



# Tied-In

The Newsletter of the International Association of Media Tie-in Writers

## Taking the Plunge

By **Don Bassingthwaite**

Since I was profiled in Tied-In #4, I have left my day job and taken the plunge into full-time writing. On December 1, I'll celebrate three months of freedom.



The majority of my time has been taken up completing the first novel of a new trilogy under contract to Wizards of the Coast—a major impetus for my decision. After a dozen novels and three years in a new (and busier) day job, I found that I couldn't keep up the pace of writing and working . . . without both jobs suffering. Fortunately, it really wasn't too difficult to decide which way to go, especially with the inspiration provided by stories from everyone at IAMTW.

The biggest change I've found was the early transition to disciplining myself to write every day and remembering that as much as I enjoy what I do, it isn't just an extended vacation. As I've told people, I think I enjoyed the first month a little too much. I have been working hard since then, though, and it's definitely the most deeply satisfying job I have ever had.

The next challenge will be picking up more work. As I write, I'm only a few days away from completing the current novel, with the second of the trilogy due early next summer and time blocked in over the winter to work on a long-promised-to-myself original novel. Freelance

copy-writing and catalogue work for my former job fills gaps, but beyond that, I'm hustling to line up another project.

Possibly the best instant pay-off from deciding to write full-time? Every time I pass through the old day job (a major Canadian publisher) for a freelance meeting, at least one of my former colleagues is certain to say: "Wow, you look so relaxed!"

## Tied Into Gen Con



**IAMTW members Donald J. Bingle and Tim Waggoner in featured readings during the Gen Con Game Fair.**

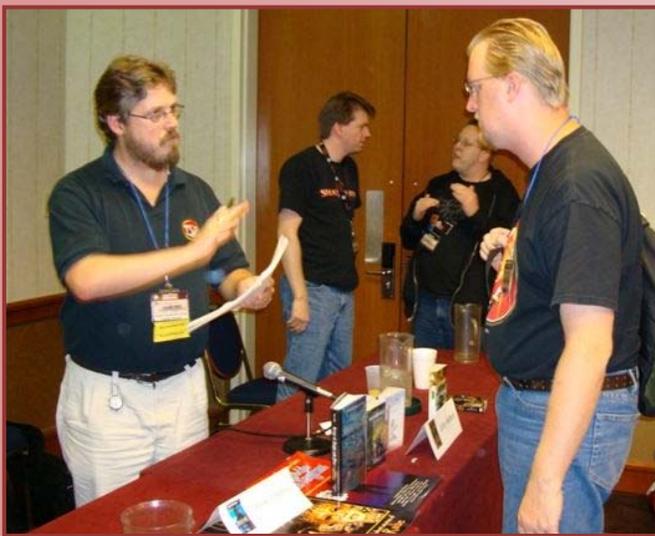
By **Tim Waggoner**

Perhaps the slogan might better read: The Best Four Days in Writing.

The 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Gen Con gaming convention was held in Indianapolis, IN, this past August. Billed as "The Best Four Days in Gaming," Gen Con Indy is the largest gaming convention in the world.

More than 26,000 attendees experienced more than 1,200 board game, 950 card games, 780 miniatures events, 105 LARPs, 1730 RPGs, and 240 seminars and workshops.

Attendees come to check out the newest games and meet the movers and the shakers in the gaming industry.



**IAMTW member Steven Schend offers a Gen Con attendee with manuscript advice.**

For media tie-in writers, Gen Con offers a chance to learn about game-based fiction-writing opportunities, meet editors and publishers, and network with other authors. The promotional opportunities include signings at Author's Avenue in the main exhibition hall or reserving your own exhibitor's table where you can sell your books and chat with readers.

