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Reclusive Author Luigi Falconi Talks

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Snow drifts against the window, against the trees. It covers the roads and picnic table. I wonder if we'll get off this mountain before spring. Luigi Falconi sits opposite me, relaxed, no worries about a little snow. Or a lot of snow. Even though we've met at an abandoned resort thirty miles from civilization, the reclusive author of *The Duke of Dubai* speaks softly from behind his trademark leather coat, dark glasses, and fedora.

IFW: You don't seem fazed by the snow.

LF: Snow? (stands, looks out window) I guess I didn't notice. (returns to his chair and readjusts his collar to cover his chin and mouth). Looks just like desert sand. But snow melts.

I hold a copy of *The Duke of Dubai*. The gold inlay on the dust jacket gleams.

IFW: *The Duke of Dubai* is a fast-paced action-adventure that keeps us laughing. But that's not the way it was originally written. Tell us about its origins.

LF: It started out as an attempt to inform the reader about the culture of the Gulf Arabs—a history of sorts. After I finished it eight years ago, I wasn't able to find a publisher. When I picked it up a few years later, I realized why: it was boring.

IFW: You certainly corrected that problem. *The Duke of Dubai* is one of those books that keeps us up way past our bedtimes, that makes us want the plane to delay just a bit longer. But how much of it is fiction? Isn't it autobiographical?

LF: It's loosely based upon my experiences as an educator-turned-oilman in the early days of Dubai's history.

IFW: But it's filled with one adventure after another, amusing us, amazing us. Meeting you, I can't imagine you getting involved in the scams and schemes the narrator tends to fall into.

LF: Some of us do foolish things when we're young. These experiences can help guide us to become a better person. Let's just say that I've had a lot of experiences.

IFW: So *The Duke of Dubai* is more truth than fiction.

LF: I didn't say that.

IFW: *The Duke* is a beautifully composed book with color photographs throughout. Don't they confirm the stories?

LF: Which story?

IFW: Any of them. The story of diving and recovering



Luigi Falconi, *Duke of Dubai* author

gold.

LF: I can neither confirm nor deny the truth of that story. We'll just have to let the reader decide.

IFW: Okay. How about the 100-pound napoleon who startled the divers and ended up filleted, fried and served to the French divers—who, during the meal, ask the narrator if he's seen Pierre, their pet napoleon, who resides 200 feet undersurface?

LF: (laughs) I can neither confirm nor deny the truth of that story. We'll just have to let the reader decide.

IFW: The gun-smuggling Bedou?

LF: I can neither confirm nor deny the truth of that story. We'll just have to let the reader decide.

IFW: Your characters leap off the page. Are they based on real people?

LF: Aren't all characters in fiction birthed in part from real people? Dubai was full of eccentric characters in the early oil boom days. My characters are a composite of many different people who passed through in those days.

IFW: Rumor has it that at least one or two are not-so-heavily

(continued on page 8)

Have you ever wondered why some writers can write about anything and sound interesting, and other writers can have the greatest plot and most intriguing characters and still sound like amateurs? Just like human bodies, prose can either be lean and sexy or obese and flabby. If we want to create strong, interesting prose, we need to do two things: first, put our words on a diet; and second, bulk up in all the right places.



LOSE THE FLAB

UNNECESSARY WORDS. This is the easiest place to start looking for fat. Any word that doesn't add to your story detracts from it. If a sentence reads equally well with or without a word (such as "that"), cut the extra word. Examine your prose for words like these: started to, began to, proceeded to, could, would, seemed to, tried to.

Bad: She began to walk to the store.

Good: She walked to the store.

Bad: It appeared that the suitcase was heavy.

Good: It appeared the suitcase was heavy.

Better: Marcus struggled to lift the suitcase.

Bad: Jackie would run to the bus stop each day.

Good: Jackie ran to the bus stop each day.

Bad: Jarod could hear laughter coming from the basement.

Good: Jarod heard laughter coming from the basement.

Better: Laughter erupted from the basement.



