

THIRD CRIME UNLUCKY

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ABSTRACT

This is a contemporary mystery novel set in the Eastern Cape. A town's airstrip, situated between the golf club and the military base, acts as host to the local flying club and an active skydiving school. An amateur investigator uses unorthodox methods and the help of friends to find the cause of aeroplane fires and sabotage. His investigations lead him via geological research and insurance reports into contact with members of the aviation, property development and military fields.

Third Crime Unlucky

Prologue

It was my fault I suppose. I manufacture traditional African musical instruments for a living, and sometimes they develop faults. When they do, I get curious and have to find out why; then I can put things right. The pleasure I get from transforming rough sneezewood and old roofing nails into finely tuned marimbas and mbiras is amplified by the steady profit the factory brings in – enough to cover my monthly expenses and a good bit more. I'd been putting that extra aside, so I could take up again my other lifelong hobby – flying – which I'd put on hold some years ago. There was just too much to do after we expanded and moved the company from a farmhouse on the Transkei Wild Coast to larger premises in the Grahamstown light industrial sites. During those years, my flying activities were restricted to infrequent social visits to the flying club at a nearby airfield.

Then, last July, we put in a big push to get a range of our products ready for display at the National Arts Festival. With production halted for the ten-day period while volunteers managed the exhibition stall, I felt I deserved a rest, or at least a change. I'd pencilled in a trip to join friends at the Wild Coast resort of Trennery's for a hike along the beach; and I felt, too, that it was time to resume my flying activities. That would be a change. When I saw an article in our local weekly about an open day at the airfield, with a new instructor in attendance, I decided to go along. I estimated I'd need at least twenty hours flying time under the guidance of a flight instructor to get my skills back to the level where I could renew my private pilot's licence.

My troubles started when the aeroplane I was having lessons in developed a major fault. It caught alight one evening and was completely destroyed. I was there when it happened. My instructor was gutted. And, of course, when the club chairman hinted that I could find out why the aeroplane had spontaneously combusted, I had no option but to step into unfamiliar territory and start searching for the reason.

I didn't know then that the fault lay not with the aeroplane, but with a person or persons unidentified – and troubleshooting faulty humans was a little trickier than finding the fault in an inanimate piece of audio equipment. And the repair would require more than a bead of molten lead at the tip of a hot soldering iron.

Chapter One

I pulled into the yard behind the airport buildings and saw three diagonal parking bays marked out beside a corrugated iron shed. They were in the path of a natural turning circle and I did not feel like being boxed into place by whitewashed bricks laid down by some long forgotten builder's mate, so I parked parallel-fashion across all three of them. Then I waited for the rain to stop. It did so after a while and, when I climbed out of my Terios 4 x 4, I noticed a rusty chain looped through square holes that someone had punched into the double doors of the shed. I could see my 29 year old face in a brass padlock that dangled there and, in a shaft of light passing through the vertical opening, I saw a Suzuki Sx4 All-Wheel-Drive, gleaming crimson and braced for action.

I looked around as I unlatched the pedestrian gate separating the public parking space from the airfield. A notice on the fence read: *No Pedestrians, dogs or unauthorised vehicles allowed on or near runways and taxiways*, but I ignored it and kept walking. Behind me, the south westerly wind rattled the leaves of a gum tree that partially blocked a view of the golf course; a wintery sun appeared from the same direction to light the control tower windows, to my right. And a single toilet, for use by both men and women, adjoined the main block. Perhaps this was an attempt at gender equality in a male-dominated aviation industry or, more probably, a way of keeping down costs.

A set of navigational markers covered part of the apron, with adjustable iron sections to indicate wind and parking directions. The paint had peeled off and they looked as though they'd last been used in the days before reliable radio communications. Nearby a cup anemometer spun madly on a pole with its fin keeping track of the wind direction.

A white Cessna with cadmium orange stripes was anchored there with its tail flying high above the fuselage. A red and white Robinson 22 helicopter and a yellow scaled down Piper Cub were behind it and, blocking a hangar entrance, stood a civilian version of a Pilatus PC-12. A pair of kiewietjies flew towards me from the army base beyond the main runway, swept under a Czech L39 jet trainer, then landed beside the taxiway. They, like all the aeroplanes parked there, faced into the wind, looking towards the skydiving school a few hundred metres along the taxiway. They were the only living creatures I'd seen since arriving there.

I stepped onto the front verandah of the aerodrome building and looked along it, past a portable rotisserie and a bicycle, towards a set of closed double doors at the far end. An iron roof extended over the concrete strip and rainwater dripped from the broken end of a down

pipe attached to one of the support poles. Signs were mounted along the wall between the doors and windows. I leant on the rotisserie cover to get a look at the writing above it, then took my hand off smartly when I felt the heat radiating from it.

Earn your wings at the National Arts Festival, the poster read. Take a break from culture and take to the skies - only R100 for a flip. Join us for a braai afterwards.

I read the other notices along the deserted verandah, one referring to landing fees – ranging from R30 for aircraft weighing 2000 kilograms or less, to R100 for those larger than five tonnes. *Grahamstown Aerodrome relies on landing fees for continued survival, I read, we therefore request that all pilots pay the relevant fees.* I did a rough calculation based on the number of light aircraft I'd seen flying around over the past weeks and came up with a total of R5000. Even adding overnight parking fees for helicopters and microlights, I couldn't see the amount collected being anywhere near enough to maintain over four kilometres of paved and grass runways, taxiways, the airport buildings, control tower and hangars, a weather station and staff salaries. The municipality must have had other funds available for the upkeep and continued survival of the aerodrome.

There were first aid rules in case of an emergency and a list of names and phone numbers to call. There was also a larger version of the announcement I'd seen earlier in the local *Grocott's Mail* – with a route map, site diagram, and information on the flying club open day with the newly appointed flight instructor, Kate Whitfield, there to help celebrate the re-opening of training facilities.

When I got to the end of the verandah, I realised that, not only were all the doors and windows closed, but the green curtains were drawn as well. It was just the hot rotisserie that made me think someone was still at the aerodrome. Further along, in the leeward area outside the room with the double doors, I heard a fizzing sound and a damp smouldering smell came from some half-drums with braai grids resting across the top. Soggy serviettes crouched limp and frog-like on a wood and iron trestle under the eaves and a number of long-handled forks were scattered like pick-up-sticks against the charcoal packets underneath. A pair of loudspeakers hissed, indicating the end of a CD, and an Irish terrier swung through various moods in the half-wet, half-light. It peered up at me and, when it realised I had no meat for the braai, barked and hurried away.

I was quite keen on the idea of the braai. A place to meet for a beer after the day's flying; a way to get to know like-minded members of the flying community and their families and girlfriends; and to find out if any others were undergoing training so we could share costs on cross country flights. I also hoped there might be some contact on a more personal level;

I'd been caught up with the factory's expansion and new product development for too many days and nights.

I had planned to get there much earlier to watch the fly-in. Aviators in their light aircraft from all over the Cape, gliding down for a late breakfast and then a grand flypast. Eager and ready to show off their craft and skills to the festinos and the locals flocking to the aerodrome for a day of aerobatic activities, ground displays and conversations with the pilots. I had hoped to go up in a two-winged Tiger Moth and in a twin jet fighter capable of flying to Port Elizabeth in nine minutes. Or, at the very least, an orientation flight in a Cessna 150 trainer with two seats. But I'd been delayed by a few pre-festival hitches at the factory – and it had been raining on and off throughout the day.

I returned to the flight briefing room and tried the handle. Someone had locked it, so I trudged onto the airfield beyond the apron, keeping just out of range of the kiewietjies. I looked back at the control tower. The blinds were unhinged on one side, hanging at an angle and partially closed. I could see through the gum trees on the far side to one of the greens on the adjacent golf course. Something caught my attention and I glanced at the flight office. One of the curtains had a bit of white lining showing behind the window. I walked back to the verandah and moved quietly to look again at the emergency procedure notices. The faint sounds of a John Denver song came through the wall. Should I knock? Should I let whoever was in there know that a visitor had arrived? Maybe there were two people in there, not wanting to be disturbed.

I hammered on the green door. "Wake up! Someone's here wanting to go for an orientation flight!" Nothing. I knocked more gently. A minute passed. The door opened a crack. A half-assembled flight-overall appeared below red eyes and straggly hair pushed into place, no shoes.

"What do you want?" A woman's voice. I tried to peer past her face into the flight briefing room, but all I could see was her attempt, with a stifled cough, to stop me from seeing she had been crying.

"I'm here for the open day, for the aviation celebration. Are you Kate? What's going on, where is everybody?"

"Oh. Hello. Excuse me." She turned away and blew her nose. "People were put off by the gloomy skies. A few aeroplanes flew in, but the rain grounded them. You're the only visitor who's showed any interest in the open day. We've had to cancel."

She started shutting the door, so I put my knee in the gap. "But there's a fire burning in the braai drum; the coals should be ready in half an hour."

“Yes, that was started by the chairman. But he’s pushed off to town with the pilots who were grounded. I don’t know when they’re coming back. Sorry...goodbye.”

“Wait...I want to look around,” I said. “I was hoping to go for a short flight, but at least you could show me your new training facilities. Those kiewietjies don’t seem to mind the wet. Could you just give me a brief tour of the club?” She looked out towards the runway, then closed the door and emerged a few minutes later, looking brighter, with her strawberry blonde hair in a ponytail.

The first place she took me was up an outdoor iron staircase to the control tower. At the landing, we peered through the glass on either side of the door. A sun-yellowed computer rested on the floor under a shelf and pigeon droppings covered a filing cabinet next to a plastic chair. An upholstered stool stood near a dot matrix printer and a telephone with its handset lying beside it. The tangled venetian blinds hung against a black cable, which led through a hole in a peeling wooden pillar to a VHF aerial on the roof.

“Do you want to go in?” she asked, sorting through a bunch of keys. I started backing down the stairs. “No? Neither do I,” she said. “I’ve been brought in here to rejuvenate this place, but you see what I’ve got to cope with?”

“Yes, the upkeep of facilities, not to mention the aeroplanes. Flying is an expensive business.”

“No it is not. That is exactly what I wanted to tell people today. It’s a myth. These days with modern aero engines and the fuel they use, you can fly for an hour for the cost of a meal at a restaurant with the family. I’m determined to get this club off the ground. I’ll start by promoting the idea that flying is not expensive. Then once I break that barrier and get people to believe they can fly, I can get things moving.”

She called me up to the landing again, pointed to the far side of the tarred runway where groups of corrugated iron sheds were arranged in an arc and informed me that they were the original Bellman hangars of 44 Air School. The Royal Air Force had established the aerodrome in the 1940s to train wartime pilots in flying and navigation, but the hangars were now part of the army base, which, with its airborne assault division, still had strong strategic ties with the aerodrome. She talked animatedly as we climbed down the stairs and a parcel of the setting sun’s rays emerged from beneath the cloud layer, catching the tip of her ponytail as she turned the corner.

She led me across the apron to the cadmium orange-striped Cessna, registration number Zulu Sierra - Juliet Whisky Oscar, opened the hatch and gestured that I climb aboard into the pilot’s seat. I settled in and she got in beside me, inserted the key and toggled the

master switch. The gyros hummed to life and she sat watching me as I looked over the instruments and felt my way around the controls. The aileron and elevator stick movements were firm and smooth and the rudder pedals showed potential. I clicked the flaps lever and watched through the window as they lowered through the set stages. The basic T-shaped instrument layout was coming back to me; the altimeter and airspeed indicators were swapped around, but the others were in their usual places.

Kate sat quietly while I travelled vicariously across the sky, then informed me that she was starving. I leant over the seat to hook up my headphones and noticed in the map pocket a glossy pamphlet with the Crown and Sunshine construction company logo on the cover. I reached for it to get a better look, but Kate whistled at me from the wing, telling me to hurry. She kept talking as we headed towards the kitchen.

She told me she had arrived at the club the previous day to take up her post of resident instructor. The chairman had told her that the builders had not pitched in time and her clubhouse accommodation would only be ready the following week. A committee member had offered her a place to stay, but she'd wanted to prepare for the open day and had unrolled her sleeping bag and slept on a bench among ladders and paint tins. She took a pack of boerewors from the fridge and stretched for some rolls on a shelf. I told her the fire would still be too hot and that I was thirsty.

"What else have you got on that bunch of keys?" I asked. "I think it's time we dealt with my thirst with something from behind those double doors." She followed me along the verandah and we swung open the green doors to the lounge and bar room. I was about to sign for drinks when we heard laughter and male voices coming from the verandah. The chairman swept in, rubbing his hands together. He recognised me from one of my social visits and he looked at Kate's face. He seemed to realise that she was in a better state than when he'd last seen her.

"Ah, customers," he said, taking up his place behind the propeller bar. "I see you two have met."

"Well no, not exactly," said Kate. "We've just been looking around. I don't know who he is, but he's the only visitor who stayed..."

"Right. Mark, this is Kate Whitfield. As of today, she's our resident instructor., She's straight out of 43 Air School, but she's got over three hundred hours, a PPL, commercial pilot's licence, night and instrument ratings and, best of all, her instructor's certificate." He looked in the ice bucket then gestured towards me. "And this is Mark Taylor. He's been hanging around the airfield for years now, usually on the ground, but he does manage to get

into the air quite often.” I left the pencil dangling above the book of coupons and stepped over to shake her hand.

“I think the fire’s ready now,” I said. “And how do you do?”

“Hello,” was all she said, taking my hand quite firmly and staring into my face.

“And I am Glen,” said the chairman as he took down glasses from a shelf. “Mark’s our local musical instrument manufacturer. And he’s doing us all a favour. He’s heading off to the Wild Coast for a few days to give us some peace and quiet.”

He walked across to a tenor marimba that I’d donated as a marketing exercise and tapped the keys with a mallet. It was a model I was quite proud of, nearly two octaves, with diatonic tuning which resonated nicely between the bass and the soprano models. He tapped out *London’s Burning* with one hand then replaced the mallet in its holder, where he noticed a set of darts. He took them out and tossed them into a board mounted beside an aeronautical map of South Africa.

Two committee members came in, one a cabinetmaker and the other a dentist, followed by the three pilots who’d been prevented by the weather from returning to their home bases. Glen told Kate that the reason they’d pushed off was to arrange accommodation for the three of them at Bella’s B & B. Then he thought for a while and came up with one of his ideas.

“You’re going hiking,” he said to me. “You were telling us you were worried about your house being empty and your dog not being there to guard it while he’s in the kennels. Now Kate’s probably had enough of camping under builder’s rubble here, so what do you say?” He opened an Amstel for me and a Black Label for Kate.

“Oh, I love dogs,” said Kate. “I mean...” She stopped talking as she realised she’d jumped in too soon.

I was speaking at the same time: “...he’s already booked in to the kennels, and I’ve asked the neighbours to keep an eye on the property...” But Glen interrupted, showing once again why he was chairman.

“Listen, you know quite well that I run the kennels, or my wife does, or the staff, or that parrot sitting at reception. You can bring him another time. Let Kate look after your house and let your dog look after Kate.” I told them it sounded like a good idea and that I would think about it.

Kate got the music going and, by the time we’d cooked the boerewors, a few other couples and the two committee members’ wives had arrived. I noticed Kate standing for a long while with her glass close to her mouth, but she didn’t drink anything. Then I realised

she was listening to a couple who sat on bar stools a little apart from the others. They were connected to the skydiving school at the far end of the taxiway – the owner, Justice Celso, and his wife, who also acted as accountant-administrator.

After two beers and a boerewors roll, I decided to go with the chairman's suggestion. But if Kate were going to house sit for me, would she be able to handle my dog, Sam? I went across to her. "Well how about it?" I asked. "Come to my house after the braai and meet Sam; we'll take him for a walk, and if the two of you like each other, then the deal's on."

Chapter Two

“You seem to know Grahamstown pretty well,” I said as we lurched to the left at the large letters of the blue-lit Bella’s B & B sign. Kate came tilting over to my side, not quite touching my shoulder with hers, as I took the corner too fast. For some reason the seatbelt did not restrain her, and scratching and thumping sounds came from the dog box as Sam scrambled to keep his footing. I glimpsed him wedging his head between the back seat headrests.

“Sit, Sammy. Sit!” I yelled too late as usual. But he’d been ready for it; he knew the way and he knew I’d been driving too fast. A string of drool caused by the air blowing into his mouth through the back window looped down and settled on the backrest. I felt slightly embarrassed as Kate looked at me, obviously realizing I should have told him to sit before turning the corner.

“Sorry, I was about to point out the MTN tower behind us there.” I waved my hand in the direction of the Oatlands North suburb, then slowed down and pulled over above the geriatric unit of the local hospital. We got out and looked back. “It’s the tower that stands all alone with the single red lamp at the top and the three-way cluster of township security lights behind, at the same height. If you can identify that combination, you’ll know exactly where you are. Then if you turn 180 degrees, you’ll be on track for runway three four. In case you’re coming in for a night landing and the lights go off.”

“Oh I know that one all right. It’s the first one we see coming in from East London after we’ve passed the radio masts on the King William’s Town road. We can see all the towers of course, but they look different from down here.”

“So you obviously know the city and its flying history quite well then. Did you study at Rhodes?”

“No. I only know Grahamstown from the air. All the flying schools in the Eastern Cape use the runway for cross country landings and night flying exercises. And, by the way, I’m going to make sure those landing lights never go out when they’re needed.” She stood on tiptoe to get a view of the area then looked down as she overbalanced slightly. “The only times I’ve put my feet on the ground here have been on flights to the aerodrome, and last month when I came for the interview. Then yesterday and today...”

I listened to her talking for a while then informed her that most people who grew up in the Eastern Cape tended to maintain their ties with the area. When I asked her whether she’d given a talk on aviation at her old school on the coastline near Port Elizabeth, she

looked surprised and wanted to know how I knew. I'd noticed a sticker on her car with information about a fete they'd held recently.

Sam stood looking down at us through the back window and started to sing in anticipation, impatient to get out and start rampaging across the commonage. We got back into the silver 4 by 4 and I drove slowly up the curving road to the top of Cradock Heights, a new suburb where houses were going up every month. A community of dam builders had developed the area years before, with roads and servitudes, living in mobile homes while they worked on a water supply system for the city.

The tarred road ended just beyond the last house of the suburb, and the tyres started to skitter across the surface, sliding on little stones that had drifted down from the dirt junction. But the Terios immediately got a grip when I pressed the diff lock button and it pulled us onto the gravel, getting into its element as we drove across the northwest commonage. It was happiest on dirt roads, the rougher and further afield, the better.

Kate looked at the first group of boulders ahead, and then looked at me at the wheel, expecting me to swerve around them. When she saw I was going straight at them she hunched her shoulders, pulled her head down, and latched onto her seat belt. Drive on, drive on, she seemed to say, see if I care if we fall off the edge. She waited for the crunch into the sump and put her arms over her head as we reached the pile of rocks. But nothing happened. All was silent as we sailed over them. Not even a faint swishing sound of the long grass making contact with the underside of the chassis. She relaxed a bit after that, but Sam had been watching her and started yelping in sympathy.

"I'm not sure if my car will make it along this road," she said. "Do I have to bring him for a walk every day?"

"No, only when he starts ripping up the house. You'll know when he gets cabin fever. We've just come along this back road so you can get yourself oriented. You'll see just now, we can approach from the aerodrome road. We're going towards it now." I wondered how long she'd had her crimson Suzuki and whether she'd bought it on the strength of her new job. I would not have wanted to bring a brand new car, 4 x 4 or otherwise, onto the commonage.

She informed me that the ground looked much flatter from the air, especially the long fairways joining the 18 holes of the golf course that spread out between the airstrip and the Grahamstown riding school to the west.

The horizon dropped from just in front of the windscreen as we crested a grassy bank. Ahead of us, out along the Cradock Road, we could see the faint outline of treeless hills; to

our left, the security lights of the golf club burnt brightly and, across to the right, a solitary floodlight from the control tower shone onto the aircraft parked on the apron. The Cessna had taxied earlier to the skydiving school, in readiness for a photographic shoot the following morning. I stopped the car and removed the keys.

“That string of lights across there,” said Kate, pointing further to the right, “that’s the military base I presume?”

“Yes, you’re right, the security fence. It looks different at night. From down here we can’t even see the hangars you showed me during our trip to the control tower.”

“Yes, I’ve been meaning to ask, why didn’t you tell me you knew all that historical stuff? You were just pretending to be interested,” said Kate.

“You were on a roll. However much you know, there’s always more to learn,” I said. “I read somewhere that the soldiers are putting on a public display for their 57th birthday celebrations. I think I’ll go along. And you were saying while we were at the control tower that they still have strategic ties with the airport. Maybe I’ll meet one or two members of the airborne assault division. They’re always up to something.”

The full moon had risen about twenty degrees above the horizon and the eastern sky was as bright as the sunset before the braai. The wind had died down, the clouds were clearing and Orion’s Belt was beginning to emerge through the dark blue directly above. Kate got out of the car, walked off and stood on a granite outcrop next to a grove of aloes. She took a slow 360-degree view of her surroundings. Then she came to the back of the Terios.

Sam tried his usual trick of squeezing through the crack in the door as I opened it, but I wanted Kate to get used to handling him.

“Get a good grip on his lead, put your wrist through the loop, then clamp your fist round the braiding. Pull the chain tight round his neck so you can choke him a bit if he makes a run for it.”

She got the loose end and, as she did, Sam launched himself from the dog box and took off, pulling Kate onto her knees. She hung on and stopped him and then got up, walked around in front of him and took control. She made him sit, then she let him walk along slowly to her left, tightening and loosening the choke to regulate his speed. I was surprised at the way she was able to handle him. But he hadn’t picked up the trail of a rabbit yet.

“What is that rumbling noise?” asked Kate.

“That’s our local infantry on the move.” I pointed to the string of battalion lights she’d seen earlier. “I knew one of the commandants here years ago and from what I remember, there’s a rifle range a short distance beyond the lights – then way out in the bush

is the Burnt Kraal artillery range. And that's where they let loose the heavy ordnance we can hear. Probably 80 mil mortar rounds. It carries on all night sometimes. I think the new commandant is Lt-Col Packshot. He's quite a live wire I believe."

The barrage stopped for a while and three parachute flares went up and stayed in the sky for a full minute. Our triple shadows moved across the veld as the flares descended, and then our solitary moon shadows reappeared. We breathed in the sweet scent of the veld grasses rolling by on a light mist.

I hadn't told her the real reason that Sam went for walks at night, only that he preferred it because that was when he could get close to the kiewietjies before they took off. She would find out once she got to know him that he didn't behave well in the company of other dogs.

The evening remained quiet; it was time to let him loose. Kate slipped the chain from his neck and he took off. That was all that was required to exercise him. By letting him go free, he galloped off and exercised himself, or rather the kiewietjies did.

These fearless crowned plovers would scurry into the air with their custard cutting shrieks, fly at bush top height with him snapping at their tail feathers, accelerate away, then turn and swoop past his ivory incisors. They lay their eggs in nests on the ground in the open veld and when intruders approach, they fly about to distract them then lure them away. Sometimes they pretend to be injured to prevent discovery of the eggs or chicks. I have never seen any of the nests, so they must be good at finding places where people or animals would be unlikely to tread.

Sam came back and found a mole hole near the seventh fairway across the track from where we'd stopped. He started digging, sniffing, and digging some more. He made the hole big enough to put his head in, then he sneezed, and the sides of the hole began to collapse. Earth poured down, and down he went, into a chasm two metres deep and about as wide. The damp earth settled then Sam looked up and tried to scramble out. I reached down and pulled him by the collar, glad I'd parked on the other side of the track.

"No wonder you bring him out at night," said Kate. "Does he always do this?"

"Not usually," I said. "But he won't be able to do it for much longer." I didn't realise then that he had given me a clue that I would be following up on when speaking to a seismic geologist the next day.

I climbed to the top of an anthill and called to Kate to join me, looking towards the golf course clubhouse. She breathed in the night air which carried the aromas of wet earth and damp grass seeds and looked around at the stars. "We are so near to nature out here and

yet the city is also very close,” she said. “And there are no streetlights to interfere with the stars.”

“Well, you’d better make the most of it. You’ll be standing here breathing in the odours of fried chicken and rancid cooking oil soon; and dirty Styrofoam tubs will come blowing across these rocks.” I informed her that a national property developer was going to flatten the golf course and the stables and replace them with a middle-income housing estate, a shopping mall and a truck stop.

She took in a breath and stood quite still. The rumbling had stopped and, as the Khoisan people had done for thousands of years before the settlers drove them away, we looked up and listened for the sound of shooting stars overhead.

“What’s going to happen to the golf course and stables?” she asked. I told her the proposal was to relocate them, as part of a sporting complex, to the nearby Belmont Valley, a prime farming area with abundant water and naturally recycled nutrients in the soil.

“That can’t be. Why didn’t someone tell me during my interview? What’ll happen to our aerodrome? We can’t have buildings all around the perimeter. There’s already a no-fly zone over the army base; we’ll be squashed into a landing area with bizarre flight patterns for circuits and long final approaches. I was just beginning to think I could do something with this club.”

“I’ll tell you what,” I said. “You teach me to fly again and I’ll see if I can help with getting the club back on track.”

“That’s not such a bad idea,” she said. “How many hours did you say you’ve done? And when can we start? I thought you had to go to the Wild Coast for a week. We should begin soon though, to create a buzz and get people talking.” She stopped speaking for a moment, thinking. “Those two people sitting to one side of the bar this evening...”

“Justice Celso and his wife. What about them?” I asked.

“They were talking about the skydiving school. I couldn’t get what they were saying; something terrible that happened there a few years ago. And it happened twice, as far as I could tell.” I didn’t want to alarm her with details of setbacks suffered by the previous owners, so instead told her about the history of the charter flight service and the flying club’s links to the university. She asked who coordinated the activities and I told her the ties were informal and flexible.

I also explained that the municipality owned the land and was supposed to provide fuel and maintain the area, including the runways, taxiways and perimeter fencing. They also owned the airport buildings and some of the hangars. Then there was the general flying

community – anyone from anywhere could land and use the facilities, as long as he or she paid. The Grahamstown Flying Club, Kate’s employers, also leased and used the buildings and had built their own hangars. They had offered to buy the aerodrome and take over the upkeep and licensing requirements – but the city officials had rejected the offer.

I gave her details of the strong core of microlight pilots, then told her a bit more about the skydiving school along the taxi way: the thriving business that attracted customers from all over the Eastern Cape.

She took in all the information, then again demanded to know why they didn’t group together as one coherent whole. A bit of competition, she said, was healthy. But this seemed to be a waste and a duplication of resources. She said she would work on the setup.

I reminded her that the orange-striped Cessna in which she was going to teach me to fly belonged to the flying club – and that the skydivers also used it for photographing their activities. She agreed that that was a start. Then she and Sam both looked up, startled by an explosive popping sound and a flash from across the commonage. We looked in the direction it had come from and saw what appeared to be the sun rising again on the western horizon.

“That’s not the army. It must be the golf club,” I said, watching, as the flames got brighter.

“No, look, it’s in line with the control tower,” said Kate. “It can’t be...no...I think it’s my club house!” She started running towards the glow and I climbed onto the roof of the Terios.

“It’s coming from beyond the flying club,” I said. “Get Sam into the car. We have to do something. It looks like an aeroplane – at the skydiving school.”

Chapter Three

Kate acted like a cat at the edge of a birdbath, straining against her shoulder strap with one hand on the dashboard and her knee against the gear lever. Leaning forward to stare through the windscreen, she paid no attention to Sam in the back; she wanted to get to the fire site. Sam, too, was a different animal, no longer singing with the anticipation he'd shown on the journey to the commonage, but sitting with his ears down, looking contrite. He had obeyed Kate's urgent command and jumped into the back of the vehicle, ignoring a flock of kiewietjies circling above.

I left the meandering grass track and drove the Terios at speed directly towards the floodlit control tower. Donga ridges and dead tree stumps hammered the underside of the chassis and the springs clanged as they compacted above the axles. One scenario kept cycling through my mind – could it be happening again? Could the fire on the airstrip be another of the disastrous incidents Kate had heard about? My brain was accustomed to stepping sideways to find innovative solutions to difficult situations, but I couldn't go beyond that thought; I had no idea what I would do when we reached the fire. Kate's brain, however, had obviously stepped ahead of mine – and was preparing for action. She had her cell phone out and was flicking through the contact list.

“What's your emergency services number here in Grahamstown?” she shouted. I told her not to bother with that but to dial straight through to a number I gave her – a local security firm – one that answered on the first ring and responded immediately to distress calls. If she told them what was happening, they would raise the fire, police, ambulance and any other emergency services they felt necessary, via their radio links. She started dialling with one thumb, then stopped. She wanted to know how I knew it was an aeroplane on fire and not a motor vehicle on the Cradock Road. That made me think – perhaps the location of the fire against the night sky had tricked my imagination into generating an image of a burning aeroplane. It could have been a flare or some other incendiary device that had gone astray and landed on the airfield instead of on the artillery range. Or maybe some of the skydivers had decided to have a bonfire to make up for the fizzled-out open day. Possibly Justice Celso had returned – although he had said he was heading for Port Elizabeth after the braai. I thought I'd seen his double-cab outside the Rat and Parrot on my way home to introduce Kate to Sam.

“You’re right,” I said. “Hold that call. Let’s get a bit closer before we spook the whole town into panic and confusion.” I was aware, however, that just a few seconds could make a difference to the amount of damage a fire might do.

I ramped through the drainage ditch running parallel to the army base road, crossed the short span of tarmac and entered the aerodrome driveway. I did it without pausing to look left or right, but made it easily through a gap in the sparse traffic flow. The Terios lost traction for a moment; sliding sideways, it then straightened and sputtered towards the turning circle with the whitewashed bricks looking green in the headlights. I rolled over them and came to a full stop against the sliding gate that controlled vehicular access to the airfield. Kate was once again ahead of me. She’d been scrabbling in her handbag after replacing her phone.

“I can’t find the gate remote that Glen gave me,” she said. I waited; she moved her hip against the window, turned on the light and tipped everything out onto the exposed half of the seat. No keys. Then I remembered that she had spread them out on the counter top in my kitchen when I gave her a spare set to my house. From the way Sam had welcomed her there, I’d assumed that she would agree to look after him and the house during my trip to the Wild Coast. She’d probably left them there. But she’d also parked her car, with her backpack and sleeping bag rolled up on the back seat, in my double garage. “The remote’s probably with your car keys,” I said. “Where are they?” She looked briefly across at me, then carried on searching.

From the little I knew of her and the way she’d established herself at the club, it seemed improbable she’d misplaced them. Then she told me she remembered hanging them on my key rack, a miniature xylophone, just inside my front door. She had hooked them between my basement keys on the left and the attic key on the right. With my faith in her organisational abilities restored, I switched off the interior light, then, after a few seconds, I noticed a pushbutton pad glowing on a post just outside my window. I tried to think of a logical code number, then reached out and pressed 1634 #, the coordinates for the main runway, but nothing happened. I switched off the engine and climbed out. The front fog lights stayed on. They picked out the vertical bars of the gate and threw their shadows flat onto the wet track beyond the fence.

I looked towards the aerodrome buildings but saw no movement behind the windows or under the security lights there. As far as I knew, everyone from both the flying club and the skydiving school had gone home after the braai, which had ended two hours earlier. So it

would have been four hours since the last person left the skydiving school – when he had taxied and parked the Cessna there.

I was becoming aware that I needed help in dealing with this but, on reflection, I was glad we hadn't called the authorities. They had been unable to sort out the previous two incidents that Kate had mentioned, and, if this were another one, then I wanted to get there while there was still evidence to see. Kate would have to help; she was the only other person around.

“Do you remember seeing any fire extinguishers when we were talking outside the flight briefing room earlier?” I asked.

“I saw a red T-stand with two buckets hanging from it. One had sand with stompies stuck in it and the other had pond scum floating on top of some foul water. They both stank. That's on my list of things to attend to,” she said. “And there were two extinguishers outside the double doors.”

“Okay, I'm going to climb over the gate. Would you be able to fetch the extinguishers, put them in the Terios, then drive back past the golf club, turn right onto the Cradock Road, then turn in at the skydivers sign and meet me at the school? I'm going to jog along the taxiway and see if there's anything I can do. I'll get there before you.”

“Do you really think we should go any closer? Maybe someone has seen it or heard it and the fire brigade is on its way right now.” Kate was having a re-think about shaking up the town. Our increasing proximity to the trouble zone seemed to have sparked off an attack of nerves – or of common sense.

“Did you dial that security firm?” I asked. I could not hear sirens or revving engines or squealing tyres. No, she hadn't called anyone. But was it right to involve her - and Sam? It was one thing for me to try to intervene, but taking them along as well, was that fair? Taking them home was not an option either; it would take too long. Any useful data would have gone up in smoke by the time I returned to the scene.

The complete withdrawal of all three of us was also not an option. We could not just push off. We were involved and we had to do something. Even just to look at the fire and note the time it started – that would be something. The authorities would be asking questions later and, no matter what we did now, it was going to be awkward. If we left the scene, they were going to want to know why. If we went there, they were going to want to know why. They were going to want to know what we were doing out there in the night, full stop.

I decided to leave Kate out of it and go on my own. Was I reading too much into it or was she was becoming a bit too concerned about my health, trying to keep me away from the

scene? But this was the closest I was going to get to finding out what was going on. I'd been half expecting something like this to happen. And besides, there might be somebody there needing help.

“Forget the fire extinguishers,” I said. “Here are my house keys. If the fire starts spreading this way, stay in the car. Start the engine if you like but keep an eye out for me. If it gets too close, don't wait, just drive away. Take Sam home, phone the number I gave you and tell them you think there may be a fire out on the Cradock Road somewhere. Don't say any more than that; don't tell them who you are. If they ask, just put the phone down.”

I climbed over the sliding gate using the fence stanchion to steady myself, then walked along with the hangars on my right. This part of the road had never been good and it was even worse walking instead of driving. One of the club members, obviously tired of waiting for the municipality to oblige, had attempted repairs. They had carted a few bakkie loads of broken clinker bricks and dumped them in the wet ruts. And I presumed they were going to come back and crush them with a stamper. But they hadn't come yet and running on the sharp, loose bricks was tough on my ankles. I slowed to a walk and had a chance to look around.

I tilted my head backwards and looked at the stars directly above me then spun around and watched them draw streaking circles in the sky. I nearly lost my balance so I stopped spinning. When I brought my head level again I saw a drab green sedan parked near a bunker at the far end of the fourteenth fairway which ran parallel to the airfield fence. In the moonlight, I saw the vague shape of the driver as he got out. He bent down to adjust his wing mirror, then walked around to look at the rough ground behind his car. He returned to the driver's door, wiped his feet on the grass and got back in. He reversed a couple of metres, then drove off into the night with his headlights sweeping across the golf clubhouse. I ran across to the fence and yelled at him to come and help, but got no response. I thought I caught a glimpse of the South African flag fluttering on the mirror he'd adjusted.