Highlights of this year's Gen Con Game Fair included Wizards of the Coast's announcement of their upcoming release of *4th Edition Dungeons & Dragons*, a packed Egame arena, a costume contest, a True Dungeon, Tracy Hickman's Killer Breakfast, and the presentation of the ENnie Awards. The Gen Con EN World RPG Awards (the "ENnies") are an annual fan-based celebration of excellence in tabletop roleplaying gaming. The final winners are voted upon by the gaming public at EN World. This year the Best Game honor went to *Scion, Hero* by White Wolf Publishing, and Product of the Year went to *Ptolus, City by the Spire*, by Malhavoc Press-White Wolf.

For the complete list of winners, check out the ENnies website: [www.ennieawards.com](http://www.ennieawards.com).

One of the most popular events at Gen Con is the annual Writers' Symposium, organized by author Jean Rabe. The Symposium is geared toward both writers of tie-in and original fiction, and this year, more than 40 seminars were offered. Panel topics included:

- Them's Fighting Words!
- The Writing Life
- Breaking into the Industry: Game Writing
- Alchemy & Sorcery, the Science of Magic in Fiction
- Worldbuilding: What to eat on the planet Kriznak
- Publishing Potpourri

The Writers' Symposium also offered a series of readings by authors such as:

- Elizabeth Vaughan
- Luke Johnson, Paul Genesse & Brad Beaulie
- Chris Pierson & Kelly Swails
- Jean Rabe & John Helfers
- Don Bingle & Tim Waggoner
- Steven Schend & Kerrie Hughes

The Writers' Symposium has its origins back in the 1990s when it was founded by editor and author Jean Rabe. She started giving seminars on writing at the Gen Con Game Fair in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Gen Con has moved to Indianapolis, Indiana, but Jean and her crew are still there. Many writers have helped her present the panels over the years, and the seminars are almost always packed with people who want to learn more about writing.

The Writers' Symposium is made up of twenty professional writers, game designers, and editors. Combined, they have sold several dozen books and short stories to major publishers, primarily in the fantasy and science fiction genres.

According to Jean, the Symposium differs from both college writing courses and writing workshops at regional conventions in that it's "hosted by a number of authors currently being published in tie-in, gaming, fantasy, and science



**Symposium attendees . . . a nice, cozy crowd.**

fiction fields, and they pass along solid advice to aspiring writers.”

When asked what motivated her to create the Writers’ Symposium, Jean said, “I learned more about writing fiction from attending seminars at science fiction conventions in Illinois, Kentucky, and Tennessee than I did in my college courses. It was panelists like George R.R. Martin, Gene Wolfe, and Joe Haldeman who inspired me and who taught me what I needed to do to get an editor’s attention.” Jean hoped the Symposium would prove equally as helpful for Gen Con attendees interested in learning the more about writing and publishing – and it has.

“Many of our attendees have sold short stories and novels, and they credit the Symposium with helping them,” she says.

The Writers’ Symposium has proven so popular, in fact, that it’s grown beyond the physical workshop. The first issue of the Writers’ Symposium Ezine was released in October. An outgrowth of the Symposium, each issue is free and will be released quarterly via email. The Ezine currently has more than 300 subscribers, and that number is rapidly growing. Each issue features articles, tips, and resources that will help writers both new and established improve their craft.

Editor Paul Genesse says that “the free Writers’ Symposium Ezine is produced by a group of twenty editors, writers, and game designers. The Symposium is dedicated to ‘Helping Writers Write,’ and features articles on crafting good fiction in addition to giving insider tips on how to get published.”

You can preview the ezine at [www.paulgenesse.com/writerssymposiumezine](http://www.paulgenesse.com/writerssymposiumezine), and you can sign up by sending an email to [www.writerssymposium@paulgenesse.com](mailto:www.writerssymposium@paulgenesse.com). Subscribers can visit the Writers’ Symposium Blog at [www.writerssymposium.blogspot.com](http://www.writerssymposium.blogspot.com) to find links to the members’ websites and their inboxes, or comment on the bonus articles featured there.