PASSIVE SENTENCE CONSTRUCTION. Construct sentences so the subject performs the action instead of having an action performed upon the subject. This means the actor (subject)

is mentioned before the action (verb), not after. Sentences that begin with "there are," "there is," "there was," or "there were" are *always* passive. Get rid of them.

Passive: Sleeping was used by the writer to prevent exhaustion.

Active: The writer slept to prevent exhaustion.

Better: The writer slept.

Passive: A book is read by the student.

Active: The student reads a book.

Passive: There were three people in the grocery line.

Active: Three people waited in the grocery line.



PASSIVE VERBS. Watch for passive verbs, such as was, is, were, are, had, am, and so forth. Replace them with active verbs, the most active and descriptive words you can think of. Your prose will come to life.



PRESENT PARTICIPLES. Verbs ending with "ing" (and requiring a helping verb) are by nature more passive than those ending with "ed."

Bad: She was eating breakfast.

Good: She ate breakfast.



INTENSIFIERS. Very, really, totally, completely, truly and so on. Is "completely" empty any more empty?

Bad: The room was totally quiet.

Good: The room was quiet.



CLICHES. Instead of reusing phrases that you've heard before, find fresh ways of saying things. Common clichés, such as "happy as a pig in a poke" are fairly easy to find. However, be aware that emotions, descriptions, characters, etc. can also be cliché. If it's been said before or used before, it's cliché.



ADVERBS AND ADJECTIVES.

Instead of using an adverb to make a weak verb stronger or an adjective to make a weak noun stronger, omit the adverb or adjective and choose a stronger verb or noun. Also resist the urge to stack adjectives. Select the one (at most two) adjectives that are the most descriptive and omit the rest.

Bad: She quickly and purposefully walked to Blaine and sharply hit his arm.

Good: She strode to Blaine and punched his arm.

Bad: Janet was tired, worn out and exhausted.

Good: Janet was exhausted.

Better: Janet forced her leg to raise, move forward, step back down. Then the other. Her legs felt like they were encased in concrete.



EUPHEMISMS. Instead of using euphemisms for parts of the body, use *real* words. Too much fluff is just like too much dessert—it leaves us heaving.



REDUNDANCY. Not trusting our words to do their job or not trusting our reader to be smart enough to understand our words leads us to repeating ourselves. We change our wording, but still present the same idea in a slightly different way. This redundancy kills our prose. *Say it Once, Say it Right!* Let's face it. We're writers because we love words. We love the way they sound and we love the way they roll off our tongues. We love to string them together and give meaning to our existence through them. Words are our babies. And one of the toughest things we must do as professional writers is to weed through these babies we've created and eliminate those that don't pull their own weight. Yes, we are talking infanticide here. Killing our babies.

Let's take a look at an example:

Shelly sat cross-legged on the oversized sofa. Her life was about to change. She peeked inside the envelope. The letter in the envelope was neatly

folded. She took the letter out of the envelope and opened it. She was afraid of what it would say. She was scared that Larry was giving her the brush-off. Her trembling hands held the paper open. With great trepidation, she read the words that would change her life forever. She would never be the same again.

Okay, redundancy irritates us. Did the writer think we were so bored we had nothing better to do than read the same thought over again? Or did the writer just think we were too stupid to catch on to what was happening? My guess is that the writer was trying to slow the pace and became lazy.

Regardless of the reason, we, as writers, don't want to irritate our readers. Therefore, we need to use care in choosing words that best say what we need to say, and then say those words once. We gotta trust our words to do their job and we gotta trust our reader to do his. So, let's revisit Shelly's letter and see what we can do with it:

Shelly sat cross-legged on the oversized sofa and peeked inside the envelope. She removed the neatly folded letter and opened it. Her hands trembled as she read the words that would change her life forever.

Well—it's better, but we do need to slow the pacing. To do that, we can add one of the following to the paragraph:

- "She wiped her palms on the shirt Larry had given her."

- Something to give the depth of her feelings: "Larry's kiss still lingered on her lips."

