bit of give-and-take; preparedness to negotiate differences; and a mature acceptance of the need sometimes to 'agree to disagree'. In the realm of creative endeavour, it's especially important not to be prescriptively dogmatic, defensive or pompous.
I absolutely never am.

Joan :
Hmmm. So let's think for example about how together we handle the thorny question of responding to a writing brief and of how you, Steve, always try to manipulate whatever assignment is set into a different arena, one which suits your ideas. You are a dreadful one for trying to bend the rules.

Steve:
What utter rubbish! How dare you! You're being ridiculous!
A competition brief isn't a blooming GCSE exam question, is it! There's got to be a few inches of latitude to allow for quirkiness and originality!
… but over two decades I've learned that if you're given an inch you take a mile…

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Collaboration in Writing, page 2

Joan:
To illustrate that point, let's talk about what happened in early December about the Christmas poem. We were having one of our regular curry catch-ups in Boxmoor. You said you hadn't come up with any inspiration for the competition. I said I had an idea, a poem about Christmas presents going to the wrong people; and I'd produced a few rhymes which set the tone. However, I'd not been able to follow through and was stuck. I was happy to give my page of jottings to you to see whether you could develop the ideas at all. So not a great amount of "discussion of ground rules" and negotiation of an "informal contract" for the project there.

Steve:
Basically it was just a case of: me clueless, you bootless, working alone useless, and outcomes fruitless.

Joan:
Quite. What a shame you aren't always that concise.
But as so often, working together stimulated a few ideas. After our excellent chicken madras, you went home and e-mailed me back a very rough draft 2 in which you'd developed my story frame. At this stage it was still just Doggeril with a few decent fun rhyming lines. But the competition line limit was sixteen, and *you* thought you might get away with a little bit more.
Twelve lines more!

Steve:
OK, draft 3 would need a little polishing it's true…
….and at that stage it was still in those unsatisfactory separate stanzas….

Joan:
SEVEN stanzas, Steve! The brief was a maximum of sixteen lines, not an epic poem in the classical mold.

Steve:
So, I maturely decided I could put up with your customary pernicketiness, and suggested solving the problem by doubling the length of the lines by tacking each one to its successor, hence halving their number. This in consequence produced a felicitous internal rhyme scheme, potentially useful in a comic poem.

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Collaboration in Writing, page 3

We then regrouped the stanzas into three sort-of quatrains, adding a moralistic concluding kind-of couplet. Hence Draft 4 soon emerged as a 14-line poem within the confines of the competition brief.

Goodness, we could've almost passed it off as a sonnet….

Joan:
…..except that no Petrarchan or Shakespearian sonnet I've ever heard of has *sixteen* syllables per line....

And by the way, there is no such word as "pernicketiness".

Steve:
So we discussed this Draft 4 version, and you liked it.

Soon, we were having lots of fun with it. For example, we'd intended that the insistent double rhyme scheme would lead the reader to expect that the word "plastered" would inevitably lead to a following rhyme with "little bastard"; but at your suggestion we instead inserted the non-rhyming (but pleasantly assonantal) word "rascal" to strengthen the joke about the wayward tipsy child and his exasperated mum.

Joan:
We decided that this Draft 5 could possibly be polished into a worthwhile competition entry with a bit of work. So we agreed on the title: *The Mischievous Christmas Elf*.

Steve:
After a few days, on the phone Joan made some more suggestions to sharpen the expression and the humour. Then she committed it to me as Draft 6 so I could work at evening out the metre and smoothing out the rhythm.
This was quite tricky because we'd crammed a lot of content into the over-stuffed lines. But that's poetry for you. And I'm a terrible one for tinkering. However, at last I was happy enough with it to return draft 6 to you Joanie, with 2 days to go before the deadline.

Joan:
Although the poem had developed a long way from my abortive early scribbles, it still captured the playful tone of family chaos I'd been aiming for.
I was pleased.
And so we slipped this in as our Final Draft submission for the competition.