I started jogging again and, although I didn't know what I would do when I got there, I knew that just being there would be constructive. If I saw something significant I could report on it, but if not, I could at least say that I saw nothing – which was a lot more useful than saying I saw nothing because I was not there.

The sound of the fire began to swell as I neared the practice rig and hangar-cum-storage barn of the skydiving school. It reminded me of the waves lapping through pebbles at the Storms River mouth in the Tsitsikamma Nature Reserve. I thought I heard the engine of the sedan coming up behind me and looked back. It was the Terios. Kate had somehow

managed to open the gate. She pulled up beside me. Images flickered across the bonnet and windscreen.

“Good, I was hoping for a lift,” I said as I opened the passenger door. The interior light came on showing the curves of Kate’s knees below the wheel and her bare knuckles resting in the ten-to-two position over its rim. She was staring impatiently ahead, willing me to get in so she could go. We were moving before I got the door closed and, behind me, Sam’s tail was going wild. He welcomed me as though I’d been away for days. I leant back and flicked my fingers at him, then asked Kate how she had opened the gate. She told me it opened by itself, and then closed again. Strange, I thought as mud splashed onto the windscreen. She kept well away from the training apparatus as we pulled up beside the hangar, which housed the microlights and parachutes.

She nudged forward until we could see around the corner. The heat hit us through the windshield and we saw her Cessna. The cabin was alight but, apart from that, it seemed to be intact. Something else had been burning; six iron poles stuck out of the ground at angles and buckled corrugated iron sheets sagged from triangular roof trusses. Empty 200 litre drums lay bloated or lidless in what had been the fuel storage shed and low flames, purple and yellow, flickered and curled along the collapsed wooden walls like the wicks of a thousand methylated spirits lamps. The Cessna was some distance from the shed, still on the taxiway, pointing into the wind.

“It’s lucky we weren’t here earlier,” said Kate as she jammed the gear into reverse and backed away behind the hangar again. Sam objected.

“It hasn’t taken yet. I’m going to look for an extinguisher,” I said and opened the door. There was no one else around, at least not anyone who wanted to be seen, but the clubhouse area hadn’t been tidied after what looked like a good party. Hot dog packets and beer bottles were scattered under the floodlights burning above the tuck shop. The wet weather obviously hadn’t dampened the skydivers’ spirits.

“There’s nothing you can do. Come back here,” shouted Kate. She spoke with the authority of someone who knew what happened when aeroplanes caught alight.

The outline of a lawnmower appeared through the smoke as the wind swirled slowly, fanning then flattening the flames. The mismatched smells of burnt feathers and a newly opened Koki pen carried across to me. A patch of vegetation smouldered against the fence and a channel of burnt grass led to the shed. The blue cranes nesting in the gum trees beyond the fence were unsettled and called out in cracked cries.

My brain gave me no choice. It spoke directly to my legs. I had to put the fire out before it told me not to. My flying future and Kate's livelihood were about to be taken away on an ascending ash cloud.

I had to smother the flames, and fast. The engine cowlings were billowing and the cabin was aglow. The wings, which probably housed the fuel tanks, were smouldering and the orange and white paint was peeling off, but the tail section was still intact. I saw some movement in the cabin, a large blue shape slowly toppling forward. Somebody in there, I thought. Rush and rescue him or stay away. His life was about to be snuffed out. There were no obvious signs of fire extinguishers, but I saw a garden hose coiled flat beside a tap near the tuck shop. That started a crabwise train of thought: hosepipe, snuffing out a life. I grabbed one end and flicked it towards the aeroplane and a stream of water sprayed out. I lifted it in the middle and worked along, letting gravity empty the water out the other end. Then I took off one shoe and sock, wound the sock round the end of the hose, and stuck it into the Terios exhaust pipe. The key was still in the ignition but Kate had climbed out. I hammered the gear lever into neutral and started the car. If I could get the exhaust fumes into the tail section, through the fuselage, maybe they would carry forward and keep the fire from spreading through the pilot's cabin. But what was I doing? If the flames didn't kill him, the carbon monoxide would. And, what if there was still unburnt petrol coming out? But no, I had a catalytic converter on the exhaust. There would be no petrol vapour.

The head of the person detached itself from the blue shoulders and rolled onto the seat, but the headphones, held by a cable, stayed behind. That couldn't be. Heads don't roll like that – not in South Africa. Relief. It was not a person, just a communications helmet balanced on the seat rest. But still, I should try – if I could just save some part of the aeroplane. Something inside the cabin, if not destroyed, could give an indication of the cause of the fire. There was no visible link to the fuel shed fire.

I collected a beer bottle by the neck and smashed the round bottom against the low playground wall then ran with the coughing end of the pipe to the back of the aeroplane. Just behind the registration lettering, I sliced into the soft aluminium underbelly of ZS-JWO. I pushed the pipe in and wedged it in place with the broken bottle. I had been aware of a persistent, medium pitched tone and other interfering noises and, when I went back to the Terios, I found Kate with her hand on the hooter and Sam howling at me from the dog box. I could smell burning hair and the sweet aroma of roast flesh. My shoulders were black and my left foot hurt as though I'd stamped on a bluebottle. I looked at it and noticed I had neither

shoe nor sock on it. I pushed Kate's hand away from the hooter and reached in to press on the accelerator. Kate realised I was away from harm and put her foot down.

I walked to the corner of the hangar and peered around. My senses were coming back to me slowly. They had obviously deserted me for a moment because they should have alerted me to the presence of something parked between the aeroplane and the tuck shop - a fuel bowser and hand operated pump; an oval-shaped tank mounted on a trailer with two wheels, a towing shaft and dolly wheel. Next to the pump handle stood two fire extinguishers. The filler cap was open, dangling on a chain, and cascading from the opening was a length of mutton cloth, soaked with aviation gas. There stood a giant Molotov cocktail, waiting for a spark. Once that went, the hangar with millions of rands worth of microlights, the jump plane, and thousands of rands worth of parachutes would follow. And then, the entire skydiving school.

But the Cessna stood alone. It appeared to be the primary target. It had caught alight independently of the other potential conflagrations. This was going way beyond the scale of the earlier two incidents.

Then came a welcome sight, one I hadn't really expected. The flames in the cabin died down and it went dark inside. Just the engine and the wings carried on burning, but weakly, with no apparent appetite for battle, and very little smoke.

Chapter Four

“You’re probably too late,” I said. “What’s burnt is burnt and whatever is still burning is under control.” I was speaking to an army sergeant who wore camouflage dress in shades of green and brown and had ochre paint on his face. “What took you men so long? There’s nothing much left for you to do.”

He had parked his 13 tonne Sabre fire engine in front of the Terios, taken a portable carbon dioxide extinguisher from a rack and dealt with the dying flames on the Cessna. He then worked urgently but methodically as he coupled a reel of flat canvas hosepipe to a valve on his vehicle pump. He’d left the engine running to generate power for a set of halogen lamps which illuminated the area between the Cessna and the burnt out fuel shed.

Kate had been right about the commonage being so peaceful even though it was close to the city. We thought we’d been alone but, in reality, people were all around us. Just a few hundred metres away was a small village, in the form of an army base, with its own post office, and guards posted around the perimeter. One of them, monitoring his surroundings from a watchtower, had seen the fire and got things moving. Five soldiers had escorted the fire engine through the sliding gate, followed by another two on motor bikes. I couldn’t find out how they’d opened the gate and that bothered me, notwithstanding all that had happened during the past half hour.

“You don’t know fire my friend, if you think this is under control,” said the sergeant as he checked the pressure gauge on the 2000 litre on-board water tank. “Fire can be a moody friend or a manic enemy. It will cook the kebabs on your braai if it feels like it, but it will turn and bite you in the veld on a windy day. This fire is not under control and it’s not a friend.”

I felt as if I’d been put in my place and looked down at my left foot. I saw toes wriggling among charcoal pulp. One of them had long since gone to market and had returned as a grilled pork sausage, cocktail size. But my right foot looked fine; it had a shoe on it.

The fire engine had arrived silently in the night with no bells, whistles or flashing orange lights, and no siren to bring out the *Grocott’s* photographers. The soldiers came stealing along behind it, their uniform buckles as obscure as the tarnished brass knobs and their rifles as cold as the alloy pipes on the side of the engine. This engine had no gleaming crimson panels and no polished helmets latched to hooks in the service locker.

The crunching tyres and the clattering of its diesel were the first indications I had of its presence. Sam pretended he hadn’t seen it and Kate looked relieved. A new smell, a cold iron smell, filled the area and I thought, thank goodness the professionals are taking over. I

started winding down my contribution and moved away to the Terios. Kate told me they wanted to know where the fire hydrant was, *that yellow and red parp with the central connector and two Y pieces for regulating the pressure*. She hadn't known where it was.

The soldiers finished laying out a pipe they'd reeled from the spindle. It ran to the side of the Molotov bowser, not towards it. Once it was fully extended, the soldiers snaked it around and let fly. I tried to stop them. They were using water on a potential fuel fire. However, I saw initially that they were not aiming at the bowser. They were hosing down the entertainment area and the walls and windows of the clubhouse. When they were satisfied with that, they flooded the bush and grass around the flowering gums where the blue cranes nested. They changed the setting on their nozzle and sprayed a fine mist over what was left of the fuel shed. Then they waited and watched for quite some time.

One soldier, wearing gloves and a hazmat suit, approached the bowser and removed the strip of mutton cloth from the filler tube. He brought it to the sergeant who held his hands behind his back, leant forward and sniffed. He took it with his bare hands and wrung it out, letting the liquid splash onto his boots.

"Water," he said. "Somebody's been washing aeroplanes. If they'd known this one was going to catch alight they wouldn't have bothered." We all approached the bowser with the two fire extinguishers mounted beside the towing handle and looked at the signs and pipes and the hand pump. It could easily have been a mobile fuel tank with explosives as well as aviation gas inside, but it was a portable hand-operated fire-fighting unit.

We walked over to the Cessna for a closer look. Kate pushed through the group standing around the propeller and tried to climb into the cockpit. The sergeant stepped smartly behind her after she hoisted herself up and caught her as the support strut came away from the wing and her foot slipped off the hatch threshold. I saw her face drop a moment before she fell - it was as if someone had cocked a revolver to her head. I looked at the bloated shape of the far side wing and realised that the aeroplane would never fly again.

Chapter Five

I couldn't tell whether they were real police or traffic police. They must have walked some distance because their car, which would have shown their colours, was not visible anywhere. They were both big – one in size and the other in presence. The younger one was tall, but didn't look it because his ash blue trousers were struggling to keep back the flesh pressing from the inside and his denim shirt was lucky to have a webbing belt keeping it tucked in around the waist. There were shields on each sleeve and a board with one-and-a-half rows of vertical coloured ribbons on his left lapel.

The first thing he did in the course of his enquiries was find a chair and sit on it. It was a folding chair, one of those seen on the embankment at the rugby, light enough to manoeuvre in a queue, but strong enough to hold five fully laden pots of potjiekos. Poor chair. Luckily, there was a gap below the backrest through which the can of mace strapped to his belt could protrude. His holster clattered against the right armrest as he sat down and he had to move his handcuffs to the front before he could wedge himself against the other armrest. I didn't think he was going to be the one to ask questions and take a statement. There was no possibility he was going to produce a clipboard from inside the front of his shirt or anywhere else on his person. Unless it was A5 sized and he kept it under his cap. A partially covered name badge read: *Viljoen*. And his non-verbal label indicated: Springbok Rugby Supporter – and ex-player.

“Wat het jy gedoen? What did you do?” he wanted to know. Clearly, I'd been wrong. He did ask questions. Well, one, at least. The other policeman was twice his age with springy grey hair and no cap. He moved under the lean-to near the tuck shop and took command. He had a bit more stuff on his shoulders and a lot more in his head, than did Viljoen, plus two-and-a-half rows of ribbons on his lapel. He looked fit enough to have walked all the way from the police station. But his boots and the leggings, which went up past his ankles, were too highly polished to have been anywhere near an Eastern Cape winter countryside recently. He tapped Viljoen on the shoulder and Viljoen stood up, lifting the chair with him. The senior policeman pulled it away, folded it and held it by one finger for the younger man to take back to the stack, and then he walked me to the low playground wall where we both sat down.

“We have to ask,” he said. “You were the first one on the scene.”

“Well, if I hadn't been, your fine friend there would not have been able to sit on that collapsing chair,” I said. “It would have gone up like a box of match sticks – along with that very wet Coke vending machine that he's trying so hard to jimmy.”

“Yes, I gather you did a good job preventing the fire from spreading to the clubhouse and training areas and we officially thank you for that. Provisionally. But would you mind running through it again? Start from why and how you first got here and just tell it as it happened.” I realised then why, as a child, I’d been told so often that liars never prosper. These people were going to catch me if I made just one tiny variation in my story. They had already tried to frighten me and then reassure me in a matter of minutes. I’d have to stick to the events exactly as they had unfolded. Which was easy; I’d just tell them everything that happened, everything I did. But telling them everything I knew, and saw... that I was not going to do. That was going to be the hard part – keeping my face neutral so I did not reveal there was more to the story than just the events of the evening. I’d just have to do the best I could. Like the time I was an amateur actor for a day – an extra in a promotional movie filmed in Grahamstown. The director told me to just be myself.

So just being myself, I told my story exactly as it had happened. And Kate would corroborate the events when they questioned her; she had been there and she would tell everything, from the time she pulled Sam away from the cussionia tree near the ant heap, to the moment before he asked his question. But she did not have the knowledge I had, which I’d have to keep to myself for at least another day. She did not know that this had happened before. That two other aircraft belonging to this skydiving school had gone up in flames, in the silence of the night. With no obvious cause, no witnesses, and no proof that the disasters were anything other than accidents. The second one had been two years before and this incident, the third, took place at the same spot on the same premises. Just a different owner and crew. I’d had some thoughts about the previous two incidents which I wanted to link to the evening’s events before I made a fool of myself with my unusual theories. The policemen gave no indication that they knew of the other fires.

The older cop’s name was Mason. He stopped me a few times. One was to ask how I’d thought of using the exhaust fumes from the Terios to smother the fire in the fuselage and cockpit. I started telling him about the principles of lateral thinking but, when I mentioned Edward de Bono, he seemed to realise that this line was going nowhere. He told me to get on with my statement. I made one last attempt. “You probably use the method without even realising it,” I said. “Like if you’re standing in a queue at the ATM and someone in hand-me-down clothes asks you for help... And then you notice a mother and daughter have been sitting on the pavement since before you got there.”

“Yes,” he said. “That is exactly what they do. They seem to be unconnected. He looks as if he’s never been into a town before – but somehow he’s got a bank account. People don’t

grasp that. They don't see that a person acting like he's ignorant, not knowing how to draw money for the bus – has actually got a bank account and a card – and he knows his pin number – but suddenly he can't work the thing. And the mother and daughter, yes, they are part of the scam. They're the diversion. They distract you while you're trying to concentrate on your own transaction. Is that lateral thinking?"

I told him he was getting there – the bit about them being unconnected – that was one of the principles. But I digress – now, and then. I took up my story again. And I hoped he would think that any funny looks I gave would be due to my mind tracking lateral thoughts and obtuse implications that occurred to me as I spoke.

Viljoen interrupted us with two Cokes he'd managed to coax from the vending machine. *Monsterneming van die getuienis* - sampling the evidence, he called it. But very welcome, even though it was a cold night.

Mason stopped me again to go back to an earlier part of my story – to ask when exactly I had taken off my shoe and sock.

"I have no recollection of that," I said. "There was a lot going on. It must have happened in the heat of the moment. I really cannot remember taking them off."

"Either you can't remember or you're just not telling," he said, trying to keep his voice stern as a smile started up unbidden on the side of his face. He got it under control and continued. "And what else do you not remember?"

I realised I would have to give him something so I told him that one of the army fire fighters had seen my bare foot and had fetched a first aid box from the fire engine and attended to my blistered toes. He waited, so I gave him a little more. I told him that most of the soldiers had wiped their boots on the grass before climbing onto the fire engine for the ride back to their base. And I asked him why he had kept back for questioning only the sergeant and the soldier who had volunteered to defuse the bowser. He told me the municipal fire chief, who had been called out, was dealing with that side of the investigation.

So I told him, as my statement concluded, that those same army fire fighters had set up their equipment so that, if the suspected Molotov cocktail bowser had ignited, they could attempt to extinguish it with a high-powered jet of water. He leant back and inhaled – then his eyes flickered as he realised I knew he was hiding something. But it was too late; he knew I'd work it out eventually. "Tell me," he said, "did these army fire fighters know how to drive their fire engine?"

"They knew exactly how to manoeuvre that huge machine through a very narrow gate, how to turn it just close enough to the hangar so that it was shielded from the blaze, but

just far enough so it did not scrape against the corrugated iron. They knew to unreel the flat hose parallel to the fire and only to pull it across just before the water flow made it too heavy. They knew how to get the pump motor going so it wouldn't cut out at a vital moment, in other words, they got the choke off long before they hit the water valve. And they had an entire side closet full of foam applicators," I said.

He realised I'd read his thoughts. "So, you thought it odd that they were going to use a powerful jet of water on a fire," he said. He knew as well as I did that spraying water onto a fuel fire was worse than pouring water onto a bucket of concentrated sulphuric acid. It would jump up and sting you.

"I thought it odd," I said, "that an experienced, efficient and well-trained team of fire fighters would be willing to spray a high pressure jet of water onto a fuel fire."

He acknowledged that, and I wasn't sure, but I guessed that he had taken me down a notch or two from being his number one prime suspect. I too had developed a little respect for his investigative powers and I wondered whether I should have let Kate call in the authorities right from the start. But I still had this niggling feeling they could have done more to investigate the previous two torchings. At least he now had plenty of information to consider – and that, I thought, might just stop him from seeing the other thing I was keeping under wraps. Something I wanted to work through with Kate, who had the most to lose from the night's events.

Chapter Six

Kate looked as though she wanted to lie down and go to sleep. Sam had already done so. It was after midnight by the time we got back to my house. She slept in the spare room, in her sleeping bag.

I got up to see why Sam was scratching at my window. It was dark outside but already after seven a.m. I'd overslept. I had intended going out to look at the burn zone before first light. There was still time, however, if I went without breakfast. I was about to open the front door to let the dog in when he came charging through from the kitchen.

"Not a thing; there is not a thing in this house. Except tins of dog food. No eggs, no tomatoes or parsley, no bacon, no coffee," said Kate as she kicked the kitchen door closed and put down two green packets next to another that I'd left there a week before.

"I don't drink coffee," I said. "It disagrees with me. I've got beer and Coke in the fridge in the basement. And there's a box of milk here. And oats." She put the fresh milk and butter into the fridge, and hot bread on the counter. I opened the broom cupboard to show her my tins of ham, sweetcorn, baked beans and sliced peaches.

"Nothing's fresh," she said. She'd been to the minimarket across the road from the petrol station. It felt like a long time since we'd eaten at the braai – a lot longer than the nine hours indicated by the clock face. "Go and put something on," she said. I went. I wasn't used to having a visitor in the house. The smell of frying bacon and onion filled the rooms, so I went around opening cottage windows and the front door.

"This fridge magnet says it's 11 degrees in here," she said, "What are you doing?"

"Just letting in some morning freshness for you. And Sammy doesn't like it when he can't go in and out."

"I thought you were heading out for the Wild Coast this morning. Oh, of course, that's why there's no fruit or veg here."

"I am. I just thought I'd go out and check what's happening at the airfield first." She nearly missed the counter top as she put the kettle down. She had been putting off the reality that she would have to deal with once the day got going. I helped her with the tomatoes and mushrooms, found a tablecloth and set the table in my dining room. I fed Sam, but he ignored his bowl. Kate had fed him already.

The breakfast was good.

While I loaded the dishwasher, she wandered about, trying out the Ugandan panpipes on the window ledge and the Shona mbira mounted in a calabash. I warned her that she

should dip her thumbs in methylated spirits until they toughened up. The metal keys of the thumb piano were harsh on the skin.

“That breakfast... do you always eat so well?” I asked as I tapped one or two keys on a bass marimba I’d brought home for tuning. She walked across to a set of Masai assegais I’d bought near the Ngorongoro Crater in Tanzania and felt the edges of the white steel.

“Breakfast like a king, lunch like a prince and pawpaws for supper,” she misquoted. She listened to the changing twang as I scraped a hollow under one of the keys. After a while she came and stood beside me and picked up a mallet.

“They think you did it,” she said.

I kept my eyes on the sneezewood keys and scraped a little from one on the next octave. I tightened two of the sounding board clamps and tapped some more.

“You didn’t,” she said. Simple as that. All my questions, my wariness about her visit, my fears – allayed in two words. *You didn’t*. I knew it, but something was pointing at me and, although it couldn’t have been me in person, I had lingering doubts; something about unintended consequences.

I had objected strongly to the planned development on the golf course, both at the municipality’s town planning division and in the *Grocott’s Mail* – and I’d signed my name to them both. There had been a distinct shift in my relations with some of the city’s inhabitants, but nothing upfront and face-to-face. Something I couldn’t put into words but tried nevertheless to explain to Kate. But she’d said it out loud. ‘You didn’t.’ My doubts began to clear as she walked swiftly to the front door and got to it before it slammed. She wedged it more securely with a crocodile carved from Zimbabwean Mukwa. “You didn’t do it and you’re not to blame for someone else doing it,” she said.

Someone knew, though, that I’d been making enquiries about learning to fly in that aeroplane.

She lifted my week-old shopping bag onto the ledge beside the fridge and looked disappointed at the packet of cheese snacks and the two Cokes inside. I should have stopped for breakfast ingredients on the way home the previous evening; maybe I could make a better attempt at lunch, and at stocking up for her.

“This keyboard, it’s got no F sharp,” she said as the mallet came down.

“No. It’s African, it’s pentatonic. You can play Japanese too if you like, yes. Japanese and Shona, both languages have the same interrogative structure. They both have a rising

final syllable and a last-word question marker. *Heré* for Shona and *wa* or *ka* for Japanese. Try a bit of sukiyaki if you like, yes *ka*?”

“You can’t do this alone,” she said. What made her think I was going to do anything – alone or in company? I hadn’t thought it through. Possibly the two policemen had said something to her.

Chapter Seven

Long shadows stretched to the left of the Terios as I changed gear for the Cradock Road climb, taking care to avoid the potholes and the tarmac lifting and folding on the flat section. I wondered how Kate had survived the cold night, with Sam getting up to bark outside her window at intervals. Her sleeping bag must have had audio as well as thermal insulation in the fabric. Sam had his mouth open, slobbering down the back seat rest.

I bypassed the turnoff to the aerodrome, went the long way round to the parachute club and parked some distance away, near the flowering gums. I leant on the door to push it closed, then walked slowly towards our ground zero. There were one or two things I thought I'd seen the previous night and I hoped these would look clearer in the morning. Such as why the inside of the cabin had been burning. If someone had started it on purpose, the firewall should have prevented the fire from spreading between the cabin and the engine, but the engine had ignited as I watched. This would indicate two starter fires. And the fire had weakened the wing mountings.

I was some distance away, but could already sense the heat radiating across the frost-covered grass parking area. It was eight hours since the army fire fighters had extinguished the lingering blue loops of flame, but my face felt hot. I had seen the Cessna before the fire, gloss-white with its cadmium orange stripes, wing tips and tail plane standing proudly above its shadow, ready to follow its spinning silver propeller into the sky. It still held its basic shape, but had sagged into its shadow; the wings were now below the fuselage, withdrawn and buckled, the colour of black rust. The Perspex windscreen had moulded itself over the dashboard instruments and the cowlings lay twisted, exposing the manifold pipes in their new resting place. The three soot-covered propeller blades followed the spinner into an ugly angle, upturned and stretching to get away. The tail plane was intact with just a taut steel control cable straining and pinking near the hole I'd punched with the broken bottle. The smell of scorched oil mingled with that of burning tyres and rubber hosepipe.

An armed police guard coughed, then stepped out from the tuck-shop awning. I wondered whether I'd surprised him or whether he was keeping out of sight to protect himself from harm while he kept a lookout. He informed me that the police *crime scene – do not cross* tape was there for a purpose and that the fire chief and police forensic investigators were due there shortly. He made it clear I was not to interfere, but I'd seen enough. There was no obvious connection between the fuel shed fire and the burnt Cessna. The aeroplane

had ignited independently, but someone had expected the whole place to go up, leaving investigators to treat the fire as a single event.

I drove along the sharp clinker brick track towards the aerodrome and flying school buildings, stopped halfway and opened the hatch. Sam followed me through the boundary fence onto the 14th fairway and along to the bunker where I'd seen the green sedan. I saw a tuft of flattened grass and pointed. Sam ran around then sniffed it with interest. I took out my Leatherman and sawed off a sod of the flattened turf then we returned to the Terios.

The sliding gate was closed, so I parked next to the narrow helicopter hangar. On the other side of the fence, Kate's Suzuki was parked between the whitewashed bricks, and the chairman's double cab and Justice Celso's truck stood on either side of it. I closed my door and looked across to see Justice stomping up and down the verandah, bumping into the rotisserie cover each time he passed it.

"They won't let me near my own skydiving school. It's my property. I want to see what damage has been done. I want to look inside my storage hangar. What if the parachutes are smouldering in there? If we can check now we might be able to limit the damage." Glen was trailing along beside him, tugging on his shoulder, trying to get him through the double doors. I saw a familiar face and a hand waving from the kitchen, holding up a packet of rich roasted, finely ground Arabica coffee beans. Not something you'd find in the food shops of Grahamstown.

"Back already? I thought you took a hike," said the chairman. "And where were you between the hours of late at night and very late at night?" But I could see he was troubled. The third torching at the airfield in two years. It was going to take a massive toll on the membership and morale of both the flying club and the parachute club and school. He steered Justice through the doors and sat him down on a bar stool. From the verandah, I noticed that the green curtains of the flight briefing room were wide open and inside at the chart table sat the police officer, Mason, and the fire chief, Gareth Herries. I had not seen their vehicles outside.

A white sedan, with yellow and blue stripes and a shield on the door depicting a set of Rocket Aloes, drove into the parking area. Real police. Herries and Mason went out to greet the newcomer. They got the sliding gate open and all drove off towards the skydiving school.

They returned an hour later and informed me that, by limiting the damage inside the cockpit, I had preserved some vital evidence. Not in the form of a clue as to what caused the fire, but rather proof that the fire was not started by an arsonist. Mason told me that the aeroplanes in the two previous incidents had been so badly burnt that there was no evidence

of the presence or otherwise of a starter agent. But this one had been preserved – and they could ascertain for certain that there was no evidence of foul play. Chief fire officer Herries said he had looked around, followed the blast track and inspected the charred remains of the fuel shed. He was adamant that the cause of the fire – purposeful or otherwise – could not be established. He confirmed that there were two separate fires but he could find no accelerant, no short circuited wiring, no agent provocateur, and no sign of sabotage or blast or fabric or fuel ignition initiation point. Nothing at all.

The chairman listened to this, then once again came up with one of his bright ideas. “Mark Taylor will find the cause,” he said. “He can solve anything. Remember when that Mooney was coming in on long final and the VHF transmitter packed in? The pilot would have gone straight down runway 16, through the fence with its white steel circles and onto the army base road. We were all frantically trying to get the batteries sorted out and the aerial plugged in and what else. But Taylor here stepped back from all the chaos and started aligning those old World War II direction indicators that we always trip over on the apron. Then he went and wrenched the mirror off the wall in our unisex cloakroom, ran outside and stood on the giant arrow and reflected the sun’s rays into the pilot’s eyes. The guy overshot, took a look at the windsocks, went around and came in safely into the wind on runway 34.”

They all looked at me. “What about it?” said Justice Celso. “I had my doubts when I bought the skydiving school. But I thought it was a grudge against the previous owner – the other fires. Now I don’t know.” He asked the fire chief whether he was going to conduct further forensic investigations with specialised equipment from Port Elizabeth. The chief told him there was little more to find, but that he would put in a report for insurance purposes. He said the insurance assessor was on his way to Grahamstown. Glen wanted to know what I was going to do since there were no clues to follow.

During my years as a musical instrument technician, I had learnt that things sometimes went wrong with the electronics. And I had been trained in the science and art of logical repair methods. If the thing didn’t switch on, for instance, I would have to carry out a systematic, methodical evaluation to find the fault. In the early days, before I’d learnt how to do fault finding, I would open up the case and look for broken or burnt or missing components, broken tubes, wires or circuit boards. If I couldn’t see anything obvious, I’d replace whatever was easiest to get at. And hope I’d eventually hit the fault and fix it.

Anyway, in this instance, we would be stupid to start looking for clues. There were none. But the one thing we could not deny was that there had been a fire and the aeroplane

had burnt to a wreck. This was not a normal thing for an aeroplane to do. So something out of the normal had to have occurred. We were going to find out – and if not we, then me.

Juliet Whisky Oscar deserved an investigation.

“But you said it’s not a normal thing,” said Kate. “When is a fire ever a normal thing? When would there be a fire that didn’t have to be investigated?” she asked.

“The most obvious ones are in a fireplace to keep the house warm, or a braai to cook the food.” I said. “Slightly less obvious is a back burn on a plantation. The forester, under controlled labour and wind conditions, intentionally sets fire to a section of land, so that the area can’t catch alight by chance or arson at a later stage, and cause uncontrolled fire damage. Lookout guards man towers all day and night, watching for the first sign of smoke.” I explained to her that no one was going to pore through the ashes or cold coals of a braai fire trying to find the cause of it, or any subsequent hazards created by the fire.

She then asked an innocent question: would I be able to find the exact cause of a braai fire if it was important to do so? Good question I told her – and that train of thought started crawling through my subconscious.

“Good question,” I repeated. “I’ll let it sink into my brain and see what it throws up. Nothing yet. But let’s do this together. We want to find out what happened, what led up to the fire that burnt your aeroplane. We don’t need to waste time looking for clues here at the scene. So we have to look elsewhere.”

“You mean like go and hang out at a pub in town and listen to the people talking and see if someone starts bragging about torching my aeroplane?”

“Not quite as concrete as that, but it’s actually a good idea. We could ask the chemists in town or go to the chemistry labs at Rhodes and see if anyone has been getting hold of combustible material. Or we could go back to the last 100-hour compulsory overhaul workshop and question the airframe technician who worked on the Cessna. But not yet. Let’s first go through the process of finding a solution when there’s no obvious one out there. We find a starting point. Look out the window and tell me the first thing you see.” She looked and told me there was a whole airport out there. I asked for something specific.

“The yellow flowers on that tree,” she said.

“Great. And right there is the solution to what happened to your aeroplane.” She listened to what I’d said and put her chin down and her eyebrows up and looked at me with a silent harrumph. “It’s true,” I said. “Let’s look a little further.” I led her out of the briefing room across the verandah and up to the tree. It was a mimosa with fine feathery leaf systems

and bursts of alizarin yellow puffball clusters. It was mid-winter and it had no business blossoming so early in the season. I took out my Leatherman and clipped off a sprig of inflorescence, took it to the kitchen and put it in a glass of water. She followed me, trying not to appear indulgent. But she just couldn't get the "yes teacher" look off her face.

"Don't look so sceptical," I said. "This works." The fire chief came in to tell the chairman that they would leave the guard at the skydiving premises until the insurance assessor arrived. "Nice flowers," he said. "Idiot tree doesn't know what's going to hit it. Must be all the rain we've been having. We measured seven inches in the past two months at the station. Not a single veld fire this winter yet, the most amazing log sheet we've had."

He left and I took Kate out to the tree again. "With this sort of problem solving method, you've got to be aware of any sort of input. Take all the information that comes your way and put it into the mix. You yourself said something that we must factor in – the bit about finding the cause of a braai fire. Now the fire chief has just come up with something. He said there have been no veld fires this winter. That is unheard of. So, we think, if the atmosphere and the surrounding countryside are not dry, not conducive to fires, then whatever set the aeroplane on fire would probably have nothing to do with tinder-dry vegetation which could be set ablaze by the tiniest spark. So, something or someone must have gone to some trouble to get the thing to burn, it must have been some intentional activity that got it going. But at the same time, he said..."

"He said there's been a lot of rain," said Kate. "And rain comes with clouds, and clouds come with electricity!" She was getting louder. She picked things up with an amazing rapidity. The look of indulgence was turning to one of involvement.

"You're getting the hang of it. Keep going," I said. "And don't forget the tree."

She carried on about the chance of a lightning strike taking out Juliet Whisky Oscar, but then she thought that the fire investigators would surely be able to tell if it had been struck by lightning. I mentioned that, with the wet grass all around, there might not be a visible ground path scorch mark. Then she started telling me about aircraft that had been struck by lightning and the sheath effect and St Elmo's fire, and volcanic ash. I had to stop her.

The sleeve alongside the Leatherman pouch attached to my belt had a cigarette lighter with an LED light at the bottom end. I held it up to a frond of leaves and flicked the knurled wheel. It spluttered out, so I pushed the black gas lever to the right and flicked again. Then I extinguished it. "Just before I do that, have a good look at the branches," I said. "Look at all the leaves, tell me what you see." She described the blue colour of the shoots, the feather-like

fronds, the way they grouped together, the way they waved in the light, variable breeze and their juxtaposition with the flowers.

“So you don’t see any form of distress in the leaves, even those at the base of the branch?” she looked again, pulling down a few twigs, then shook her head. “Well just to make sure, let’s take a few photographs.” She was about to drop her chin at me again, but instead went to my car and got a camera from the cubby hole. She took six pictures and replayed them on the screen. I took the lighter again, held it under the closest frond and flicked the wheel. What happened was intriguing. The feathered fronds first started giving off a dewy liquid and became completely wet. I kept the flame going and then, when the water dried up, the leaves began to curl. And, the amazing thing was that the other leaves, further up the branch, and those on disconnected branches, also started to shrivel and withdraw from the flame. This was their natural protective mechanism. I stopped the flame and, after a while, the leaves began to restore themselves to their comparatively plump state.

“Now let’s go and do the same to the leaves of that eucalyptus out there, where the blue cranes nest,” I said. She got it almost immediately.

“Gum trees! Australia. Flash fires. I’ve seen them on TV at the end of a long dry season, the air is still and filled with eucalyptus oil vapour – with a blue haze hovering above the trees – and just the slightest spark will cause an explosion – and the bolt travels at the speed of a racing car from tree top to tree top ...”

Chapter Eight

Kate considered for a moment the implications of what she'd said about flash fires in Australia. "I'm a bit confused," she said. "Are we trying to find out how the fire started, or who started it, or why it started?" I explained that discovering how it started would hopefully lead us to who started it and why. If we found out how, we could try to discover who was able to employ that particular method of destruction.