- The use of other senses: "The letter smelled of Old Spice. Shelly took a deep whiff and imagined Larry sitting next to her, holding her hand, rubbing her knuckles, bringing her fingers to his lips for a soft kiss."

Redundancy can also come in the form of a pair of words or a phrase. For example, "free gift" or "sum total." Entire websites are devoted to naming and eliminating these little nuisances.

Or redundancy can come in the form

Creating Strong Prose Without the Flab

Writing Technique

of dialogue. Don't tell us what was said and then act it out through dialogue, like this:

Carl told Dolly he didn't want to go. "Dolly, I don't want to go."

Dolly was livid. "Don't you dare back out on me now."

Carl didn't understand why she was upset. "But Dolly, I never—"

Dolly interrupted. "Yes! You did!"

TRUST your dialogue. TRUST your reader to "get it." Doesn't this sound much better?

"Dolly." Carl leaned in the doorway. "I don't want to go."

Dolly's eyes narrowed. "Don't you dare back out on me now."

"But, Dolly, I never—"

"Yes! You did!"

Be aware of repetition in your writing. Crisp prose has no room for it.

Any word that doesn't add to your prose, detracts from it.

NARRATIVE INTRUSION. This is when the writer makes himself known in the story by explaining or voicing an opinion on what is happening. This not only disrupts the flow of the story, but it reminds the reader that this is a story, breaking the spell created by good fiction. One form of narrative intrusion is the "gawking character," in which the action is filtered through a character.

Bad: Connie heard a loud noise.

Good: A loud noise exploded nearby.

Bad: Paul saw the bird land.

Good: The bird landed.

BUILD MUSCLE

Once your prose is lean, it's time to add muscle. This means giving the reader the details that bring the scene to life. When done correctly, we not only add sensory flavor, but we also add the most important component of all: emotion.

ACT IT OUT. The First Rule of Writing is Show, Don't Tell. That sounds easy, but what, exactly, does *show* mean? It means we must act out our scenes using action and dialogue in such a way that our reader can visualize exactly where he is and who he's with—all while keeping him on the edge of his seat.

Let's look at an example:

Carey ate breakfast, then he took a shower and went to the store. At the store he met a girl and they talked for a long time. Carey liked her but she blew him off. Then he went home.

Tells you a lot about Carey, huh? Okay—so this example is exaggerated, but it drives home the necessity of showing and not telling. What can we do to fix it? We need more detail, especially in dialogue and action. Consider:

Carey studied the frozen dinners. He'd had turkey and dressing for the last four days, so Salisbury steak would be good for a change. But did he want the "Big Man" or the regular?

A scent teased his nose. Not the overwhelming smell of fish and frostbite, but a fresh smell, like the smell of skin just out of the shower. He glanced sideways and saw the most perfect arm he'd ever seen in his life. Long, slender, graceful, full of sinewy muscle and smooth skin. His eyes followed the arm to the shoulder and then the head. Her head. A head covered with long blond hair and containing a face that made his heart stop.

"Hi," she said, her voice rich and melodious.

Carey's mouth didn't work. He tried to return her greeting, but only a grunt came out. He tried to smile politely, but his face erupted with a grin as large and toothy and goofy as a cartoon character's . . .

So now you have the idea. We need details. We need to know thoughts, feelings; we need to smell the perfume, taste the wine, feel the cashmere. It is

especially important to act out emotions and emotion-packed scenes. This is the writer's opportunity to shine. Never *tell* us what a character is feeling. *Show* us. Anything less cheats the reader from experiencing our imaginary world.

Bad: John was angry.

Good: John's eyes narrowed. He slammed his fist on the table.

We also get into the "show, don't tell" problem in less apparent ways. For example, in description.

Bad: Mary was a pretty girl, with blue eyes and blond hair.

Good: Mary's blue eyes glistened and her blond hair bounced with each step.

Bad: Molly is a wonderful person.

Good: Molly is always there when anyone needs her. She's the first to arrive with a casserole when someone is sick, the first to send a note of encouragement to those who are troubled, the first to offer a hug to anyone—man, woman or child—at anytime.

