

Mick Halpin's feedback on the "Meeting With Mack, Michael's Literary Agent" scene from "A Canadian Werewolf in New York"

Cheers for checking out the set of comments I made for the introductory section of ACWWINY, Mark. I was amazed that Writing Show host Paula B and your good self went thorough it line by line. Man! Remember: these are just random ramblings by some unqualified, overly-critical Internet punk. Write the story that YOU want to write. Feel free to groove off of any suggestion below, and shitcan anything I've misunderstood. Grab what you like. Diss the rest. There's certainly no obligation to argue through it point by point.

Anyway: onto Submission Two. A capable scene that introduces a character, advances the plot, and demonstrates a slice o' New York life. Again, what follows is a list of points to consider, with the "well done"s edited out in interest of brevity.

One element that would be neat to see in this story: Michael is a werewolf. View his New York through wolf eyes. When he first enters the restaurant, here's his perception:

"I felt a huge knot of tension suddenly release in my shoulders and I let the glorious smells of various breakfast foods being cooked in the open-kitchen restaurant wash over me."

Good inclusion of physical feeling and smell. But Michael's senses would be much more attuned, I imagine. A wolf would survey the environment, evaluating prey and danger. Where normal humans would only detect "various breakfast foods," a canine nose would recognize there were six separate meals on the grill, that the sausage meat is thankfully free of the usual decrepit pork and rusk. A wolf's nostrils would flare, and he would gauge that the steak and eggs were for the pair of young execs faintly splashed with CK1. Michael'd smell the chlorine from the hard morning swim of the aspiring boxer in the corner, the man he instantly judged to be the only possible threat in the room. He'd notice, whether he wanted to or not, the odor of blood coming mysteriously from the goth-rocker grad student smoking clove cigarettes and leafing intently through the stack of freebie newspapers in the front window. He'd spot which member of the older married couple near the toilet was the dominant and which the henpecked submissive.

Be careful- including overly much detail in every scene that Michael enters could swiftly grow tedious. But writing a few unusual, superhuman descriptions would give the narrative a style that most books lack. Make your readers see in a new light the world that they believed they knew.

Other actions, observations and opinions that a wolf might view differently: "I'm a little peckish this morning" – Michael is underplaying his hunger, true. But would Duran Duran ever have recorded, "Peckish like the Wolf?" Just doesn't sound right to me. Later Michael is pushed by his publisher, fancies his collection is as good as another author's, and states he is desperate to hang onto Mack. A big bad wolf wouldn't go for none of that.

“While I worked at adding ketchup to my plate.....” Michael likes his breakfast nice and bloody. Good werewolf characteristic. Another element that would be novel, fun and plausible: incorporate wolf behavioral traits in Michael's personality. To rip off Wikipedia and a other sites on the Internet:

“Dogs use certain movements of their bodies and body parts and different vocalizations to send signals to other dogs, animals and humans. There are a number of basic ways a dog can communicate. These are movements of the ears, eyes and "eyebrows", mouth, head, tail, and entire body, as well as barks, growls, whines and whimpers, and howls.” --- rather than use indicative actions like smiles and whatnot. How about a series of distinctive growls, yips and barks of almost Touretts proportions?

“One of the most common communications between dogs, and from dogs to their human companions, is the display of either dominance or submission.” --- This would be brilliant to bounce off Mack's characteristic dominance. Would Michael and he growl, circle for position? Or would Michael roll over? How do grown men in business conversations show aggression and deference?

Also: decide whether or not Michael is an alpha male werewolf- a key factor to know, seeing as there is another sniffing around his Gotham patch. If he is not, and not every dog can be the alpha, make it clear that Michael knows this. His life does not revolve around being the hairiest chest on the block. Plant the question in readers minds: will M. roll over and show his belly, when it comes confrontation time?

Slight tangent: what's Michael's weakness? To keep readers interested, Superman needed his kryptonite. Even Achilles needed his Achilles heel. Make it clear what Michael's weakness is here in the first act of the novel. Maybe he is deathly afraid of cats. Or can't digest chocolate? So far, it looks like Michael's flaw is that he is a good doggie... in a city where, of course, rottweilers prowl.

“When a dog is happy or wants to play, he might pant with lips relaxed, covering the teeth and with what sometimes appears to be a happy expression (it might appear as a smile to some observers) or with the mouth open.” --- panting at such moments would make Michael... *interesting*, especially to other characters.

“The leaning of a dogs head to the right or to the left often indicates curiosity and/or a sound he hasn't heard before.” --- also good detail. Can this be fit in as a replacement for instances of grinning, smiling, looking, etc?