She had not been back to look at the Cessna in daylight and I felt she wasn't up to the trauma it would cause. She was still trying to avoid the reality of the situation. She had resigned from the familiar routine of her previous job where she had free accommodation, meals, and minimal transport costs. She'd lived on the air school grounds in a thatched hut and could walk to the lecture rooms, hangars, dining and entertainment areas. She had a choice of aircraft any time she wanted to fly. Now she had exchanged those familiar, secure surroundings for a quaint city, a dilapidated control tower and a pile of metallic ashes. I wondered whether some deteriorating relationship might have helped push her out of Port Alfred.

"You seem to have hit on the how," I said. "Eucalyptus oil vapour. So we're looking for someone who has access to some highly inflammable gas-like material and the ability to deploy it without being noticed. A person who can leopard crawl through a field of sleeping kiewietjies without disturbing them. I don't think many of the citizens of our little city have that sort of armament at their fingertips."

She hadn't realised that her laterally thought out solution also explained how the fire jumped across the firewall in the Cessna. A fuselage full of volatile hydrogen gas could ignite in all parts of the aeroplane simultaneously – the cabin, engine, wings and luggage hold. I refrained from mentioning the loss of humanity in the Hindenburg disaster of 1937.

"And the chief fire officer says there's no proof of foul play," I said to her. "What do you think?"

"I don't know enough about all this," said Kate. "When I applied to take over as instructor for this flying club, I knew it was in the doldrums, but I thought I could get it going. Nobody told me about the skydiving school and two other aeroplanes mysteriously catching fire in the night. I didn't want to get involved in this sort of thing – and now the flying club aeroplane which was parked outside the parachute hangar has burst into flames.

I realised she'd had enough; she was hiding a bundle of shaky emotions. I didn't push it, but I could imagine *Grocott's* interviewing her for the second time. An interview very different from the excitement of the first one.

Reporter: "Do you suspect foul play? The fire chief told us that they don't suspect arson and that they have not identified any suspicious persons."

Kate: "Arson definitely is suspected, no matter what the investigators say. I suspect it. If anyone thinks that three aeroplane torchings in a row are not suspicious, he is lying."

I looked at my wrist watch. It was still early morning. "How about some tea?" I suggested. But it was true; the chairman had not told her about the two earlier incidents at the skydiving school. He was obviously trying to be positive – a new beginning with a new instructor. But, at the braai, she had heard Justice and his wife talking about the two terrible events, so, even if the Cessna had not caught alight, she would have found out about the earlier incidents. I decided to let things settle before alarming her with details of what happened on those two previous occasions.

"Yes, coffee would be great. I know my way around," she said as she headed for the kitchen. "Anyone else feel like some?" she called to a group of business people waiting for a plane to arrive.

I thought she needed something a little more powerful than coffee; she'd just had a cup. I dialled the number of the cabinetmaker, Gerry. He appeared ten minutes later with a little yellow aeroplane dangling from a master key. "Here you go," he said to Kate. "Tank's full, see you back in time for lunch. I presume you have a type-rating for the Cub J3C?"

She dumped the tray of dirty mugs on the magazine table and almost jumped at him. "Do you mean it? Of course I'm certified on the Cub, it's a Piper isn't it? 43 Air School has over 100 Pipers in its fleet." We went with Gerry to wheel ZU-DKE out of a hangar shared with three microlights, then rolled the huge corrugated iron doors closed again. She wanted to know if I was joining her, but I thought it better to let her go up on her own. Her clinical pre-flight checks wiped away all the visible turmoil and her eyes were glistening between the headphones by the time Gerry swung the propeller. She moulded herself into the back seat and zigzagged along the taxiway.

"I've never seen anyone quite so hungry for air," said the chairman strolling out along the verandah. "She got that Cub off the ground before she'd even reached the second marker. "And this is Mr Winston," he said, introducing an elderly man with a sagging shoulder and a briefcase in similar condition. Mr Winston wheezed as he took my hand and I was surprised at the pressure of his grip. He had come to assess the damage.

Chapter Nine

“Mr Taylor? How do you do.” he said as he released his grip on my hand. “Rather cold here. Glen Cross tells me you could possibly help me with this business.”

He started by asking what injuries I’d received. None at all I told him. And in answer to his further questions: I had not been flying in the aeroplane at the time it caught fire, I did not have to make an emergency landing and I was not inside it when it self-combusted on the ground. He shuffled his notes on the chart table, then pulled out a single sheet with score marks running down the length of it.

“Zulu Sierra – Juliet Whisky Oscar,” he read. “Cessna 172 Skyhawk with a 160 horsepower Lycoming engine. Is that the aeroplane that you tried to save from fire destruction?”

“Yes.”

“Any superficial injuries, eye damage, head compression, loss of hearing?” he was reading from a checklist.

‘No, no, no and no,’ I replied. Then he asked me if any of the passengers had received injuries. No, again. Did any passengers survive? I decided to leave.

“Please sit down.” His voice took on a hint of the handshake he’d executed on introduction. “You realise you may have saved the engine, the entire instrument panel and some of the avionics?” he said. “And although poor Whisky Oscar will never fly again, there’s a lot of her that could still be quite useful. And that lot could be worth half a million rand. And ten percent of that could be payable in recovery fees – to a Good Samaritan, to someone just like you. Now tell me, do you have any, no matter how slight, back or neck pain?” I thought about it. No. Nothing that I could remember or feel. Nothing that I was aware of. His wheezing got worse as he became mildly annoyed with my answers.

“Is that your final word on the matter of injuries,” he asked. Yes, I was certain.

“How about, for instance, your left foot?” he asked. Oh, hell. I’d forgotten about it again. I couldn’t pretend that there was nothing wrong, so I took off my shoe and sock and showed him the army fire fighter’s bandage.

“Sorry, I’ve obviously got a mental block about it. The cops kept asking me about it too, but I have no recollection of getting my toes burnt. It’s not important.” He wanted to know whether I was taking antibiotics against gangrene. Then I asked him how he knew about my foot seeing that he had only just arrived. He told me he could recognise a pilot’s limp when he saw one and that, if I wanted to hide it, I shouldn’t concentrate so hard on

pretending there was nothing wrong. And that made me wonder, whom had I been trying to impress with my feigned wellbeing?

Was I aware of anyone who had anything to do with aeroplanes being near last night's fire, he asked. I told him there was me; I was supposed to be having flying lessons. Who was the first aviator at the scene? Well Kate of course, but she was with me, and my dog.

"May I have a word with her?" he asked. I felt that he had picked up from my responses that I was not trying to hide anything, that I had ideas to contribute, and would make a good ally in his investigations. I told him that Kate was the one who had just buzzed past, two metres above the airfield, setting the kiewietjies a-flutter.

Then I asked him how he had managed to get to Grahamstown so early in the morning. From Durban. He told me that, minutes after the chairman had called him to report last night's incident, he'd heard of a ferry flight departing for Port Elizabeth. He'd hitched a ride; they'd taken off from Virginia before five and dropped him off at our airfield, en route. I wondered if he'd seen a string of hikers along the beach near Trennery's.

"So you know about the two previous incidents," I said.

"Obviously. We paid out millions – in aircraft replacements and in loss-of-trade income to the skydiving school. We know there was no accident, particularly the second one. And now this. I just want a short chinwag with Kate and then I'll be off to peruse the scene. You are not a suspect, by the way," he stated quite positively. And I believed him.

I told him about our exercise in lateral thinking and the conclusions we'd reached. I also told him that I hadn't yet given Kate the details of those two previous instances. He considered this and suggested I bring her up to speed before he talked to her. He wanted her to think about the past events before she was caught up in the present investigations.

We managed to get her back down to earth after she'd refuelled and hangared the Cub. Her pencil appeared to float over the page as she filled in her logbook.

"Right, I'm ready. Throw at me whatever you wish."

"I'm going to tell you briefly what happened to the other two aeroplanes," I said, and started summarising the facts. I told her the sky diving school was one of the most active in the country and specialised in corporate team building functions. Companies paid for their employees to come from Port Elizabeth, East London and beyond. There is nothing like the fear of death to bring quarrelling work colleagues together.

I explained that a group of them, including their families, would drive to Grahamstown on a Friday evening. The instructors would present one or two hours on

procedures and harness drills. The trainees would practice jumping and rolling from a replica aircraft hatch located behind the hangar and learn emergency and landing procedures. They would sleep in bunk beds overnight and be ready for the big jump on Saturday morning, if the weather was good. Or they could all stay on and hope for good weather the next day. So it would be lessons on Friday, party all day Saturday, and leap of faith on Sunday morning.

“What fire?” she asked.

“You’re not listening,” I said. “The previous owner of the skydiving school also ran a pizza take-away place. He used to park his sky van outside on the grass, no problem.

“One night there was a fire, a blackened wreck. His aeroplane had gone up in smoke. The insurance investigated. It could maybe have been an electrical fault. Just one of those things – unlikely, but they had to pay.

“He bought himself a bit of a crock to replace the sky van; I don’t think it had ever had a door, so they didn’t have to remove one from its hinges. They put in a bit more security in the form of sensor lights, then poof – another fireball. Now the insurance company was really annoyed. They instructed him to build that hangar, which now also houses the parachutes and other gear, for his third aircraft. A big six-seater ex-army Kudu still painted drab army green. He had to wheel it out and in every morning and evening. A nuisance, but the insurance insisted. And what a racket when it flew. It sounded as if it was hovering just above my breakfast table on a Sunday morning.”

She couldn’t get this into her head. “What kind of an idiot would set light to an aeroplane! Twice! No wonder no one told me about it. No wonder this place is full of dust and papers instead of people. What kind of person would know how to burn an aeroplane? Ordinary people don’t burn beautiful works of machinery. Pilots don’t burn million dollar aeroplanes. To a pilot it would be like setting himself alight. It could not have been a mad man, they would have caught him, there would have been clues leading back to him. Someone who could burn an aeroplane, twice? There must be a way of finding him.” She was firmly back on earth.

I reminded her that she had already provided a possible method for the torching of the third aeroplane. And that it was the *how* that would give an indication of the sort of person who would burn a million dollar machine. I remembered that in South Africa aircraft sale prices were always quoted in dollars.

She thought about what I had said, then she suggested that it might have been someone who’d bought a bad pizza. Or one of the members of a corporate team building exercise who had not been brave enough to admit he was terrified of leaping out at three

thousand feet. Then she mentioned the obvious one, the previous owners trying to make a bundle on a big insurance claim.

I explained that these were people dedicated to the sport of sky diving. They had gained nothing and lost plenty from the episodes. They were devastated. The insurance money did not cover the costs and each replacement craft had been inferior to the previous one. They had to put up a hangar at their own expense, cancel classes for months, fork out insurance excesses, short falls and fee refunds for lost contracts. The owners hadn't done it. If they had, they would have taken the insurance money and run. Instead, they had tried to rebuild each time.

“Well there's a morale problem here.” She said. “We are going to sort out this arson question and move ahead. There is something holding us back from take-off... and... what was that you said?”

“What was that what?” I asked.

“You said something about a short fall. You pointed out the insurance not being enough, but it has just occurred to me – a short fall is also a term used for a low-level parachute drop, from five hundred feet. It's usually directly over the runway. It's a military manoeuvre, thirty special ops troops line up inside a Hercules C130 transport, it flies just above the ground, they step out on static lines, holding their emergency chute cables, and they're out and down before the C130 reaches the end of the run. That's where we start our investigations. We should be looking for a military person with training in the Special Forces! And stop gawking at me,” she said.

She had hit it within one day, in fact within one minute of hearing of the earlier arson attacks. The police, the fire brigade, the insurance assessor, and the pilots – all had got nowhere. Now, here was this young woman, not present previously, nothing to lose, everything to gain, bang on target with the prime suspect.

We had all thought it was a disgruntled participant, the jealous owner of a rival school, or as Kate had said earlier, a dissatisfied pizza customer.

But, the idea of a special forces soldier, a HALO jumper, a parabat, a black ops practitioner – that sounded like a possible suspect. An operative piqued at the commercialisation of his craft, a deadly military manoeuvre being turned into a frivolous sport! The special services commandos trained for months. The testing, tough selection process, the weeding out, the forty kilogram packs with no food or water for three days. Only the finest, the fittest, the strongest mentally and physically made the grade. Black and white, treated with equal respect. You made it through that ordeal and you were a man. Only then

could you step forward for your first parachute drop, followed by a hundred hours of aerial training. And finally – the proud day when the colonel awarded you your wings and the coveted dagger-wreath badge for your beret.

And here was this upstart giving two hours' instruction in the evening and then letting his trainees jump the following morning. Then a ceremony at which they were presented with their wings! And a video tape of the mockery. That called for remedial action with extreme prejudice. A torching.

It all made sense. We had to keep in mind though, that all these scenario solutions we were generating were still just that – scenarios, not facts. But this was how lateral thinking solutions worked. You jumped to the solution first – then went back afterwards, and traced out the logical steps that connected the initial problem to the solution.

How had she reached that finding? Something I'd said, about insurance. The short fall. And everything else she said made sense too. The fires, the poor morale. The enthusiasm and energy of those days when the aerodrome had been alive – all gone. Even I had been tardy about keeping up my licence. I had arrived the previous day in response to the *Grocott's* announcement – and now here I was, about to take off in a way I could never have planned.

Mr Winston got up from his armchair in the corner. He looked at me, held up an *SA Flyer* he'd been paging through, then held it above his battered briefcase. I signalled for him to go ahead and he slid it into one of the concertina compartments. He came across to our table and we both stood up. I introduced them to each other.

“Kate, my dear,” he said, taking her hand and dropping his lips to it. “I think I know your father.”

“That's nice,” she said. “I don't see much of him.”

“In construction, property, I believe. Based in Durban of course. Doesn't come to the club very often these days. Busy, busy, buying. Ha ha.” Kate stood, waiting for him to release her hand.

“A word?”

“Go ahead,” she said.

“Whatever happens to the two of you in the next few days, do be careful,” he said.

“Please don't fly too close to the sun.”

Chapter Ten

We needed hot sunshine. The wind that earlier had nearly slammed my front door was strengthening, the frost had melted, but the day was cooling. The previous night's fire lingered, but its heat was in my mind rather than on my skin. Captain Mason had been sitting with Mr Winston while I went over the first two torchings with Kate and they had listened to her make the intuitive leap to the short fall. Winston had never suspected me of being an arsonist and Mason increasingly was accepting me as an aid to his investigations. He seemed to realise that the reason I'd kept information under wraps for a day was to protect and assist Kate. But now he knew the theory about the volatile gas, and I'd established that he knew about the two previous fires. I still had to carry out some research into activities I'd seen the night before – but that would have to wait until I had a chance to visit the army base.

Kate's shortfall suggestion appeared to intrigue the captain and the assessor as much as it did me. They had just finished comparing notes, when in stomped Justice Celso with Sergeant Viljoen right behind him.

"I was told I could get back onto my own premises when the insurance assessor arrived," he said. "You are the insurance assessor. You have arrived. Give me back my skydiving school." He had shaken off the huge Viljoen as he entered. The door was too narrow for the two of them.

"Meneer, asseblief, stadiger. Please Sir. He's got to inspect the site before I can let you go there. It's just a formality. It's got nothing to do with your or your wife's rights." He attempted to take Celso by the shoulder again but Celso looked up and stared him down. The policeman's hand went to his belt, hovered, then settled with a thumb hooked through the handcuffs.

"It's lucky the whole place didn't go up, including the clubhouse, the hangar with our jump plane, the microlights and a quarter million rands worth of parachutes," said Celso. Yes lucky, I thought, lucky someone was there to stop it from spreading. "I've got records... the week's bookings in the office. I need to see them so that I can contact the corporates. If you won't let me into my own business, how can I run it?" If I remembered correctly, he should have been in Port Elizabeth for the morning. Changed his plans obviously.

"Do let us sort things out, Mr Celso. Pronounced 'K'? Yes. You know of course that we were somewhat out of pocket the last two times the aeroplanes at your skydiving school went up puff..."

“You know I wasn’t even living in this town then. And the police said that those incidents must have just been unlucky. Do you think I would have invested my life’s savings in a fireworks factory that’s going to go puff, as you put it?” Someone laughed as his anger made his words sound comical and that made him angrier.

“We should be getting along to the crime scene... the site of the fires, then,” said Winston. “You’re welcome to come along Mr Celso, but just mind the yellow and blue tapes.” Celso said he would rather wait until he could go into his office. I said I would join them shortly as Sam was barking at an Irish terrier he had seen through the back window, and Kate said she supposed she couldn’t put off visiting the scene any longer.

Winston pulled up his trouser legs and tucked them into his socks. He, Kate and Mason set off along the track, stepping around the puddles. Kate hung back a bit, talking to Winston, and I took Sam home.

I returned and parked out of range of the blue cranes. Kate came over, leant against the Terios, and wondered aloud how the birds would enjoy the shopping mall when it imposed itself. I told her that their alien trees had survived the Working for Water axes and that they had a good chance of surviving the future. Like our country. We turned to watch the assessor.

“You’re sure you don’t mind if I look around?” asked Winston.

“Help yourself. You’re not going to find anything,” said the fire chief who Mason had called to check on the inflammable gas suggestion. “There’s no sign of an incendiary trigger in or around the Cessna. It’s as if it just took in a breath of air and breathed out fire onto itself. Hey, shit happens.”

Winston walked around the wreck at a distance, then moved in towards the back. He took an instrument that looked like a light meter from his coat pocket, fiddled with a rotary dial, and then held it against the tail section of the fuselage. Then he moved gradually towards the nose.

“What’s that?” asked Kate.

“Looks like one of those infra-red temperature sensors,” I said.

“So, what was it that you spotted in the cockpit of the Cessna before you attacked the fire,” asked Mason.

“What makes you think I spotted anything?”

“It’s common knowledge.” I gathered his policeman’s instincts were having one last go at me. If I had started the fire and only afterwards discovered there was someone sleeping in there, he surmised, I would have tried to pull him out. Arsonists are not murderers.

The assessor asked the fire chief if he could use his ladder and he spent some time in the cockpit with his sensor and his camera-voice recorder. He climbed down, paced up and down, poked about among the burnt walls of the fuel store and then he came across to the Terios.

“Not a thing,” he said. “I went to a training course on assessing fire damage once,” he said. “They taught us all about the fire triangle – it needs heat, fuel and air – and all about different types of fire extinguishers, and how to spot an accelerant and how it differs from a starter, and all about heat and hazmat protection, and oil, wood and paint, and how to do the fireman’s lift. But do you know the most important thing we had to learn?” No, we did not.

“The most important tool in the fire assessor’s toolbox is the ability to read a balance sheet,” he said. “Let’s adjourn to the clubhouse and office that the good army boys saved.” Kate said she had seen enough, so I offered her a ride back to the flying club. We left Mr Winston to figure out the rest of his case and he went off in good spirits with a bunch of Celso’s keys.

Kate came out of what was becoming her flight briefing and control room with a VHF communications set slung across her shoulder and we heard the scream of twin jet engines travelling downwind. A Cessna Citation landed and, as it taxied towards us, I saw the Crown and Sunshine logo of Whitfield Enterprises Construction highlighted on its high tail. It parked facing into the wind, towards the sky diving school. The pilot opened the cabin door and let down the stairs. He was about to fasten the handrail but instead looked up the taxiway at what he thought he’d seen from the air – the burnt out wreck of the Cessna. A man, whom I recognised from press footage as the CEO of the national construction company, stepped out onto the top stair. It shuddered as he did so and he stumbled and had to leap back to grab the indoor rail. I saw Kate’s anxious look as she hurried through the reception door. A woman on the aeroplane, wearing a Crown and Sunshine scarf, shared Kate’s concern for the man who had nearly fallen. She helped him down and they came towards us in the reception area. Kate kept away from the woman; they seemed to want to spit at each other.

“Hello young lady”, said the iconic chief executive to Kate. “I see you two have met. And how is my Katherine today?”

My Katherine? I said to myself, and wondered what was going on.

The aeroplane belonged to the developers who were planning to demolish the stables and golf club and build the KFC and other fracking monstrosities on the site. I'd seen this jet often before, but never with the chief executive on board. Other employees climbed down after the pilot made fast the stairs, followed by a familiar figure in shorts and an orange scarf, carrying a gadget case. It was a geologist I knew from the university.

"Hello Aurora," I said going out to help her with her overnight case. She managed a piton, a Geiger counter and a blue bag of rocks. Her name was Aurora Argent and she was a gold-and-silversmith in her spare time. "Fraternising I see?" She swung her bag of rocks into my knee and said she was working on something in the Karoo. After she'd washed and refreshed herself, I took the chance to ask her what she knew about the stables and golf club development.

She told me that she had done quite a bit of work for subsidiaries of the Crown and Sunshine group and that they had asked her to investigate and write a report for them. They wanted her to certify the suitability of the land for residential and light industrial development. She had told them straight, it was not suitable. "Not even under certain conditions?" they had asked. But, when she maintained her assessment, they had told her to forget they had ever asked.

So, I asked her: "Is it the kaolin mines dotted all about here, including the one that has been turned into our very own stinking, rotten, mismanaged rubbish dump, that make the land unsuitable?"

"Don't talk to me about that mountain of plastic wasteland," she said. "No, kaolin is fairly stable. It's montmorillonite we have to worry about. It's a type of clay we have here but not in big quantities – it's like a chamois, which, when it's dry, is totally flat. When it absorbs moisture, it expands. It takes in a molecule of water per molecule of clay lattice." She explained by pointing at the square slabs of paving with her toe. "So, if this is the clay lattice – this and this – then imagine these two rows are a molecule of clay. Now you take a molecule of water – what happens is it pushes it apart. It's like the meat in a sandwich. It's still clay, but it's hydrated. So when there's been an abnormal amount of rain it expands..."

"So it'll collapse, like the hole my dog fell into on the commonage?"

"It won't collapse. It'll rise and crack. It'll lift the foundations and cracks will appear, usually above windows and door frames, then in times of drought, it'll sink back and the cracks will come back together again, but they'll be ugly." She told me that the two years' drought, followed by the extremely heavy rains of the past month, would create ideal conditions for montmorillonite deposits to cause anything built on them to rise and crack.

I looked out along the tarred runway as a featherweight motorised glider came down and wondered whether it was because of the montmorillonite beneath us, that only aircraft below a certain weight were allowed to land on runway 16-34.

Chapter Eleven

The long-winged glider floated past the flying club verandah just above the runway, showing no inclination to touch down. It can't be that there's too much lift, I thought, even with the wind up. He could easily stall if he wanted to land. Then I realised he was travelling towards the skydiving school. Abeam the training rig he tiptoed onto the tarmac, turned left and skated over to the wreckage. His wingtips brushed the airfield grass as he took the direct route instead of the taxiway.

Through my binoculars, I saw Mr Winston stroll across to meet the pilot, and tell him, I was sure, not to cross the crime scene tape. I went into the reception area to find out about the other recent arrivals – the property developer with his air hostess attendant, and Katherine.

“My dear,” I said to Kate when I found her putting out scones in the kitchen, “I didn't know you had visitors flying in today.” I noticed them sitting in the lounge with the business people Kate had made coffee for earlier.

“You don't get it do you? Last night before the fire, you told me a property developer was going to flatten the golf course and stables. I knew my father was investigating projects in this area, but I didn't know it was right here. I told you we couldn't have residential property coming up to the runway and you said if I helped you fly again you would help with the club. If you do that, you are going to go up against my father. And you are going to find out how rigid he can be.” She told me he was one of the reasons she became a pilot.

“Your father? I just didn't associate his surname with yours – Whitfield. He's always referred to as ‘The CEO’ or ‘The Icon’, on the news. You should talk to him. Tell him you're trying to get this club off the ground. He's got money. Tell him someone torched your aeroplane and ask if he can help with a new one.”

“He won't listen to me; he'll tell me to go and work somewhere else. But we've got to stop him. You can do it. Come on – tell me, what's the first thing you see?” Oh hell, I thought. Too clever by half. By now, we were on the verandah, taking the scones to the lounge. I lifted my binoculars and focused them on the guardhouse at the entrance to the military base. Exiting the boom was a drab green sedan, but I couldn't see the number plate. I told Kate.

“You do pick them, don't you? But I'm telling you it will take more than a clip of tracer rounds fired by the South African National Defence Force to stop my father. The burning tips of the lead bullets will freeze when they get anywhere near him.”

“What about the air hostess? Let’s get her to talk to him. Maybe she can melt his heart.”

“She has already. Don’t talk to me about that woman. She’s my stepmother. And he deserves her.” We walked off the verandah into the lounge. Kate put down the plate, straightened and said, “Dad, this is Mark Taylor. He’s going to find out who set fire to our aeroplane.”

As I shook his hand, I saw, and felt, the ruthlessness. All smiles and affability on the outside, but inside an undercurrent of pent-up venom. I felt it wasn’t his money that gave him the power to do whatever he liked to whomever he liked – it was his ability to strike and crush that had made him rich. He offered to butter the scones for everyone before he passed them round. We were left to add our own jam or cream if we wished. I half listened as they discussed charts and data projectors and municipal bylaws.

“Did your dad ever talk to you about his work?” I asked later. “When you were growing up?” I didn’t hold out much hope of that. Whitfield’s public face did not leave much room for personal ties – other than the replacement of Kate’s mother. A son? He could perhaps have had some bond with a younger version of himself. Kate’s answer seemed to come from a part of her memory that had faded a decade before.

“He always asked if I’d done my homework. Now that you mention work, yes he talked about sly characters in the building industry and how they kept getting away with things. But, one day he came home and told me he’d hit the jackpot. He’d bought some landfill in a disreputable location and it had just been rezoned as industrial. I didn’t know what it meant, but he was very excited.”

She told me he had then focussed on property development. The marina beyond Jeffrey’s Bay, the land lease scheme for mining conglomerates near Richards Bay, the consolidation of three private earthmoving companies who did work for the government and for farmers who were selling out to game reserve amalgamations.

Mr Winston was going over his notes in the bar where a group of members and guests were having after-lunch drinks. The owner of the motorised glider, Ian Banghome, looked a little out of place among the locals. He farmed pineapples near Kenton-on-Sea and was a country member. He heard the chairman chatting to me about the possibility of the club closing down or, at best, going dormant until we found a replacement Cessna and he’d casually thrown us a line.

“Take mine,” he said. “It just sits in the pineapple shed and gets covered in sweet, sticky juice.” Normally we’d feign interest in his tales of pineapples and not much else and let him buy the next round, but this time the chairman picked up on what he’d said.

“What do you mean, ‘take mine’?” he asked, stopping the general chatter with his sudden, intense interest. Banghome looked about the room realising it had gone quiet at something he’d said, something important. He seemed about to cast it aside as nothing of consequence but this was a chance to spin out his moment of acceptance.

“I said; why not use my motorised kite for a week or two, until you get this fire damage sorted out.” So, he really had meant it. He’d said it half in jest, then thought about it and repeated it. It was a genuine offer.

I looked at Kate, but she didn’t dare move. Her neck had stretched towards the group of farmers at the domino table, her ear to one side. She’d picked it up at the same time as the chairman and could hardly believe the message. She could see me looking at her, but did not move.

“Well then,” said the chairman, “we can get it registered temporarily on the club’s insurance – for training categories C and D and we’ll let you use it and all our other facilities whenever you’re in town.” He had accepted the offer without allowing a moment’s doubt and had sealed the contract with a safety clause. But there was more. He’d noted that this was Banghome’s transition to full club membership. “Listen up everybody... Ian has stepped up and has most likely saved the club from going back into the doldrums.”

He tinkled his glass as he spoke. “And he’s letting us use his flying windmill for Kate to carry on with her training schedule. I think each one of us owes him a beer. So, when your turn comes around, remember what it’s for and have one for the bright flying future.” He went through to the office and switched on the computer. To print out the insurance template probably, for Mr Winston to look at. He was also, presumably, going to fire off an email to the brokers’ offices to get the first premium deposited.

I offered to take Banghome back to his farm where we could collect the airworthiness, registration and licence certificates. He accepted but thought that, as he wasn’t taking his glider back, he should at least go home with his scooter. It stayed in the same garage as Kate’s Suzuki did and he used for his errands into town.

Banghome dozed off almost as soon as he settled into the passenger seat of the Terios. He seemed reluctant to wake, so Kate offered to drive the scooter. She wanted to ask him questions about the glider’s handling characteristics. I was hankering for the beach, so thought I could leave her at the farm and go for a swim while she picked Banghome’s brains.

I led the way in the Terios with Kate following on the scooter. I kept an eye on the rear view mirror. She kept far behind, avoiding not only the chips of stone that the Terios flung up, but also the dust. We drove out on the Port Alfred road and turned right before the kennels, before Stone's Hill. The road wound down through hadedda country, tarred for the first seven kilometres then, just when it was too late to turn back, it changed to dirt. I wondered if she knew how to avoid the corrugations; by putting the nearside wheels just off the grass verge and letting only the offside wheels go over the tooth chipping undulations. But, of course, it wouldn't work on the scooter. I tried to keep my speed down, so that she could keep up and so that I didn't generate too much dust; but we had a time window and I didn't want the offer to founder on a farmer's sense of punctuality.

Eventually, after pushing aside a herd of Nguni cows and after taking only one wrong turn, I came to a set of cast alloy minaret gateposts. They looked incongruous in the African bush and fencing wire stretched away on either side. The north-western sun was ripening the winter Cayenne pineapples on the other side of the fence.

I put the flicker on and waited. When I'd last spoken to Kate, she had told me that the signs were quite visible to those who obeyed the speed limit. I switched off the engine, turned the key to the garage slot to keep the flicker going and punched in the position monitoring option on the GPS. I expanded the range and looked at the position of Ian's farm in relation to the Peninsula Pines consortium. Then I looked at the distance from the 43 Air School to the new development on the left bank of the Kariega – the pristine land that for years had been farmland – with only three or four old, but well-tended farmhouse shacks overlooking the river.

I heard a tapping at my side window. It was closed. I hadn't realised she'd arrived; I'd neither heard nor seen her coming. I usually never drove with the window closed, always leaving a gap, even if it was only a centimetre, so I could hear the warning signs of the traffic. The dust, of course.

I switched the fan on to the second notch and wound down the window. "I've been parked behind you for three minutes, watching your flicker going," she said. "It seems Ian's not the only one sleeping in here." He woke up as abruptly as he had fallen asleep.

I left Kate at Ian's farm to familiarise herself with the motorised glider – discussing flight characteristics, engine maintenance and storage conditions.

After having a swim at Kenton, I bought an ice cream and wandered through the town. I nearly dropped the cone when I saw a big picture in the estate agency window – of the planned development in Grahamstown...

There in front of me was an artist's impression of something very familiar. The agent was selling stands in the proposed development, so I went in posing as a buyer.

The office clerk started unrolling a blueprint of the Grahamstown site onto the counter. The top north-western boundary section was just coming into view when the estate agent saw what was happening and rushed over to grab the plans. "They are still to be passed by the municipality", he said.

I remembered seeing an announcement in the *Grocott's Mail* about a public meeting to inform ratepayers of the proposed property development. So, off I went to Bells & Buoys and scratched through the papers until I found a copy:

WHAT: Presentation of proposed Cradock Flats planned development

WHEN: Tuesday 07 July

WHERE: Library Hall, Hill Street

TIME: 5.30 pm.

All are welcome

Signed: (unreadable)

Committee member of the Grahamstown Ratepayers Association

"What's the date today?" I asked the woman at the till. She'd been waiting for me to complete my purchase. She had already rung up my Coke and Niknaks and was looking through the *Talk of the Town* broadsheet when I returned with the *Grocott's*.

"It's the sixth."

I looked again at the notice. The seventh, that was tomorrow. At five thirty – for six probably. I had all day tomorrow to get there. I wanted to see what they had to say about the size and extent of the planned development. And I started formulating a question; I wanted to phrase it in a way that would extract information without letting the developer know that I knew a little bit more than the general public.

Chapter Twelve

“How did you get hold of this?” asked the chairman as we settled down for sundowners. He had pulled his barstool up to the counter and pushed his squat glass of freshly-iced Blue Label towards the edge where stud pins formed a border pattern. He closed the coffee table brochure and looked at the glossy green and red artist’s impression on the front cover. It was an aerial view of the Cradock Road running northwards out of town with features on either side. To the west, a single road branched off and this split into another six roads, staggered, going to the left and the right. And around each branch road were clustered plots, numbered from one to 256. The overall plan looked like an Arizona desert cactus, but with prickly pears growing thickly on each branch.

I had retrieved the glossy brochure from a pile behind the Kenton estate agent’s shell collection as he hustled his office clerk away with the blueprint. The brochure contained the information he’d tried to hide from me. And, when I showed it to Kate after collecting her from Ian Banghome’s farm on the way back to Grahamstown, she looked abashed. She knew I’d seen one of the same pamphlets, with the Crown and Sunshine logo, in the map pocket of the Cessna before it caught alight.

I turned it towards me, then called to the barman for a cloth. He brought it and wiped the frost drip from my Amstel bottle and from the bar surface. I let the moisture evaporate, then pulled the document nearer. Glen moved over for a closer look.

“The Kenton estate agent has more of these under his shell collection,” I said. “I’ve only glanced at it.” I flicked through the pages and fragments of coloured images, diagrams and texts appeared in my view.

“Let me see that picture again,” said Glen as he oriented the top edge. Something had caught his attention. “Look, there’s the Cradock Dam, but what’s all this other stuff?” I looked and saw that the curve of the road and the shape of the dam were correct, but the positioning of the housing plan seemed illogical. We looked to the east of the Cradock Road and saw a lake with a meandering canal running down from it into a series of S bends. “That looks like a marina,” he said.

“Yes. And what’s that further out? Looks like the one-stop for trucks. They can’t put it there.” I saw a graphically coloured schematic of a Pentagon. A five-sided sprawl with the logo of an anchor store and tags showing boutiques and a bicycle repair shop. “Just wait a bit; I think I saw something inside.” I opened the brochure to the middle and saw on the right hand side the same picture as was on the cover. On the left was a page of tracing paper. I

pulled it across so that it lay on top of the cover picture. Glen nearly coughed up his last sip as it hit the back of his throat.

“Creeks, look at that!” he spun the open document for a better look. Through the tracing paper, we could see the artist’s layout of houses, marina, truck one-stop and shopping mall. Printed on the tracing paper was the land as it existed at present – the entrance to the riding club, the club house and pavilion and dressage fields; the layout of the stables, sheds, drinking troughs and fences.

