

Power-Punch Your Next Novel

by Sandra Elzie and Tammy Schubert

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Wish you knew how to organize your storytelling and recognize the weak spots? Ever spent time and money on books and classes filled with great information you can't apply to your own manuscript? Maybe you are just tired of rejection letters instead of contracts. Or maybe you are a multi-published author but can't seem to break into the big league?

Don't despair! Commit to professional development so you can take your writing to the next level. Continuing education isn't just for doctors and lawyers. Writers are professionals too, and it is time to invest in yourself.

With this in mind, we took the first step and attended a [Break Into Fiction™](#) weekend retreat, developed and taught by [Mary Buckham](#) and Georgia Romance Writers' very own [Dianna Love Snell](#), where we were introduced to their unique character-driven Power Plotting method. If you have never heard of it, we encourage you to check out their Web site (www.BreakIntoFiction.com).

The concepts they teach are not new, but their unique template system and hands-on approach to each student's project and professional goals differentiate the Break Into Fiction™ retreat from other craft workshops. The weekend is designed to teach students how to streamline the process of plotting stories. The templates focus on writing strong beginnings, creating hooks, developing solid middles to eliminate the sags and to keep the story strong until the very end, regardless of genre or story length.

No, the templates do not set you up to write from a formula. They are analytical tools every professional writer should have in their library. Writing is a business and, like other companies large or small, analytical tools are a must to grow the business.

Break Into Fiction™ templates empower writers to become more self-sufficient in identifying weak spots and more efficient by writing a great draft the first time without requiring excessive rewrites later. If you are revising an existing draft, use the templates to pull the story apart and find problems. It doesn't matter if you are a new writer or a multi-published author; this system drives you to take Goals, Motivation and Conflict (GMC) to a deeper level. Mary emphasizes that, "We are teaching you to not just write one good story but great stories."

Throughout the weekend, these two ladies push you to go deeper—test the limits. The first and second answers are not good enough. "Go deep" is the mantra of the weekend. Hit that third level. Then go even deeper! When drilling for oil, it's not enough to just go through the first few layers of earth. The dark, rich treasure lies deep below earth's layers. Dianna and Mary frame all their questions around the word "why". Why does it matter? Why should the reader care? Why? Why can't something worse happen? Why should a reader believe this? Why is the character motivated to take an action? Why is the heroine acting in such a manner? Go deep! Then go deeper.

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Mary and Dianna spend quality time with each person, answering questions and working out kinks in the students' stories. Personal story consultations are walk-up events. No bidding or pre-arrangements required. Ask all the questions you want. These private sessions take place during breaks, meals and relaxed evening socials. If you prefer group discussion, don't be shy about getting people involved. Everyone is encouraged to contribute. Quality learning is not an individual endeavor.

As an added bonus, during the interactive evening socials, decoding agent/editor rejection letters and getting instruction on how the templates can help you avoid these problem areas in the future are hot topics. Promotional tips, how to foster good working relationships with industry professionals, etc. are just some of the other issues that come up.

Mary and Dianna's passion for their work energizes and mobilizes everyone. "My life is enriched when I'm helping others succeed," Dianna told us. "We're currently writing a book on Power Plotting because we can't teach everyone in person."

By the end of the weekend, everyone's brains are on overload and notebooks are overflowing with industry information, templates, quality examples to demonstrate concepts, personal notes filled with information gleaned from private consultations and group discussions along with pages of classroom exercises. And we can't forget the new manuscript pages hammered out during breaks and right before passing out on the bed each night.

A concern when considering attending this workshop is the price. Yes, there are less expensive workshops, but after the first day, we knew we had gotten more than we anticipated and much more than we paid for. The retreat is designed for the committed writer, those who have a burning desire to take their writing to an entirely new level. People came from all over the country in January to attend, and they left excited to get home and continue working. Regardless of the cost, many of the participants who were polled stated they intended to attend the retreat again after spending six months to a year applying what they learned.

Mary and Dianna don't teach you how to be one-book wonders. They provide the tools to create countless, quality books. Their method can be compared to feeding the hungry. You can give a starving person a fish and feed him one time, or you can teach him to fish and feed him for a lifetime. They teach writers to fish.

Since the workshop is designed to provide everyone with the opportunity for multiple one-on-one sessions, the class size is limited. The January retreat was full, the next session is filling up fast. Due to their numerous commitments, the Break Into Fiction™ workshop is only being offered in six cities around the country in 2008. They are in the process of creating the 2009 schedule. Check the [Break Into Fiction™ Web site](http://www.breakintofiction.com) at www.breakintofiction.com for details. Your career is worth the investment, so don't wait until the last minute to sign up and power-punch your next novel.