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Collaboration in Writing, page 4

Steve:
We were surprised and really delighted to win a VW Christmas pudding as a result. Actually, I was more delighted even than Joanie, because she can't stand plum duff, but I really love it and subsequently scoffed the lot over Christmas.

Steve:
So. Well. There you are.
At least we're agreed that the process of working out the possible pitfalls of collaboration are really important both for the integrity of a long-term professional relationship and for the creativity of a writing partnership.

Joan:
Hmmm. You make it sound easy! But I've had twenty years' experience of trying to manage a close working relationship with you…

Steve:
But seriously, there have been many times when we have had to gently confront the other over delicate issues in our Psychotherapy Practice supervision sessions together. We've had an ongoing commitment to learning through positive confrontation and this has always been part of our professional work; and we think this has made us better therapists.
Er, don't we…?

Joan:
Actually yes, we do.
And we earnestly hope that the same principle may help us to improve as collaborative writers.
And what we hadn't been able to achieve in the Christmas competition working alone, we'd been able to do working together.
And what's more, we'd had a lot of fun doing it.

Steve:
You shouldn't start a sentence with a conjunction.

Joan:
Oh, do shut up.

Steve and Joan

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The Crystal Decanter Gets Heavy

By Philip Mitchell

It was a pleasure judging the Crystal Decanter competition this year. As with all our competitions, it was interesting to see how each entrant interpreted the theme, which for this competition was 'Heavy.' From the weight of betrayal to the heaviness of a giant baby, the theme inspired some great stories. The high quality of the entries made choosing the winners a hard task. Over multiple readings, and scribbling a lot of notes, I choose my winning three:

- 3rd - *A Brave Attempt* by Robert Paterson
- 2nd - *Regret* by Mandy Carter
- 1st – *The Last Lift* by Tina Shaw

Tina's winning story did what all good stories do and made me really *feel* something. I found it incredibly moving. Mandy's story was a brilliant portrait of the heaviness of someone's regret. And Robert's pacey story of brothers flying across Antarctica was like a classic adventure story. Well done to all. I look forward to the theme Tina will set next year.

Phil

Ed. Congratulations also to Wendy Turner, who won the Gnome De Plume that night with her pseudonym Phil R. Monic. See Tina's winning entry overleaf.



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The Last Lift

Tina Shaw's winning entry for the 2025 Crystal Decanter Competition

When the registrar asked if anyone had come with him to the appointment, Martin knew that the news was not going to be good.

'The results of the tests have come back; he began.

Martin almost felt sorry for the young doctor. They were supposed to train them in how to give bad news these days he thought, but still, he remembered, it wasn't easy even in his day when they had so many fewer treatments to offer.

The registrar pointed to the computer screen and cleared his throat and tried again.

Can't see the bloody screen Martin wanted to say, but didn't, wishing he would just get on with it. He tried to concentrate as the results were hurriedly glossed over, the registrar failing to realise that Martin knew the details only too well.

'Pancreatic cancer. Difficult to treat of course, but we can try.'

Martin drifted off. He didn't need to be told. He knew already. His time was to be curtailed. It was not as if he was a young man. Sixty-eight wasn't a bad innings. Cleo had already gone to meet her maker, always supposing there was one. They'd had forty-eight years together; mostly happy. Just a few ups and downs he recalled. The worst was losing their first born- a boy. Well, hardly born if he was honest. A late miscarriage they called it. Plenty of time to try again, but it took them a while. Five years to be exact and then Greta finally arrived. Such a joy and so many happy memories; dancing classes, school plays, little friends over for tea. She has a baby blessing at the synagogue; didn't want to be bat-mitzvahed, and finally went off to university where she met Adrian. They weren't too sure about him at first. Unusual was Cleo's description; a bit weird he thought but they seemed happy enough until Joel came along and then things went downhill, and now Adrian seldom put in an appearance. Hard for Joel but it gave Martin the chance to be more involved and to admit to himself that he always wanted a boy and have the chance to help him learn his bar-mitzvah portion like his father had done for him.