“Look at the street names,” said Glen. “I see an Equestrian Crescent, Lipizzaner Lane and a Stallion Street.” I looked to the east and saw the layout of the golf club and course. The road to the airstrip and army base was still there and the tracing paper showed the fairways and greens. But it ended along the 400 metre track joining the flying club and the skydiving school. And that was the section hidden under the rolled up corner at the estate agent. And, just showing along the right hand edge, was the place where Sam had dropped into his hole.

I lifted the tracing paper and looked at the layout of the lake. It covered the clubhouse and the back nine. I superimposed it again and saw that the marina canals followed the fairways of the back nine and the mooring hubs were located on the raised putting greens. Picturesque yachts were anchored around the circular hubs. To the north, the truck one-stop replaced the skeet shooting range. I could imagine the gun club boys coming out at weekends and taking pot shots at eighteen-wheelers. The pentagon, where the real shooting is planned, replaced a beautiful grove with a rocky outcrop interspersed with cussonia trees, fine grasses, euphorbias and cycads, which have remained untouched, and growing in their element since before Christ was born.

“Look at this,” said Glen. “This is an expensive document. It has messages from the municipal manager, the town planner and the mayor. It has all sorts of legal conditions, financing opportunities... and the dates of the various phases of development.”

“Yes, and look at this title page – they’ve managed to include the word ‘Royal’ – and here are pictures supposedly of William and Harry in the Spur wearing motor bike helmets.” I was getting a sick feeling and it had nothing to do with the beer.

“I remember reading that the information and feedback meeting to put forward their proposals for discussion was going to be next month,” said Glen.

I pushed back my bar stool, stretched my feet to the rail and put my hands behind my neck. “Well I thought I’d bring the brochure to show you. The second thing is that meeting; it’s not going to be held next month, it’s tomorrow.”

“So they’ve sprung it on us. It’ll meet the legal requirements and the city will be left wondering what happened. Lucky you went to Kenton today. Why was it again? Oh yes, Kate had to sort out the offer of an aeroplane. Training hours done on that dancing dragonfly will count towards real flying time of course.” The chairman closed the glossy pamphlet and pushed it to the centre of the counter. We thought alike.

“You’re thinking what I’m thinking,” said the chairman.

“Yes,” said I. “Altogether now...”

“It’s a done deal!” we both shouted together.

“The plans have been passed, the deeds drawn up, the golfers are going to be evicted, and the horses never had a chance. It’s goodbye green pastures, hello anti-green slime balls.”

“We’ve got to get to that meeting,” said the chairman. “But we’ll have to plan our approach. It’s in the Library Hall you say? We must get there early and position ourselves so that we look harsh from the property developer’s point of view and friendly and wise from the councillors’ and public’s side. Let’s practice here.” He shoved barstools around to depict the layout of the hall. “We may not be able to stop it but we can make them look like fools.”

“I’m looking forward to it. Tomorrow I’m also going to see what’s on at the Village Green then I’ve got a trip to the army base as well,” I said. “I’ve been invited to their 57th birthday party. The whole town has.”

“Can I come too?”

“No, everyone in the town can but not you. Kate is coming with me.”

Chapter Thirteen

One of the reasons that I wanted to attend the birthday celebrations at the army base was that the newspaper invitation had stated that every individual on the base – male, female, civilian or uniformed – would be involved with the preparation, support and presentation of the displays and exercise drills. In return, they wanted every citizen of Grahamstown to attend. If the army personnel could all be present to welcome us, we could all present ourselves to get to know the boys and girls in brown. And there would be information on rescue missions, health drives, animal welfare projects and disaster management, for which the army was well equipped.

I wanted to be one of those civilians present to see what the more secretive members of the base looked like when they were forced to come out into view. I thought, too, that I might catch up on the latest weapons and communications equipment in use in today's army. I wanted to see the sort of rappelling gear that the airborne assault division used when exiting the Oryx helicopters. And I wondered at the chances of going for a flip in one.

On the home front, cold meats, bowls of fruit, baskets of onions and potatoes, juices, jams and bread rolls had sprouted from all quarters of my kitchen and I was late leaving the house again. Kate had accepted my invitation to visit the army base; Sam had insisted.

I tried driving directly to the main entrance gate, hoping that the guard would lift the boom and let me in for the open day. I had driven past the marshals who had tried to direct me to park near the volleyball court with the other visitors. But the guard kept the boom down. He was not going to be put on a charge for allowing in vehicles without a pass. He sent me back to the visitors' area.

I parked on a slope under a blue gum, left gaps at all four windows, then set off for the combined soccer and rugby field stretching in front of a well-populated concrete and iron pavilion. I had my binoculars over my shoulder and a camera in my pocket. Kate kept up with me, but didn't talk. She could see I had enough distractions multiplying in all directions. Walking around was not productive, the field of vision kept changing, nothing stood out and grabbed my attention, so I went to hover outside the display tents.

The equipment ranged from the deadly to the defensive to the plain ordinary. A corporal demonstrated the loading mechanism of a Y3 automatic grenade launcher and another told me he could transfer 81 millimetre mortar rounds to the enemy's side of the hill at a rate of thirty rounds per minute. A sergeant showed me his mine detector and made Kate, who had caught up, wear some filthy headphones and listen to the sine wave growing in

intensity and frequency the closer she got to the mine. And there were camouflage nets clearly in view, covering a room with water purifying chemicals: an AIDS poster and field dressings as well as pots of face paint. At the pavilion end stood a mock barrack room with a neatly made bed with stick boots at the base and big pack, small pack and webbing on the blanket. A shaving kit, mug, billycans and cutlery stood beside a dress shirt in the locker.

A face blocked my vision. I tried to shoo it away. "How's your foot?"

"What do you mean, 'how's my foot'? What's it got to do with you?"

"Your toes, your toes?"

"Hell, I'm sorry mate, you've gone and embarrassed me. My toes are fine, thanks to you. Hell, I'm sorry. It was dark. Do you want to see your bandage?"

He shook Kate by the hand and told her to "mos bring him along". Kate led me to an ambulance van with three sides wide open to inquisitive eyes. A field operating theatre with every life saving device, including anti-gangrene paste and bandages for toes. He kept his head turned away as he unwrapped the two-night-old stretch bandage, then emptied a bottle of spirits followed by antiseptic powder onto my toes.

"I don't think you need a jab, but watch it, ja. Check inside your thigh for red streaks. Take the bandage off after two days and try to walk around bare foot. On the beach if you can." Good idea, I thought. But I had things to find out first.

Kate took Sam for a quick walkabout on his lead, around the trees and piles of cut grass and I wondered if she'd had a chance to play his tracking game, 'find the biscuit', with him. I decided the ambulance van was a good vantage point to watch the army world come by.

Music played and children ran about on the field, then came an immensely loud explosion and smoke rose from the ground. The children cleared the field and others ran to look. A band of terrorists had taken up position near the double walled security fence with razor wire along the base. If they'd climbed over that lot, I felt they deserved at least one atrocity.

The officers and their wives lined the top level of the pavilion when the shooting started. Away across the field, now hiding behind clumps of earth, were the terrorists with bandanas covering their foreheads. A yellow van drove by and the terrorists rushed it, shooting and throwing grenades. Then the whoop-whoop-whoop of an Oryx approaching, all green and steel and glass. It hovered ten metres above the ground and commandos from the airborne assault division began rappelling down the cable.

Another stick of six landed from a second helicopter and they deployed in COIN formation and proceeded to the attack zone, hurling red smoke grenades and firing rifle rounds as they signalled back to base. The hostages from the van were about to be shot.

At that point, the dogs of the army camp's married quarters decided to join in. A bunch of mongrels, small and large, rushed onto the field, scampering in all directions, followed by children and dog owners, throwing sticks and a ball, trying to get them to come back. And that was when I held out the sod of turf I'd fetched from the Terios for Sam to smell.

"Find it Sammy, find the boot." And off he went, first onto the field with the other dogs. But he stopped. He had a mission to complete. He went into the crowd, then onto the pavilion steps, up, up and along the row of engrossed soldiers standing, watching. He stopped, backed away and barked. One bark, extremely loud, between shell bursts. Then he sat down facing a military officer. I had my binoculars out. I leant against the ambulance with the door open, a public position with no defences, showing I had nothing to hide, part of the production. I watched and eventually Sam returned. I took him to the back of the Terios and held something else for him to sniff, something he'd picked up two nights earlier near a fire engine. He took one sniff, then took off. He went straight to the officer he seemed to have taken a liking to, wagged his tail at him and returned once more.

The festivities ended and people began to disperse. The officer followed his wife to one of the duller coloured vehicles parked near the ambulance, fiddled with the rear view mirror, checked that nothing was behind, wiped his feet on the grass, then drove off. Gotcha, I thought. There was no mistake. He had the crown and star insignia of a Lieutenant-Colonel on his epaulettes and the name "Packshot" on his pocket. He was the base commandant. Well done Sammy.

I took him home after dropping Kate at the flying club, then tried to think of a way to get through the entrance boom at the guard house. I wanted to speak to Lt-Col Packshot when he was relaxed, comfortable in his home territory. And, judging from the atmosphere, the open day had been a major public relations success.

I cruised along the streets of the married quarters, and then slowed down for a group of children running along the verge with their curly-haired dog. One of the occupants had put a collection of corrugated iron sheets against the fence running around their garden. The dog must have been inside, or had burrowed underneath and gone to help capture a terrorist. One house had washing drying on the garden fence and another had a Toyota Conquest up on blocks. Many of them had a braai drum of some sort and one or two had made an attempt at

growing roses. The grass in all the yards was struggling to keep a hold in the trodden and tricycled earth.

Cars were parked at most houses but I could see none at any of the double storey hostel flats. The flats had trees and sections of dry lawn, but no garden. The cars that drove past all had some accessory, a blue light glimmering under the front bumper, an imch-ka imch-ka sound system, gaudy mag wheels, a pair of dice dangling from the mirror or holographic decals surrounding the headlights. Two short-haired men stood in civvies at one corner and one waved as I drove past, then the other, when I waved back.

Doors were left open, there were no Trellidor sliding gates and no high walls. And no unkempt individuals or undesirables wandering about. Four youngsters in bright T-shirts kicking a ball waited while I passed, then apologised for getting in my way.

Getting into the married and single quarters had been easy. I merely drove past the aerodrome then turned right through the big gates that were always left open and I was in. No one stopped me to ask who I was or what I wanted; most people seemed to accept my presence and a few seemed to think I belonged there.

But I still hadn't breached the guard house booms. I wanted access to the barrack halls, the administrative centre, the messes for officers and men, its training grounds, parade ground and its vehicle depot and its armoury. I wanted to get into the ops room to see what the Lieutenant Colonel had on his planning charts.

I wanted to get in without attracting any attention at all. I wanted the entry to be routine, unremarkable and safe. I wanted to get this first attempt right so I could return if my first trip proved negative. I wouldn't be able to pass as a soldier; I had no uniform or military identity papers. But I'd noticed trade vehicles going in, an electrician, a plumber, a bread delivery van. Going in as a tradesman had its problems. I would have to go to a specific location and park and get my tools out or pretend to take a parcel somewhere. Or someone might call me across to fix his creaking door and I would look incompetent.

I couldn't come up with a plan, so I decided to go home and have another look at the satellite picture of the base. Or maybe I could laterally invert my mission – work on a scenario where I was already inside the base, trying to get out. As I turned onto the golf club-aerodrome road, I passed a soldier whom I'd noticed standing at the junction when I first arrived. I slowed then moved off, but I saw him running towards me. What now? He'd thought I was stopping for him; now he'd taken notice of me and my car. I stopped. He got in and sat in the passenger seat.

“I can take you to the centre of town,” I said. “But I’m trying to find a green sedan that came along this road. I bumped into his door at the shops and I want to give him my details so we can sort out the insurance. I’ve looked around the married quarters but I couldn’t see it.”

“Ja, I noticed. Two guys asked me what you were doing cruising around our jive spots. I don’t know who’s got a green cab but there’s lots of green trucks inside the base. I’ve got time. Come let’s drive around till we see it, then you can take me to the Albany Lounge. Fair?”

“But will they let me in there?”

“Just drive. Turn around and point at the boom.”

We got to the boom and a soldier with an AK 47 strolled across and looked at me.

“Back again,” he said. “Pass?” Then he looked in the window and saw my passenger. “Oh, you’re with Daniel, why didn’t you say so. I’m going off duty now; just tell the one o’clock shift you got visitor status.” He lifted the boom and saluted as I drove in.

“Which way?” I asked. Daniel indicated straight.

“Let’s start with the admin block before they all go home or to a prayer meeting,” he said. “And how did you enjoy the open day? Jus, I was just hoping I wasn’t going to have to ride with your big dog in the back.” We reached a building with a plain lean-to sheltered verandah and a pair of whitewashed boulders bracing the entrance to a concrete path. Notices were pinned to a board on the left of the green door and cigarette stompies lay scattered on the grass. A Mazda and a Ford bakkie stood near the boulders but neither was any shade of green.

“What do you mean by green?” he asked. “Is it a dusty green or a pale green or like Bokke green with the gold? And it was a sedan you say?”

“It was a dark military green,” I said. He thought that should be easy to spot. “Well maybe some of his paint is on my front bumper.” I pulled onto the grass next to the Mazda and we got out. I never wash my car and there are chips on the windscreen and grass scratches and dried mud flecks everywhere. Daniel noticed a clean section on the bumper.

“It must have been here,” he said. “But there’s no paint there. Maybe it wasn’t as bad as you thought. Why didn’t you leave a note? But who leaves a note these days? And who comes chasing after the bloke? But I suppose you were looking for some note paper and a pencil in the Pick ‘n Pay when he drove away.”

I decided to chance it. “Listen, Daniel, I’ll give you a lift to town next time. I want to see Lt-Col Packshot. Something happened during the public display and I need to speak to him.”

“You should have said so. He’s right there in the duty room, go quickly and you’ll catch him before lunch.”

He had his back to me when I entered. He was inspecting a wall chart and turned when he heard me. I struck without introduction.

“About that aeroplane,” I said, “I can prove you did it. I can prove military involvement and that you, Colonel, did set fire to that Cessna.”

He looked at me as though I were a non-member in his officers’ club. He said nothing; he didn’t try to protest and he didn’t ask what I was talking about. He knew that I knew. He was top dog of the Grahamstown command, however, and not used to people talking to him in such an undisciplined manner.

But he needed fixing and the only way I was going to do that was by putting him in the hot seat. I did not actually have any indisputable evidence that would condemn him, but I carried on. “Do you remember those dogs enjoying your mock battle earlier?”

“Damn dogs, they’ll get their heads blown off. They had the kids chasing after them as well. Undisciplined rabble.”

“Do you remember all the dogs?” I saw him rock slightly, and then he reassumed his stance. He told me there had been a motley pack of dogs, all unkempt. And that he would issue a directive for the next open day. No dogs allowed.

“One of them was quite friendly though, quite normal. Came and sat with me. Wanted me to throw a ball I think.”

“Well, you were part of a line-up in an identity parade this morning. Identified by that large, friendly dog. A dog that knows what the grass smells like when you wipe your feet on it, and one who can match you positively to a face veil found and photographed at the scene of that fire.” It was the speed at which the accusations hit him that made him falter. If he’d had time to consider each parcel of information he could easily have explained them away.

I repeated that I could prove he’d set fire to the Cessna, I could prove how he did it and that he was on the 14th fairway at the time. And, that he was lurking among the fire fighters when the army fire engine arrived, trying to get them to, in effect, pour petrol on a burning fire.

He sat down, trying to assess his situation. He was quick; he pulled a plan B from his mental Q store. “Okay, I’ll level with you,” he said. “But we are now moving into official secrets territory. If you repeat anything I say to you now, you will go to jail for a very long time. I’m not admitting anything but I will speak candidly.” He kicked the door stopper away and closed the door. He didn’t ask who I was.

“Now, assuming there was some military involvement in the burning of that aeroplane, and supposing I just happen to know that it is impossible to tell what started the fire; that there is no causal link and no clues whatsoever linking the fire to anything. How would you go about putting that ‘evidence’ to the court room? There is no evidence.”

“That was your downfall, Colonel. That was the evidence. If you’d left some grain of potentially suspicious material, it could have thrown the investigators into a chase for proof. But they told me there were no clues, no evidence and no suspects. Except there was a fire – and that was enough for me. So the very act of leaving no evidence was the sign. No evidence meant no clues to follow – therefore we had no choice other than to pluck proof from the ether...and that’s what we did, and this is what we found. We found you.”

“You have no proof, how many times do I need to tell you?”

“So why am I still standing here and why are you trying to filibuster your way out with your plan B?”

“So what do you want from me?” he asked.

“All you have to do to get me on your side is to reallocate some of your resources,” I said. “And that is why I’m here. An aeroplane needs replacing and the flying club needs re-launching. You do that and I’ll shut up. The army shares the facilities with the airport. You have development funds. Develop our aerodrome and its functions and get that control tower working again.”

“I’ll consider it,” he said, but he obviously wanted to justify his actions. He stood up, walked across to a cabinet and opened a wide, shallow drawer. He pulled out an ordnance survey map. I went over to look at it. It showed Grahamstown north, with the stables, golf club, airstrip, army base and commonage.

“Look at this,” he said. “How many houses do you see? How many residential complexes of any sort? I leant forward to refresh my knowledge of the symbols in the key section, then scanned the map. I saw black rectangles along the industrial site roads, at the stables, one at the southern end of the golf course, the golf course clubhouse, the aerodrome and parachute club – and the military base and married and single quarters.

“Not many,” I said.

“And do you know how long this base has been here, and how long 6 SAI have been here?”

“Obviously – it’s your 57th birthday today – so that one’s easy. And I happen to know that this cluster of Bellman hangars here,” I said tapping, “was constructed by the Royal Air Force engineers during World War II.”

“Exactly. We run a tight ship here. We share strategic facilities with the aerodrome. Now, you know that the Crown and Sunshine developers want to build houses and shops just the other side of the air strip. And can you imagine what sort of defence capability we’d have here with an ice cream parlour and kids playing in our back yard; thousands of civilian bodies permanently resident on our doorstep?” I thought of the Port Elizabeth airport with its attached army base, surrounded by civilian housing.

“Do you know, on average, how many men we’ve got billeted here at any one time? I’ll tell you – 1 200 at the most.” I told him I thought there were far fewer soldiers at the base, and that I’d seldom seen any at the First City Drill Hall in town.

“That’s right; we like to keep inconspicuous. Enough visibility to deter, but not too prominent that we antagonise. We like to cooperate with the civilians and we’ve spent a lot on promoting congenial links with the people of the city. Take today’s invitation – as you can see we are quite candid about our armaments, and we were giving helicopter rides to the children.

“Now I’ll tell you something. Harare. That colonial capital with the scarlet flamboyants lining the streets in spring and the mauve jacarandas in October. That beautiful landlocked city up north. And right inside that city just a little way out on the Second Street extension is a military base.”

“I thought it was out on the Seventh Street extension,” I said. “The KGVI barracks.” He looked at me as though querying how I would know such a thing. He straightened a map in his wide, flat drawer then carried on.

“There’s a new military base in Second Street,” he said. A foreign base with a permanent billeted force of one hundred and fifty thousand Chinese soldiers there!” I was astounded. I’d read somewhere that the entire Zimbabwean army, before independence, could muster a total of 72 000 including reserves.

“This is all just imaginary talk, you understand. Clamped under the official secrets act. If I told you I approached the Crown and Sunshine CEO, posing as a dishonourably discharged, out of work special forces operative. And I told Whitfield I could help him get

the aerodrome, the parachute school and all flying activities driven off the place. And he agreed and he paid me R100 000 to do it. What would you think?”

“I would think he would believe you were who you said you were. To him R100 000 is what he eats for breakfast. It would be as if his dreams were coming true without costing anything. If you’d asked for any less he would have thought you would not be up to it, and, asking for much more would tell him you were a chancer.”

“And, what if I told you he believed it could be done with no links whatsoever to him or his company or to me or the army?”

“Then,” I said, “I would believe that the human brain really is capable of using only ten per cent of its capacity.”

“Touché!” he said and gave me a high five. “So, we’ll sort out the upgrade, maintenance, Cessna replacement and any on-going expenses at the flying club and skydiving school – all above board with big announcements – Private/State cooperation and all that. And you know what to do in return?”

“I do,” I said. “I’ll shut up about your nocturnal sortie with the Cessna and I’ll have a few questions for the Crown and Sunshine people at their meeting this evening.”

“Agreed.”

“But, I’m curious,” I said. “Why go to all this trouble to pretend to Whitfield that you were going to drive out the aviators. Why not just attack him directly. Surely there were other ways of stopping him from developing the stables and golf club?”

“I wanted to give him a bad name,” he said. “Although I could never admit torching the aeroplane on his instructions, the rumours will emerge and multiply and he’ll be blamed for all three aeroplane fires. Although I think the first two were accidental. Yes, we could have stopped him, but that would have meant spoiling our good relationship with the Grahamstown municipality. They are very keen for this development to go ahead. The project is on the go. We had to think up a strategy to stop it without our visible involvement.” He walked out and looked over the parade ground and beyond where members of the transport division were washing vehicles.

“We took this route because, if he is not stopped here, he will just go somewhere else and start his nonsense again. Spoiling the countryside and coastal environs. We want to stop him for good.”

Chapter Fourteen

I arrived at the ratepayers' meeting in the library hall with five minutes to spare. A few crumbled crisps were left on the paper plates and the juice looked as if it had been watered down. I noticed the chairman in position and went across.

"You've got your questions? Yes of course," he said. "Something I've been meaning to ask you – someone at the club mentioned it – said you keep referring to me as the chairman. They want me to remind you that it's chairperson. Equality of the sexes and all."

"So how does that help," I asked. "Next they'll be asking me to call you chairperdaughter." He appeared to find this mildly amusing and went back to his position near the long table where the city councillors sat. I wanted to keep my options open.

A man I'd seen at the aerodrome was trying to pull down the roller screen – but it kept rolling up again. He hadn't checked his BMI for some time and he hadn't done his homework. He wore a suit – with blue and white cufflinks and a Pierre Cardin domino tie – in Grahamstown! Nobody was impressed; we could manage without them. He'd brushed back his hair and kept it in place with a touch of darkening gel on the temples. He had shaved shortly before the meeting and the flush of his aftershave highlighted the increasing redness of his cheeks as the screen rolled up once more. The ratepayers didn't offer to help. He laid a chair on its side and tied the string to it then squinted as the laser beam from the data projector penetrated his pupils.

He began by telling us that our town had been specifically chosen for its old world charm and rural atmosphere. That this development would raise the value of all properties and bring in the type of retired and high-income category five people who would give the city coffers a boost.

The complex would be called the Royal Vantage Green Development Project and he reminded us that it had the full backing of the acclaimed firm of Crown and Sunshine and that we should call him by his first name, Douglas. He said it was not a shopping mall – but a shopping strip. There would be parking bays interspersed with green belt parkland areas where children would play. And a special section of the budget would be set aside to attract wild birds to the area. We must try to bring back garden birds to our cities, he said. And perhaps some of them would stay and build nests in the platforms they would provide. The area was 8000 square metres and would be anchored by two major retail chains.

He informed us that, being close to the CBD and the schools, this would be a win-win situation. The city would win, the people would win and the environment would win. So it

was in fact a win-win-win situation. I wondered why he'd left out the greatest win of them all from his formula. But he could obviously read my mind, as he spoke about the mall immediately afterwards. The graphics, paintings and facts rolled past on the screen.

Hermione O'Grady stood up and introduced herself, saying she was speaking on behalf of the Grahamstown Women's Institute and that they had delegated her to ask what would happen to the riding club and the golf course.

"I haven't come to that yet. It's on graphic five," he said. "I wanted to reassure you first..."

"Well why not jump to scene five now?" said Hermione. "We do understand that this development is in our best interests. You've already informed us of that." And she sat down. He tried to carry on with the win-win slide showing 2 000 jobs but others wanted to ask questions.

"In major development projects like this there are always some good points and some bad," said the chairman. "And these days there's always an added, unexpected attraction. What is yours?"

Douglas fielded the question. "We are having a food court with five non-competing products on offer. You'll have a choice of chicken, fish, spicy chicken, burgers or Chinese. Now there's an added attraction which is hard to beat. And I've already told you about the green belt passing not more than forty metres from any shop. And we have, and I shouldn't be telling you this, a surprise to be announced later. But think theme park, I can say no more."

"But there are usually more gracious additions to today's estates. How about, say, a golf course with communal clubhouse where residents can relax or have business meetings and watch the Egyptian Geese at play?" asked the chairman.

"How about some riding stables with internationally renowned equestrian dressage judges residing right here so the wealthy income category fives can gallop across the northwest commonage of an evening?" I asked.

"Yes, and these days all the prime estate developments have an airstrip attached. Would you consider adding one of those as an incentive for the improvement of Grahamstown?" asked the chairman.

"And there's that one essential that any property just cannot do without – a marina and lake stocked with rainbow trout, could you throw that in as well, perhaps?"

One of the ratepayers jumped up. "But what about that putrid rubbish dump site on the boundary of your development? And what about the noisy aeroplanes buzzing constantly

overhead, and the army dropping bombs every night? What are you going to do about those added distractions which you failed to get to in your presentation?”

The Crown and Sunshine people were starting to gather their portfolios into their brief cases and the city councillors were beginning to look uncomfortable.

It was my turn again. I wished that the Lieutenant-Colonel had been there. I held up a glossy brochure for the ratepayers to see. I turned the pages one by one in the data projector bright light. There were gasps from the floor.

“It’s a done deal,” both the chairman and I shouted at the same time.

I continued. “The Crown and Sunshine people have the municipality in their pockets, people. The council was legally obliged to facilitate this meeting to enable the residents to choose for themselves. This brochure has plans marked up which take the complex way beyond the boundaries shown in the presentation. The lake flows right across the airfield. They are already selling sites in Kenton; an office clerk was a little too ambitious there and jumped the hidden gun. This is a done deal people.”

“Just one moment,” shouted a councillor standing up. “No such agreement or done deal exists...” I saw Douglas turn on her with a flash of acrimony in his eyes, but he said nothing. “There have been no prior negotiations between Crown and Sunshine and this council,” she said. “I challenge anybody to prove it. This man is talking nonsense. We have never seen that pamphlet.”

“By the way,” I said, “I have a copy of a geo-technologist’s report indicating that it would be criminal to construct a project such as this on the land in question. The report was rejected and hidden by Crown and Sunshine. I have an affidavit for your perusal.”

The chairman was back. “You were going to develop and sell the units to private individuals. Then you’d be on your way to the next ugly deal, leaving the struggling first-time buyers to cope with cracking walls and sagging ceilings caused by the rising montmorillonite sub structure lattices,” he said with a thumbs up to me for his pronunciation.

“I think this city is going to be too hot for the likes of Crown and Sunshine,” I said. “We think it’s time you were on your way.” The residents and ratepayers crowded around the group of property developers and walked them out of the double doors.

Epilogue

“How did Sam let you know he wanted to go for a walk this evening?” I asked.

“He has these subtle hints which become slightly more demanding if you ignore them. But you knew that,” she said as she released the chain from his neck. The kiewietjies saw him coming and were at tree height by the time he reached them.

“And to think we’re not going to have the joy of fried chicken fat rolling across this commonage. Just a sprinkling of plain sweet grass and heather, with the aloes and the earthy smell of broken ant heaps to go with the setting sun,” I said as Sam found his ball and brought it for Kate to throw.

“Good goal keeper’s over arm action”, I said, “do you play soccer?”

“No, why?”

“There’s a grass soccer pitch a long way east of here where the locals play. It’s 760 metres long and 25 metres wide and it’s been laid out running in the direction of the prevailing wind.”

“Sounds like you’ve got to run way beyond the normal distance to score a goal,” she said. “Where is this place?”

“It’s a little holiday resort, famous for its seafood platters, on the Wild Coast. It’s called Trennery’s. I’m supposed to be going there, but it’s a long way by car...”

Kate thought about this for a while, then she turned to Sam and said, “You like the kennels don’t you Sammy, just for one night? No. Well if you sit very still in the glider’s luggage compartment...” She turned to me, “Okay then, let’s go. And I’ll let you take control during the flight.”

REFLECTIVE JOURNAL & COURSEWORK PORTFOLIO

A portfolio submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS (CREATIVE WRITING)

of

RHODES UNIVERSITY

by

ROBERT OLIVER CARTWRIGHT

February 2012

Master of Arts (Creative Writing)

Supervisor: Professor Laurence Wright

Co-Supervisor: Paul Wessels

Coursework Coordinator: Robert Berold

Description

This portfolio fulfils the coursework requirements for the MA in Creative Writing. It gives an indication of the reflective journal entries, coursework assignments including feedback, and excerpts from free written material produced during composition of the long project. The entries provide a record of the primary material as it was produced. It shows the coursework in progress and the journal entries are in raw form, allowing the reader to see the seeds which generate more polished work. Most of the material is from the first semester and a sample of journal entries from the second semester has been added to show progress towards completion of the long project, a novel.

I have been keeping a record of events in my life for some time now. I always carry an A6 notebook with me in which I write observations, story ideas, character sketches and so on, but when I was accepted for the MA in Creative Writing I decided to try a computer-based system. I found the LifeJournal for Writers at <http://www.lifejournal.com/writers/> which helps you to organize entries into categories and offers writing prompts and quotations to inspire you to write.

This document contains extracts from the lifejournal (there are 232 entries so far; some one-liners and others, more comprehensive) along with emailed feedback from the writing teachers and supervisors. I have also included the assignment titles as points of reference.

2010/09/30 0:32 AM

Hello, this is my first journal entry in the LifeJournal for Writers diary.

I'm going to formulate my MA application cover note here. I'll tell them that in my Reflections Journal I want to include comparisons between my 10 years of Dream records with the corresponding entries in my 93 Notebooks. Plus other comparisons between writing, dreams, music and art and cycling.

Plus all the derivatives...

2011/01/25 5:38 AM

I wake up - and the only thing I can remember about this morning's dream is glass blowing - then I actively drift off again and up comes the snippet - kiln - then I remember it's got

something to do with me wanting to put some other objects into the kiln along with the ceramics which are there for two weeks - for short term curing. The kiln operator has to think long and hard before giving me permission. My products may bring in extra moisture which would interfere with the curing process of the ceramics.

[Then while slashing it comes to me - one of Dick Francis's books centered on glass blowing - and also I said in my MA CV that I wanted to correlate dreams with notebook entries. - And now I must start doing exactly that - by using this LifeJournal electronic database.

Thursday, 03 February 2011

2011/02/03 07:55 PM

“We are very lucky to be here,” said Ruth. How right she is.

One of the women talking about the classical books she'd read in her English undergrad studies. Cold shivers. I've never read any of those books, only Anna Karenina, plus a few movies, and Macbeth in 1963 - too long ago to count. But fortunately, later, Robert said this was not about Shakespeare or Dickens, it was about reading the kind of books like the ones we want to write. No English literature exams.

But already I'm beginning to realize that reading 'difficult' books is going to help my writing. I usually only read Dick Francis - who I would like to emulate anyway - but reading top class literature will make my books richer.

Robert - you can read any book you like - but tell us about it first - so we can make sure it's not too light for the course and for your own good.

Bernat informed me that he had learnt to write poetry in preparation. He now felt confident enough to tackle a novel. “But I suppose you can carry on with your poetry while writing the novel, after all, you've published a book of your poems.”

“No, you can't do both at the same time. The two styles interfere with each other. Poetry jumps ... and stories flow ...or maybe a play ...”

Friday, 04 February 2011 2011/02/04 06:53 AM

Been thinking about arranging my work time and my MA time. Will have to be strict with Drama requests.

Meeting with Laurence - substitute some Reading time with formal Collation Project?

I draw up a Drama/ISEA timetable with two hours on Mondays, one on Wednesday and two on Fridays - and take a printout to Vusi and Andrew. I tell Andrew I'll make up the seven 5-

hour periods in the holidays. "Only if you have to," he says.

We tour the library with our friendly, efficient, knowledgeable tour guide - Linda Cartwright.

At least one person was listening - "Is she a relation of yours?" - Ruth Woudstra.

"...no, he's one of the students..." = Robert.

Joan Metelerkamp also seems to want to know where I fit in - so I tell her I'm one of the students - and she seems a bit embarrassed for some reason.

"I detect you have a bit of a sense of humour," says Bernat. "Does it come out in your writing?"

Saturday, 05 February 2011 2011/02/05 05:35 AM

Question - Oliver - those of you who've written a [fiction] book - how did you choose that book among all the millions you could have written?

Joan -0 can I answer that one (Paul hovering) - I was alone - joined a book club written six books of poems - someone said - why don't you write a book?

Paul - just start writing - and that was the book that emerged ... the book finds you...

Laurence - [someone] the secretary of the invisible...

Mxolisi - the kind of book that you HAVE to write

Anton - [someone] - only write those things you don't want anyone to read about - your secrets...

Gise - process of writing- intimidating - therefore didn't write - just doodles and notes and bits - then there were lots of words - so he started to edit them see what emerged ... so he went straight from the rough tinkering stage to the editing - so eliminated the actual writing...

You don't go and get it -- it comes to you...

OC - so you just got to keep doing things and it will come to you...

How do you choose your shirts?

I just wait for Christmas...

Yes and they come to you ... socks in the darning basket = new socks

Robert - this course - lots of different types of writing - try them all - lecturers / self can pick out eg four lines of poetry - and say = this is you = stick to this type = pick out the essence and give you direction ...

Monday, 07 February 2011 2011/02/07 05:53 AM

Two ideas running in parallel one develops - leap frog the other, set it down - then the other leapfrogs over idea one and so on

2011/02/07 6:44 AM

Start finding out where Artists, Composers (and Writers - see Saturday's Seminar) get their ideas from - Pete Midlane; Franz Liszt – Peter's Hons thesis

2011/02/07 10:59 PM

Laurence mentioned on Saturday that when he had time off to write, he didn't write. But when he was flat out busy, then the writing came. Things would gel - then a thought would strike and he would write and write.

Same thing happened to me in 2006 - my busiest year ever - with the move to the new journalism building - and along came Harbours Bizarre - a story from scratch, based on a few forays into the lift-on-a-dumpster idea.

2011/02/08 9:46 AM

Starting writers spend a lot of time on construction. How long should a sentence be, what makes a paragraph, where does it begin and end, why does it end there instead of later? Scenes - what are they; do they really exist, where does one end and the next one begin? Chapters - the how-to books always say what? That a chapter encapsulates a fixed number of scenes, that it should always end of a cliff-hanger or puzzle or at the end of an incident. And where does the next chapter begin? And why didn't it begin three quarters of the way through the previous chapter. And how many chapters in a book and how long should the book be... Starting writers spend a lot of time and struggle trying to get to grips with all these things.

But where did all these concepts (and conventions) come from? Did the original writer decide what should be what and set it down in fireproof papyrus?

