

The Art of the Unexpected

Writing is hard work, and the more you write the harder it gets. Yes, you read that right. The more you write, the more you realize how much you have to juggle. After writing going on fifteen books I've learned the value of giving readers what they don't expect. It's so easy to slip into the cliché by accident, the predictable turn of events as the story progresses and the typical character actions or motives. How can you avoid the same old same old? Here are some tips and exercises:

- ✦ Make a character do something that is totally different from what the reader might expect. What if the murder victim's wife laughs hysterically when told he's dead? What if the hero is close to having the one thing he says he wants then turns away? What if the scene leads up to a hostage situation, but the person held hostage is the person the reader thinks is weaker than the villain?
- ✦ Create a plot twist that is logical, but totally unexpected. What if the serial killer is killing serial killers for a reason other than to save their victims? What if the murderer is innocent of the murder he's accused of, but killed someone else? What if the district attorney wants the truth to come out and the defense attorney doesn't?
- ✦ Create a setting that contrasts with the events. Set your story in a sunny, lovely town full of nice people- with nasty secrets, but those secrets are for a very good reason. What about a dark and gloomy place that seems full of shady people, but who are actually heroes? What if a fun treasure hunt weekend is a cover for something sinister?

Just remember, you should not rely on coincidences. Well you can, but you'll seriously annoy readers. Any unexpected turn of events should make perfect sense because you've laid the groundwork properly. Know exactly why the unexpected happens and make it believable. That means you need to know why the victim's wife is laughing, and eventually reveal it to the reader. The seemingly "weak" hostage taker who turns the tables should have the means and abilities to do so, and you should give clues along the way. See what I mean? Hard work. You have to give some thought to plot turns, character motivation and more to master the art of the unexpected.