To find out more about Gen Con, visit [www.gencom.com](http://www.gencom.com), and you can find Paul Genesse on the Web at [www.paulgenesse.com](http://www.paulgenesse.com).

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**The Symposium will expand at next year’s Gen Con, set for Aug. 14-17, 2008.**

**Already several IAMTW members are scheduled to participate.**

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# Toys of My Own

**By David Mack**

Sometimes, you just get tired of sharing.

When new acquaintances ask me about my writing for *Star Trek*, I’m always happy to tell them that I love it. I’ve been a fan of *Star Trek* since I was toddler watching reruns of the original series. A highlight of my career and my life is that I got to co-write two episodes of *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*. And my passion for the franchise has not abated since I started writing *Star Trek* novels and short stories for Pocket Books.

But one day not too long ago, I realized I wanted more.

I think that this new desire started in 2004, after I was asked by editor Marco Palmieri to help him develop and launch a new literary-original line of books for the franchise. That project, set in the time of the classic TV



**David Mack**

series, became *Star Trek Vanguard*, a series for which I’ve so far written two novels. It gave me an opportunity to craft a series concept from the ground up, develop all-new characters, plot long-term story arcs, and put my indelible stamp on a corner of the fictional universe that I’ve loved my whole life.

That was my first successful attempt at series-concept development, and it suited my inner megalomaniac. By the following year I found myself unable to stop thinking about creating my own universe.

Writing for media tie-in projects has often been called “playing with other people’s toys,” because one has to respect the condition in which characters and situations are received and, in most cases, put them back as they were found.

I was good at doing that, but it was time to make some toys of my own. Toys that I could

break, fold, spindle, and mutilate at will. So I turned my attention to *The Calling*, an idea for a TV series that I'd tinkered with years earlier. All I had composed on my first pass were a few pages of character concepts and loglines in a spiral notebook.

Now I looked at those pages with a new perspective: I saw the potential for a book series.

First, I pitched *The Calling* to my wife, who thought it had possibilities. Several months later, I mentioned it to my agent, who loved it and demanded that I get her pages right away. I promised her I'd work on the outline and sample chapters as soon as I had a break in my tie-in writing schedule.

More than a year later, I was still bogged down. Finally, I carved out a block of time at the start of 2007 and made a commitment to get *The Calling* out to the market before I submerged into another tie-in project (in this case, my *Star Trek Destiny* trilogy).

With great confidence, I delivered the outline to my agent to get her feedback before I dove into the sample pages.

She hated my outline. The entire premise was a disaster, she said. Its central plot element was "a kiss of death."

Some writers would have curled up and surrendered right there, but not me. I'm a tie-in writer. As notes go, these seemed pretty gentle. I asked her to elaborate on why she felt various elements didn't work, and then I went back to work. As with so many *Star Trek* outlines that I've had to revise, the actual number of words that changed was relatively small. It reminded me of the joke about the man who complains when a plumber charges him \$150 to twist a single nut and stop a flood from a leaking pipe. "Anyone can turn a wrench," the customer protests. And the plumber replies, "You don't pay me to turn the wrench. You pay me to know *where* to turn it."

She loved the revised outline. And I was grateful at that moment that I had learned how

to write rich, detailed, and readable outlines as a tie-in writer. A well-crafted outline, coupled with the sample pages, was what my agent intended to use to sell this book to a publisher, and, if we were lucky, to get the story optioned for film and television.

I know of original-fiction authors who boast of never using outlines, or of not making more than a few cursory notes. I'm glad that works for them. But in my case, a detailed, tie-in-style outline enabled my agent to spot my story's problems early. Consequently, I was able to fix its conceptual and structural problems even before I wrote the sample chapters.

When I turned in the first 60 pages of the novel, I readied myself to bask in the glow of my agent's praise. It didn't take her long to call me back.