OC - these are objects of nature. They just appear naturally. You just start talking or writing and they appear of their own accord.

2011/02/10 5:51 AM

All these stories are chugging through the production line getting bits added at each station, each one different. They are writing themselves. I just have to keep the conveyor belt going and the teams of muse-workers add chunks of plot, setting, description, narration. But none of them are specialists; each team can add different elements at different times or stages.

It's more like a ship building yard.

One of the muses comes to me and asks where the soldering tools are. I give him directions (he's about 73 years old, an engineer, highly experienced. he goes off with a young appie and they're gone for half an hour. I realise they haven't found the pliers as my directions hadn't mentioned the little cave behind the cupboard with the tools. I leave my post at the conveyor switch for a while, everything has to stop, and go through to the sub-workshop and find them there, frustrated. they've got everything except the long nose pliers. I show them the hidey hole.

"I thought there must have been an extra security device," he said, picking out the last of the tools he needed and heading back to his station on the production line.

Now I'm worried that I don't have a story to tell. It's like the time in 2006 where the deadline was a few days away and I had all this information about dumpster trucks but no story to tell. So far, all this time, the stories had been telling themselves, I just had to let them flow - but now here comes a deadline - and the story has jammed up.

I know I've deserted my post at the conveyor switch. Everyone is waiting to get on with doing my job. And also I've forgotten to provide them with the correct tools for the job. Get back into the swing.

my job is to just organise, supervise, provide the necessary work place and the jigs and dies and tools and the environment and the conditions and design and background research and the spark == and to nurture the teams of worker muses = and allow them to get on with it.

Then who will do the touch up and painting ad trim and luxury fittings and the one-off special features? All of us of course - along with the people on the course and the people

taking the course...

[The above started with a few elements from this morning's dream - then it took off on its own accord as I started typing

But there was a moment towards the end of the dream where I got the cold shivers - I had two stories due that afternoon - and they had stalled. And I knew that all the other stories - I had just gone into the zone and allowed them to flow. So don't force the stories, do all the background stuff, get all the material in place - then hand over to the teams of muse workers - and give them the space (time and freedom ...) t do their job.

And get you bum seated firmly on the typing chair. And do your reading. And brush up an all the tools - and keep them in good order in your toolbox - don't leave the soldering iron in the next door room where no one can find it

Robert Berold Choosing a book Friday 11 February 2011 Oliver Cartwright

Sent: 09 February 2011 05:00 PM

Hi Oliver

I would like to respond in private via this email to the issue you raised in the seminar the other day concerning reading. There are no such things as unacceptable books to read. I read Ed McBain, Ross MacDonald, John D. MacDonald, science fiction, horror, comics, pornography, you name it. The problem is not with the books you read, but with what you are able to do with them - and you **MUST** be able to do something with them; that is, you must be able to learn something from them that will help your own writing, even if that something is just to get you in the mood to write, or more technically, to see what the author foregrounds: character, plot, setting, maybe even some other device.

Read what you want, but always remember that you are a writer looking for more weapons - not a couch potato looking for more chips.

2011/02/11 7:00 AM

Just an easy-going relaxation and the knowledge that my novel is underway. Laurence told me yesterday that I can start now. I don't have to wait until the second semester, or even for a few weeks before getting going.

I have this episode - the burning aeroplane ... having a strange meal in a dodgy dive...

Just see a scene or topic – and start writing...

2011/02/12 5:53 AM

.Laurence gave me a boost - start your novel right now he says (on Thursday - now at yesterday (Friday's) session Paul says i write like a chihuahua and should develop the long loping strides of a greyhound ... and Robert has seen five inconsistencies already on just the first page of Harbours Bizarre.

i thought this might happen - it happened when i started the Dale Carnegie course in 1972 - i thought i had all the moves and was the gift to the society - and was the main manne - but i got a surprise when the course got underway.

they systematically broke down all my bullshit, slowly built it up again - and i came out far far stronger - relationship, friends, public speaking ability to get things done whole-rounded-character social animal-wise.

so - the same thing is happening here - a bit demoralising at the moment - but i've survived one day at a time for ten days now (wed to friday) in fact eleven as today is Saturday - and still going with the programme.

"You can write - there's no question about that - there's nothing we have to teach you there - dialogue, character, narration mood emotion -- but there's no plot. It's full of inconsistencies - there's a private detective - but he's high powered he's got a secretary - so what's he doing on a rubbish truck why did he take his PI ID licence along what's he getting into what if they find out - he won't be able to pretend he's one of them . and what about the handlangers, they speak english well - they engage him in conversation, they understand and speak so well are they black? and whats this about a hitch hike and why does he choose a rubbish truck that's going nowhere ...

i felt a bit down yesterday - unable to plot - but I found that out in 1994 or before - as i told Guy Berger - I had this book by John Braine - Writing the novel from plot to print - as soon as he said i must write an outline I got stuck - i read three books and wrote the outlines for them - Luciano's Luck, Lady in the Lake and Nerve - - but writing my own outline - got stuck - not creative or if i did - i couldn't turn it into a story which would tke off ...

2011/02/12 10:18 AM

for years i've been doing the same old stuff, carrying a notebook around, jotting down stuff, writing late at night =- and i thought i was being a writer. now i'm beginning to learn a bit of tghe hard stuff.

one thing i've never been able to do is OUTLINES - i'd rather just write and see what

happens

i have written outlines - mind maps etc - but that's it = they're all just dead in the preserving bottle

now robert says i must just write an outline ==

plan the plot - on paper - get it watertight - bring it to the class

plan the whole thing from beginning to end - the writing will work - you can do it

2011/02/12 10:33 AM

the course has come as a bit of a shock - taking strain - and i'm not even back at work yet

last week i got a mouth ulcer, yesterday i got a pimple on my nose, tried to relax last night and it has gone down a bit this morning

2011/02/13 6:18 AM

How about having the TITLE for each entry as any one of each of the four strands

then use the existing topic and sub-topics to allocate to the writing done for the title

the titles shown in the video tutorial are too amorphous - and the titles i give - i always have difficulty thinking of a title - so - to make it easier - whatever i've written after the date - time stamp; - i have to choose from only four choices ==

THE BOOK

THE RECORD

MY FEELINGS

THE DERIVATIVES

Then under THE BOOK - i can allolcate topics such as Building Blocks - and sub topics like Plot Building and sub sub topics like Journeys

or i can allocate Stage of Progress etc

And under THE RECORD I can also allocate Building Blocks - P:lot Building = because we will have learnt about plot building in class that day - as was given to me as an ongoing assignment by Robert on Friday ::...get it watertight..."

And under MY FEELINGS - I can allocate Personal Journaling - Health - Stress - == after i've dexcribed my state of wellness in the entry ...

Besides giving the TITLE as one of the four strands = i can also give that particular strand as a TOPIC so that will be another way = and possibly a quicker way of getting to each of the four strands when collating and compiling the REFLECTIVE JOURNAL for submission..

2011/02/14 5:51 AM

- | | | |
|----------------|---|-----------------------|
| 1. BOOK | Was = Project - novel | Renielwe = My book |
| 2. RECORD | Was = Record of Progress | R = What I'm learning |
| 3. FEELINGS | Was = Oliver - feelings, thoughts, mood | R = How I feel |
| 4. REFLECTIONS | Was = Reflect - on 123 above | R = Where I'm going |
| 5. DREAMS | Was under its own section | |

Laurence - Thursday 10 February 2011 = You are writing the journal for yourself = FOUR STRANDS =

1. = Project stuff - thinking plans drafts = for your book - OC

2. = Record - things you learn on the programme

eg teacher - narrative of the novel

- record of content

- what is Oliver reading - dip in - skip

- my response to what's put into my head

- what you're learning

- what you got from the course ...

3. = Write about Oliver

- how feeling today

- difficulties with time management

- people pissing you off ...

4. = Reflect on the other three strands

- eg - what I initially thought was important ==> something else
- narrative strand - not working - what made me realise it?
- struggles definitions

- convey a sense of why you write about eg water ...

- Master your understanding of how Oliver becomes a writer -
 - eg - don't only have to write at night - = 2:15 pm

So when you've finished your project - Book - you've got a story of how the book came into being

The Journal is for you = First Thought = Best Thought - don't edit it - only later get it ready for submission

2011/02/15 6:28 AM

I sat on the grass at Robert and Mindy's getaway yesterday and when I got up my left ankle wouldn't function. i had to hobble around for a bit until it loosened. I put Rep gel on last night - but it's still not right this morning

i'm slowly beginning to realise that there's a lot of work and it'll take a lot of my time - the reading, the daily journal, the lessons, the book - and my job in Drama - = it comes in waves = I felt overwhelmed a few days ago = but i'm beginning to pigeon hole the activities and i know i can do it

Robert Berold Plot Summary 17 February 2011 Oliver Cartwright
Harbours Bizarre

Story Outline

1. The police receive information that a crime is about to be committed. They believe it will be disguised as a service delivery protest.
2. Their usual operatives are too well known and their informants won't talk so they ask a private investigator to find out what is going to happen so they can prevent it.

3. The private investigator works under cover to make contact with various municipal service employees to track leads and pick up clues.
4. He comes to some surprising conclusions regarding the crime that was being planned - who was going to do what to whom, when, where, why and how.

Plot Outline:

Where is the overall story going? What do I need to know about this detective that the reader doesn't know?

Elements of: chase, puzzle, race against time, flashback, foreshadowing and sub plot.

Beginning – lead the reader into the essence of the story and set the platform to build the story on. Some dramatic incident

Middle – develop the theme, feed out bits of information and allude to things being not quite what they seem. Slow down the pace a bit

End – the final act where the most important conflict is resolved. Climax. Tie up all loose ends

The Police in East London receive information that a crime is to be committed. They don't know the date or the place or the nature of the crime but they have an idea it will be connected to industrial action or service delivery and will be master-minded by an organised crime syndicate.

They try to infiltrate the world of the unions and workers but get nowhere. Their undercover operatives have all blown their cover and their usual informants have clammed up.

They call in a private investigator who grew up on a farm in Pondoland and works in Gauteng. He speaks Xhosa and has been through some hard times – so is able to transform

2011/02/17 5:15 AM

Am I changing from a night owl to a morning person ??? = almost unheard of - after 63 years !!!

I forced myself to go to bed at 12:30 am this morning. yesterday morning i got to sleep at 3:30 - too late for bedtime, struggled to get up for work.

now i've been lying awake for some time - then suddenly my right calf goes into spasm - Ive got cramp in it for the first time in ages. The year before last and before - i had stopped getting cramp - or i got them and they went away quite quickly.

I thought that was one good thing about growing old - the muscles became so slack that they were not capable of going into cramps.

now this morning I've got severe cramp first time for ages.

and i start thinking - this is because my muscles have been toned up. I am now super fit from riding my Bike - which I've had for a year and six weeks now.

and a few months ago, while cycling and reflecting (from both the front and back mudguards) i began to list analogies between cycling and my soon-to-start MA course in Creative Writing

one of the analogies i was trying to draw up was that of fitness. I haven't cycled since I left school in 1965. and i haven't really used my brain since i left school in 1965 - -- i went bacdk to stuydy after working for 8 years - but struggled.

i'd been cycling for a nearly a year before i was fully fit - but each time i cycled i got a bit fitter - and i drew up lessons for this writin course - i relised i would have to get my brain fit - and i listed all sorts of tricks to make it so. The stages in getting fit ==
the strength barrier = exhausted - nothing left to give
the fitness barrier = my times were staying the same - Saturday after Saturday
the wind barrier - if i went too fast - the wind resistance would kick in
the hill barrier - i used to do twenty-pedal fforce standing periods up what i later found was jane Fonda Hill
the distance barrier - at first = airport = then Table farm = tghen Hellsview = next = Carlisle Bridge

and as i lay awake - fully awake - and i got the cramp in my right calf - i realised my leg muscles are now super strong = and then i realised that my brain muscles are also becoming supeer strong - and that i must just keep persevering with the MA class and get my brain toned up.

I've been struggling with the volume and the pace of the incoming workd exercises - and i've had to read up on PLOT and OUTLINE and STORY and SYNOPSIS and what they all mean and what the difernce is = as i have been avoiding such things during my writing career = that's why i liked \Stepehn King's methods so much = just get a beginning situation = and start writing and see where it takes you.

now i've got to focus on PLOT - and it's a stressful learning exercise ... but this morning's episode of the cramps reminded my that my slack muscles, unused for years - are capable of getting super fit and toned up again - both physiciela and mental - so i am now encouraged to get the plot - the exercise for my homework - done ...

2011/02/17 6:19 AM

i have just found ot what the beginning the middle and the end are!!!!

i have never known the difference = as far as i could tell the story just starts off and carries on and the story is told - and then it's the end.

it always seemed such a simplistic statement - if theres a story of course there's a beginning - or it wouldn't start etc

but i never knew what the actual elements of each sectrion were

now i've been forced by Robert to PLAN the PLOT - on PAPER - to GET IT WATERTIGHT - then bring it to the class

to PLAN THE WHOLE THING from BEGINNING to END = then once i've done that - the writing will work - i can do it - the writing

2011/02/19 6:41 AM

MORSE meets REBUS at the NUMBER ONE DETECTIVE AGENCY at the top of the MIDSOMERSET HEIGHTS where the MURDERS are comitted ???

the Rhodesx ladies' book club book club -what do they talk about no men allowed -0 not even in that part of the house ...

2011/02/19 9:53 AM

Total Distance: 539.5

Distance: 41.81

Time of day: between 7 and 8

Time: 1:49:08

Average Speed: 22.9

Max Speed: 58.0

Wind: from the left o/g angular headwind i/c

The psychological barrier

the can i do it barrier

teh bum barrier

the age barrier 63 and counting

the muscles barrier - cramps hamstring ankle back

the breathing barrier - long deep breaths himalayan shuffle puf puf p;ufff

the how do you breath and not keep in time with the pedal rotations

the cadence barrier

The blue crane joined me for a while this side of Jane Fonda - he was happy to accompany me until a car came too close so he veered off towards the air strip

2011/02/19 10:58 PM

Chrissie said 3, 5 or 7 minutes - so you can concentrate the mind and not be daunted by the freewrite - and because there were going to be a hellovalot of them on the march toward the MA - so this has suddenly been thirty minutes - so i better stop right there ...:.

2011/02/19 11:18 PM

For years i've wanted to write a novel just like one written by Dick Francis - but am i getting the message that his type of work is too lightweight??

2011/02/20 5:33 AM

Wave after wave of incoming and outgoing physical and mental data - tumbling and ejecting
- loose and strange matter gurgling out

2011/02/20 9:53 AM

IT SEEMS Laurence and Robert think the book should be in the Eastern Cape ... What do I think?

Jessica Vye / Girl on a Swing type story - use shells instead of ceramics

Cannery Row / Che - the real story / Casablanca /

Break in at the Waterfront - Daan - tag along with the hikers

Airshow - the Peroni girl / various flights /

Showtime - Tamzin / Susan's 21st / Trevor's 70th

2011/02/20 12:11 PM

Reflections - How do you choose which book to write? 2011/02/20 12:11 PM

I've been thinking about that first session we had with all the students and all the teachers -

there was a reason i asked the question: Of all the books you could have written - how did you choose that one?

i never really answered Anton's question: how do you choose your shirts?

well i do it like this - i have a certain sense of the type of person i am, my place in society, my place in life. i know what i look like , my face, my build, - and i know my personality. i am not a hipster or a ducktail or a pop artist or a clown - so i don't buy silver zigzags and sequins or plastic or bling i don't buy red or orange or deep purple

i like muted greens most of all - then blues then checks and stripes

i like cheesecloth - but you don't get it any more

so the kind of story i'm going to choose is quite conservative - with a feeling of responsibility, family connections, friends, and pleasant conversation - but not too conservative - there will be explosions - of anger - of humour - every now and then

AND as they said - the stories will come to me - just soak up the environment, write and read - and the stories will come ...

And - see the Chrissey Boughey lecture on reading and learning - - learn by writing etc ...

Just happened to read through my notebook of Saturday 4 December 2010 =

Q - Where do you get your ideas from?

A - Deadlines - Stephen King - to pay the bills

Answer - i don't get ideas - they are given to me - by my brain? - whatever that is.

Like the Grace of God - you can't do good deeds and works to try to earn it - it's just given to you freely.

They come from the Amazing Grace

i don't go out hunting for ideas ?? they just pop up - eg Rubbish Truck - drives past - OC - what if i asked for a lift !?

But you can create the space and conditions for the ideas to be given to you

IDEAS are very different to stories. i don't get stories from my notebooks or dreams - that's why i found writing Bakers Dozen so hare - and why i haven't yet finished it - I'm trying to get the story from my Notebook No 74.

The one = Break in at the Waterfront - where the guy is just sitting there - and he gets approached by Daan - with the slit of light etc - that's my story ...

The notebooks and dreams give you just the starting point - then leave them alone - and just get on with writing the story - that's already been given to you.

Go back and forwards to the books to check yr facts, or when you're stuck ...

2011/02/25 6:05 AM

Reflections - night owl, early bird

If you're not frightened, it's probably not worth doing - says Michael Rabiger. Well the stuff i'm doing on this course must be super relevant - because i am permanently petrified. look at the date -time stamps on these entries and look at the "saved" Date modified times on the assignments. Late at night, early in the morning. i've always been a night owl - but i am becoming a morning person as well - i am both...

2011/02/25 7:53 PM

Reflections – on talk by Professor Chrissie Boughey – given at post-graduate orientation programme on 18 February 2011

The things she said were exactly the same as for writing:

Summary

Writing is very important at MA PhD level - it's through your writing that you get your degree - and it's out there for scrutiny ReRR

writing is not doing a lot of research getting ducks in a row - then writing it up the day before it's due = it's about learning and research

Research on writing - what people do - compare good writers with poor writers

Good writing behaviours:

They used writing to find out what they wanted to say - as a process of discovery - not to record meaning

Main points - three steps =

Generative =

Free writing - before you study a topic - see what you already know, don't know
read what's written - might be rubbish - but dealt with might be great - use it
focus your thinking capture thoughts shows what you know and don't know

Reading journal - and writing - keep a reading journal - get a handout - don't highlight and underline - read the whole thing - get overall idea - not the impt points = bigger

put citation at top of page - write a response to it - liked disliked agreed with
reminds you of - other articles LINKS across the literature
you learn only as you write

Research journal - what I did today what did I learn from what I did puzzling me
what do I need to do next?

Drafting = get it all down, delete whole chunks, if I say this - she counters with that...

sort out before submitting

Editing = mechanical - grammar, proof read polish get it perfect

Generate-Design = Carpenter - table - buy the wood select and link diff bits - oval or rectangular

Draft - mustn't rock or tilt

Edit - sand and polish

By keeping a journal you remember better than highlighting or underlining

Reflections on the above

apprenticeship

start writing - and it just takes off - if you hadn't started writing - none of the stuff that followed would exist

mind maps - outlines - I've done them but nothing has come of them = here's the outline - now what? it just sits there - it's dead in the water - not inspired at all ...

you do all this work, writing up your story or your book - but only after you've finished it - that's when you find out what it's supposed to be about - what you wanted to say ...

Paul Mason Plot Outline 27 February 2011 Oliver Cartwright
Friction Oil

Exposition: A woman, Miriam, is left to run a guest lodge after her husband has a stroke and is hospitalised. The hours are long and the work is too much for the woman who does most of the after-hours work herself. Her daughter, Elizabeth, who grew up in the lodge, would like to help on the management side but for some reason her mother won't let her. She only lets her help with front-of-house and staffing duties. Elizabeth wonders why her mother won't trust her with financial matters.

Inciting moment: After the last patron leaves the bar one night, the daughter sees her mother is exhausted and tries to take over the cashing up and liquor stock take but her mother

Paul Mason Flash Fiction 25 February 2011 Oliver Cartwright
Friction Oil

Dialogue 27 February 2011 Oliver Cartwright
Friction Oil

“Where was the door stopper when you got here?” asked the inspector.

“Well the door was half open so I pushed it and went in. I mean, I made my entry according to the standard operating procedures, Sir.”

“You kicked the door stopper flying across the room, Mason. I want to know exactly where it was when you got here. I want to know whether the door was just slightly ajar or almost fully open before the intruder entered. Did you get down flat on the floor and carry out a full visual analysis before you went barging in waving your pistol about?”

“Yes of course I looked all around and I even tried sniffing to see if I could smell anything distinctive about him. But it was gloomy and door stoppers are the same colour as the parquet flooring, how was I supposed to see it?”

“Don’t worry Mason; we’ll get forensics to scrape samples from the floor and the underside of the door. They will tell us where the rubber stopper was wedged.”

“But I don’t see what difference it makes.”

“It’ll tell us Mason, whether the intruder was familiar with the people here and whether he knew his way around the lodge. It was dark; the position of the door stopper will tell us whether he had to push the door open to see who or what was in the room, or whether he knew already, before he went in. Do you understand?”

“Yes Sir. Well no, not really. But it doesn’t make sense. Even if he lived at the lodge all his life, he still wouldn’t know what he would find in any particular room at any particular time of the night or morning.”

“Look - what I’m trying to tell you is, if he lived in the house he would know whether the stopper was to stop the door from closing, or to stop it from opening wider. This lodge is over a hundred years old; all the door frames are warped; none of the doors will stay where they are, they’ll either swing closed or swing open. He would know whether he would have to pull the door back slightly to release the stopper then move it out the way and go in - or whether he could just barge straight in with a little extra shove knowing the door would keep travelling. I need you to think, and tell me - was it moved just slightly away from the door frame - in which case it was an inside job - or was it first jammed into the floor then shoved violently out of the way - in which case it was an outsider?”

“Oh I see sir. I’ll try and play it through my memory. But I can save us the trouble.”

“What trouble, Mason?”

“I can tell you that the stopper was placed so as to stop the door from closing.”

“How do you know that?”

“Well she had the window open. That means the wind would have been blowing into the room from outside. So she would have to have wedged it from the passage side.”

“How do you know the intruder didn’t open the window?”

“Well look what she was wearing. All her clothes are here and her mother said she had on a thin see-through slip of a thing. That means she was hot last night. And you yourself said after the night bowls that your towel was completely wet from the humidity getting on your woods. That means she opened the window to let the breeze in. And you see these little mimosa leaves here on her dressing table and on the carpet? The wind was definitely blowing inwards towards us.”

“Mason, are you turning into a genius? We wouldn’t want that now... so where the stopper then?”

Mason had already made up his mind that Elizabeth knew the intruder. The maid had told them the man had a stocking over his face and spoke in a strained voice. It was gloomy. A stranger wouldn't have bothered disguising his voice.

The team came in from the woodshed below the balcony. The grounds man had told them about the long picnic bench. It had been recently moved into the shed – they had compared the amount of moisture on it with that on the balcony ledge.

“So, Mason, you are saying that the intruder was familiar with the household, and that he moved the bench. He wanted us to think he used it to climb onto the balcony and in through the French window. But what if he really was a stranger – what happens to your theory then?”

“It's not my theory Sir, it's yours. You've got him. He obviously planned this whole thing, but he didn't realise how important that bit of information was, lying on the floor. He tried to make us think he was an outsider but your door stopper deduction has given him away.”

The inspector wasn't convinced. They still hadn't found the stopper and Mason probably hadn't seen it, he thought, because the intruder had picked it up and put it in his pocket.

2011/02/27 7:40 AM

Reflections - rapid pace of course - 2011/02/27 7:40 AM

I normally spend a lot of time on reflection - it comes naturally to me. things just occur to me and i usually write them in my notebook. i don't have to consciously have to sit and think things up.

but what seem like the brighter ideas - i have to write them down quickly - or they fade away.

But now that i have to write up my reflections - they don't seem to be coming. and there is a hell of a lot to reflect about. Maybe there's so much new information coming in that it's taking my brain a while to assimilate and accommodate it all ... just when my brain is about to sit back and make sense of it all - then it's bombarded with a whole lot of new stuff ...

Robert started by getting me to write up a watertight plot for H Biz 9as i've mentioned) and that involved a lot of research into plot summary vs plot outline and story vs plot and synopsis etc etc

Then along comes Paul Mason and we start covering the topic formally in class - and for homework. And Namhla, who is a very down-to-earth = say it like it is = humorous person = says - you're lucky - you've done all this already ...

(she often comes up with original, unique and pertinent comments about my writing)

And it turns out - at the feedback meeting on PLOT - everyone was struggling with the concept and the layout NB - keep the other examples and learn from the way they did = or should have done them = get strength from them - me being not the only one to struggle with the concept of plot.

And then to add to the information bombardment - Robert gives me Walter Mosley's book = This year you write your novel -== and of course, one of the first things i look up is the section on PLOT = and he hauls out an analogy = Marissa Novella =

STORY = her face, smile, cooking food, chatting to friends,

PLOT = skeleton, veins, organs, = and her psyche

This analogy makes it quite clear - the difference between story and plot - but is it going to be any use to me in drawing up my own plots?

2011/02/27 9:15 AM

Feelings - antibiotic Bike -muscles = 2011/02/27 9:15 AM

4 pm yesterday - sick to the gut - oh dear the course is taking its toll i thought

2011/02/27 9:28 AM

Reflections - struggling with the course = 2011/02/27 9:28 AM

Bike training - analogies = keep going - you will get fit

Laurence = most productive - when most busy = if too much time = very little output = i am super busy - job plus course ...

Other students on the course - also not quite getting the hang of PLOT - not very nice for them - but give me strength - seeing them in comparison to my own struggles

This course is like a Novel = character development - thropwn into a life-changing situation - shattered acceptance slowly start crawling out of the pit building up strength - strategies to cope = get at and slowly overcome the enemy = the enemy becomes a friend = character strengthening - of both the writer and the protagonist = = CHANGE at the end ...

2011/02/28 5:22 AM

Trying to implement the class suggestions to fix the Friction Oil PLOT OUTLINE for Paul Mason's assignment - the whole thing just unravelled ...

Robert's comments:

story a bit peculiar - got crime fiction element - ordinary domestic drama = not sure if work together

= do either one or the other

far-fetched = not necessary - banal is okay

you write well re dialogue, characters = now we want a plausible story / narrative

you're constructing a plot from above = mother / daughter relationship = could develop by itself ...

get the story - get the story to hook me - then whatever happens - we accept it

Paul's comments:

strength - is in middle section (of the homework) = dialogue - 2 pages

banal stuff in other sections - dialogue - quite humourous , trivial

don't need something as extreme as a disappearance / kidnap

death and dramatic stuff - doesn't happen in real life

daughter - under the bowser = but not too far-fetched - x=closer to real life

plot - there's too much - that doesn't yield enough - emotion substantial thoughts

flash fiction - too dense - simplify a bit

scrap the disappearance - find another way to prove herself

So - picking up on Robert's point = ... mother / daughter relationship - could develop by itself

THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT I'VE ALWAYS DONE i just start writing and the story takes me along ...

it's because i had to put the story into compartments = exposition inciting moment rising action complication crisis falling action resolution = that the thing looks contrived

I'll work on Michael Rabiger's suggestions and see if i can get a better grasp of what's potting

One thing that seems to make sense = (from handout)

Analysis

Define

1. The central conflict for the main character or characters. Think about this carefully, because few people go into this deeply enough
2. The development in the main character (or characters) that you would hope to show

and at the talk - he said = we want to see CHANGE in the character

Uninvited

It wasn't my choice you know. I didn't invite him to visit, and I didn't ask him in. But here he is, in my house, using my bathroom. Ten years since Frank died and I've been quite happy on my own. I don't need anyone staying here. But he arrived three weeks ago, duffel bag and all, and he's still here. He's put himself in the long dark hole of Calcutta, in there with my shop on the trolley.

Richard sent him. Either Richard or the building society or the church on Speke. It's probably the Perm; they've been trying to get me to sell for years. Bugger them. I'm not moving. Or was it Barney from the Masons? Frank brought him around once, before the stroke. That stroke; that was the worst. All he could do was call in that empty water bottle voice and ring that silly bell because he thought I couldn't hear him. The most stupid things; he'd call and call: Emily, Emily, and when I'd get there he'd forgotten what he wanted. Wheel me to the balcony he'd say. Wheel him off, hell; why didn't he just die straight away – or at least lose his voice at the same time. His waist and everything below it; and I mean everything. Bloody useless.

And he said he was a Jehovah's Witness. I'll soon fix that, I told him. Don't you dare walk up my driveway in a suit with a briefcase and a little girl. Now he says he's not one but I don't believe him. You can tell after someone's been in your house for three weeks. I'm going to follow him one Saturday.

I don't want anyone in here. Here Bella, you and Ginger, come for supper. Oh no someone's in your room. Did you put the fleas in there? That's my shop you know. The ladies don't like it when they try on a kain sarong and the fleas bite. And there's a Jehovah lying on the bed at the far end of the hole, witnessing them trying on the silks and the push me-pull me. They were all sent to me from Hong Kong you know. Joan sent them. She hasn't replied to my last letter yet, naughty thing. But with that husband of hers, it's no wonder she can't write.

I locked him out the other night you know, when he went to get more coal. But then the fire went cold and I had to let him in. He knows how to make a pot of tea though, the proper way.

And he does listen. I wonder if he's been to Burma? And he did fix my light fitting. Can I bring a friend, he said. Yes, he's got three friends, all senior students. Well if they're going to behave themselves – and they are doing honours and masters...

We'll have to add on another bathroom of course, but no wasting of toilet paper. After all, I've got seven bedrooms. And that nurse was right. If she hadn't come in to drop off the vitamin B she wouldn't have found me lying there on Frank's balcony. Not in time, anyway.

Oliver Cartwright and Ruth Woudstra

MA Creative Writing

6 March 2011

Dialogue between two characters

Anton Krueger

THE LADY AND THE MECHANIC

THE CHARACTERS

MISS EMILY: An old woman, slightly built with a frail voice. Aged 80.

BERNARD: A street wise young man, underweight

SETTING

The action takes place in and around a Victorian house in a suburb of Grahamstown. Faint traffic sounds in the background. Late afternoon.

Scene 1

The sitting room, passage and front door of Miss Emily's house. Miss Emily is sitting in a faded wingback chair in her lounge with a cat on her lap and a Royal typewriter on the coffee table in front of her. An iron poker lies on the floor near the fireplace with a pile of coal-ash under the grate.

When the curtain rises, loud and persistent knocking is heard above the sound of Mozart's Piano Concerto No 21 in C major.

MISS EMILY: Hello? Hello? Is somebody at the door?

BERNARD: Hello ma'am!

BERNARD's voice coming from outside the front door.

MISS EMILY: What do you want? I don't want any today.

BERNARD: No, ma'am! I'm not trying to sell anything (*then softly to himself*) I'm mos not a smous.

MISS EMILY opens the door but leaves the security gate locked.

MISS EMILY: I'm not opening the gate for you. I've already given some bread to your friend.

BERNARD: I'm not soeking any bread ma'am, I'm just looking for a –

MISS EMILY: Are you the mechanic?

BERNARD: Um, mechanic? (*He pauses for a moment, thinking*) Um, yes ma'am. Yes I believe I am. Your son phoned the garage this morning...uh...I think he said something like about that the car is broken? Or something...

MISS EMILY: Oh nonsense. There's nothing wrong with the car. You don't look like a mechanic to me.

MISS EMILY: Why are you so thin?

BERNARD: You calling me skraal? No, ma'am. I just haven't eaten for –

MISS EMILY: Hold on a minute, it's the phone... (*she totters off to the phone in the corner of the room then returns to the front door after a while. Bernard stands and looks around, then goes onto his haunches and cleans his fingernails.*)

Oh, hello? Now, what was it you wanted?

BERNARD: I'm the mechanic, mevrou. I'm here to fix your car. Your son mos phoned to say there's big trouble with the car.

MISS EMILY: You mean that burning smell?

BERNARD: Yes ma'am. He said it was a big problem and someone must come fix it nou dadelik.

MISS EMILY: Where are your overalls?

BERNARD: I...uh...I forgot them, I think...but I'm mos like a gentleman mechanic, I just work carefully...

MISS EMILY: There's nothing wrong with the car, but if Richard said you must come, then go round to the back and I'll look for my keys.

BERNARD, *eagerly*: Okay, Miss. Thank you, Miss. Thank you thank you.

BERNARD goes round the back and MISS EMILY retreats into the passage and through to the kitchen, followed by her two cats.

Scene 2

The lights over a fifties kitchen with a stable door and a rose garden with a garage beyond it go on. The sitting room from scene 1 is in the dark.

Miss Emily potters around looking for her keys in the kitchen.

MISS EMILY: Get down from the curtains, Bella! Now, where are my glasses?

She finds her keys in an old Baker's biscuit tin and opens the top half of the stable door.

MISS EMILY stays in the kitchen and talks to BERNARD through the gap.

MISS EMILY: This door always gets stuck. Now, why did you take such a long time coming round here?

BERNARD: I was just looking at the roses there by the voëlbad. They remind me of my Ouma's garden. Have you got the keys, ma'am? I need to check that clutch.

MISS EMILY: I'm not giving you my keys. You haven't shown me your dompas yet. Where is your... um... I mean your identification document.

He shows her an ID book which she inspects. Satisfied, she opens the lower door then steps across the threshold and is about to hand him the keys.

MISS EMILY: What's that? What are you putting in your pocket? You've stolen something from the garden shed. I'm not stupid, you know.

BERNARD: No ma'am. I haven't stolen anything. It's just my cousin's phone. He doesn't need it in jail.

MISS EMILY: Are you an escapee?

BERNARD: A wat, mevrou?

MISS EMILY: You said you were in jail.

BERNARD: No, not me ma'am, I'm not a skollie. It was my girlfriend who wanted to...

MISS EMILY: Girlfriend? Have you got a girlfriend? What's that, turn your head, what's that in your ear?

BERNARD: It's an earring, ma'am.

MISS EMILY: Is that a diamond in your ear?

BERNARD: Yes, ma'am. It's sommer just a fake one from the Chinese shop. A diamanique.

MISS EMILY: Men with girlfriends don't wear earrings. Especially not diamond earrings! And what's wrong with your cap? Take it off! Can you see this piece at the front here? It's to shade your eyes. Put it on the right way round!

BERNARD: Don't mess with my style miss. This is the street style. All my chommies mos wear their hats like this. You can mess with anything, maar jy mors nie met my style nie, mevrou!

MISS EMILY: Stop it! Stop it! Don't talk to me in that language. And mechanics don't dress like that. Now are you going to fix the car here or are you going to take it to the garage?

BERNARD: Um... I think I should take it to the workshop. But I mos need the keys, mevrou.

She hands over the keys.

MISS EMILY: And where are your tools?

BERNARD: My tools, ma'am? ...Uh, I...um

MISS EMILY: You what?