Back to reality the registrar was standing up explaining the next stage of treatment and wishing him well; platitudes of course. He was definitely time limited but he needed to last another few months. Joel would be thirteen in August and the arrangements had all been made for the big day. Adrian was expected to attend but had little interest in taking part in the ceremony and had suggested that Martin take over his duties, much to Martin's delight.

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The Last Lift, page 2

As he drove home trying to absorb the diagnosis it hit him. How was he going to manage to lift the scroll; a heavy task at the best of times but with his fast-failing strength would he be able to manage it? It hung over him during the following weeks as the one goal he wanted to achieve. There were many other things to sort out; paperwork to minimise the task for Greta to deal with afterwards; de-cluttering and trips to the charity shops, all to be fitted in around his medical appointments. Then there were visits to old friends and relations to let them know the news and remind them of the old days, but August loomed large and he had to make it, failing strength or not.

The week before the ceremony they had a rehearsal to prepare themselves for the big day. Joel was almost word perfect. Only nerves would throw him off course. Greta and Adrian were to open the ark and Martin was to lift the scroll and rotate it so that everyone could see the portion that Joel had read. The Rabbi showed Martin the easiest way to lift the scroll, balancing it on the edge of the reading desk, and bending down before lifting it up. Theoretically easy enough until Martin remembered that they were coming to the end of the Jewish year which meant that the scroll would be totally unbalanced, much heavier at on end that the other.

At the rehearsal, as he began the lift, a sharp pain seared through his body causing him to gasp out with the effort. This was not a moment to drop the precious scroll and the Rabbi raised her hand to guide it gently back onto the reading desk.

‘Are you alright? Can you manage?’ She asked anxiously.

He nodded with relief. ‘It’s just that I wasn’t prepared for the imbalance.’

There were smiles all round and only afterwards Greta questioned him quietly. ‘Is it too heavy for you Dad? Are you sure you can manage?’

He shushed her, not wanting Joel to see. ‘I’ll be all right. I need to do this.’

When the day came, he felt overwhelmed with excitement and anticipation. Relatives and friends greeted the family and commented to Martin on how well he looked.

One last effort he thought. Whatever the physical pain it will all be worth it, and so it was. After a lifetime of many blessings and a few sadnesses he had completed his task. As he lifted the scroll the weight seemed to vanish as his life flashed before him and the cries of muzzletov rang in his ears.

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An Interview with Pernille Hughes



On the evening of 7th May, Verulam Writers was delighted to welcome published author Pernille Hughes as a guest speaker. She gave us plenty of advice on how she writes her stories and where she gets her inspiration from. Afterwards, she signed copies of her books for members. It was a thoroughly enjoyable evening for all who managed to attend.

Now, Pernille has agreed to answer a few questions for Veracity readers. She had a lot of feedback concerning question 3, so she has agreed that her answer will instead be an article in the autumn edition of Veracity. But don't pray for summer to pass too quickly on her account!

Robert Paterson

1. Were you ever a member of a writing group yourself?

I wasn't. I started writing when my four kids were tiny – I think I would have been asleep by the time a writing group commenced! I took a correspondence course for Writing for Children to start me off, then plodded on by myself. Later, I did have a Critique Partner (she lives in the US, so it was all by email), where we would swap work, so I know the value of having others to critique and cheer you on. Now, I meet with seven other Romance writers bi-monthly at a local chocolate café to discuss our WIPs and the business in general. It's such an uplifting meet-up, even if we're grumbling. Having a tribe is essential, not least because writing can be a lonely business sometimes.

2. Do you have any fond memories of visiting them?

Not applicable.

Ed. This is her first visit to a writer's group!

3. What handy advice do have for our members?

Ed. As mentioned above, this will be an article in the autumn edition.