She hated my pages. They were "flat," she said. The action had no punch. The secondary characters felt unrealized. A key character's emotional reactions felt "untrue." The pacing was off. The main character seemed to have nothing at stake.

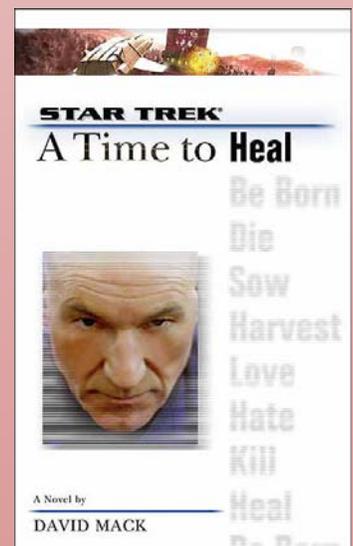
Another author might have ripped up (read: deleted) the sample chapters and started over. I, however, am a tie-in writer. It's my belief that one should never write six words when the problem can be fixed with five.

I read my agent's e-mail on one side of the computer monitor while matching her criticisms to specific passages in my manuscript, which was open on the other side of my screen. After weighing all of her many, valid

points, I realized that all we were really talking about was rewriting two scenes, trimming two others, and adding one line at a crucial moment.

Easy-peasy. I made the changes, she loved the pages, and out they went, to garner me fame

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and fortune and accolades. One publisher after another turned me down.

An editor-in-chief said my series concept was good, but she didn't think much of my prose styling. A senior editor at another house called me "a solid writer" but described my series pitch as "trite and unoriginal."

*So far, so good, I figured. Now all I need is one publisher to call me a worthless hack with a dumb idea, and all that will remain will be to find the one who likes me and my story well enough to take a chance on both of us at the same time.*

Then came a casual meeting with my longtime *Star Trek* editor Marco Palmieri, to whom my original novel proposal had been sent. He explained to me what he and another editor had liked about the pitch, and which parts they felt could be improved. More lessons of tie-in writing asserted themselves: take advantage of

good ideas when they are offered, and be grateful when other people want to help improve your work. I agreed on the spot to implement the suggested notes, whether Pocket bought the book or not, because the ideas were that good.

Pocket made an offer the following week. I accepted.

As soon as I finish the *Star Trek Destiny* trilogy, I'll start building my brand-new literary sandbox and populating it with my very own toys.

And who knows? If my toys become popular and successful enough, maybe I'll let someone else play with them someday.

But for now? *Mine—all mine!*

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*Read more about David Mack's megalomania on his Web site: [www.infinitydog.com](http://www.infinitydog.com)*



## Send Us Your News

Do you have a new novel on the shelves? A great convention story to share? Tied-In is a great place to report either. We're especially looking for "Spotlight" articles—how you broke into the writing and tie-in business. *Ye editor's 'in basket' is empty at the moment . . . nothing on deck for the February-March issue. Please deliver something to her e-mail basket that can be printed in the next Tied-In.*

E-mail news articles, writing advice, classified advertisements, and more to: [jeanr@sff.net](mailto:jeanr@sff.net) or [jeanrabe@hotmail.com](mailto:jeanrabe@hotmail.com), and please mention tie-in or IAMTW in the message header.

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# GEN CON

THE BEST FOUR DAYS IN GAMING!

## GEN CON LLC and IAMTW Join Forces

By **Jeannette LeGault**

The International Association of Media Tie-in Writers in partnership with Gen Con LLC is pleased to announce the addition of two new categories to the Scribe Awards line-up. These are game related and will “tie-in” nicely with the Gen Con Indy audience. The categories are...

- Game Related Speculative Fiction - Original
- Game Related Speculative Fiction - Adapted



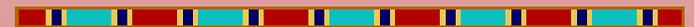
The same submission rules and guidelines apply to these two new categories as with the others; they will also be juried by committees. Submissions are now being accepted, and the nominees will be announced on the IAMTW website in early 2008.