BERNARD, *annoyed* Fine, so I'm not really a mechanic, ma'am. I'm just looking for a job. I'm sorry. I don't know anything about cars – I don't even know where or what a clutch is.

MISS EMILY: I thought so – you don't look like a mechanic. Mechanics know how to put their caps on. Give me my keys back! I might be eighty but I'm not stupid. And I'm not giving you any bread either. I already gave the

crust to your brother who was here this morning and I don't have another.

She backs away from him and puts her hand on the lower section of the door.

BERNARD: I'm just looking for an honest job, ma'am.

MISS EMILY: I've given to GADRA. If you want soup, you must go to GADRA.

BERNARD: All I want is a job mevrou. You see, I want to marry with this girl, her name is Baby. She's the light of my life. I don't have high school and I just wanna save a little bit of money so I can trou with her. Just for a small wedding you know, only the family. And you can come too if you can help me out a bit here. It's my dream ma'am – please just give me a chance.

MISS EMILY: I'm not coming to your wedding. But if you can't fix the car, then what can you do? Can you prune roses? Get down Bella, come away from him!

BERNARD: I can do that too, ma'am. But, what I can also do... I had a look into your kitchen when you opened the door just now. And I just thought... why don't we sommer go in there? I want to show you something.

MISS EMILY: You leave my Royal Dalton alone! I'm not letting you in.

BERNARD: How do you know James Dalton? Do you watch rugby, mevrou? Mevrou, you one of us! Now, let me show you what I'm talking about.

MISS EMILY: You said you were going to fix the car, and now you're trying to get into my kitchen (*looks across at the yard broom*).

BERNARD, *desperate*: Please ma'am, let's just go inside.

He walks around her into the kitchen and she reluctantly follows.

MISS EMILY, *terrified*: So what do you want with me in here?

BERNARD: I want you to tell me... where you keep your Handy Andy and your lappies.

MISS EMILY: What? Don't talk nonsense.

BERNARD: Keep quiet! Just show me where they are!

MISS EMILY: Okay, then... look in the cupboard over there, the one with Bella's photo on. The Handy Andy's on the shelf, next to the Brasso. The cloth is there next to the basin.

BERNARD: Is this where you mean? Okay, I'm going to start with the sink. And then I'm going to tackle the stoof.

MISS EMILY: There's nothing the matter with my kitchen. I keep a clean house, just like Auntie Rose taught me.

BERNARD: Where's the warm tap?

MISS EMILY: There's no hot water in here. You'll have to get some from the bathroom. The bucket's in the broom cupboard.

Sound of a bucket filling with water. BERNARD returns with a dripping cloth and squirts Handy Andy onto it. He cleans the sink and the stove and then polishes the kettle. MISS EMILY stands watching, then starts rearranging an untidy pile of placemats on the kitchen table.

BERNARD: I'm sorry I pushed by you just now. I didn't mean to give you a skrik.

MISS EMILY: A fright? I lived through the Naga rebellion, I'll have you know. But you've never heard of Burma, have you?

BERNARD: Yes, I have. But isn't it called something else these days?

MISS EMILY: Cheeky sod!

BERNARD: I'm not stupid, you know ma'am. You don't have to now insult me just coz I'm poor.

MISS EMILY: Well, never mind that. But now that you've polished the kettle, you can put some water in and see if it still works.

He fills the kettle while she gets a tray and starts putting out cups and saucers.

BERNARD: Let me help you with those things. Is that the James Dalton you were talking about?

MISS EMILY: Don't you touch that! Careful with my china.

BERNARD: Your china, mevrou? Where?

MISS EMILY: The china on the tray! My Royal Dalton which we had to bring all the way from the Far East. I'll have to get some scones from the pantry now because your brother took the last of my bread this morning.

BERNARD: What brother?

She fetches scones from the pantry and sorts out the teapot.

MISS EMILY: Now, where did I put the sugar? Will four spoons be enough?

BERNARD: I just take milk, thank you, ma'am. No sugar.

She puts one scone onto a cake server and another two into a chipped porridge bowl. She gets an enamel mug from under the kitchen sink and fills it with milk and tea. BERNARD notices several dirt spots he missed before and wipes them with a cloth.

MISS EMILY: There you are. Now you can take your tea and scones and eat them on the stoep.

The sun dips behind the rose garden as he sits on a wire chair and Mozart's Piano Concerto No 26 in D Major ("Coronation") comes from the sitting room.

CURTAIN

2011/03/02 6:00 AM

Ruth and I worked from 7 to 10:30 pm last night on the dialogue between the 26 year old youth and the 80 year old woman

rough idea than launch - onto the digital recorder = that went fine = took a long time transcribing and fixing though

2011/03/03 6:29 AM

Reflection -monologue 2011/03/03 6:29 AM

sitting waiting for the monologue to appear - nothing

sit down and start with with just the line = she didn't want him to come in = and the thinking took off not in the direction that we took with me and Ruth ...

saw Paul Mason in Drama - waiting for Sele - chat about the plot exercise - and what Laurence said about the way my mind works re plot development ...

i start and then plot

others plot and then start

BUT worked on the dialogue with Ruth on Tuesday night ... we tried to put in the critical

incidents of exposition something happens and then each character has to CHANGE ...

i sat down at 4:30 pm half an hour before due to meet with her again and tidy it up = and i banged out a plot graph =

expo inciting moment rising action complication crisis falling action resolution and it just popped out within 20 minutes = all that sweating over plot story summary arc of tension all grouped together and smashed to bits = PLOTTING IS EASY !!!!

well that's the recipe - now for the derivatives and variations etc

but it was a bit of free flow plotting then a bit of imposed structure then back to a bit of free flow and so on ...

2011/03/04 6:03 AM

Reflection - Character Development - 2011/03/04 6:03 AM

i've been hearing that in a book the character must develop - that's the most important thing incl Michael Gill ...\\ but i've never know what that means - now here is Anton:

what do they want?

What's stopping them from getting it?

As simple as that

2011/03/04 11:09 PM

Reflections - Michael Rabiger - 2011/03/04 11:09 PM

the most important thing i found about Michael's workshop today where he analysed four stories - Anton, Liz, Namhla and Reneilwe - was that he's one hell on an encouraging teacher. he started by saying how great all the stories were - then he said only good things about each one - not a single negative comment - not one - then he said how great they were again - and

what a great bunch we were - and that the stories could never have emerged from one writer alone - and that we are a great group - and we must keep supporting each other as a group. Wow.

with encouragement like that we gonna go far and further ...

Just one thing where he showed his hand a bit - to Reneilwe he said: tell them you did, tell them you put it there on purpose ..

i also asked him about where memory resides - based on something he said at the Journ talk at teh Dean of Humanities - and he said it resides not only in the brain - but also in the flesh. you mean you burn your hand, your hand's not going to let your brain tell you to put your hand in the fire again next time. no - there was a woman having therapy on her throat - and she started choking and being unable to breathe - a memory returned of her drowning as a child.

OC - memory resides in places, smells, music situations, discussions, books and hard drives.

not many of my memories reside in my brain - i sometimes scratch around in there but if they are there they go and hide in a corner. but if i tell my brain to go and find them - then it does. sometimes it goes off for days before finding them and throwing them triumphantly up for me to see. those ones must be a long long way away.

pianists talk about muscle memory. i've got gear memory. i've been driving cars with five gears for what, twenty years now - and i still think i'm driving a car with only four gears.

2011/03/05 6:39 AM

Reflections - no more to stay - 2011/03/05 6:39 AM

Write a lot, read a lot - to quote from Stephen King quoting everybody in writing and according to the course requirements.

but following on from the tuts, feedbacks, outings and visits we've had on the course I'm starting to find that we should also

talk a lot, listen a lot

show a lot, see a lot

feel a lot, empathise a lot

give a lot, take a lot

etc ,...

So, did you note the title? i tried to type = no more to say = because that was the tune repeating in my head when i woke up - being sung by the Rascals or whoever - then i thought - why this tune - and that led to my reflections ...

so we'll have to work on why or where the concept of no more to say = ;lus its freudian? slip derivative came from
-maybe something will jell on my bike trip just now ...

2011/03/05 7:44 AM - off on the bike ...

Michael Rabiger - talked about PRESSURE building up in one of the stories - seems like a lot of physics terms could be used for analogies - force, speed, load, weight, volume mass critical mass ENERGY

and teh there are all the organic analogies - nourish your story let it grow give it water, give it time, it's got to gestate ...

2011/03/05 11:52 AM

Feelings - not so panicky - 2011/03/05 11:52 AM

i'm beginning tgo believe i can do this thing - i've handed in four assignments now = research on reading - RB, PW; 3 pages from application material - RB, PW; plot, dialogue or flash

fiction RB, PM; monologue - RB, AK; and we've got to hand in our joint dialogue plays by tomorrow evening - and Ruth and my play is virtually finished. May we can hand in the audio recording for added value.

for a few weeks now i've been waking with palpitations - another assignment due and don't know what's potting, don't know what to write, deadline coming closer and closer = but ive survived so far - just keep going day by day ..

all my musckes working fine on this morning's bike ride - back, calves, hamstrings, ankles - no problem. just a bit stiff walking around or up stairs of lifting and sorting out the pool - which i've just done. lifting that motor cover - got to be careful not to lift and twist - which is what yhou have to do.

2011/03/05 12:42 PM

Reflections - Old woman

a strange thing has happ;ened - i've turned into an old woman. Anton made us pick up bits of paper with notes written by various people - and then to free write based on the char who wrote the note. Then we had to do a dialogue between two of the chars on the notes - and now i go around muttering old lady sayings ...

ive been getting into her head ...

now i've just got to use the same system for all the characters in my novels ... schizophrenia here we come ...

i've found a new and much better type of TV. i seldom turn the old one on these days - it's an intrusion - it violates my private space. my TV is my bubble - i go in there and see and hear all sorts of exciting stories, movies - and now plays.

my bubble is quite fragile, it's got all my research and writing tools in it it hovers at different heights above the ground and moves fromplace to place. it appears at anhy time of the day or night. i can usually see out - but i can black it out if i want. people can see in if i let them - its gor that mother-of pearl sheen - so sometimes they can see in - but not often ...

2011/03/06 6:24 AM

DREAMS - you wake up with a pleasant feeling and you know you were having a pleasant dream - so you try to go back into that dream- that pleasant state - there was such a wonderful world going on there.

so this tells me four things = there's a wonderful world there
 = i want to go back there
 = i can get there through a dream
 = the dream is imparted to me in the form of a story

SO I, as a human, like pleasant things = one form of pleasant thing comes to me by way of a story

so if I can tell stories - I will be giving pleasant things to people

Three Poems - Mzi Mahola

13 March 2011

Oliver Cartwright

One Man's Vote

Pretty as a Picture

the camera never lies
but the photograph does

especially if it lies
for thirty years

the camera never lies
for long

he fell for her again
based on the image
the one in the drawer –

the one in his brain
had lain dormant thirty years
imagination run amok with age

Chase away blue crane.

Puddles splash his toes;
calf muscles pushing pedals.

2011/03/14 6:01 AM

Looking for a poem - 2011/03/14 6:01 AM

spent the entire weekend looking for one poem. this is not a natural pursuit for me.

2011/03/15 7:33 AM

Poetry - Mzi Mahola and Brian Walter

Mzi says we should not use worn-out metaphors - also based on what Don McLennan says in Funeral III - or the listener gets tired and bored and goes off (in his mind?) to commune with pigeons.

Brian says we must look at the myths, old stories - and pick up the ancient themes - then use them / refer to them as a way of poetic shorthand - understood by all (in the know)

eg thread - pops out all over the show bushmen, penelope skein etc

But using those old themes over and over - isn't that really using the same metaphor over and over - nice to recognise it a few times - then - oh that old thread again - how clever ha ha

Oliver – Feb 2011 – just start writing – burning aeroplanes ... incl bits from before ...

Maybe there were two people in there, not wanting to be disturbed. One thing I did know, whoever was in there was well aware that I had been stomping around, back and forth for the last twenty minutes

Novel – first draft

We sat on the wooden bench on the verandah and she held her hands together between her knees, her shoulders hunched forward. She had gone on for half an hour, talking of the blossoming life of the club, of the baby grand she would commandeer and set up next to the fire place. Of how the transport minister was going to hear about the flying facilities and how the transitional local council had blocked the flying club's request to take over all the aeronautical and maintenance tasks at the aerodrome.

I listened and chipped in with snippets of support which she didn't hear and flicked at the moths that dropped down from the lamp. And once, I put the back of my knuckles against her temple. The evening was turning chilly but she stayed warm.

Earlier she'd gone inside and set the CD spinning, sat down again next to me, then leapt up to shove down the volume when it finally started to play. It was still connected to the outdoor PA system for the open-day crowds. The blast had streaked out over the taxi way, across the tarred north-south runway, along the grass strip and over the fence into the army base. It shook up the guard who pressed off a warning peep on his siren - just to say hello and I'm still awake. Guinea fowl and a few impala, startled, came towards us. And she told me how they'd tried to get the place fenced off with proper grade four security, fire breaks and signal alarms.

“What fire?” she asked.

“You're not listening. The sky diver, the owner of the vibracrete walling company, yes the guy who runs East Cape Skydivers. He had a Cessna, ZS-JWO, always parked outside, no trouble.

“One night, there was smoke, a fire, a blackened wreck. His aeroplane had gone up in smoke. The insurance investigated. It could just, and only just, have been an accident. Unlikely, but they had to pay. He bought himself a bit of a cronk; I don’t think it ever had a door for them to remove from its hinges. They put in a bit more security, then ploof – another fireball. Now the insurance were really peed off. He had to build that hangar for his third aircraft, wheel it out and in every morning and evening, what a bellyache. Big, a six-seater ex-army Kudu. And what a bloody racket. Thing takes off on the other side of the chicken farm and it sounds like it’s hovering just above your breakfast table on a Sunday morning.”

She couldn’t get this into her head. “What kind of a pratt would set light to an aeroplane! Twice! Why didn’t anyone tell me? No wonder this place is full of dust and papers and no people. What kind of person would know how to burn an aeroplane? Ordinary people don’t burn a million dollar machine. Pilots don’t burn aeroplanes. To a pilot it’s like setting himself alight. It couldn’t have been a mad man, he would have been caught, there would have been clues leading back to him. Someone who could burn an aeroplane, twice? There must be a way of finding him.”

“Could have been a her,” I said.

“You mean his wife? Are they still married?”

“Yes, they’re together always, during the working week or out at the club, joint instructors; folding emergency chutes together, organising events, registering all the corporate trainees - too scared to say they’re too scared to go through with it - and doing the admin. No, it wasn’t her.”

None of them brave enough to admit they’re poop scared of leaping out at three thousand feet. Lessons and a piss up on Saturday night, leap of faith on Sunday morning. You’re not suggesting it was one of them. There’s no logic in that one. They were devastated. The replacement craft have been getting worse each time, they’ve had to put up a hangar, highly inconvenient, cancel classes for months on end, fork out insurance excesses, short falls and fee refunds for lost contracts. They didn’t do it.”

“Well this is why there’s this malaise here. And I’m going to find out who set them alight and this thing’s going to be sorted out and we’re going to move ahead. There’s a bad egg in here and I can smell it but it’s seeped through into the carpets and the wall fixtures and it’s not showing its exact whereabouts. There’s a malignant force in this club and that’s what is keeping us from take-off. And what was that?”

“What was that what?”

“You said something about a short fall. You got it! You pointed out something, it’s been bothering me since you said it. A short fall is a low level parachute drop, from five hundred feet, usually directly over the runway. It’s a military manoeuvre, DC 3, all thirty SAS troops out and down before the DAK reaches the other end of a two k runway. Roll, roll up and stash, meet at the centre line within twenty minutes of the static line exit chute. That’s where we start our investigations. And stop gawking at me, shut your mouth.”

She had hit it within one day, in fact within one minute of hearing of the arson attack. The cops, the flying world, the few leads thought-of by the tow pilot, all followed up, all blank. And now here was this girl, not involved, clean, nothing to lose, everything to gain, bang on target with the prime suspect.

We had all thought it must be a disgruntled customer, whose wall had fallen down or had got short changed. Or a jumper or a jumper’s wife who had a bee in her bonnet about the EP Skydiver’s setup, a course gone wrong or a motor car damaged by someone falling from the sky and breaking a wing mirror or a wiper, or studded boots scraping off the duco. It couldn’t have been just a passing tramp or a homeless rubbish packet thief. If we had a pyro one of them in the community, their hot sculptures would have spread across the town, cars, bicycles, houses, busses, whatever, would have been seen going up in billows. But this idea of a professional angel diver, piqued at all this commercialisation of the craft, turning a deadly military manoeuvre into a frivolous sport! The SAS trained for months. The selection weeding out, forty kilogram packs, no water, three days, only the finest, only the fittest, the strong mental, the finest physique, no matter if black or white, equal respect. You made it through those tough times in that tough valley in that October heat and you were a man. And only then could you step forward for your first of a hundred hours of sky training. And here was this piss fart giving two hours instruction in the evening and then letting them jump the following morning! That called for a burn.

How had she reached that finding? Something I’d said, about insurance. Short fall. I moved a step closer to her along the bench. Any lateral thinker on a bench next to me was a very good friend of mine. Everything she had said had made sense. The fires, the malaise. It had not been like this in my student days. The aerodrome was alive, and even when I was working

here, Dave Bertram and the boys - all gone. Yes, we had to do something. I was just here to take up the Grocott's offer, and now here I was, about to take off in a way neither, she, nor Grocott's nor I could ever have planned for. This was me, from innocent bystander, sneaking out from work and church, off on a journey, never to land fully again on the hard green earth.

“A jumper, you say? as in like, going to jump off the 32nd storey window ledge? as in, ‘was he pushed or did he jump?’”

“Well metaphorically speaking, yes. Yes to all of your questions. That's what has to happen to some skydivers. You don't actually push them but if they're a little bit nervous the first time, we tell them to go out of the cabin and stand on the wheel, then if they don't like it, they can always come back in. But, of course, as soon as they stand on the wheel, we take the hand brake off and the wheel spins...”

“Well so much for your investigation. You should have caught him by now. Did you see in today's news? Melkbosstrand, north of Cape Town, parachuting club, the only one in the region. 3 am, somebody piled up all the tandem chutes in the middle of the hangar, set them alight. They had a Cessna 182 and another one, a 286 both burnt out ash. Ten parachutes at R120 000 each, total value around six million. Everything, including the hangar, was completely gutted. Police say that in a case like this, they automatically treat it as arson and carry on doing so until an accident is proven. Arson is suspected.

“Now here's the thing. Housebreaking, a charge of housebreaking is being investigated. Well hang it all, the entire house was broken good and proper, very well, raised right up to the ground. And here's another thing: *a bakkie was stolen from a farm next to the hangar!* Now what do you think of that?”

“Theft of a bakkie. How would that tie up with the two attacks in Grahamstown? Doesn't fit.

“Oh doesn't it? How about this: he's used to burning aeroplanes, lots of avgas, low octane, not quite as volatile as petrol, lots of time to set the incinerator, lots of time to steal quietly away in the night, lots of time to take cover behind some gum trees or away over the hills with some binoculars and watch his dirty smoke trick. Now, here's this fire bug in Cape Town's Melkbosstrand club, he's inside the hangar, three o'clock in the cold Cape morning.

And what's he got? He's got *two* aircraft. And they're both from the evil skydivers' stable. And now he's overwhelmed, he's at frenzy pitch and he just wants to burn. But which one? Or which one first? Which is more expensive, which is the one they'll most miss? He's beside himself, he can't decide. But look! Parachutes, the very things that brought this on, the things that, with the aeroplanes, brought his baby down. What a find! In Grahamstown the aeroplane was just parked out there in the open, twice. It was the logical target. Cruise up, strike a light, hit the blue touch paper, head for the hills. He did this twice, then the third aeroplane, the insurance, very pissed off as they were, made him put it in a hangar.

“So off he goes, his passion flame satiated. But not for long. And now he's living in Cape Town. But his evil is bubbling under, stoking up the bile. And here he is, winking in the plinking, surrounded by corrugated steel, aeroplanes all around him, and him not able to decide which one gets the chop. And what if he does choose the wrong one, and what if the other one doesn't catch alight?

“And then his ship comes sailing in. Parachute cloth - fine, light nylon, propylene, Terylene, polypropylene - whatever. It'll burn! Like the blazes! What a find, all just bundled up there waiting for his fiery touch - pshghzzzztt. He piles them up, pulls the rip cords down and across just the way he's been taught - and there, in case you didn't get it, is the major clue. Then he druks his match, holds it up while the flare flashes across the crazy whites of his evil eyes, and drops it into the edge of the frilly billows.

“And now he gets a surprise. Pffooff it certainly is. His forearms all singed, no eyebrows, the carcinogenous stink of his carbonised hair and this red daylight glow. He's taken by somewhat of a surprise. He runs for the sliding doors where he left just a shoulder-sized gap and it's going too fast. This is not how it should be, he should have half an hour, easy to amble safely away, with lots of time to turn, look back, pause, take stock of the land ahead. All that. But now he's running, thoughts of the Hindenberg tossed far behind the pace of his burning thighs.

“What's to do. If he ambles off the way he's used to, the skyline's going to be ablaze and he's going to be one big silhouette, gigantic against the cool deserted Cape hillside. So what does he do? Like all good arsonists when things get too hot - he panics. Got to get away fast. What goes faster than a crazed arsonist running away from the all-too apparent blaze, blazing

a trail just behind him? Why, a motor vehicle of course. And there it is, parked out in the open, just across the barbed wire fence - and there, Watson, another clue, but we gotta be quick, before the wire cuts heal. And what farmer ever took any security measures for himself and his family, let alone his staff, his livestock, his gun or ... his bakkie. None of course.”

“So he gets in the bakkie, turns the key and away he goes. Brilliant. He’s not a car thief, he’s a fire bug. He fits the mould. He’s an arsonist, a fire bug. And he can’t help himself. He’ll burn and burn again. And always a skydiving club.”

“Well he doesn’t actually turn the key. This is a farm bakkie, they don’t have keys, just a little bit of wire pulling and fiddling under the dashboard is all they need to get going - but, yes, you got it.”

“Who, who we gonna call? The cop who investigated the Grahamstown burnings? The insurance agent? The Boldline Colour Block man?”

“No one.”

“Why? you wanting him to do it again?”

“Call me.”

“You. What do you know about investigating fire bugs. You’ll get your fingers burnt. Leave it to the experts. What qualifications do you have?”

“I’m writing this ain’t I? And the story’s not quite finished yet, is it? Not by a long way. And he hasn’t killed anyone. Lets trace him and pace him, let’s get close to him, follow his story, get some intelligence on him, watch his ways, build a character, tell the story, the whole story. Arrest him now and he’ll clam up, no more story, nothing. Lost cause.”

“But what if he does it again. You can’t let him burn another six million dollar aeroplane. Someone might get killed next time.”

“We track him, get close, get our story, watch him, see him set up his next attack, then call

the cops and catch him in flagrante delicto. Or as he would see it - in conflagration delectable. Step out, like they do in all the good whodunits, and catch him just about to do it so they've got something to arrest him on. There's no proof he did the other ones. And the cops give us the whole story from their side, in exchange for our side. But, come to think of it, there probably is some proof of the other burnings, quite a bit of it in fact. For a start we can look for someone who's coughing a lot. And that's another reason he took the bakkie - burning parachutes are poisonous. He probably got a lung-full of that plastic fume coating before he got the hell out of the hangar. In fact, I wonder if there were two of them. Maybe one of them's still smouldering in there?"

"Okay! Let's get to Cape Town. I'm not so sure that this plan works in real life though."

guiding thought - HOW the first aeroplane caught fire

Guiding thought: Suspect number one =

no matter what – he would find fault and accuse you of something...

Saturday, 12 March 2011

2011/03/12 07:37 PM

Plot = Burning Aeroplanes – just carry on - Saturday, 05 March 2011

He had popped into the club quite a few times over the years, walked with a bulky sort of grace, stringent jaw, not quite hamster cheeks, slightly asymmetrical nose, always had some sort of gadget in his pockets, a nut cracker or lighter in the early days, a Leatherman or a GPS pocket navigator in recent times. Sometimes with a moustache, sometimes without. He never said much, just stood with his hands in his pockets, fiddling with whatever gadget was in there, listening, joining in with the laughter. Always a bit of a surrounding airspace clinging to his shirt and rods, slightly old, slightly haystack aroma, strained the air that he spoke with

through dry lips. Very good at darts, precise stance, exactly the same throwing motion for each shot, just moved his foot position left, right or slightly back for grouped shots. Always

“But what’s your strategy, what plans have you made? What will you do if you come face to face with him? What backup have you arranged and what communications system have you got in place?”

OC = sounds like someone’s trying to build up a plot outline – will his strategy follow the beginning middle end exposition trigger rising action climax/crisis resolution model?

“I’ll wing it. I’ve never been down this road; it’s the most exciting one I’ve ever travelled. And it’s firmly planted on the ground. Mark Shuttleworth has followed a path which led him right out of this world. He’s sitting on top of the world and he hasn’t got even the parson to thank. He can’t even tell the bottom from the top and look at the impact he’s making. The communication has ended.”

Brian Walter

Sunday 20 March 2011

Oliver Cartwright

Apron Strings

Things went well the first week. I thawed and ate all the frozen food, finished the cauliflower and green beans in the plastic bowl and bought cat pellets from the Hoof and Hound. The second week, I boiled some eggs and cooked sweet corn in the microwave to go with my tins of ham and garden peas, and I picked up 25 kilograms of balanced nutritional dog mix from the co-op. This was the first time I’d been left on my own since getting married thirty years before.

Out of the blue, Kate got the news she'd been chosen to go to America on a study course for eleven weeks. She and her mother spent days cooking and putting meals in ice cream tubs and labeling them for the deep freeze. She had lists of instructions for me: feed the cat and the dog; water the fuchsias hanging from the pergola; remember the rubbish on Thursdays, the cleaners every second Friday and the garden service once a month. And there were reminders about the swimming pool and making sure the house was locked and she gave me a demonstration on how to use the washing machine.

I usually had nothing to do with it, other than being turfed out of bed on Sunday mornings to string up the washing line and connect the pipe that led the water from the basement to the shrubs next to the garden bench. I could never understand why Kate insisted on doing the washing when it was supposed to be a day of rest. All those weekends when the boys were growing up, I'd drop them at Sunday school while I went into church. Sometimes she'd come with us but more often she'd not; and the boys would ask, "...why do we have to go if she doesn't?"

She carted the washing down to the basement every week, with pegs in her apron and the strings somehow tied in a bow behind her back. I pulled one end once and things nearly unraveled when I suggested employing someone to help.

I was looking for a midnight snack halfway through the third week when the laptop started making that flanged, whooping sound. A call coming in on Skype. I could only guess; yes, Kate on the line, right there in the room with me. I thought I'd get in first with my report but no; she started telling me about her trip to the Amish. There was a community just north of Champaign-Urbana where she was attending a conference. They weren't allowed to use electricity or computers, she told me, with no trace of an American accent. Then this tinny crackling sound came across. She'd bought homemade peanut brittle from the Amish shop and was eating it to show me how wholesome the ingredients were. I let her carry on for a while before telling her the important news.

"I can't find my socks," I said. "Do you know where they are?" She stopped eating her peanut brittle and looked at me from 6000 miles away; the silence echoed down the line. I knew what she was going to say and so did she. She was going to tell me that I hadn't done the washing.

"I don't know John. Go and buy some."

"But they are usually on the shelf next to my underpants. They are not there."

“I told you what to do but you weren’t listening. And I told you what would happen if you didn’t pay attention. Now you’ve run out of socks. I don’t like to say this but... I told you so. And what about your shirts? Your clothes won’t wash themselves.”

I had already unwrapped the two bamboo and mohair pairs I’d got for Christmas and the set of three for my birthday. An old pair of army socks had pinched my toes one day and that evening I’d gone to look in the mending bag. It moved around from time to time; the last place had been in the spare bathroom cupboard under the basin with the paint flaking from the wall. I couldn’t find the mending bag or any darned socks anywhere.

“I had to wear sandals to work this morning,” I told her.

“Go and look in the wash basket,” she said. I looked. There were black, white, grey and blue socks plus one Tasmanian devil. I took them out and laid them on the bath mat. After sorting them I counted them up and found I had seventeen pairs of socks. I went back to the computer.

“You must have taken some of Peter’s. Those were his cricket socks; he didn’t need them in Jo’burg. You know what you have to do.”

“I have to wash them myself...?”

“Yes, John.”

“Isn’t there someone who can do it?”

“I showed you what to do, I’m sure you remember.”

“What about one of those places with the coins...?”

She told me again about the rotary knob for the load size, the settings for hot or cold water and the scoops of blue soap powder. When it was light I went and strung the line across the garden, manoeuvred the wash basket down the stone steps, feeling my way with my toes and balanced it while I got the basement door open. I was puffing by the time I’d tipped everything into the top loader. I pushed *start* and it made all the right sounds so I went up and put my oats in the microwave. While I waited I found the apron with the clothes pegs in the pouch and looped the top over my head, but I was unable to tie the loose ends behind my back.

When my porridge was ready I put it on a tray with milk and sugar and carried it down to the lawn. The cat joined me on the garden bench and I sat in the morning sun thinking about nothing in particular. Then after half an hour I became aware of the open end of a pipe next to my foot. *Now what’s that for?* I began to wonder as my eyes followed it back towards the basement.

Breaking promises

Before the quarrymen came,
we sat two metres apart on the granite dome,

2011/03/24 1:15 AM

Charley Moreley - Lucid Dreaming

copy out notes from note book 95

Student feedback form for assignment: Symbols and the string

Student: Oliver Cartwright Tutor: Brian Walter Date: 22 March 2011

Good work with the task, a prose piece and a poem, both exploring an image (or set of images) as a real phenomenon, and then also as a symbol (set of symbols)

The rock in the second piece is really well handled, in terms of its very real, but also symbolic, presence. The story is “getting there”, the lines evoked, but somehow not yet pulled together in the conclusion.

Yes, for *Breaking Promises*. In the story, *Apron Strings*, I think the conclusion needs to be a bit more fully realized: I’m not sure that the reader will make the leap of connection to the

pipe not connected at the washing machine, but – more importantly – if the reader makes the connection, what the effect will be. There is potential in the ending, though: but I think the reader might need to be led along the hose, back to the leaking machine, and back to the core image of the apron strings.

Also, in the class editing, it was suggested that the story end a little sooner, not trying to do too much. This is wise, and generally well done. But I think the threads need to be brought into the conclusion a bit more. The conclusion needs just a bit more symbolic and artistic work. The *motif* of strings and lines, even the hose, in *Apron Strings* is generally well used: but needs some re-enforcement in the conclusion. The apron possibly needs to be present as a reminder of the central image, and – as mentioned above – the ending slightly more tightly pulled together.

“Until a crack splintered above the euphorbias / and the great concave slab slid away”. A great literal and symbolic conclusion to the poem; dramatically evoking the scene: “the great concave slab slid” has effective sound devices, short clear words

Generally, yes, in both pieces. Concise, and clear.

Yes, in both cases. The story has been tightened up considerably, and elements within it shifted to good effect. While less was needed on the poem, the context has been economically evoked.

Comet's Wake

It sits in front of me, shellac brittle, prettier than a picture, its high gloss exterior contains, preserves and hides its essence - emitting nothing, revealing nothing – or so I think.

I cannot see its transmitted messages shooting towards me. It is glowing and pouring out information – but I am blind. It's encoded and explosive

A fiducial point appears on the bubble. It trusts me. Blind faith but can I live up to its expectations? It opens a bit – a ripple peeling outwards, the bubble starts to fold back on itself – rolling away and over – inside out – revealing an unprotected, naked emotion visible only to me. The exposure blossoms for a moment. Defenceless – it dies.

I didn't see, I couldn't see, I wouldn't see – it gave and gave to me. If I'd seen, if I'd taken, if I'd absorbed what it gave – I'd have fed back to it. If I'd taken its message – it would have lived. But because I couldn't comprehend it, it had to keep giving – until there was just a residue, hard as rock, which I crushed.

God gives and gives. I take and take – we both survive. God gives and gives – I ignore – I die.

2011/03/27 6:30 AM

Sunday Mornings 2011/03/27 6:30 AM

Joan told us to be still for twenty minutes – then start writing. I did it a number of times and this strange writing appeared – Robert seemed to think it was similar to Finnegans Wake by someone called James Joyce.

is it the day after already. no it's already nearly two days later - evening approaches and it's warm in the morning. i should have taken the pill in the night before - it takes two to six hours to work and you gotta take it on a full stomach. so if i want one now i'll have to eat first. and im not at all hungry

now this could be Joan 6 - if i really wanted to go into that James Joyce state - it seems to be

a state of balance - of balance between the left brain - which is doing the typing - and the right brain - which is doing all the associations and half associations and thinking it's being very clever with all these half-words and funny slitting and joining and free associations and logical associations and calling up of links and memories from afar and new things from a future.

sonw now th the big question is this - did he write by hand or by machine??????????????

2011/03/27 8:59 AM so Joyce was aware of paragraphs. it's that last one that is very long - are there any others? So that means that last paragraph must be experienced all in one go - it's one long group of thoughts on the same scene.

how much editing did he do? i can read and interpret the things - the everyday things that don't need a literary or other academic background to have knowledge of the every day everyday words in common use or general knowledge - and after awhile its quite fun and absorbing and humorous to get into - just this longquirky humour string - there's that thread again - string string we can string this one out all day = string of syllables and phrases and you recognise what he was trying to do - the associations - sometimes only associating some paragraphs - pages? chapters?? books?? later - the rest of the assoc appears.

but i cant see the rising tension the triggering precipitating incident s instance moment appearing any time soon - being the expert now - having read a total in snippets of about one whole page of finnegans wake fine fine guinness -was it around then - yes - must have been - we just missed the 250th birthday party in 2009 ... Arthur somebody and his kids ...

2011/04/01 6:28 AM

ball hits wickets

sent in my fifth revision of formal committee proposal last night

Hello Robert, thanks for all your work on these proposals. Yes please, I would like to make a few changes:

=====

MA creative writing 2011 - thesis proposals

Candidate: O Cartwright

Topic: Novel

Description: A contemporary mystery novel set among the Eastern Cape's coastal resorts and in the vicinity of Grahamstown. The city's airstrip, situated between the golf club and the military base, acts as host to the local flying club and an active skydiving school. But somebody has managed to creep between sleeping kiewetjies and set fire to million rand aeroplanes - two so far. A novel about secret research papers, insurance reports and the ingenuity of an amateur investigator.

Supervisor: Prof L S Wright

Co-supervisor: Mr P. Wessels

Paul Wessels

Friday 1 April 2011

Assignment 1

A. Superbly, as it should be:

I had no sense of time. The hours and days stood suspended above my pillow. I surfaced for brief spells and each time I had to feel around – and only when my fist or elbow met cold steel did I remember where I was and why.