Instead of saying *Sam is a talented musician*, let us hear the crowds cheer, let us feel his passion. Take us into his head as he strokes the piano keys:

Consummation of the soul. That's what Sam called the gratification he received from music. When his passion became so intense it begged to be satisfied, pleaded to be released, and he was helpless to resist its urges. When his fingers assumed a life of their own, titillating the ivory keys with the complex music of Bach and Mozart and Beethoven, and he became one with the cadence, breathing with the crescendos, his fingers caressing the melody, until everything else faded, everything else disappeared, and only the music existed.

Dialogue is another area where we have the opportunity to show or to tell. "I love you," she crooned. "I love you, too," he sputtered. And I cringe. First, using creative dialogue tags (crooned, sputtered) is telling, not showing. Let the power of your dialogue and the accompanying action show your readers the tone of voice and the emotion.

Consider:

"I love you," she said, her voice smooth as her fingers massaged his Rolex.

"Love you, too." His glassy eyes roved over her naked body, his mouth too wet and limp to properly form words.

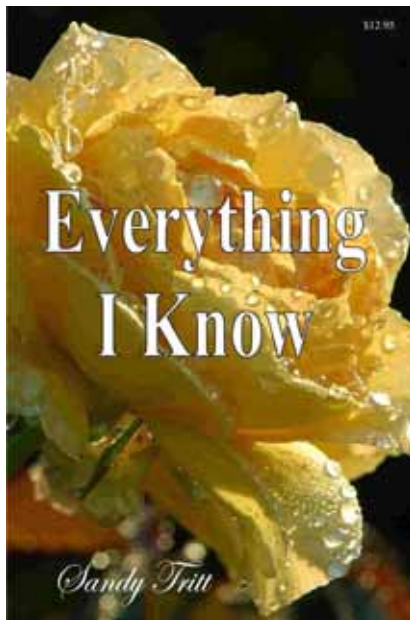
You can't tell us someone is a wonderful person, a talented musician or a spoiled child. We won't believe you. You must show us. Throughout your manuscript, look for any opportunity to show us in real time, to act out, to let us feel.

But—does this mean we should act out absolutely everything? Uh-uh. Let's face it—if we showed everything, our novels would run tens of thousands of pages—and readers would die of exhaustion. So what do we do? We must decide what information the reader needs. Just because we know everything about our characters and just because we spent weeks researching, it isn't necessary to share everything we know with our reader. We must choose only the details we need to authenticate our story and omit everything else.

One of the most difficult and most crucial elements in story-telling is knowing when to give play-by-play action and when to back off and summarize. Play with this. If a scene doesn't hold your interest, maybe it is better to summarize it in a sentence or two and go on to something more important. However, if it is a pivotal scene in the plot or critical to our understanding how our character reacts in a given situation, go for it. Give us action, give us dialogue, and let us experience and savor every single moment of it.

Exercise your prose. Get rid of the fat. Add muscle. You'll be amazed at the difference.

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Versatile author Sandy Tritt announces her latest book, *Everything I Know*. A collection of practical tips, creative solutions and original recipes, *Everything I Know* is a handbook for young women as they step out on their own. A marriage of Robert Fulghum and Martha Stewart, *Everything I Know* is an excellent gift for graduates, newlyweds, and anyone who enjoys a fresh perspective sprinkled with a little humor.

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The Writer's Prayer

Open my mind, Lord. Grant me the talent to write with clarity and style so my words go down rich and smooth like fine wine and leave my reader thirsty for more.

Open my heart, Lord. Grant me the sensitivity to understand my characters—their hopes, their wants, their dreams—and help me to confer that empathy to my reader.

Open my soul, Lord, so I may be a channel to wisdom and creativity from beyond my Self. Stoke my imagination with vivid imagery and vibrant perception.

But most of all, Lord, help me to know the Truth, so my fiction is more honest than actuality and reaches the depths of my reader's soul.