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An Interview with Pernille Hughes, Page 2

4. What did you write before you wrote novels?

I tried novelty books, then picture books, then chapter books, then Middle Grade books, then Young Adult books before realising Women's Fiction was where my voice lay. I wrote short stories, many of which were part of The Sunday Times' Confessions of A Tourist column. I wrote a 5k word story which was published in a Women's Fiction anthology, called *Sunlounger*, after which I decided to write a full-length novel.

5. Do you have a favourite writer, or book?

The Course of Honour by Lindsey Davis. It's an epic romance, spanning decades, between an ex-slave and the Emperor Vespasian, set in ancient Rome. I'm a sap for the love-over-many-encounters trope, or anything second-chancey, or enduring-love based. Davis normally writes Roman cosy crime novels which are a joy, but I love this stand-alone story. I'll read it time and again.

6. How do you balance writing with other responsibilities in your life?

When the kids were at school, I wrote when they were there, but they've left for jobs or uni now, so I can write most of the day, around the housework. I also work part-time at a Hospice of St Francis shop, which means I get to see other people, move around and laugh a lot, which counter-balances the sedentary solo writing life.

7. Do you have any interests that assist with writing or provide inspiration for it?

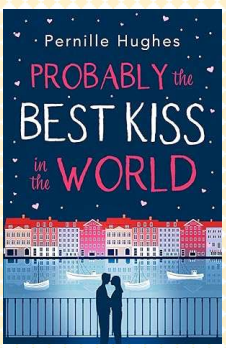
I've always been a voracious reader. Reading truly is my passion and in a way my sport; my reading feels like training for my writing. I would always be suspicious of a writer who says they aren't a reader. How would they improve their craft? I always have a book on the go, whether on my kindle or in paperback, and if I'm cooking or walking or driving or in Tesco or on the rare occasion that I'm cleaning I'll have an audio book in my ears. I've even listened to books when swimming.

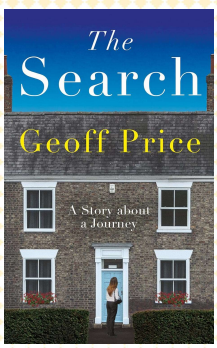
Otherwise, I find travel triggers all kinds of ideas. My second book, *Probably the Best Kiss in the World* was inspired by a trip to Copenhagen. Seeing things helps fill my creative well.

ATTENTION, MEMBERS!

You can order books written by our visiting authors right here.

Amazon.co.uk : pernille hughes
The Search: A Story about a Journey eBook : Price, Geoff: Amazon.co.uk: Kindle Store





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An Interview with Geoff Price

The second of this term's author visits came on 4th June, when another Home Counties author, Geoff Price, graced us with his presence. He related the story of how he created the characters and story for his self-published novel *The Search*, then took us through a creative writing exercise that encouraged members to build a character based on a list of items that he or she possesses.



I offered him the same questions that Pernille answered and his response was swift enough that I stopped the metaphorical presses. Thank you once again for what you did for us, Geoff. You gave us all something to think about.

Robert Paterson

1. Were you ever a member of a writing group yourself?

I found Chiltern Writers after Covid, they meet just five minutes away from my home.

2. Do you have any fond memories of visiting them?

I enjoy our monthly meetings and still attend regularly. We have also set up a Manuscript group, we call the Nitpickers, which meets separately.

3. What handy advice do have for our members?

Share your work with other writers; they will improve it and also help you to define who your readers might be.

4. What did you write before you wrote novels?

Business reports and letters of complaint.

5. Do you have a favourite writer, or book?

John Steinbeck opened the door to adult fiction for me, especially *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Of Mice and Men*.

6. How do you balance writing with other responsibilities in your life?

Family takes priority. I still do some work, so I do what I have to do for clients – when those things are done, I write.

7. Do you have any interests that assist with writing or provide inspiration for it?

Life and people.

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GHOST HUNTERS AT GREYSTONE HALL

PART 2: NO GOING BACK NOW

THE STORY SO FAR;

Simone Greystone has returned her family's ancestral home with three very different companions in order to right a historical wrong. Lady Cynthia Lovejoy was jilted by her ancestor centuries ago and her embittered ghost has haunted the house ever since. Their quest to lay her to rest may be very short, however, since the walls of the library are closing in around them, and their only escape from being crushed is to take one of four mysterious doors that may lead them to their freedom… or their doom.