Paul Wessels

Sunday 3 April 2011

Assignment 1

A. Poorly as it should definitely not be:

The Oke

Yus did you see that oke? I'm just sitting watching like always. Look at him pissing shit, shitting blood all over her back seat, jussus what a thing. There she was all concerned and fretting, trying to lift him, what a joke. He was light but she had not a hope; she was half his size. And he was white, white I mean even for a whitey. And she's calling us to help move him. He stinks. Help him – I wouldn't touch him, get my overalls covered in bloody shit – that stuff doesn't wash out no ways.

At last they've got him properly out; and he's out of it. I mean he keeps falling down and they want his medical aid number. What a priority. So I'm just sitting, checking this out and then they give him shorty pyjamas sommer out there in the front. For a tall guy. What a government!

Now I know about tablets, ecstasy, phenobarbiturates, and magic banana crush. But this bloke! The stuff they dish out – six blue and white, two vomit yellow, the big ones, green liquid and the pump. They connect one to a spike in his wrist. It's just as well; he can't walk properly so it'll fix him just lying there in bed by the window looking across at the parking yard on the roof. He talks to the pigeons and sometimes he calls the nurse.

One day he's really hacked off, he's been sleeping and it's dark and they turn on the lights. Then he yells when he sees this dude with the turban bandage and he tells the nurse to hose him down. The dude has been socialising down in the pit latrine. I mean, like, that's his home. It was bad enough, people being asked to load the oke into his girl's car – but this dude he's the king of shit. They must prod him with pitchforks and get him into the shower. Then they must set alight to the shower cubicle. Jussus, I just don't like what I see and I need a nose job to get rid of that honk.

And the oke, when he sees the dude all roses and stripes, he starts to cry man, what's he so ashamed about?

Paul Wessels

Friday 1 April 2011

Assignment 1

A. In a surprisingly different way:

Shin Dig

Uncle Red and shikn split skin shin splint shimy shinnn shinning up a whee shinning up a log in a whee whee wheelbarrow.

Steel swhweel turning turning closer crack crack the log in the fire the bone in my been been there done that.

What a shindig Shin dead.

oh dear ma Oude Meester obama Oxford E D the sod ;;; the pod :::cure all cure me swollen
pnk punk junk jumble sale anyone for a DVD pirate pavement special DVD DVD anybody
Chinese sub titles DVD = DVT DVT I divert I divert I meant to say divertimento Scarlatti
scr tissue swelling whole whole heal heal heal the healthy hole new moan here shelter
Somebody stole my clutch catch the crutch catch the crutch thief

I bring you proof poof poof! up in puff of truth they've known for years they know but they dispense with the truth dispense with the proof

I buy proof in the dispensary - farmer cyst crystal clear truth = it has always been my bene is kak – im swallowing I'm plastered plastered in France left banking on the chalk pavement special special case anti anti pro fukin pro anti me anti I eyes are fine - but I can't see where I go what I swallow; churning churning

I said it before freedominium freedom of speech no inflammatory Lourenzo Marques on your marks, get shit, go go flolw flolw . Infamously quoted silver lining lining shattered shards of stomach; awful offal – I'll sue I'll sue if only I had a banned aid a medical ade aiding and a-gambolling = I toll you catch the crutch thief - h'es got my crotch now – pouring shots of neat clots = wreched retched wretched wreck wrecked him, canal; pro pro and anti anti infamously prolonged use of pro fukin ibuprofen – soo - they'll roo the day I soo themall. The stoma ache – Irish troubles Ulster men ulcer men;s true ate too many orange men orange and green men in captivity cavity guts it takes guts it takes your guts out internal to externalise blood and guts lies on the barf room floor floored, can't stand brain is aware internally body won't get up – I sinned sinn d sinnd eeeee help help me pl eeee eee ease my pain my I bu pro fen fukkken pain. Capgun caps you'll use in a cowbow firght fight fight = four stomachs. Could chew.

Yor hospipe spits = your hospittle hospitality stinks yur hospital is where I sinks I sink or swim . I sink – no I swim. Under water – there's no time time is warm. I'll sink next to my invalid bed I'll swim this time thank you Time ding ding = beeeep beeeep beeeep dripdrip could be I'm too weak could be a week, could be ten days in and out in on under in and out sleep wake sleep sleep light on lights on light up don't smoke. He stinks he stinks he's me me a day ago a month ago - he's a used bog roll im on a roll – his heas head is a used toilet roll he's been rolling in shit. Let him sink stink nurse nurse me back to life block my nose who knows it may be me standing over ther. Nurse nurse get him into the sink into what a shambles what a shower, my you manky specimen of stool get those birds out of here they lice lies. Get him in the shower before he gets you wash your hands of him ladies stop pouting

Jim jams jimmy jolly jammers pie jams it's him its him – it is me - he's one of us shame aga shame hes's tame let him in let him close – he's dry now his towel head towel trowel in his skull shit in the drain he's me he's me he has morta mo phasised fanta rides = transformographied transformer former inmate – he's released he's one of us o shame I

shame I am shame I'm in my place placid pisey pasey let it be let it beeee a private hospital
no no – let the government beee beee beee beee beee beeee Unk= uncle Red Uncle - ankle
better much better getter better get her get her = shindeeee oh shindeee don't slur cindy?

Paul Wessels

Friday 1 April 2011

Assignment 2

Explanatory Analysis – *Sail On! Sail On!*

I am immediately alerted to the title, before reading one word of the text. The repeat wording and the capital “O” indicate not only that a ship, and its crew, will be sailing onwards, regardless of any reason to hesitate - but will also be sailing on top of something.

2011/04/02 6:03 AM

I've been reflecting on what Reneilwe said at yesterday's feedback with Paul Wessels and Robert. she said all her friends ... something ... and she could use only first person narrator - but this exercise superb badly surprisingly different = after the feedback her middle one was 3rd P - now she doesn't agree with me that i can only write in 1st P she says it is poss to write in another p .. i tell her i've taken x years to find my voice and I'm not going to change it now - there are subtle things you have to do to get it right = and the same would apply to starting in a new P

it's to do with finding your voice i tell her it takes years to find your voice ...

V BUT I'm open to discussion

my middle piece got Namhla laughing so much she had to leave the table - Is it 3rd P or

omniscient - or 1st P ? it was supposed to be wrong ...

Tue 2011/04/05 02:58 PM

Hi oliver

I think the reason for the fact that your “poor” version beat your Superb one was because the poor one was completely embodied, honest, open, and of course, very amusing. Your Superb version read like it was trying hard to please and was a rather flat and uncreative working of my presentation of the story. The Different version was great too and you should try to apply yourself to that style of writing on short subjects at some stage.

Black Box Landing

We followed a gradual westerly descent path towards runway 28. I had the controls and my instructor slouched contentedly in the right hand seat. I didn't mind him nodding off; at 72 he deserved a rest. He'd been persuaded to come out of retirement and move to Port Alfred to help get the new Tree to Tree Air School off the ground. He had decades of experience and obviously had confidence in my abilities or he would have been hovering over the joystick. The Piper Colt was trimmed for landing, flying at well above stalling speed and the vertical indicator was reading just fine. I pushed aside a vague memory of the airframe technician whacking the exhaust manifold with a half brick the previous day. His unconventional repair seemed to be holding.

This was my first landing approach in ten years. I'd postponed my training after moving from Zimbabwe and had eventually saved enough to resume my flying lessons. Weather records indicated that May would be good month; still fairly warm and very little chance of rain.

On my arrival, Florin, the owner's wife, showed me around the ex World War II flying school with converted barrack rooms, instruction centre and reconstructed control tower. The crew's quarters were thatched with creosote rafters, a shower, toilet, desk and bed in each unit. And names like *Hurricane*, *Spitfire*, *Oxford* and *Mosquito* were fastened to the doors. My room was *Rapide*. Quite apt, I thought, as the first time I'd ever left the ground had been in a *Rapide*, flying from Harare to Vilanculos on the way to Bazaruto.

"Come to the bar at 7 this evening," said Florin after I'd unpacked. "You can meet some of your fellow pupils and your instructor." We looked up at a circling aeroplane. "That's sis, your Colt," she said. Then, seeing me looking at her, said, "No, CYS, its registration number: Charlie Yankee Sierra."

The bar sounded like a good place to complete my orientation. Bob, the owner, was there with Peter, a guy of 35 who'd started flying the previous week. He looked bewildered, as though he could barely swim, let alone fly and he was envious of the fifty hours I had in

my log book. Two youngsters were fighting over the next round and when they heard that I lived nearby, wanted to know where the local talent hung out. I suggested they try the Pig and Whistle in Bathurst, or the golf club. Then I met my instructor, but I wasn't sure if he was aware of me. He seemed a good reminder of why retirement was invented.

Early Monday morning was dark and still with just the sounds of a kiewetjie near the landing strip and the ocean to the south. Then a referee's whistle shook awake the day and there was shouting, "... come on, come on you lazy sky pollutants..." followed by scrambling and muttered comments about the golf club. I showered under the thatch and thought, was that eucalyptus and creosote shampoo I've just been using?

Three aeroplanes took off but I had to wait until after breakfast before it was my turn. We spent twenty minutes on pre flight checks then took off and proceeded to carry out basic orientation exercises over the general flying area north of Port Alfred.

"I can feel the wind pushing us from the sea," I said. Then I immediately realised how much I'd forgotten about flying.

"Well you'd better get rid of that feeling," said the instructor as he tapped the clear glass gauges on the console. "If pilots could feel the external forces applied to the fuselage there'd be no need for all these instruments. We'd be able to fly with our eyes shut and never become disoriented." I looked at him after a while and noticed that his eyes were actually closed.

"Do all aircraft, even these little two seaters with a single engine, do they all have to carry a black box flight recorder?" He looked across at me from between his headphones and shut me up by indicating that my rate one turn was becoming a very steep turn.

That first training flight took one hour forty minutes then he brought us in to land. After lunch we had lectures on engines, airframes and instruments in the class room – a theoretical reminder of the need for altimeters, artificial horizons and airspeed indicators. Then Tuesday we took off through a cloud of doves into a smoky red blob and practised turns and glides then mock circuits and landings on the Martindale road. And that afternoon we wrote the first theory exam and I later learnt I'd got my radio licence.

On the Wednesday I replayed the long debrief I'd had the previous evening: take-off settings; wings level on climb out; circuit turns at attitude; trim settings, stall recovery and landings. Then we had a session on procedures for handing over control. We had to be very clear as to who was flying the aircraft – the instructor or the pupil. He told me I would be in control until he said, "I am taking control", otherwise any alterations he made would be gentle reminders indicating what I should do. If something serious developed, he would take

control immediately and correct it and then crap on me later for doing the incorrect thing. There would be no time to say, "I am taking control."

Later I waited near the fuel pumps for Neil, one of the youngsters, to finish his training flight. He got out with the engine running and the instructor signalled me, through the propeller blur, to climb aboard. "What about the pre flight checks?" I shouted.

"This thing will never start again if I switch off now," he yelled. The machine was obviously working so I strapped myself in and took off into the westerly wind then headed for the training area to the north. I noticed the compass was stuck so I transferred to the Direction Indicator but that was not working either. Over the general flying grid I did 90 degree turns, straight and level, glides, climbs, climbing turns, descending turns, and practised circuits and simulated landings over the Trappes Valley - Cuylerville road.

As we returned to the airstrip I noticed the wind sock and pointed out that the wind was now coming from the south instead of the west. The instructor said we should land on the same runway we used for takeoff. We were going to land in a strong crosswind.

I flew only a short distance south before turning downwind as a foggy cloud bank below crept inland. During this time a Piper 180 had taken off and we were above it at 12 o'clock so my instructor called and asked if it could see us. Yes, it had. I turned downwind and kept going until I could see the aeroplane on our left, at the same altitude. Then I turned left onto base and left onto a long final. I had to hold the nose to the left into the strong crosswind and the Colt came down side slipping, straight along Runway 28 with the controls crossed – ailerons left, rudder right. I throttled up a little near the threshold as we appeared to be undershooting but the instructor said we didn't need throttle so I closed it.

We got over the threshold and the instructor said, "There's a strong crosswind, I will take control." I removed my hands from the wheel and my feet from the pedals and said, "OK I'm clear." We continued forward and I noticed him sitting there with his arms folded. Then he said, "What are you doing?" "What are you doing to the controls?"

I said, "Nothing. I'm clear. I thought you were supposed to be taking control," and again I held up my hands to show him. The aircraft was beginning to drift right and I kept wondering why he didn't put on left aileron and how long he was going to take to get it straight. Then we started moving hard and fast to the right as if a great wind had caught us and I still waited, not wanting to interfere with the controls, expecting him to do something. The aeroplane was now revving very loudly and I could not see the wheel turning to the left as it should have. The grass was rushing past beneath my window in a streaking curve and we

were way off to the right of the runway. I realised then there was going to be no chance of correction and as we went into the ground I thought I had only about one second left on earth.

It appeared to me that the left, front-side nose impacted first and as my head went straight for the grass under the side window I put my left arm over my whole head and felt a blow along the entire length of my curled arm then I felt the speed slacken abruptly. The aircraft continued its flight and I began to pull my knees up and got myself into a ball. Crumpling sounds echoed in all directions but I could see only the blue of my overall and bits of light and shapes on either side. And I began to think that this wasn't so bad and things were taking their course nicely and that there may be a chance through it all.

We stopped tumbling and I surfaced to find myself on the high left side of a crumpled cabin. I was quite bewildered and not thinking straight, trying to come to terms with the idea that I was not dead. The instructor got the hatch open and said, "...you know, I was just thinking it's about time I applied to go on pension. Let's get out of here - this thing looks like it might catch alight."

I got my seat belt undone and scrambled out after him.

2011/04/05 7:25 AM

Creating my novel world

Silke Heiss

a novel experience this morning - starting to create the world of my novel - never done this sort of thing before - quite a strange experience - - a new and strange and wonderful creation is coming into being

i didn't realise it was an actual place with a actual people at a certain time with a an actual incident kicking things off

i usually just start writing and see where it goes

but this is different - i am in charge of CREATING this living earth and all that is on it and all that is going to happen in it

it's a heady feeling indeed

this is serious stuff - no room for bullshitting ...

2011/04/05 2:04 PM

my novel world is slightly elevated as well - you have to step up about 475 millimetres left foot first - no rail to help you up just plonk on the left foot then launch up and the right foot lands on the plinth and you're up and in - then you look back over your shoulder and there's the road back to kenton and the hinterland - you look ahead and slightly to the left and there are blue mountains in the distance and the dune and the victoria hotel on the hill going up and off to the wild coast and the carpet selling bus and the great fish and mpekweni and all that ...

2011/04/06 6:11 AM

The Novel World 2011/04/06 6:11 AM

sde bokeer how is that for a setting in the desert

how easy is it to create a novel world?

very easy - just look at a game of rugby on tv - see them running and lining up for a lineout see the ball tossed up caught he turns towards his own team bends down over the ball they crowd around he feeds it out off it goes along the back line

see tiger woods making out for a long putt click the ball travels travels closer closer to the hole - slows slowly slower gets to the edge of the hole they all shout it curves round the hole and stops two inches past it

see - it's easy - the novel world is just over there - just step into it

2011/04/16 7:51 AM

Explanation for Silke - see today's notebook...

Silke - originally =

setting/place = forest => coastal forest; rock pool

character = librarian; thief

time/when = the crucial incident; early evening

theme/nerve = jealousy

situation/incident = an ominous gathering; an accident

1. opening paragraphs = character setting time
2. turning point crisis conflict
3. turning point 2 if next
4. resolve

originally - accident forest jealousy

j => vanity

but when suggested i write the whole story as humour - had to drop jealousy/vanity - thought
H was theme

story confusing because i put the setting/character/time all at the beginning in the intro =
therefore it seems like they landed safely

ie don't stick to these rules as they are - just be aware of them and write the story with them
hovering in the background.

=====

Hi - I'm glad if my commentary helped.

I'm genuinely curious - did I 'get' your story or not? Was/ it it a spoof on the actual writing
exercise, allegorically rendered by means of the flying scene?

If your story *is* about writing and the self-reflective consciousness, then I guess that would be
its nerve.

On Thu, Apr 14, 2011 at 6:32 PM, Oliver Cartwright <o.cartwright@ru.ac.za> wrote:

Hello Silke, many thanks for all the hard work you put into evaluating my writing and for your comments and suggestions.

I'm still swimming when it comes to theme / nerve / hum but it's slowly sinking in - cheers,
Oliver.

Port Elizabeth Airport PLZ CCTV Security Camera Footage**2011/04/12 11:07 AM= West Departures Entrance-Exterior**

A traveller in champagne silver and navy removes her luggage from a Hertz Rent-a-Car and it drives off past a Blunden bus. A porter separates two trolleys with blue handles and advertising placards on the back and gives one to the traveller. She puts her foot against a wheel and piles the luggage onto it; a suitcase and a duffle bag onto the frame and a backpack into the basket. She wheels the trolley up the slope and the double doors part like the red sea.

2011/04/12 11:11 AM= West Departures Entrance-Interior

She heads off to the left, wheels clicking along the white tiles right to the end, passing grey wall after grey wall with a wooden buffer strip running all the way, with blue walls below and glass doors at intervals, past the group of men in shorts leaning against a trolley with a balloon in the top basket, past the Bureau de Change with the South African flag and the red-light numbers in the window, hesitating as two maintenance men in blue overalls stroll in front of her, noting yet another red and white chevron board with fire extinguisher attached, pausing at the Nelson Mandela Bay Visitor Information Centre to glance through the cylindrical towers of what to do-what to see-where to go pamphlets, reaching for a free copy of the Herald, then hurrying past the SAPS Ports of Entry office, all the way to the Blunden Tours and Travel kiosk with phone us, fax us, office hours or after hours numbers on the lintel and a man in a green shirt behind a burgundy desk, ready to help right now, while you settle back on his three-seater plush sofa. Or there's the Shuttle Service timetable on a static sandwich board if you're just going home, with photographs showing the sizes of the shuttles.

2011/04/12 11:19 AM= East Terminal-Interior

She glides her trolley along the line of stainless steel piped and punched seats and the man in the pink shirt and white, wispy beard is too old to notice her but his bored companion leans just a little bit forward as her *derrière* passes by. At the very end she sees a little alcove with the pink easy chairs, all vacant. People think they're for business class.

2011/04/12 11:23 AM= East Arrivals-Interior

A girl in a black top and grey slacks puts her left hand on her hand bag and crosses her legs and tries not to look at the couple staring straight at her from the row of seats below

the bicycle race on the flat screen above another fire extinguisher attached to the wooden rail between the grey wall above and the blue wall below. Another laden trolley, abandoned for a leak, nods at champagne girl's trolley as it goes by. They know each other.

She wheels across to a public relations disaster – a poster of a man and a woman in blue uniforms. He's looking into the gleaming lens of a brand name camera on a tripod with coiled, glossy cables dangling down and she looks on approvingly at his hard jaw. They try to pass it off as a community policing and social justice poster – something everybody wants – putting a stop to crime - but it's there for all to see. It's not a camera; it's a laser detecting device. They are not here to help – they are traffic cops and they are manning a speed trap; and Flight BA6263 from Durban has been delayed by 45 minutes, because of them?

2011/04/12 11:37 AM= East Central-Interior

She looks across at a sign saying *Arrivals* against glass doors and windows and realises she's way off course. She heads back the way she came, and there's a sailor tugging at his pack thongs, sitting under the Cosmic Candy saucer flying through its planetary system and she notices for the first time the stainless steel rail running against all the walls at ankle height towards a steam train from long ago. And right up against *Arrivals* the white and orange plastic chairs of Primi >> Caffe stress and strain as occupying patrons tap their wrist watches and beckon. Back across the passage a bloated, striped T-shirt emerges from the racks of candy and bounces by the Electro Electronics & Sound store.

2011/04/12 11:45 AM= Central-Interior

The big wedge clock says quarter to twelve; she hurries a little, through the gauntlet – MTN to the left, Vodacom to the right, abandoned trolleys to the front, a running man and a down arrow at the red sea glass exit. It opens for her. She doesn't want to go there. It opens again and green umbrellas and light cloudy sunshine invite her out. Her trolley pulls her through.

2011/04/12 11:52 AM= Central-Exterior

Alfa Romeo, Continental, Vodacom and Avis cubic triangles lift her chin and the zebra crossing says cross me now. But the portly policewoman sees it all and says, "...*Departures* back inside, Ma'am, to your right."

2011/04/12 11:57 AM= Departures-Interior

Past the Men's Toilets and Lochner's Biltong just around the corner, she's in the Departures Hall with the SA Weather Office, SAA, Kulula and BA Check-ins and Club.

2011/04/12 12:00 PM= West Departures-Interior

She sees the taped-off queue lines, the dayglo security official, the chuckling trolleys of jolly travellers and she hears the hum, the anticipation, the joy and excitement of faraway places and wild adventure.

Sun 2011/05/22 04:15 PM

hi oliver

here are marked versions of the two assignments you did for me, plus the book report one.

I have used track changes to make some editing suggestions.

regards

robert

the first one is interesting in its obsessive detail, but flat. the bursts of emotion in it, like the red sea, and the last sentence, come as a welcome relief.

the second one was more interesting, with its erotic tension and its enigmatic hints of a narrative. it would be interesting as an exercise to continue this story to see where it goes – as part of a chapter in your book? -- especially with your new insights about the character-changing requirements of a story.

2011/04/23 7:15 AM

and now I'm getting the chance to let things sink in =- I don't know out aloud what they are - but inside I can feel things going on in there - which tell me a story is forming a plot with scenes and incidents (and accidents) from both Silke and Paul Simon = there's a lot of outdoors stuff and the scene in the chemists - and we have Mathew and peter along for company - but where's the girl? the amateur detective's sidekick?

Write and see = don't wait and see - you'll wait for twenty years and still you won't see -
because there'll be no writing to see - just more and more vague ideas...

Rework a piece of writing – after Javier Marias**The diving board**

We stripped slowly, piling our clothes on the Old Cape coping; my fleece-lined jacket at the bottom, her purple pullover next, my cords and boxers on top of my shoes with socks inside. Then her sandals with beads on the ankle straps, shorts and knickers, tank top and bra. My shirt was last, on the top. Was this a good idea? The water looked colder than it had from the clubhouse veranda, green and deep. When we'd seen the mist rising we'd thought, warm water surface, cold air above - the perfect scenario - a hot bath.

She got all self-conscious. "Race you in!" she said. We both ran along the rough flag stones with indented grouting and strands of lichen between the cracks to the deep end and dived together, the elemental water reaching places it didn't normally encounter. It was hotter than a bath. She waited for me to emerge at the shallow end then climbed out after me. She felt the cold, it was colder than before we'd dived, with the evaporation and the rivulets running down the tan of her shoulder blades, across the white diverging stripes, and down her spine.

We dived in again. A warm quiver passed from our heads to our toes. We surfaced near the midway line, adjacent to the water polo nets, breathing in the mist. I bounced the floating ball, pushed it down and let it go. Spiralling upwards it leapt from the surface and we tossed it back and forth. The distorted red shape caught my eye. "You get the puck," I pointed and down she went, just the ripples following the curve of her curves. I tossed the hockey stick away into the deep end, "...sorry it slipped."

"You're crazy," she said as she set off with a butterfly stroke after it, a Venus rising then head down, then tail up, then a forty five degree dive into a gradual descent past my blurred eyes. When she came up, I told her about the job we had to do. She straightened her shoulders, shook the water from her eyes and said, "...we've made it this far, we can make it right through."

She hooked the short, squat stick around my ankle, tugged and led me off to the side where the changing rooms were. We rolled along the brick tiles, their heat radiating through us, keeping up the work of the water, then we crawled the length of the one metre springboard. She lay on her stomach, looking down over the end into the settling ripples. I lay on my back with my head on the soles of her feet. She got the diving board going, slowly cycling up and down. And just once, she lifted us into the air and down again on a cushion. She never got out of synch but I was moderately pleased I wasn't lying on my stomach.

2011/04/27 6:38 AM

DREAM = Gary appears does limbering up exercises then does approximations then little components of the main thing and on and on and on a little bit in the top left quadrant a different shade of a loop a different colour here a different colour there like the segments of an onion shell different bits revealed in three dimensions

we are all waiting for the spinning gymnast holding the bar with his hands and going round and round and round

he builds up and up

then wow WOW he does one

then he slows down then he reveals a bit more technique and eventually the show is over.

we all seem a bit deflated - he never got into buzzing spinning motion

but then we start to realise = we saw learnt experienced a hell of a lot more than the usual audience sees

we have been shown the secrets of the extravaganza we have been shown the elements the HOW not only the what

we have seen the PLOT not just the STORY

this was far more valuable of a show than we had a right to - we are extremely lucky - we saw the layers of the onion revealed and down the steps - the hole wide at the surface getting smaller as the layers go deeper - then a smaller hole looking right inside into the hollow onion - just the one hole - but showing the inner core the inner construction - instead of lots and lots of holes - so many that they reveal nothing - which the normal audience would see. we've seen just enough that we did not lose the picture in the big picture we have seen its constituent parts - we can now go and do the same - with our own show ./// writing

the usual audience sees just a flash and a blur - the result of all the practice the exercises - the writing - the finished product - we were disappointed = but we now realise we have gained seen something far far more valuable..

[Andrew the practise IS the research practice is is is is research ...over and over an and over again trapeze artist launches into the air - just misses the catcher tries again does it slightly differently misses tries again with adjustments nearly there again and again practise makes perfect and again - eventually gets it

that's what we've seen with Gary - how he got to that final finished product - HOW HE GOT THERE !!!!!!!] now we can go and do likewise ...

Sweet wrench

Zimbabwe's ruins pushed him to the floor.

Belgian rifle, ration packs, kopjes;
austerity rationing, wage cuts, bread queues
pushed him to the floor.

She from Port Elizabeth – He from Harare.

Beit Bridge

pulling, pushing him;

pushing, pulling her.

Love taken; his country forsaken.

Uniform burnt on a septic tank,
old flames' photographs in the ashes.

Friendships, family, memories abandoned.

Bridge burnt.

Honeysuckle promises.

A baby with verve; humour, parties, friends and socials.

Another masters puzzles, a genius, classical pianist.

They lift him from the floor.

God's Grace

2011/05/01 5:51 AM

Reading Mosley on poetry last month – he says fiction writers must join a poetry group and get involved and have a go at poetry. He says if prose writers can look at each word the way poets do and get exactly the right word and leave out the wrong words – then their writing will improve. I decided to write a poem for Mxolisi – even though we were allowed to submit a story. Doing a poem on purpose - this is strange new territory for me...

2011/05/02 6:23 AM

At 2:22 am this morning I emailed this poem to Mxolisi and Robert.

About three hours later Barack Obama announced that Osama bin Laden had been killed by American special forces.

Why did I have that dream-vision of the twin towers, still standing, on the morning I got up and wrote the first feedback version of the poem - Friday morning?

Here we have two burning aeroplanes in Grahamstown. On 9/11 we had two aeroplanes burning, bringing down the twin towers.

In Pakistan we had SAS-like forces bringing down bin Laden

in my novel we have the SAS ringinging down the aeroplanes

This is how international terrorism starts - getting away with arson, starting with a low-level gripe.

bin Laden started with a low-level gripe against the opulence of Saudi royals and elite - joined the Mujahadin in Afghanistan against the Soviets. the Mujahadin were supported by the CIA.

he found a cause , set up a network...

An SAS operative would make a very good terrorist

A land developer who gets away with insulting neighbourhoods - would make a very good terrorist ...

the link that Robert wanted me to find - the attack on eg the bankk manager who woldn't give the arsonist a loan - the link is the property developer ...

We flew to Europe and the UK in July 2001, two months before nine eleven with all the restrictions on air travel. we all trooped into the pilots' flight deck and joined them in the cockpit

Linda arrived in Joburg on an American airline Delta flight a few hours before bin Laden was killed, a few hours before the Americans started issuing travel alert warnings about air travel and other revenge terrorist attacks.

Sat 2011/05/14 03:50 PM

Dear Oliver,

Attached is mark sheet for assignment.

Best wishes,

Mxolisi

Oliver still battles to find his voice in this poem. That he has a lot to say is evidently clear. But for a poem to be successful felt emotions must be centred around a central image. This helps the reader to appreciate the message in the poem. I think there is just too much going on in this poem – and the poem still needs to be filtered down somehow – to identify points of energy that the writer could use or follow in leading or guiding us through the meaning of the poem.

Book Report 1

I have a pile of bookmarks in my house. Some are index cards from the Rhodes library, thrown out after they changed to an electronic database. They are six-by-four inch cards, buff, with half-sized punch holes running down either side and across the top and bottom. They have Dewey numbers, authors and titles typed on them. Other bookmarks are from the public library. These are the proper shape; the length of a paper back's spine and two inches wide. They have adverts on one side and bright yellow, red and purple-coloured pictures, encouraging children to read, on the other. And the rest are ATM slips, empty envelopes with torn openings, soft paper serviettes, or leather markers with the name of a castle embossed on them.

What do I do with all these bookmarks? One thing I do not do is mark books with

Sun 2011/05/22 04:15 PM

Robert Berold [r.berold@gmail.com]

I liked this, it is full of interesting observations, mainly about how books grow on you .

--- the bookmarks part is a bit of its own thing, but I would like to offer it to wordstock if you don't mind.

Meaning less tomorrow

I went to Zanzibar when I was three and rode upon a tortoise. I balanced with my legs apart and my hands in front, on acres of bottle tops stretching all around. The palm trees flapped against the blue sky and a man with a beard and white gown closed a door covered in brass buttons that was big enough for an elephant to walk through. He told me the tortoise, called Sultan, was sixty years old.

On the way back to the ship we went into a shop where everything had a very old smell. A parrot called Pirate sat on a carved ivory tusk and said, ‘Jumbo.’

When we got home from holiday, my dog Toffee, a Scottish and Other Terrier, jumped up to say hello. Later that year my dad took him to the vet where they gave him an injection and he went to sleep. I asked if I could have a parrot. The budgies could not talk.

I saw a tourist video on Zanzibar last week and there was Sultan, sixty years later, still fit and lurching around with a little boy on his back. His geometric patterns were only slightly battered.

About fifty years after Toffee died, my parents re-did the kitchen floor and under the old Marley tiles, in the cement, were his footprints. I wonder if the new Novilon floor with the lifetime guarantee will outlast the pyramids.

Research doctors should stop wasting time on stem cells and start searching for the longevity gene. Ear of elephant, claw of parrot and tail of whale – boiled and stirred in a giant tortoise shell – should provide the basics for eternity gruel. If a macaw can live to 100, then there should be some way of getting a dog to reach 100. And if a dog can live ten times his normal life span, then humans should be able to live to 1000 years.

But who wants to live forever? The giant barrel sponge lives for more than 2000 years and some clams reach 400 or more. What a life. If humans were designed to never die, there would be no need for babies. And if humans lived forever, so would their pets. And what sort of a life would we have without the joy of a newborn child or the excitement of a newly arrived puppy? And would we ever see a rosebud frosted with dew?

Stage fright

“You got the part!”

“Who is this?” I asked.

“It’s Dianne. I got my call sheet yesterday and you are on the cast list. Can you do 6 am?” I didn’t know what the telephone voice was on about but I played along anyway.

“Okay, so I got the part. What do I do now?”

“Come to Church Square at six tomorrow morning.”

“Listen, I really don’t know what you are talking about. This is Conrad Mellroy; is that who you wanted?”

“Yes. You were with the Drama staff and student group. Everyone in that group had at least three years acting and movement training. You’re under staff; you have ten years professional acting experience, or more.”

“I’m on the Drama staff, yes. But I’m a technician!”

“Well I’ve got a contract sitting in front of me says you’re a cowboy.”

I hoped she hadn’t heard the sound of my involuntary intake of breath. “You’ve got a contract on me?”

“Yes, that form you filled in and signed; that is binding. You have to play the part to the best of your ability and uphold the rules and principles as laid down by the guild.”

“But I’m not an actor. What am I supposed to do?”

“Just do what the director says. You’ll be fine.”

“Then what do I wear?”

“America, eighties, dusty, blue jeans.”

“I haven’t got any blue jeans. I haven’t got any jeans at all.” I was hoping that might put her off.

“Just do your best. Come as a cowboy.” She hung up.

I’d been walking through the theatre foyer one morning where students were queuing up to have their photographs taken. One of them suggested I give it a go.

“Give what a go?” I’d asked.

“There’s a casting agent here. They’re looking for extras for a film that’s going to be shot in town. They’ll pay.” I drifted along with the students, had my photograph taken and filled in a form.

Now here was this phone call telling me I was an actor and to get myself onto a film set the following morning.

And the morning was more than just cold. I awoke in the dark and felt the chill creeping under the duvet and up my bones before I realised why. I knew I hadn’t slept well and I knew I’d woken myself for a reason – then I remembered. My breathing was shallow and unregulated but I got up and showered before I could think of an excuse to back out, or carry on sleeping. I scratched around for a wide belt, a checked shirt and my twenty-year-old wrist watch then, realising I had no time for breakfast, took myself off to Church Square.

The street lights were taking on a blue hue by the time I got there. Men in blue jackets were unloading tripods and cables from a van and a group of drama students sat leaning against the statue of an angel.

“Could one of you help me?” I asked.

“Why, what’s the trouble?”

“I don’t know how to act. Tell me, what is the most important thing an actor must do?”

“The most important thing,” said Silver Flash, “is to be yourself. Just carry on as though nobody’s watching you. Don’t let the camera intrude on your thoughts or actions.”

“Be myself,” I said. “I think I can do that. Yes, it’s going to be a good day. Did somebody say they’re going to give us breakfast?”

2011/05/06 6:41 AM

huge chunks of novel sections juxtaposing

Hazel Crampton - sandwich box

the write up to the assignment was more of a trigger than the contents of the box - film industry – pick up and run with it ...

Sun 2011/05/08 02:04 PM

hi oliver

just a few thoughts about the feedback session on friday. I hope it wasn't too much of an assault for you. but I think you know that we were all trying to be positive. I do see clearly now that the missing key to your stories is to look at the plot through the development of character. in other words each character's feelings are changed through the interactions in the story - especially those of the main characters. however difficult it is I am convinced that this is what you need to apply to your plot outlines. you don't have to get into describing the feelings of the characters at all, what counts is their actions, which will make their feelings evident to the reader.

interestingly that short and uncharacteristic poem of yours was a voluntary excursion into the description of a life [in this case, yours] through feelings.

robert

2011/05/09 7:07 AM

Feelings

Character - emotional state

just describe the results of his inner feelings

show his emotional state through his actions

van cliburn

Kate in the passage Chris Sewry at the Rat

Sam - singing and jumping for joy when Linda got home from USA - you know what he's thinking, feeling, experiencing, remembering ... without being able to look into his brain without being able to talk to or listen to him

2011/05/10 0:31 AM

Sam

I've been studying my dog as a step towards interpreting and conveying people's feelings and emotions. His thoughts and intentions are plain for all to see!