Wrap these gifts with opportunity, perseverance, and the strength to resist those who insist it can't be done. Amen. ~ Sandy Tritt

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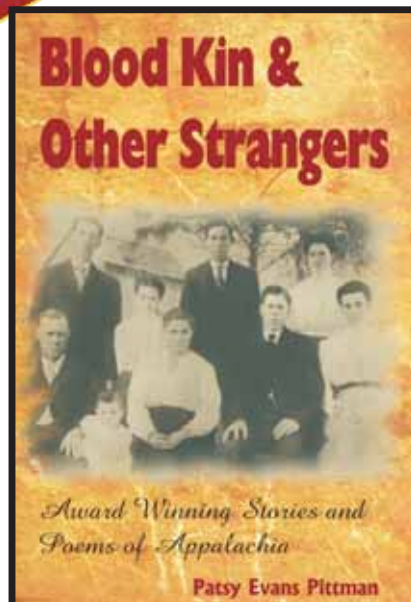
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FICTION FIRST AID

Problem: My scenes don't feel "complete." It's like I just stop writing. What can I do to make my scene endings stronger?

Solution: Two things. One, be sure to end each scene by giving us action, dialogue or internal dialogue focused on the **viewpoint** character. And two, be sure to come full circle. Review the opening of the scene and, if possible, return to something mentioned there, although most likely in a different light.

Problem: How do I craft a flashback?

Solution: If you choose to use a flashback and are writing your story in past tense, you must tip the reader that you are leaving the current story line. This can be done with a transition statement such as "John remembered the day his father died." Then, use past perfect ("had") two or three times to complete the clue that you are entering the past. And you are in the past. Act out your scene with action and dialogue in normal past tense, and when you're finished, clue the reader that you are returning to "real time" by using past perfect ("had") once or twice, and, if necessary, another transition sentence ("But that was then and this is now, and John had to let the past stay in the past").
NOTE: Be sure to keep the flashback strictly in the viewpoint of the character having the flashback. No one can "recall" what someone else was thinking--only what he himself thought.

Visit www.InspirationForWriters.com for additional tips and techniques and additional details and examples of the ones listed here.

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QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"Keep away from people who try to belittle your ambitions. Small people always do that, but the really great make you feel that you, too, can become great."

~ Mark Twain

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Confluence Literary Magazine seeks quality poetry, stories, essays, and translations August 1—November 30. Include mailing address, email, and phone on submission. Mail to: Confluence, P.O. Box 336, Belpre, OH 45714. Electronic submissions: send as email attachment in Microsoft Word (.doc) or Rich Text Format (RTF) to the editor at wilma.acree@suddenlink.net. Complete guidelines at www.marietta.edu/~conflu.

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- * Where appropriate, offer suggestions for plot development, character development or other areas that could be strengthened, and point out inconsistencies in style, facts, or plot.
- * Return a two-to-six page written analysis of your work (for book-length manuscripts only). This will include evaluation of plot, setting, characterization, dialogue, voice, point of view and any other areas particular to your work.
- * If appropriate, recommend reading or resources to strengthen your areas of weakness.

- * Answer any questions you may have via email.
- * Provide a telephone number for a personal follow-up, if you desire. We believe that you have the right to ask questions or discuss the manuscript and its future.
- * Use the Microsoft Word Tracking Feature on electronic submissions to make editing suggestions, and use the Insert Comment Feature to advise or to explain the suggested changes.

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Inspiration for Writers

On January 22, 2008, I became a published writer. Your encouraging, thorough, and responsive edits greatly helped my growth as a writer. I found your advice to be helpful, insightful and inspiring. Your dedication to serve your clients is exceptional. You were ALWAYS available—whether I needed an early morning phone chat or a late night e-mail. Often one is disappointed when a product/service does not live up to expectations. But in your situation, you exceeded my high expectations. ~ Bob Fortune, Illinois