The winners of the two new game related Scribe Award categories will be announced at Gen Con Indy this summer during an awards ceremony honoring all the Scribe Award winners. Gen Con is held every year in Indianapolis, Indiana; the 2008 dates are August 14-17<sup>th</sup>.

Gen Con LLC is including the Scribe Awards (and the new game related categories) as part of its writer's programming, which includes Author's Avenue and the Writer's Symposium seminars. Gen Con, best known as the “best four days in gaming,” is building its writers track into an outstanding program which will parallel if not rival other literary conventions, and where writers can come together, hone their skills, and meet other like-minded individuals.

In August, 2007, Gen Con's writing program included more than 75 seminars and workshops geared towards professional and aspiring writers. Their writer's program for 2008 will include more seminar and workshop topics, advance level classes, an Author Guest of Honor, and much more.

The inclusion of the Scribe Awards at next year's show is the icing on the cake to the writer's program, and Gen Con is proud to include it as a way to support and recognize the writing community for its contribution to the gaming industry. Gen Con will soon be known as the best four days in writing!



For more information about Gen Con and its writer's program please contact Jeannette LeGault at [jeannette@gencon.com](mailto:jeannette@gencon.com). For information about IAMTW and the Scribe Awards please visit their website at [www.iamtw.org](http://www.iamtw.org) or email [info@iamtw.org](mailto:info@iamtw.org).

# Spotlight on John Helfers

chose it. All of the main campus buildings were connected by underground passages, so once on site, you never had to go outside to get from one building to another—very useful for those cold Wisconsin winters (not so much of an issue given the recent climate changes). Also

every dorm room had its own bathroom, so there you go—tunnels and toilets decreed my choice of college. Seriously.

It was only after I had been there a couple of years that I realized that the UW-Green Bay campus was the home of none other than Martin

As 2007 draws to a close, I've discovered that this year has been one of the most rewarding and demanding of my professional life. Apart from my day job at Tekno Books, assisting with

handling the many ongoing fiction and nonfiction projects there, I also landed the gig of helping to launch *Room 59*, a new thriller

series for Worldwide Publishing. The good news was that they signed me to a three-book contract, my first multi-book deal. The not-quite-as-good news was that the schedule called for all three books to be written before the end of the year. I managed it, thanks to a very patient and understanding wife (the steady advance money coming in didn't hurt either), and a grueling schedule that has not only given me a new appreciation of how full-time writers handle that kind of workload, but also gave me a deeper understanding of my own writing abilities as well.

But before we get into that, I should relate the rather unusual way I broke into writing and publishing, which has to do entirely with tunnels and toilets. After graduating high school, I was trying to figure out what to do with myself. While I enjoyed writing, at the time I didn't figure I had the slightest chance of actually breaking into the world of published fiction. Falling back on many writers' day job, journalism, I decided to try my hand at that, and then looked at colleges with suitable programs. I found the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, but its journalism program wasn't really the first reason why I

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H. Greenberg (whose name I had first seen back in my high school library, on the cover of his

anthology *The Last Man On Earth*). After screwing up my courage, I made an appointment to ask him for some kind of internship, figuring I'd learn something about the editing or publishing business for a semester, and that would be that. He said he didn't have any plans for an internship at that time, but if I wanted to,

I could come over to his house and "organize his library." Okay, how hard could that be, I thought. Little did I know that even in the mid-1990s, Marty had been in the business long enough to collect not only



many thousands of copies of his own books, but tens of thousands of galleys, review copies, and much more. What I thought would be a fairly easy part-time job took more than eighteen months of sorting and organizing all three floors of his very extensive library.

From there, Marty moved me into the office, and the rest is editorial history.