“Howling can be used to locate another pack member, to keep strangers away, or to call the pack for hunting. Sometimes dogs howl in response to high-pitched or loud noises such as alarms, sirens, music, or singing.” --- Gives me ideas, anyway.... &:)

And, of course, there's always digging, shredding and chewing furniture. Destructive behaviour is common in wolfdogs when they grow bored. Now wouldn't THAT be fun to work into the story! Trashing hotel suites is accepted behaviour from hot young rock stars. What about hot young crime novelists in touch with their dark side? Everyone would think Michael

is just the eccentric badboy of the pulp scene, never knowing that his rep and outbursts are just the cover for the real truth. Ah-woooo!!!!

Two word about how dogs instinctively communicate: Sniffing. Butts.

On the posterior subject.... it would also kick ass if Michael took a bite outta a particular kind of crime. Wouldn't scumbags who abuse their animals rank higher of his shitlist than comic book baddies? Throw in a vigilante scene against animal cruelty. Different, plausible, satisfying.

The wikipedia has an article on Wolf body language. Give it a read if you're interested. Michael in this Mack scene smiles, looks, glares....

To move on to a different subject: one of the reasons books are enjoyable is their teaching aspect. Even the weakest historical romance or WWII spy adventure contains a few dry bits of trivia. Readers walk away satisfied that they've gained a little more knowledge about, say, occupied France. (Or, in the example of Marge Simpson's bodice-ripper *The Harpooned Heart*, Nantucket whalers.) Though this may feel overly "educational," Mark, you may wish to include information that readers had not previously known about wolves.

For instance: what kind of a werewolf is Michael? Sure, Eastern Timber Wolves are native to Canada, but North America is the great melting pot. Perhaps Michael was bit by a Caspian Sea Wolf. Or a Tundra Wolf, Egyptian Wolf, or Arabian Wolf. There was a distinct species called the Hokkaido Wolf which is believed to no longer exist... perhaps this breed is not extinct, but changed into a new form where they can be camouflaged in the world of man? Explore depth of detail about wolves and work those facts into your fiction.

Choosing one definite species of wolf and absorbing its traits would make ACWWINY superior to stories featuring generic werewolves. The monsters from most werewolf fiction feel about as authentic as Michael J. Fox's teenwolf. Make Michael leader of that mangy pack! Convey real information about real wolves. Let reader walk away from your book impressed.

Two other quickie areas that you may wish to consider: (1) The long asides that interrupt M's conversation with M. Without, for instance, slowing down for Michael to internally state that he isn't in it for the money, the conversation would flow more smoothly. (2) I just kept seeing Mack as J. Jonah Jamieson.

A few line-by-line specifics:

Mack had a wry smile on his face--- as opposed to a smile, where-?

Smile... smile. ---- Same word in close proximity. Sounds a little clunky.

But I kept telling myself that would make him look more like the comic-book version of J. Jonah Jamieson from the Spider-Man comic books.--- comic book, comic book. Same word

in close proximity. JJJ is probably a well known enough character that the sentence can end right there, especially after the Spider-Man reference earlier on in the novel.

“You decide... this morning?” ... I’m a little peckish this morning.” --- same term.

“Promise me you’ve got something else to wear for tonight’s spot on Letterman.” --- Oh no. Please tell me this novel isn’t just a huge setup for Stupid Pet Tricks. “Well. Dave, I’ve got a wolf that turns into a man when I shoot him.” -- “This I’ve gotta see, Mack... a little suitably spooky music, please...”

My last novel, Print of the Predator had been released about 4 months ago for the past couple of years.... A popular trend with many popular authors---- Stupid Pet Peeve Tricks: hunt through the draft of any manuscript, at polishing time, and axe any “about,” “sort of,” “kind of,” “somewhere around,” “a bit like,” “or so” and all other words or phrases that diminish what would otherwise be a definite statement. “My last novel, POTP, had been released four months ago. For the past two years my publisher had been pushing me.... A popular trend with popular authors.” Perfectly good sentences. Nothing wishy or washy.

While I worked at adding ketchup to my plate, Mack immediately started shaking salt onto his plate,--- plate, plate.

“You’ll be appearing,” he said, “alongside the hot new shock rock dude. Knell. ---- This felt like a big hint so soon after the mention that there is a new, mysterious wolf on the scene. Is Knell the other werewolf? If so: I dunno. A bit too close to Lestatt from *Queen of the Damned*.

with young folks lately.--- How old is Michael? To call teens and twenty-something rock fans “young folks” may be too old of a term. Especially as I imagine a werewolf being into aggressive, pacing, hunting tunes. Like Knell’s.

term “young folks” is used again later....

gotten a taste of the food, I was almost not able to meet the demands of my stomach and bring the food in fast enough.--- food, food. There are five foods within three short paragraphs.

took on a seriousness--- “a gravity” would sound better than “a seriousness”

“One more business item to discuss so I can properly claim this meal as a business expense.” --- business, business. And a man who always gets his way, period, might not bother to make explanations.

That’s it! No more hypercritical hooley.

Best of luck, Mark- to riff off The Muppets, I’m looking forward to the continuing story of a Canuck who’s gone to the dogs.