I shopped for an editor much the same as I would shop for a car: I got samples from several editors. Sandy's work stood out. Her enthusiasm caught my attention right away, but it was what she brought to my story that determined my choice. She went a step beyond all of the others. She brought a personal interest to my story, making detailed suggestions that resonated with my vision of the work. She treated my work in a sensitive and thorough manner, ferreting out mistakes that many critique partners had missed. Her service offers value beyond what you will find elsewhere. ~ Sherry Wilson, Ontario, Canada, author, *Recipe for Adventure*

Sandy's critiquing is more than just a professional service. It's like having the expertise of a writing instructor and the personal assistance of a coach all at once. While a writer brings expression to words, Sandy's professional touch adds the flavor of life to that expression. Thank you, Sandy, for your invaluable support and critiquing. ~ Blanca Greenberg, NY, author, *Find Your Spirituality-God Will Lead the Way, The Path That Leads The Way*, and others

After a lot of research in the market, I decided to mail Sandy my novel to proof and critique. What she sent back two weeks later stunned me. Not only had she ferreted out numerous pesky errors that my diligent friends had missed, but she also provided a wealth of insightful commentary. This may be a talent other editors possess, but the positive and sensitive way in which Sandy did this work makes her a stand-out in a very competitive field. I can think of no better name for her business than Inspiration for Writers. ~ Tim Newman, BC, Canada, author, *Yesterday's Falcon*

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By the time we were back onboard, the crew had stowed the gear and removed the portable winch. Using a large crowbar, The Duke pried the lid off the largest of the crates. He removed the top and cut into the waterproof fabric that enclosed numerous cardboard cartons, and then opened one of the cartons. Hundreds of Citizen watches in all shapes and sizes sparkled within.

“Shit,” I said just as the top of another package was opened to reveal even more watches, this time Seikos. “There must be ten thousand watches here.”

“How about a thousand dozen?” The Duke said. “These are the cheap ones. Wait ‘til you see the others.”

The next two crates, about half the size of the largest, contained gold Rolex, Cartier and Patek Phillipe watches.

The Duke inserted a bar between the lock and the clasp, twisted his wrist in a quick, smooth motion and popped the brass ring from the bottom of the lock. “Takes me back to my teenage days in California.” He lifted the top of the chest a sliver, peeked inside, and slapped his right hand against his knee. “Ooo-eee, we found the right boxes.” He stepped back proudly. “Come here, Falcon. What do you think of this?”

Dazzling rays reflected from the boat’s lights bounced from the shiny metal bars—ten-tola gold bars. My heart pumped wildly as I gently took one of the smooth bars, felt the weight, rubbed the cool bright metal on my cheek and even kissed it. As if in a trance, I continued to fondle the gold bar.

Enough foreplay; I wanted to know how much gold there was, and counted the visible gold bricks, eight across, four long, thirty-two per row. Stacking them on the deck as if I were a child playing with building blocks, I reached row thirteen, a portentous number. I tallied a total of four hundred and sixteen ten-tola bars per metal container. Each of the almost five thousand bars of gold weighed three and three-quarter ounces. At the current rate of \$35 per ounce, they were worth over \$600,000 on the local market. Once smuggled to India, they’d be worth more than 2.5 million dollars.

I pulled my camera from my dive bag and took a few shots of the bars before replacing them in their treasure chest.

With a shit-eating grin The Duke looked at us. “Why don’t you guys have a beer and get some rest while the boys and I get underway?”

While the Bertram built up speed, we lay back on the cushioned bench seats and talked about our dive.

Just as I started to doze off, a jolt from the thrust of the engines knocked me backward into the rear of the bench seat. My slumber aborted, I watched Josh and Frankie as they tried to keep their balance. Holding

on to the side of the boat they sidestepped toward the bow until they finally reached the cockpit. As the boat gained speed and the bow bumped madly on the sea, lifting higher and higher, I took my chance and crawled on hands and knees to join them.

“Yaaa-hooo!” The Duke bucked up and down like a rider on a bull in a rodeo. He pushed the throttles forward and we shot onward at breakneck speed.

“What’s the hurry?” Frankie asked. “Got a couple of those Indian beauties waiting at home?”