I wish my characters were as open with their feelings and changes as my dog...

2011/05/22 6:04 AM

THIS IS IT - this is the quirk that my amateur detective has '

HE COMBINES LATERAL THINKING WITH HIS TECHNICAL TROUBLE-
SHOOTING SKILLS PLUS HIS ABILITY TO STEP INTO HIS RIGHT BRAIN ZONE
INSTANTLY

PLUS A BIT OF SELF-HYPNOSIS LOWER- ORDER BRAIN (EUGENE MARAIS) PLUS
THE INPUT FROM HIS SIDEKICK

TO SOLVE HIS CRIMES and - as peter says about stieg larssen - he gets it wrong quite a
bit of the time

South African Literary Journals

I did not realise, when I started this survey, how many South African writers there were, nor did I have any idea of the number of magazines, journals, anthologies or online publications available in this country. Crystal Warren had put out samples of twenty different literary magazines for us to look through at the NELM offices in Beaufort Street and I took a while sorting through the loose copies and the bound volumes of different journals, trying to find issues that published my type of writing. I was surprised that I knew so many of the authors and poets, including some I'd met on this course.

A striking photograph of a woman on the cover on the First Quarter 2010 edition of *Wordsetc*, which claims to showcase the best of South African literature, caught my eye. Then the caption, *Margie Orford - the queen of crime fiction* drew my attention to its contents. My long project involves a mystery with elements of crime in South Africa so I thought this magazine would be a good one to investigate.

The editorial by Joanne Hichens, *A culture of crime – setting straight in fiction what is disorderly in life* confirmed I was on the right track. She talks about individuals and countries that are able to block out realities such as homeless people or genocide. Then she says, "...but in South Africa we do see. Then we write. We write editorials, opinion pieces, non-fiction and fiction, much of the writing reflecting a multi-cultural developing world in which exists racism, irreverence, fraud, corruption, killing - all part of the 'culture of crime' to which we've largely devoted this issue of *Wordsetc*." Just right for my research.

Then a look at the list of contents made me wish I'd been a crime fiction writer two years ago so I might have had the chance to contribute to this edition of well-written pieces.

One of the five essays concerns Nora Kruger's doctoral thesis on sex and crime and the way prostitution is dealt with in crime novels here. Another, by Sarah Lotz, explores the growing trend towards legal thrillers in this country following a mass of similar overseas written and television material. She concludes that more and more readers want to know what happens to criminals once they've been caught.

There are also personal notes by celebrities such as Justice Malala, features and appraisals, how-to articles by crime writers, and interviews. There are two short stories – where my contribution would hopefully fit - and of course, the profile on Margie Orford, picking up on her life overseas and in Namibia, her absence from South Africa for thirteen years, her experience as a crime reporter, and her character, Dr Clare Hart, who is partly biographical.

Names of people I know or have known kept appearing as I paged through NELMs comprehensive collection of Carapace poetry magazines. Names like: Don MacLennan, Crystal Warren, Harry Owen, Robert Berold, Andrew Martin, Mzi Mahola, Clive Lawrance, Chris Mann, Mariss Stevens, Dan Wylie, Carol Leff and many others. I didn't realise I knew so many poets.

Most of the poems were fairly short, many of them light, some humorous; and there were quite a few short prose submissions which made me think the editors could find a place for one or two of my short stories. The sub-title, *poems graphics and molluscana*, on many issues of the magazines also led me to look further at this magazine. It sounded like something Gus Ferguson might have had a hand in. I enjoyed his book of cartoons, *Waiting for Gateau*, and something about the word *molluscana* had his trademark. And, of course, I discovered his involvement with the editing of Carapace.

I was drawn to the New Contrast magazine partly because of its fiftieth birthday edition in the summer of 2010 and partly by its prose content. I was also interested to see that it is published in association with the Centre for Creative Writing at UCT. As I'm doing a creative writing course at the moment, this journal should have room for the type of work we do for our assignments.

I looked at an excerpt from *My Mother's Lovers* by Christopher Hope, but I found it quite heavy going. It didn't appeal to me; it was not the sort of writing I would like to produce. I looked through a few more editions and found more of the same sort of style: ponderous, historical. Then out popped a short piece by Gus Ferguson and I thought, there is something more here, and I kept reading.

I came across a 2006 edition with an editorial apologising for delays in distribution and encouraging readers to enjoy the “...wide-ranging mix of fiction, non-fiction, poetry and reviews that will be landing in your letterboxes.” Then followed a few poems that I found I could easily understand. I think I’ll try sending one or two of the poems I wrote for Mzi Mahola or Brian Walter for consideration.

Besides these three publications, I found that examples of *Chimurenga*, *New Coin* and *Green Dragon* also appealed to me. In particular, the larger format and graphic layout style of *Chimurenga*, which mimicked a work-in-progress, conveyed an immediacy which was hard to ignore. Crystal Warren has kept up the high standards set by Robert Berold and others in *New Coin* but I was disappointed at the dull, uniform layout of the 2002 to 2007 binding of *Green Dragon*. I’m sure more recent editions will have come alive.

Recently-published novelists

Crystal Warren, in her introductory overview of the South African literary scene and NELM’s holdings of material, mentioned that more funny writing is emerging and that the crime genre has taken off in this country. I like humour and I’m interested in crime.

I asked to see a few examples of South African crime novels so she brought me six to look at. One was by Deon Meyer, one by Margie Orford, another by Mike Nicol and there were three others. I decided to focus on the first two authors.

I looked at the last few pages of Deon Meyer’s book *Blood Safari* which explores, along with other topics, vulture rehabilitation. There was a long list of acknowledgements and thanks referring to sources such as the Moholoholo animal rehabilitation centre, wildlife books and articles, newspapers, the SAPS psychological division, ATKV (for financial support), five websites and fourteen fiction and non-fiction books with information on game parks, birds, snakes and trees. These acknowledgements gave me some insight into the research processes of a successful South African novelist.

Then I looked at Margie Orford’s *Blood Rose* which investigates the murders of homeless teenagers in Walvis Bay. And I thought of the growing numbers of shelter children in

Grahamstown and the increasing urbanisation of our population groups, and it made me aware of a rich source of material for my novel, set in the Eastern Cape.

“What else do you have on these authors that will help me find out more about them,” I asked.

“Wait here,” said Crystal, then she came back with piles of coloured folders - buff, yellow, blue and green, containing clippings of interviews, reviews, articles and biographies, which included letters sent and received by the writers.

I started with a yellow folder on Deon Meyer and found an interview with Neil Sonnekus. It revealed some of Meyer’s uncertainties on how to portray a black protagonist and how he liked to show the realities of crime fighting in South Africa. He struggled with the character of Tobela Mpayipheli, an ex-ANC assassin, in the *Heart of the Hunter*, until he realised he should look at the similarities between himself and his character. Once he saw past the fact that one spoke Xhosa and the other Afrikaans, and he took the view that they were both the same age, gender and both loved their families and country, he began to relax and get on with the writing. When questioned about a white policeman protagonist in the new South Africa, he responded that retired white cops are being recruited as mentors and that there was a drive to recruit young white cops here. He went on to say that, “...’the only way we’re going to normalise literature in this country is if we write about reality’.”

He seemed to contradict himself, though, by views expressed in different clippings in both the Review and Biography folders. He said that there is no relationship between real world crime and crime fiction. Crime fiction is intriguing, sensational and full of riddles whereas real world crime is sad, sordid, filled with domestic, alcohol and drug abuse in tragic socio-economic circumstances.

But after reading a review by Gillian Slovo, an article by Mike Nicol and a biographical post by Paul Pregolato in www.brainwavez.org/book I began to get a feel for the difference between the source material and the written product. There were also a number of postings with photographs and public appearances with Deon Meyer accompanied by top cop, serial killer hunter, Piet Byleveld. Meyer saw Byleveld as the master from whom he could learn. There is a top cop in Grahamstown too, whose memories I would like to pick.

I noticed in one of the Interview clippings that, “Deon skryf wat hy wil lees.” And I got the impression also, that he writes what he lives. There was mention of his wife and children, his home, his day job that he gave up in a jangle of nerves, his wildlife interests, his contacts and his motor bike travels. All these interests come out strongly in his novels. And the various teachers on the MA course have encouraged us to be more aware of our surroundings. I wonder how Meyer came to that awareness.

I nearly twisted my back pushing the pile of coloured folders on Margie Orford into the centre of the long table at NELM, and then I lifted off the top one. It had a review of *Blood Rose* in the Guardian indicating that the protagonist, Dr Clare Hart, worked as an investigative journalist who sometimes gets involved in the crimes she reports on by operating as a profiler for the police. The author also worked as a crime reporter but her desire to bring completion to her newspaper items led to the creation of her protagonist. I find I tend to bring my experiences and skills as a technician into my stories and now I feel I should spend more quiet time dredging up memories of the personalities of hundreds of students and their equipment needs over the years.

In both an interview in the Telegraph, and a review in The Star Tonight, she had a wonderful way of describing Windhoek; the cold, grey, uninspiring fishing town at the edge of a desert. And she shows the town as a character like any of the humans in her novel. Of course, Grahamstown has a charm, and a bite, like any of the quaint, intelligent, young and old inhabitants living and visiting here.

Margie Orford chaired a discussion at a Centre for Creative Arts function in Cape Town with Deon Meyer and Mike Nicol, who believed that any social commentary in their novels was a “by product” of suspenseful, gripping stories written to entertain, not sermonize. She noted that crime was a symptom of a disordered society with crime writers acting as diagnosticians... who were able to present their findings through conflict, restoration and red herrings, with a bit of love interest included on the side.

She also explained, in an article posted at www.internationalcrimeauthors.com that it was the little investigative details, such as pollen on someone’s shoes, that made a crime story real and gave the clues to help solve the crime. In one of the biographical folders she also pointed

out that ordinary people could become novelists if they took the time to train themselves, gain experience and build up a portfolio. “It takes a very long time to become an overnight success,” she said.

And any success I have as a novelist will be enhanced by my visit to NELM and the wide range of research material there.

Recently-published novelists

Crystal Warren, in her introductory overview of the South African literary scene and NELM’s holdings of material, mentioned that more funny writing is emerging and that the crime genre has taken off in this country. I like humour and I’m interested in crime.

Sun 2011/05/22 04:15 PM

Robert Berold [r.berold@gmail.com]

An interesting and very thorough use of your time at NELM.

[conventions on the use of italics. normally one uses italics for journal names and book/film titles. not sure about newspaper titles. articles in journals or poems are usually in quote marks.]

2011/05/27 0:57 AM

Reflective journal = edit to 10 000 words ...

early days plus cycling

A4 exercise books

note books

supervisor meetings

assignments

assignment emails

other

Paul Wessels

Book Report 2 - Sunday 22 May 2011

Oliver Cartwright

Plot and Character

Before coming on this course I'd read a few books on writing and most of the information made sense to me. Build up your vocab and style by reading, tighten up on grammar, write every day to find your voice, organise and focus on the topic, follow a logical progression, write a first draft, cut out unnecessary words and follow the rules for submissions. There was advice on choosing a setting and a lot of discussion about point of view. One book said that beginning writers should write in the first person, so I tried it out and found I was comfortable with it.

But when it came to more abstract terms such as mood, tone, theme and arc of tension, I had nothing concrete to link the concepts to. And when it came to drawing up a plot outline, I would get stuck. I tried mind maps, chapter lists, *what if* questions and beginning-middle-end scenes. But when I looked at the outlines on pieces of paper and started trying to write, they meant nothing to me. There was nothing creative in drawing them up and they didn't inspire me to write. I even tried writing outlines of existing novels but they didn't help with my own work. For my short stories, I found I would just get an idea, make a few notes, and then start writing.

On this course, I tried imposing a plot on a story I'd written about a rubbish truck driver but the story had so many inconsistencies already that the plot didn't work. Then I drew up a plot with a mother and her daughter running a guest lodge, using the graphic representation of

exposition, inciting incident, rising tension, climax and resolution – but that also had events that were unlikely to occur in real life.

Fortunately, I found a possible solution in Stephen King's *On Writing*. He suggested (p 127) that stories and novels were made up of three parts: narration, description and dialogue. Narration moves the story along, description puts a picture into the mind of the reader and dialogue shows that the characters have life. "You may wonder where plot is in all this," he said. And that was where I began to have life. He was about to tell me how to plot my stories. I read on.

He informed me that plot was nowhere; that he did not trust plot. He felt that our own lives did not follow any plot and that (P 128) "...plotting and the spontaneity of real creation aren't compatible." He went on to say that stories, like fossils, are found objects and the job of the writer is to uncover them using the tools of grammar, style and so on. Well this made sense to me. No more boring structures and outlines and putting down a list of disconnected ideas with the hope they would make an exciting story.

Later, (P 135) he outlined a situation where a man escaped from jail after killing one of the guards then hides in his ex-wife's house, waiting for her to come home. He gave a few more details plus the names of the two people then suggested the reader invert the sexes of the antagonist and protagonist and just start writing. I tried it and ended up with quite a workable story. I always used this method until I came on this course when I found out that my writing could do with a bit of tightening up, especially with regard to plot.

I looked at Walter Mosley's book, *This year you write your novel*, and found the sections on story and plot. He shows that a story tells what happens; it is a narrative that has a beginning, a middle and an end and may include some details about people's feelings and insights. "The story's job is to engage the reader..." he says. This is done by grabbing their attention and keeping them interested; by getting them to identify with the characters, by describing fascinating places and by writing in a way that would keep them wanting to know more.

At this point he moves from story to plot. Plot is more than just a chronological narration of what happens. Plot tells just so much, then also hints at things to come and gets the reader to wonder about different scenarios that may play out. And if the story has done its job of

getting the reader to identify with a character, then she will naturally be concerned if the character comes to harm.

“...By holding back essential information, we arouse the reader’s curiosity and keep them reading; this is the function of plot... plot is the structure of revelation...” says Mosley (P 56). He shows that through plot, readers can find out how characters react to a terrible event, how they relate to each other, how their struggles shape their lives and their psyches. The plot determines the timing and method that the writer uses to reveal information about events and characters.

I found this information very interesting, but it still hadn’t laid down instructions to help me plot my own novel. He even went on to say that, “...story and plot [are] the most abstract and complex interconnected components of fiction writing.” Then he tried to differentiate between the two with an analogy. He sees the novel as a woman called Marissa Novella. The unfolding story is the person we see – the way she speaks, laughs, what she looks like, what she wears and how she walks. But the plot is something hidden, deeper – it is her skeleton, the muscles and sinews that make her move, her unconscious motivations. We are aware of these structures but we can’t see them, and without them there would be nothing to push the story, or Novella, along.

With this analogy I have come to an awareness, still partly hidden, of the sorts of things that I should consider when plotting my novel. There is a scene, for instance, where the protagonist sees an aeroplane on fire and among all the confusion he notices a bakkie driving along a dirt road some distance away. The vehicle is barely mentioned at the time but its importance and the impact it has on the investigation is revealed later in the novel.

Next, I looked at John Cawelti’s *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance* to see what he had to say about plotting a novel. The contents page listed the words, “formula” or “formulas”, under many of the chapters so I thought there would be some magic formula that I could apply. He says (P 2) that his book “...is a study of popular story formulas, those narrative and dramatic structures that form such a large part of the cultural diet of the majority of readers, television viewers, and film audiences.” And in chapter 1 he talks about recipes that can be used for plot construction then gives some technical details relating to westerns, detective and spy stories. I read further trying to find something relevant to my own plot construction and found (P 7)

“The concept of a formula as I have defined it is a means of generalizing the characteristics of large groups of individual works from certain combinations of cultural materials and archetypal story patterns...”

This didn't help so I jumped to chapter 6, “The Hard-Boiled Detective Story”, and there I found something useful (P 142). “The hard-boiled formula resembles the main outlines of the classical detective story's pattern of action. It, too, moves from the introduction of the detective and the presentation of the crime, through the investigation, to a solution and apprehension of the criminal.” He indicates that the detective should be subjected to both “...intimidation and temptation” and that suspicion should fall on a number of possible suspects. And another requirement, which I'll include in my own plot, is that the story “usually ends with a confrontation between detective and criminal.”

Besides plot development, I have also learnt on this course that my stories would work better if they were character driven. Previously my portrayal of character would come from dialogue. I'd just get someone to start talking and see what happened. Then another person would reply and so the story would take off but I had never consciously tried to show the development of a character.

Mosley (P40 to 48) gives a long account of events that shape a person's actions and thoughts. Members of his family are killed and he is left half blind with one son to look after. He has to take stock of his life before and after the attack and find ways to adapt and survive. Mosley points out that interpersonal relationships and mistakes made also play a part in shaping peoples' behaviours and attitudes and that conflict is always present in the transformation.

The account he gives seemed a little contrived to me so I looked for a different approach to character development. Robert McKee in his book, *Story*, says (P 376) “The key to True Character is desire. In life, if we feel stifled, the fastest way to get unstuck is to ask, ‘What do I want?’, listen to the honest answer, then find the will to pursue that desire.” He goes on to show that a character comes to life once we can see clearly what he wants, whether conscious or not, when he wants it, and why. The reader comes to know the character through his actions, which are determined by his choices, by the things people say about him, by his own ideas about himself and by his physical appearance. And it's only when we see the choices he makes under pressure that we find out whether our first impressions were valid.

McKee also says that characters should be multi-dimensional, and then after some discussion concludes that, “*Dimension means contradiction*: either within deep character (guilt-ridden ambition) or between characterization and deep character (a charming thief).” He notes that the contradictions should be consistent then gives Hamlet as an example of a person with a complex, contradictory character: “...ruthless and compassionate...lucid and confused...sane and mad.”

Then he says something I find very useful: “In essence, the protagonist creates the rest of the cast. All other characters are in a story first and foremost because of the relationship they strike to the protagonist and the way each helps to delineate the dimensions of the protagonist’s complex nature. Imagine a cast as a kind of solar system with the protagonist as the sun, supporting roles as planets around the sun, bit players as satellites around the planets – all held in orbit by the gravitational pull of the star at the center, each pulling at the tides of the others’ natures.” He shows that the peripheral characters are there to interact with and highlight the main character’s contradictions, “...so that his complexity is both consistent and credible.”

This, I think, is the most important piece of information I’ve gathered so far. Although he is writing for the movie industry and trying to give actors advice on character portrayal, and doesn’t really go into character transformation; he has done me a great favour. On this course I have been struggling with both plot development and character development or transformation. So with this advice, I can get them both off to a good start. If I can first put together a well-rounded, complex, contradictory character, with his desires and motives, conflicts and obstructions all fully fleshed out, then the other characters, the setting, the story and plot, and possibly a theme, should all start falling into place.

And I’ll keep in mind his information (P 375) that, “Characters are not human beings. A character is no more a human being than the Venus de Milo is a real woman.” They are works of art consisting of both characterization (observable traits such as appearance, habits, dialect, non-verbal expressions, gait, home address, hobbies and sporting activities) and true character (trustworthy, heroic, dependable, tolerant – or otherwise.)

And in particular, I will use his statement: “True Character can only be expressed through choice in dilemma. How the person chooses to act under pressure is who he is - the greater

the pressure, the truer and deeper the choice to character.” to create my protagonist and build my plot.

Readings

Cawelti, J. G. 1976, *Adventure, mystery, and romance : formula stories as art and popular culture*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

King, S. 2001, *On writing : a memoir of the craft*, New English Library, London.

McKee, R. 1999, *Story : substance, structure, style and the principles of screenwriting*, Methuen, London.

Mosley, W. 2007, *This year you write your novel*, Little, Brown and Company, New York.

**Second Semester 2011 = reflective Journal = thoughts on writing the novel
– summarized from entries in electronic journal and notebooks**

2011/08/04 8:46 PM

Two supervisor meetings today

Paul =

oc - i cant read, absorb and apply all the books on the course...\

pw - you have one huge advantage over the studious types - you can write - you don't have to learn how to write ...

stop reading how-to books stop dipping into like-minded novels to see how they did it - the swotting is over now, if i don't know it now, that's tough = START WRITING - the exam has started - just put down what you know. he says i have talked through the novel - the basics are all there - just get on and write it

Laurence =

point of view - the prop dev - we don't want to know too much about him - an air of mystery - two people talking - a school friend of his talking - reveals a little bit of wing pulling on the playground

(Paul - months ago - said it was his daughter - so she can have lots to say about him - his inner thoughts and feelings ...)

we dont want to know too much about the prop dev - our focus is on Spike and his doings and motives and tenacious hunt

says i've been writing all my life - not a problem - just carry on with what you do. the triangular flight from pe to joburg to durban and back to pe - how does it fit into the story. if it doesn't belong - leave it out.

what chapter is the triangular flight? OC - something to do with the insurance man?

the three disasters - the fire in chapter one the aeroplane crash at the coast the bringing down of the block of flats - oc - low key but big implications - symbolic bringing down of the prop dev etc too = Laurence says the aeroplane crash comes after the flattening of the flats - it's in retaliation. prop dev realises it was me who did it = but like him/sp ops guy - i left no clues therefore he can't get at me by legal means - so sabotage the aeroplane - his sidekick can get to aeroplanes just like that - as he's proved three times already

so - it was the same bloke who burnt the first one - and the second one - because of the grudge / loan refusal = OR SO WE ARE LED TO THINK - and then he offers his services to the prop dev for money - to clear the airfield tenants so he can build RDP housing for the corrupt councillor = so he burns the one Spike and Kate see - and he sabotages our training flight

now how does this fit with the whole thing having been engineered - seeds sown by the lieutenant-colonel who has done a deal via the SA government with the yank army ?????

THE STORY = Spike is on the trail - everything that happens is to do with him getting to the bottom of the fire ... - that is the thread = he is a no-nonsense type, pretty bright, sense of humour - won't do stupid or irrational things - like jetting off to durban via joburg for no reason

keep the yanks and their secret base on the same fairly small scale as the story - international repercussions NO they just want a presence here nothing more

OC - aircraft carrier in the runway - no need for five kilometre monster base - they want

an airfield associated with their foothold at the army base

PIRATES - MOVING DOWN from Somalia to south africa

OC major exercises once a year - at festival time - so nobody notices - with the tens of thousands of strangers and strange people influx

get down the story - fix the fiddly bits later - by mid september THIS YEAR not going on next year - quite spare clean text story ...

LAST TWO CHAPTERS

SECOND LAST = meeting in lawyer's office - army presence / influence revealed prop dev = puppet but did not know it - s'ike and kate will shut up about the yank army etc and all its dealings with the prop dev - if they let them have their flying club and have it abundantly

LAST CHAPTER - resolution Spike/kate - do they get together = there's a bit of a fight - continued - ongoing = ups and downs all the way through - how what where Sam - walking out one moonlit night sam at the dam ..

"what do you think Sammy? Sam leaps up and licks her then he leaps up and takes spike's arm and puts it on hers

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imposing the story

i am trying to impose the story on the outline - - the story must come to me

feet up, pipe and slippers -- sit back and reflect -- the stories come pouring out ...

generating incidents for parachuting stars = short stories - not enough impetus for an entire novel - see ken follett on students' ideas for a novel = "this is a scene - not a book..."

need an all-encompassing scenario - WWII - personal challenge PLUS will affect outcome of war

trying to FORCE a story out of an imposed outline - needs time to gel // impress me with its merits

outline - doesn't look familiar

dot to dot - joining day 1 scene 1 to day 1 scene 2 ... to day 2 scene 1 to day 2 scene 2 ...
= difficulties

block - just write something - hence episodes - not necessarily related to novel ...

<http://wondering-mind.blogspot.com/2007/06/ken-follett-suspense-masterclass.html>

A good idea for a novel is one that will generate between 50 and 100 dramatic scenes. *Pride and Prejudice* has 61. Some ideas only give you 2 or 3, and are not enough for a novel.

<http://www.ken-follett.com/masterclass/pen.html>

In creating these stories the writer must always be aware of raising the stakes. Think of a German spy in wartime England. He's not just trying to get home with some information, he is trying to get home with information that will change the course of the war. The people who are trying to catch him must know that he's got that information and then for them the stakes are higher. Preferably there should also be some personal thing that makes this the most important thing that has ever happened in their lives. Perhaps one of the people who is trying to catch him failed to catch a spy a year earlier and is terribly ashamed of having failed. So not only does he want to catch this spy but he wants to in order to vindicate his whole life.

it's vitally important that we catch the fire bug soon soon - because i know he wanted to destroy the complete complex of the skydiving school - not just the aeroplane. and once it's destroyed - it'll never start up again and then he's going to destroy the flying school and control tower and all flying activity - then no one's going to base themselves there and no one's going to fly in - they'll all keep well away - and that's the end of the airstrip and all activities to do with flying - so the land developer will take it all and that will be the end of that.

so why can't we just post a guard - that'll stop anyone from torching the place.

this guy will bypass any type of security - he can get past sleeping kiewetjies - he'll get past any guard or electric fence or alarm system - that's why we have to actually catch him.

and for the land developer - it's vitally important that he destroys the flying activities - so it will make it worth his while - the stables and golf club are not enough.

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2011/10/04 1:04 AM

2011/10/07 1:46 AM

Supervisor meeting with Paul

Step into the third dimension person

my foray into the third person lasted exactly one sentence - the first of the first paragraph - then i found myself back in the story

HARD BOILED

how come it was here comes Burl Ives - just a coupla weeks ago = and here his is big and brassy - along with Orson Welles and the Third Man and the big ferris wheel on the banks of the Danube in United Nations Vienna - micro cosimed in Grahamstown - the festival is the ferris wheel and the city hall is the uniting thread - strangely enough !!!

here is the foray -=

Parachuting Flares - in the third Dimension

Thursday, 06 October 2011

He stood with one elbow on the side of the tuck shop watching the last few flames put the finishing touches to the Cessna 206 with its tail still flying high and proud.

“Good job,” he said to Kate who was standing some distance away with her hand on the collar of his dog, Sam. “Pity we didn't get here sooner, we could have saved one of the wheels or maybe the helmet headphones. Oh well some aeroplanes burn and some crash. This one got torched.”

“What are we going to do about it?” she asked. “No one else is here, we should tell someone.” She fiddled with a bit of yellow daisy she'd picked from Sam's collar. A patch of them lay forlorn and withered where they'd been growing on the far side of the Cessna. Its high tail began to sag and the glossy orange stripes peeled back to show the aluminium softening against the struts. The rudder cable twanged as it shot company from its pulley wheel and the frayed ends flew past in front of my singed eyelashes. “Careful standing there,” she said. “I still think this thing's going to blow.” I could tell she thought that. She'd been thinking it a long time now, the way she hovered right back in the Terios the moment we got there. Well out of blow range.

Well it was me really, I'd told her to stay back. I felt a cold heat in my left foot and looked down at it. And there it was but it looked like it belonged to someone else. I looked at

my right foot and that was mine all right - it was covered in a shoe, and a sock. I looked back at my left foot and saw toes wriggling among some yellow and red pulp. It was my flesh coming up all motley and butcher counter looking. They looked like they'd been given the third degree on a grid iron. Pork sausages, cocktail size. Wriggle wriggle, what a tiny little toenail coming out the end ill get a fork to them maybe wrap them in a bandage. Now where's my shoe, where's my sock? I think that policeman's got them/ no it's a fire fighter he's coming towards me. But I think I need a bandage first to bandage my little tootsies before they go to market. This a porky porkers, little g piggies stop stop there u'uy'all...

I caught a glimpse of the back on the side as she walked towards the blackened wreck. She skipped a bit when she saw the trails leading out from the window towards the hosepipe went back to my exhaust. As she turned the wisps of smoke came flickering through the ash blonde. She came running back towards the Terios and said it's still hot in there and I think there's somebody lying down flat there was a somebody lying flat there - can you call the police?

I'll do that. Not just yet I said

Someone's got to stop him from finding out who burnt that aeroplane and that someone's got to be you Perkins you'll go and wait outside his door wait until he comes out with his girl and then don't follow him follow the girl she'll go round and round and round he'll meet up with her = later on you'll never find the way he goes to get to her when he meets up with her you'll be waiting you stop him from finding out who burnt that third aeroplane Perkins off you go.

Character development knockdown p 138 = brother - job as accountant crispin
- go professional

OC – Mark - to go for CPL and ATPL as char developmnt

Kate - improve sort out her relnship with Dad

White scenario left brain blue scenario right brain

Getting to know how people work

Looking inside many characters - so they become real people

He's just the hitman but who's he working for\ he's the small fry we have to find the big fish = we find him - he's the prop dev

But I have this nagging thought that he nowadays too important to be small fry

But no - prop dev = small fry in comparison

!!!! he's being manipulated by the SAS dude

Mark - in character thinks - what am I going to get up to today that will really put a spike into the enemy...

Prop dev = diversion eg area 51 - put as much useless info out there so don't see the real goings on prop dev obfuscation

Aircraft testing site even put up a few flying saucers - so no one will believe any of his other stories = once that one debunked\

SHORTFALL - include it as a lateral think - after the how

WW II sabotage suspected - a flying school in SA aeroplanes crashing - all the same aeromech court martial - luckily ground staff found bee nesting in the carburetor on one still on the ground - before it had a chance to crash ..

Carte blanche mark welman

Serial killer - definition 3 or more murders

Mostrated suffocated

Geography\ victim - gay young

Internet - online dating

Unforced entry

Known to victim

Comfortable in that environment

9cel tel taken

0

Triumphant return to telex telephone auto exchanges

Insurance assessor's course = arson

Most impt module – analysis of balance sheet

Quick 72 – see phil courts course handout

++ burn pattern evaluations

Gate ch 3 calling hi tec was like bolting the stable door - or trying to dodge a bolt of lightning

We should have employed them as we thought of it – something terrible at the braaaai

The why ‘’ arsonist wanted to buy ep skydivers not for sale therefor torched to A put school up for sale

B pushed price down

= wrked last tiem drove deon to hoedspruit serial killer – if he gets away with a certain mo will use it again and modify to adapt refine to condx

The tell It col how I recognized him the way he wiped his feet

Before - getting into bakkie back into fire engine into pavilion on 6 sai open day

My char if it move salute it if it doesn't white wash it

Mark super hero - finding solutions to problems not faults and in doing so he solves today's social ills

Poverty crime corruption unemployment education aids orphans gender issues

Initial blaze seen from commonage compost –spontaneous comb or stree
childrenlight afire t deep warm - either was cops see cause of fire as accidental
Mark kate pvt school

THEME fire renewal purify regenerate destroy plague - fire of London

CHAR DEV THr char change he progresses from dealing with finding faults
with machines to dealing with fixinf HUMANS so he has fo fix the human buy
wayu of a little bit of punishment al bit of the hot soldering iron
Fire – germinates seeds

You look like you need a rest - oyou been flying too close to the sun

I have broken the overwhelm barrier ch 1-5 pretty okay 6 – 12 full steamkd

Kate breakfast king pawpaw

By saving the Cessna mark was able t achieve something re clues ie rather than
preserving soke vital clue he preserves vita info he proves ther were no clues..

Kate - a hard assed pilot but emotional sensitive intuitive woman

Loose ends

Refl jnl - theres so much crap in bits of free write I should have just written the story fro the outline one day novel day + real life day after another - then if it ws crap – at least it would have been in the right order

Paper notebook has been use d to run the novel v useful points to include loose ends

Nothing – all the lectures, tha notebooks the advice the books on writing the hero the grammar the elements char dialog mood narration exposition description - all that stuff - the encouragement - the threats - none of it gets you to actually sit down and actually do the hard graft of the novel

Oyou just gotta sit ansd sit and werite and write and eventually it starts to appear once you build up steam it starts to multiply like an atomic thermonuclear reaction - it fuels itself and all the little clever notes and reminders just come pouring out - you don't know what you wrote or how far you got

THE ONLY WAY TO WRITE A NOVEL IS TO WRITE A NOVEL - all the elements count for nothing in the actual WRITING nothing can prepare oyou for the steam roller that halts you from doing the writing - a little bit of encourage mnet - the right thing can open up the flood gates - well it's done now - look over it in amonth or tow and see how embarrassed you are - or how surprised !!

Cant be taught the actual summative process of writing the novel you can only find out if you've learnt to do it if you DO it

And then all the typos and the editing and oh hell this is crap but oh joy this is great

Quite chuffed and lost my voice - now for all the pretty admin and pdf stuff.

I'm actually quite astounded at producing something hopefully at MA level – for eight years after school I just worked – then someone said I qualify for mature age acceptance – so I got a degree – but saw all these bright studious types getting honours degree - way beyond my mental capabilities - now I've done an MA course and it's quite a strange feeling thinking if I pass I be up with the big boys.

Im glad they asked me to apply – would not have done all this on my own but - the gentle encouragement the heavy deadlines the novel world the novel writer's world the world of novelists - amazing stuff

All those nights sitting from eleven to 3 or 4:30 – producing NOTHING for months on end and just doodling looking things up trying bits of writing a whole lot of crap pages and pages of horsekack = I looked through it when writing eventually got going bits of it dragged into the novel - okay takes longer to drag and paste and then fix than it does to write straight off

The big problem was the TIME - I've only got 2 months but there's so much I want to get so I can make a good impression = I know it's going to take a long time to do it well but the story won't gel I'll never finish I'll never finish – so I can't start - spend more energy panicking than writing

Trying to include greek myths and threads and water and wind and FIRE - YES FIRE I can do that but what about the archetypes and the beginning

middle end and the balance of each paragraph and chapter and when to end - all this stuff churning churning away - and eventually Pauls says - forget all the clever stuff - just write like Dick Francis I like the way people responded in class - the way Namhla had to leave the room she was laughing so much

The way I wrote badly as an exercise - and it was better than the superb version - so that's what I did starting on Sunday 12 Feb and I finished the novel this morning - no sleep but that's good because the whole thing is inside me at the same time - didn't have to go shuffling through pages and pages of material - all the stuff I wanted just popped up when I needed it - chapter after chapter just churning out some longer some shorter some different than I envis.

And only had to go back to a few things to sort out my list of loose ends that had to be resolved still a few hazy ones - but solutions implied eg how does Mark know so much about bushcraft military - he was conscripted and who burnt the first two of planes - soldier thinks an accident - but what does he know - and who opened the sliding gate for Kate and for the army firefighters - just a lingering mystery - but Lt-Col was definitely there - according to the lateral thinking scenarios

Anyway it's been a lasting and wonderful journey - thank you ... ROC

2/29/2012 3:22 PM