But that only covers how I got into editing, not how I got into writing. Even working for one of the giants of the industry, in those first few years, I still didn't think I had what it took to actually be a writer. Only when Richard Gilliam offered me the opportunity to contribute a story for his anthology *Phantoms of the Night* did I get my first real break into fiction. I also owe most of my current career to Larry Segriff, who helped me shape many of those early short fiction efforts into recognizable prose, and even more importantly, helped a young writer find his voice, a debt that I will never be able to repay.

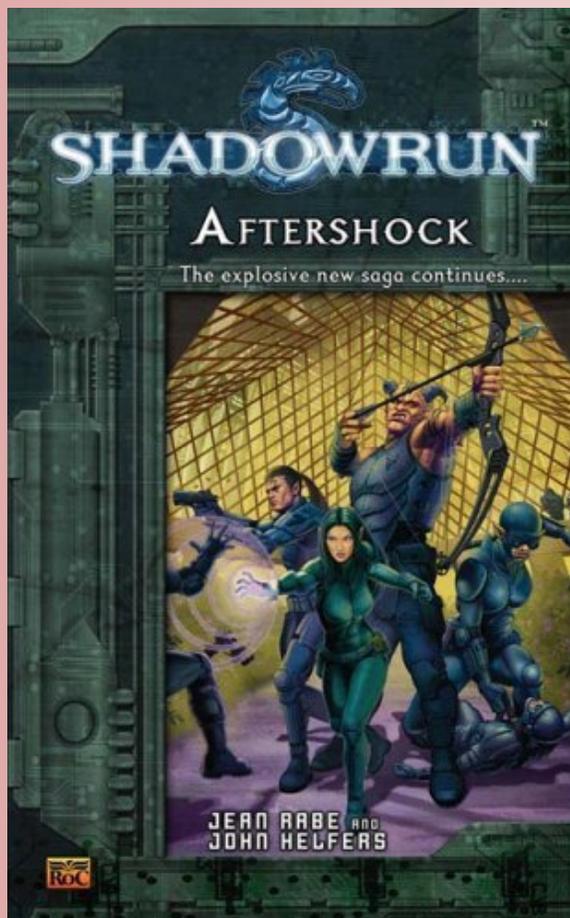
Since then, I've done the usual route of wrangling slots in anthologies, editing, and keeping my eye open for opportunities, which culminated in my learning that Worldwide Publishing was seeking new authors to write for their existing and new fiction lines. After contacting Worldwide managing editor, Feroze Mohammed, sending my resume and a letter of introduction, I signed my first three-book contract, and am in the process of contracting with them for another three books.

Working on the *Room 59* series has been a lot of fun, allowing me to stretch my creative skills to the limit while also attempting to put my own stamp on the techno-thriller genre. Feroze and my line editor, Nicole Brebner, have been a pleasure to work with, allowing me a wide latitude of creative freedom, and stepping in editorially only when either of them feels it is necessary. As a result, I have been able to put much more input into the high-tech, high-stakes world of *Room 59* than might normally be allowed for a tie-in project.

It has also been very challenging, considering that while I have edited my fair share of techno-thriller novels, I hadn't tried my

hand at writing one until this opportunity presented itself. I had dabbled in science fiction

tie-in writing when I had written the third novel in the first ever licensed *Twilight Zone* trilogy, and co-wrote one of the recent *Shadowrun* tie-in novels with Jean Rabe, but had never attempted something of this complexity before, and definitely not on this tight of a schedule. I'm pleased to say that I was able to make every deadline that was required, and turned in three books that I think kick off the series with a quite a bang—well several bangs, and more than a few explosions. Writing the *Room 59* novels also increased my confidence in not only my ability to produce a quality novel in a limited time frame, but also in my ability to stretch my writing to cover a



previously untried genre.

Only time will tell if the series is successful. But since the first book, *The Powers that Be*, will be published in January 2008, I suppose I won't have too long to wait to find out. The folks at Worldwide seem to be pretty confident in the series, because by the time it does appear, I'll already be hard at work on my next *Room 59* novel.



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