"This is bullshit!" Diana scoffed. "We can't get separated in a place like this!"

"I don't think we have a choice, Diana," Simone said simply. "If we want to lay the ghost we have to play by the rules. Each of you go through your own door. The map shows the corridors converge at the Greystone vault. We'll meet there. Go!"

"But who gets A?" Diana protested.

"Me," Gus drawled. Then seeing Diana's look of bewilderment, he added; "Augustus."

"The wall!" Felicity's voice seemed almost unnaturally high. "It's nearly here!"

"Through the doors, guys!" Simone ordered. "It's now or never!"

With the wall no more than ten feet away, the four of them tore open the portal that bore their initial and charged through, slamming the doors behind them. There was a deep boom as the outside wall slammed into the door frames. Then there was silence and darkness.

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GHOST HUNTERS AT GREYSTONE HALL
PART 2, PAGE 2

But not for long. Each of the four companions found their path suddenly lit up as lamps in sconces along the walls of their corridor burst into life.

"Guys, can you hear me?" Simone yelled out.

They all called back to her saying they could hear her.

"Great. Head forward along the corridors. Watch your backs and be ready for anything. The Greystone vault is at the meeting point of the corridors. I'll see you there. I hate the situation too, but there's no going back now. Good luck, guys."

More than a little afraid, but knowing they had only one choice, the four companions went onwards into the unknown.

*****

With bony hands trembling and jagged knees knocking, Gus trod cautiously down the illuminated corridor. His ears listened for any random sound, but all was still. He could not even hear his companions in the parallel corridors.

For what seemed like hours, the shimmering corridor continued until Gus emerged into a richly appointed bedroom. It looked like it had been designed with a woman in mind, with a knee-high dresser and a wardrobe painted with extravagant flowers next to a florid four-poster bed.

Gus strained his ears again, but there were still no threatening sounds. He checked under the bed and inside the wardrobe in case some famished monster lurked there. Luckily, there were none, so he sat down on the red-cushioned stool that lay in front of the dresser to rest his aching feet.

"What's this?" Gus muttered to himself.

On the dresser, right beside a tin of blusher, was a blood-stained piece of paper. Gus read it. It was the same verse his Aunt Felicity had found and had led Simone back to Greystone Hall.

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GHOST HUNTERS AT GREYSTONE HALL
PART 2, PAGE 3

Suddenly, the gauche young man cried out in shock. New writing was melting into being on the page, below the poem. Gus watched the sinister writing emerge with trepidation, but when the words finally stopped emerging, his whole body went rigid.

Yet do not enter lightly. For first ye must learn;
That four shall set forth… but three shall return.

At first, Gus held the paper at arm's length like it was something poisonous that he dared not bring close to him. Then his courage returned and he shoved the note into his coat pocket, determined to show it to his companions before one of them walked into some invisible trap.

But before Gus could take flight, the mirror on the dresser drew his attention. Something about his reflection seemed bizarre. Then he saw it; a mole in the middle of his right cheek that hadn't been there before. Maybe he needed to see…

No! It couldn't be! Another mole was appearing on his left cheek. Then a wart started to bud just above his left eyebrow. Before Gus's disbelieving eyes, his skin began to turn putrid. Pustules erupted, his cheeks grew limp and bristly hair sprouted at unnatural speed. Gus was watching himself turn into some kind of hellish abomination before his very eyes!

Screaming in abject terror, Gus fled forth along the mysterious corridor, all thoughts of caution driven from his shattered mind.

*****

Not long before Gus had entered young Lady Cynthia's old boudoir, Felicity had still been following the corridor behind her own door. She willed herself not to run, but step briskly instead. Panicking might mean she missed some trap Cynthia Lovejoy's ghost had laid for her. Her caution, however, was in vain.