“Fuck no; we got an I-ranian customs gunboat on our ass. See that little speck of light over there? That’s them. Word just came in over the radio from some nearby fishermen friends.”

“So what?” I said. “We’re just picking up lost cargo, salvage rights, law of the sea and all that.”

Frankie, Josh, and The Duke looked at me like I had just said the dumbest thing they’d ever heard.

“Shit, Falcon,” The Duke said, “for being smart enough to run a school, you sure are thick when it comes to real life. This here ain’t no lost cargo and we ain’t in Dubai waters. One of Bin Jabirs’s Dhows was sneaking it into I-ran. They was gonna be boarded and inspected, so over it went.”

The adrenaline rush didn’t take away the fear. I was scared.

Josh and Frankie laughed.

“You sons of bitches knew all along, didn’t you?” I said, looking at them.

“Fuck, Falc,” Frankie said, “no one had to tell us. Anyone wet under the collar could have figured it out.”

Josh just stood there shaking his head and smiling.

An abrupt “CRACK” sounded, and then another. Fiberglass splinters sprayed our faces.

“Motherfucker, them bastards are shootin’ at us. Let’s get our butts moving,” The Duke yelled. “They ain’t supposed to do that—that ain’t playing by the rules. Hold on, boys.” Our crazy leader pulled a knob on the instrument panel and kicked in the supercharger, sending the boat flying.

Josh laughed like a kid on a trampoline, bouncing up and down as the boat pounded the waves

Frankie moved to the cockpit. “Go for it, Duke. Let’s show those fuckers who not to mess with.”

The Duke yelled over the noise of the engines, “Well, if them mothers want to fight, this will be the ‘Mother of all Battles’.”

Battle? What had I gotten myself into? These two assholes, Josh and Frankie, were just as certifiable as ole Bimbo Timbo over there.

It seemed like hours, but it was only a few minutes later The Duke pulled down on the throttles. Just as

rapidly as we had picked up speed, we dropped to a smooth, brisk pace.

The adrenaline rush didn’t take away the fear. I was scared. “You’re not giving up, are you? If you are, I’m over the side, ‘cause I am not gonna spend my best years in some Persian jail.”

The Duke looked at me with his piercing blue eyes. “Hold on to your dick, Falc. We’re back in Dubai waters. Those customs creeps can’t touch us. We’re home free, baby.” Reducing our speed even more, The Duke set the throttles on autopilot, then walked towards the ice chest on the stern. “Come on, the captain here will buy you a cold one.”

I grabbed the beer from The Duke. “Damn you. I thought I was gonna be the bum boy for some Iranian prison guard. Your buddy Iskar told me he just needed a couple of amateur divers to salvage some worthless equipment for a friend.” Walking away from The Duke, I took a swig of the Heineken and let the cool liquid run down my parched throat. I felt like an imbecile. Brought here under false pretenses and having my naiveté ridiculed was one thing, but being shot at by Iranians was another. I was pissed off.

During the half-hour it took to reach the dock I barraged The Duke with all of the new cuss words I had learned from him.

“Calm down, Falcon,” he said with a smile. “No one was hurt, you had a nice dive and we had a little excitement. What’s the big deal?”

I was wasting my time. As the boat glided into the slip I turned and addressed my mates. “You fuckers are crazy. This is like living in a sci-fi movie. You’re all being cloned into little Dukes. I’m outta here, assholes.” I hit the deck, loaded my gear and took off with Josh’s yellow Suzuki, leaving him and Frankie on the boat still laughing and shooting the shit with The Duke.

Marie and the kids were fast asleep when I crept in at dawn. I climbed into bed, snuggling to the security of Marie’s warm body. Lying there waiting for my heart rate to drop back to normal, I replayed the evening’s events in my mind.

How could I let myself get into a situation like that? Less than a year ago I was Luigi Falconi, mild-mannered school administrator hired to come to Dubai to run an oil company school, and today I’m “the Falcon,” leading a team of divers recovering smuggled goods.