Felicity tripped on something and fell to the floor. While getting to her feet and rubbing a sore knee, the medium studied what had caught her foot. It was a gaily painted wooden toy horse. Looking up once more, she noticed the corridor was turning a corner ahead, around which was a doorway.

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GHOST HUNTERS AT GREYSTONE HALL
PART 2, PAGE 4

Taking the toy horse with her, the old medium hobbled forward and peered around the corner. Her eyes brightened at what she saw. She had found a child's playroom, as clean as if it were still lived in. The room was filled with toys; dolls, puppets, stuffed animals, a rocking horse and much more. The corridor continued through the opposite wall, but Felicity decided to examine the toys before proceeding.

There is a strong spiritual presence here in this place, her sixth sense told her. *Maybe this room holds a clue to laying the ghost.*

For a good fifteen minutes, Felicity studied every toy carefully, trying to determine any psychic power it held on top of any sensory clues. She drew a blank until, as she opened a chest and was examining a spinning top and croquet set, the spiritual power she had sensed on first entering grew much stronger.

A low moan and a hiss like someone exhaling through clenched teeth made Felicity whirl round. A whitish-grey mist was filling the playroom and gathering a few feet away from her. The mist wrapped itself into a vortex and began to spin faster and faster. A gale started tearing through the little room. Felicity tried to move away to the opposite doorway but the wind was pushing too hard against her. Worse still, a large shadowy shape was forming inside the vortex.

With a last almighty whoosh, the wind blew itself out of the room and took the mist with it. And there, standing so tall it had to stoop below the ceiling, stood a creature so large and atrocious the scream Felicity might have made caught in her throat.

It resembled a monstrous teddy bear, ten feet tall and reeking of decay. Its claws were like cutlasses; filthy, keen-edged and dripping with sickly brown liquid. Its dense black fur had been slashed in several places and dried blood still stuck the hair together in clumps. Only its right eye remained intact, the left socket spilling gooey white fluid down towards jaws brimming with yellowed fangs. It uttered alternate low groans and whining screeches as it advanced on its cowering victim.

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GHOST HUNTERS AT GREYSTONE HALL
PART 2, PAGE 5

Just as the creature raised a mighty claw to dismember Felicity, she heard her nephew Gus's screams and the sound galvanised her into action. She rolled away just in time and only the toy chest was destroyed. Luckily, the monster was too large to follow Felicity through the far corridor and by the time it struck again, she was running pell mell deeper into Greystone Hall.

*****

Simone hung her head as she made her way along her own corridor. It was not only fear weighing her heart down. Shame at her ancestor's betrayal of Lady Cynthia now intertwined with her regrets about leading her friends into this a foul place.

This is worse than when I failed my driving test for the ninth time, she thought guiltily. *They might have looked at me like Boadicea leading the Iceni. Now I feel more like Godzilla. Hang on, what's that?*

Simone now saw what looked like a doorway ahead. She quickened her pace slightly and hurried through it. What she saw next made her feel like she had stepped back in time.

Simone was now standing in a large dining room; a roaring fire lit in the hearth to her right and a long, spotlessly polished table set as if for a banquet. A doorway led on through the opposite wall.

"Cynthia! Can you hear me?" Simone called out as she made her way through the room and past the fireplace. "My name is Simone Greystone, descendant of the man who wronged you. Would you make your presence known? I wish to entreat with you. I can't tell what pain you felt at my ancestor's betrayal, but my companions are innocent of any crime. Tell me how I might make redress and…"

She stopped as a soft white-grey mist began rising from the hearthrug. It formed a cloud about a metre in diameter, hovering in the air not unlike a mushroom cloud.

"Thank you, Cynthia," Simone went on. "I know if we reach an understanding…"

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GHOST HUNTERS AT GREYSTONE HALL
PART 2, PAGE 6

Like Felicity, Simone was interrupted when a growl as loud and fierce as an aircraft engine came out of nowhere. The cloud over the hearthrug grew bigger and bigger until it stretched from floor to ceiling. Simone retreated as a vast, menacing shadow took shape within the cloud. Then, with a great rush of air, the mist dissipated.