This was one helluva way to spend my Christmas holidays. The adrenalin rush, the gold, the machismo—I had to admit, I loved it. ©2008 Luigi Falconi, All Rights Reserved. Reprinted with permission.

Scene has been edited to meet space restrictions

Author Interview

(continued from front page)

disguised real people.

LF: Luigi Falconi is a real character. And, I swear on the grave of Timothy Leary, I really saw the little Yemeni jinn.

IFW: Yemeni jinn? Who or what is that?

LF: A *jinn* is like a leprechaun. There are good jinns as well as cantankerous ones, but mostly they are just mischievous. They're not harmful in a physical sense. It's believed the mountain people of Yemen can call upon these spirits to protect them and keep outsiders away from their remote villages. The jinns appear as small men wearing traditional Yemeni robes and headscarves. Instead of the traditional Yemen knife, called a *djambia*, they wear a magic belt around their waists. They rub their belts to appear and disappear.

IFW: Okay, so the Yemeni jinns are real, but the people and situations in color photographs are fictional?

LF: I'm a child of the sixties. We imbibed in a lot of spirits and other types of substances that could make one see beyond reality. Maybe I was high when I took the photos.

IFW: That would explain a lot. Certainly. Tell us about Tim Johnson—The "Duke"—the title

Luigi Falconi Talks

character. He's one of the best drawn and most memorable characters in modern fiction.

LF: Like Michael Jackson's face, Tim is a composite of parts. Some are his, some have been created, and some have been borrowed.

IFW: I don't want to give away the plot here, but in the second part of the story, The Duke returns in a quite fanciful way. Surely this is pure fiction.

LF: I can neither confirm nor deny the truth of that story. We'll just have to—

IFW: Let the reader decide. I know, I know. Mr. Falconi, whenever you're seen in public—or even here, in the middle of nowhere—you're wearing a high-collared coat, a hat and dark glasses. From what are you hiding?

LF: I'm not hiding. I'm just a very private person and prefer not to have my photograph published. Besides, I'm not much to look at.

IFW: Since I can't see you, I'll take your word for that. But let's talk about you. Your biography seems a bit on the, uh, *imaginative* side.

LF: (laughs) Like the novel, there is some truth in my biography. I did live in Michigan as a youth and received my MA and BA from Michigan State University; my father was from Tricarico, Italy; and I did become the superintendent of the American school in Dubai and

Author Interview

lived there for 35 years. Our family baptismal records show our lineage includes a priest.

IFW: Will we see any more stories set in Dubai coming from Luigi?

LF: I certainly hope so. I'm working on some now, and I have been approached by old Dubai friends and acquaintances who have better stories than mine. I'd also like to get more stories from the older Dubai Nationals. They are natural storytellers and have some great tales of the past.

IFW: Speaking of the Nationals, how was *The Duke of Dubai* received in Dubai?

LF: At this point I can't say, as it's still in the Ministry being scrutinized by the censors and has not been sold there. In Dubai, anything is possible.

IFW: Even blizzards?

LF: Hah! Snow melts. You should see a sandstorm. Snow covers the windows. Our vehicles—the only two cars in the parking lot—now look like sand dunes. Before I can protest, Mr. Falconi is outside with a broom, brushing snow from my van. Has our interview been worth a two-hour skid back down the treacherous mountain road? Absolutely. You can't spend time with Luigi Falconi and not be impressed with the man's intelligence, integrity, and, uh, intrigue. But next time, I'll rent a four-wheel drive.

New Release!

Carved from the sun-baked sands of Arabia, Dubai has evolved from an oil boomtown into one of today's most exciting and opulent metropolises. In this world of wealth and power, mystery and intrigue, Luigi Falconi is transformed from a naïve youth to Lou Falconi—The Falcon. Adopted into the brotherhood of eccentric expatriates, amusing Arabs and assorted adventurers led by The Duke, Lou is swept up in the excitement of Dubai's burgeoning development, discovers its morally conflicting cultural codes and uncovers many of its secrets.

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