Simone screamed aloud as a gigantic quadrupedal beast turned and bore down on her. The monster had clawed feet, a hunched back studded with curved spines and was built like it must have had the strength of a hundred giants. Worse still, it had four heads sprouting from four stout, vascular necks, one of which was of a dog and three of which were human, but with fangs as long and sharp as a scimitar!

Scrabbling backwards, Simone blundered into something and there was a metallic clanging as it collapsed. Suddenly, her heart leapt. It was the poker for the fire! She took it in her right hand and hurled it like a javelin. Her aim was true and it struck the the monster's canine head, bouncing off its right eyeball.

As the beast gave a roar like a wounded lion, Simone scrambled under the dining table to give herself cover and then sprinted for the exit door. The dog monster, just like the bear monster, was too large to fit through the door, so Simone was soon out of immediate danger.

NEXT TIME: **THE REAL TERROR BEGINS!**

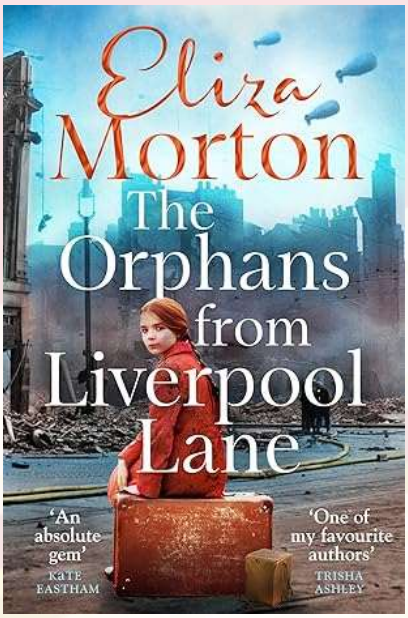
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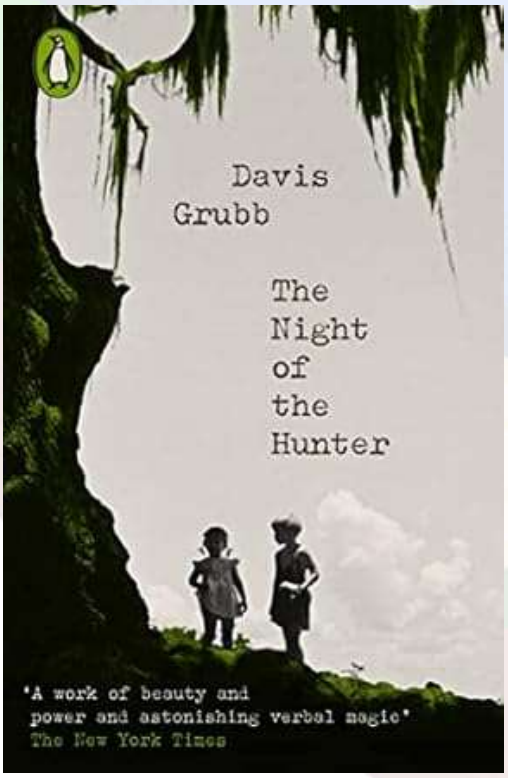
What We're Reading (and What We Think!)

Tina Shaw is reading;

The Orphans from Liverpool Lane by Eliza Morton

This is about a family suffering the effects of the Second World War and what happened to the daughters who were looked after by nuns. I am having to read large print books at present and the library has a limited choice on offer, but fortunately this turned out to be an enjoyable read.





Philip Mitchell is reading;

The Night of the Hunter by Davis Grubb

This 1953 novel is a tense, eerie tale about a fake preacher marrying a widow to find her executed husband's hidden bank robbery loot. With "*LOVE*" and "*HATE*" tattooed across his knuckles, the preacher ends up hunting the widow's two children across the southern states until the book's dramatic conclusion. With its oddball characters and chilling suspense, it's like a fairy tale gone wrong. It's simple, sharp, and unforgettable. I thought it was great.

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Verulam Writers 2024/25 Competition Winners

David Gibson Cup

Topic: Something in the Water (set by Suzanne Stanton)
Adjudication Date: 2nd October 2024

FIRST	SECOND	GNOME
David Weaver	Only one winner, I'm afraid!	Alex Craig (aka Kirsten Swore)

Lisbeth Phillips Plate Competition

Topic: A Historic Moment (set by Judith Foster)
Adjudication Date: 4th December 2024

FIRST	SECOND	THIRD	GNOME
Mike Spurgeon	Nargis Walker	Ben Burgonzi	Ben Burgonzi (aka May B. Troo)

President's Competition

Topic: Print the Legend (set by Ben Burgonzi)
Adjudication Date: 19th March 2025

FIRST	SECOND	THIRD	GNOME
Jake Pirrie	Mellie Neville	Wendy Turner	Steve Seaton (alias D.S. Calaishan)

Crystal Decanter Competition

Topic: Heavy (set by Philip Mitchell)
Adjudication Date: 21st May 2025

FIRST	SECOND	THIRD	GNOME
Tina Shaw	Mandy Carter	Robert Paterson	Wendy Turner (alias Phil R. Monic)

Howard Linskey Competition

Topic: Crime
Adjudication Date: 19th June 2024

FIRST	SECOND	THIRD	GNOME
Cecile Keen	Anne Ellis	Steve Seaton and Joan Crooks	Steve and Joan again (aka Penny Forum)

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Information Resources and Contact



The VW Website www.verulamwriters.org

Contains information about our upcoming meetings, competitions, events, etc.

This newsletter may be found there too!

verulamwritersevents@hotmail.co.uk Here you can register your interest for **volunteering at events** and submit a piece to our website's **Writing by our Members** section. We will post it for you. One piece per member.
VWPublicity@gmail.com For any **events you know of** and would like publicised.
VWVeracityEditor@gmail.com For **articles for this newsletter** and any **feedback** for the editor. Send them anytime; no need for him to request them.

Members' Forum This section of the website is for members' **discussions on writing**, **sharing work** for feedback and **making suggestions** about the Writing Group. Any member with an e-mail address and paid-up membership can join. We'll need to check your membership and validate your account afterwards, but that's a mere technicality and should take us two days maximum!

Venue Address St Stephen's Church Hall, 1 Watling Street, St Albans, Herts., AL1 2PT. We meet at 8PM on the first, third and, if the calendar allows it, fifth Wednesday of every month within term time. Check the website just in case, because the church sometimes has to allocate us different evenings.

The editor would like to thank all of the contributors past and present for this, and every edition of VERACITY.

Our next meeting will be on Wednesday 18th June at **St Stephen's Church Hall**.
For more details please visit
https://www.verulamwriters.org/

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VERACITY

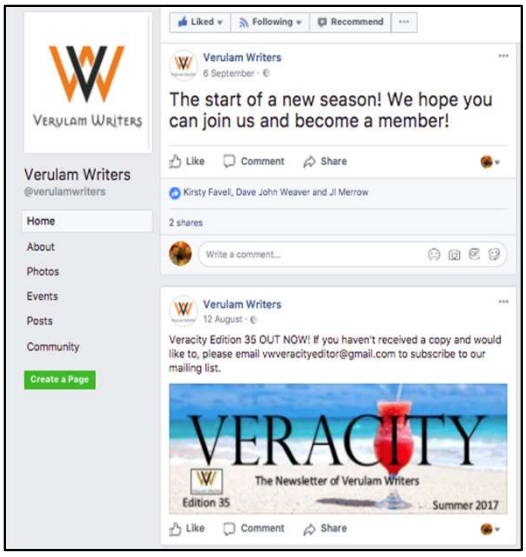
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- **Share writing-related news, such as an event or publication of an interesting article or book.**
- **Share links to websites that could be a good resource for other writers.**
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