

QUIZ: Want to Save the World Through Typing?

By Holly Lisle

So you're a writer, and you want to use your writing as your vehicle to save the world.

Can I talk you out of that?

I know all sorts of writers. I know **Earnest Craftsmen**, who are forever looking for a better way to tell their stories; **Obsessed Lunatics**, who put writing right after breathing and considerably ahead of eating or going to the bathroom; **Tortured Idealists**, who have survived something tough, and who are determined to get their experiences on paper so someone out there might read what they've written and escape the same fate; and **Exuberant Talesmiths**, who are forever bounding into view shouting, "You won't BELIEVE the idea I just had!"

Then there are the other sorts. The **Scam-Artist Writers**, who write things they have no respect for while publishing this self-described dreck regularly, who sit around muttering, "I can't believe those suckers paid money for that". The **Pain-In-The-Ass Artistes**, who throw tantrums when editors suggest that their words might be less than perfect. And the worst of the lot, the **Writing Superheroes**, whose self-declared goal is to change the world through typing.

And you may be saying, "Wait a minute. I was with you right up until that last one – but what's wrong with wanting to change the world with my writing?"

Let's look at the big picture first: the Whole World picture.

The last guy who really changed the world – the whole world – with his writing was Karl Marx, who had the unfortunate idea, based not on real-life experience but on theory, that we would all be better off if people were forced to share. Along came some folks who read his work, agreed with him, and thought they would like give his theory a test run – from the position of Person Forcing Others To Share, mind you, not from the position of Person Being Forced To Share. They carried Karl's half-baked theory into the real world.

Horror ensued: mass slaughter, war, totalitarianism, annihilation of human rights, and the impoverishment of whole nations. There are folks who will read this and scream, "But the people who tried out his theories misinterpreted his words." Maybe. That does not change the fact that he had a fundamentally bad idea, he decided to gift all of us by writing it down – and that no matter which way you interpret the theories of Karl Marx, bad things are going to happen.

More big picture. Let's look at the authors of the four Gospels of Jesus Christ, and Paul of Tarsus and his preachy letters; Mohammed and the Koran; Joseph Smith and his mysterious vanishing stack of gold tablets; L. Ron Hubbard and **Dianetics**.

The first two are genuine big-picture, the second two are big-picture wannabes. Nonetheless, these writers have changed the world. The Gospels and the Koran between them have been responsible for everything from hot-lead enemas and daughter-drownings and witch roasts and ripping people apart with horses, to war, to torture, to genocide, to infanticide, to the stripping of basic human rights from whole genders and classes and races of people.

And people acting on these writings continue to screw up the world today. People are still being tortured and slaughtered and imprisoned and executed and oppressed, based on the dictates of these written works and the interpretations of nutcases who believe them and want to force others to believe them (willingness to use force being the way you define “nutcase” in this instance).

To a lesser extent, the L. Ron Hubbard and Joseph Smith works are guilty of crimes just as vile, and they would both be much worse if they were bigger.

If you’re inclined to say, “Yes, but so much good has come of these works,” I simply counter, “Is there any way we can have the Pieta and Chartres and the **Ode to Joy** and people loving their neighbors, and just skip the iron maidens and the rack and the slaughter of Jews, slavery, the Crusades, 1400 years of perpetual jihad, and other oppressive, evil goodies?”

Because the bad is out there, and it is terrible almost beyond imagining. And the bad is as much a direct result of readers acting on the words of writers as the good. You don’t get to claim one and pretend the other didn’t happen.

About the best thing you can say about Genghis Khan is that he **didn’t** write a book.

Still want to save the world through typing?

Let’s do a **Superhero Writer Sniff Test**, then, and see if you’re qualified.

Start by giving yourself ten points, and honestly answer the questions below.

- 1. – Have you ever successfully saved civilization before?**

- If NO, subtract one point and move to question two.
- If YES, answer questions 1A-1E.

1A. – Have wars or human rights violations occurred as either primary or secondary fallout from your intervention?

- If YES, subtract ten points and go away. Sucking at your job the first time around does not qualify you to receive a second opportunity to screw up people's lives.
- If NO, keep going.

1B. Has anyone ever killed anyone else in your name?

- If YES, answer subquestion IB-i.
- If NO, skip to question 1C.

IB-i. Do you think having someone killed in your name or based on your precepts was an appropriate action?

- If YES, subtract ten points and go away. We're up to our asses in zealots already.
- If NO, (in other words, if your words were misinterpreted), subtract eight points. If you can't write words that can't be misinterpreted, how exactly are you qualified to save civilization? Go to question 1C.

1C. Does your current plan for saving the world involve IN ANY WAY using force to change the minds of those who disagree with you, or require a majority of the world's population to follow your plan for it to succeed?

- If YES, subtract ten points (or all remaining points) and go away. We have no job openings for the creators of dictators.
- If NO, go to question 1D.

1D. Does your plan for saving the world discriminate based on race, creed, gender, sexual orientation, philosophy, handicap status, or in any other way?

- If YES, subtract ten points, (or all remaining points). Only equal-opportunity saviors need apply.
- If NO, go to question 1E.

1E. What is your plan?

Type it out in appropriate manuscript format.

If you have less than five points, burn the manuscript and hit your head against a wall until you forget what you wrote. It's a bad idea.

If you have five or more points, but less than ten points, put the manuscript in a drawer and forget about it. Maybe someday someone will come along and find your manuscript and do something worthwhile with it that won't result in disaster.

If you still have all ten points, go ahead and submit your manuscript to publishers until one of them agrees to take it on, and then wait. Once it's on the shelves, maybe we'll decide to shell out the bucks to buy it, and if we like it, and if we decide we like it enough to actually change our lives based on what you've written, maybe we'll get back to you in fifty or a hundred years.

2. If your plan to save the world through typing is not based upon successful world-saving experience, upon what is it based?

A. My written works have single-handedly saved an entire race or nation from disaster.

Subtract one point for not having saved the whole world, and go answer questions 1A-1E.

B. My written works were responsible for the elimination of the national debt, poverty, or world hunger.

Subtract five points for having dealt with only one very

limited issue, and go answer questions 1A-1E.

C. I am or have been leader of a first-world nation.

Subtract ten points and go away. You didn't save the world through action, sucker – there's no WAY your writing is going to do the trick.

D. I have no relevant job experience. All I have is a wild-ass theory that I think would work and that I would like my readers to force down the throats of unsuspecting world populations.

Can you ... uh ... pass this theory on to the FBI, the CIA, and maybe Interpol, and title it My Plan to Save Civilization, and then ... um ... go stand in a dark alley in a crime-ridden neighborhood and try out your theory on the folks there? No?

Then subtract ten points for sheer idiocy, and ten more points for callous disregard for your fellow humans and their rights, and take a sledgehammer to your computer before you hurt someone.

E. I have decided that I really don't want to save the world through typing.

THANK YOU! Oh, thank you. Thank you, thank you, thank you. Subtract ten points – you didn't want them anyway. Then go write something wonderful that we can read and enjoy.

Writing to change the world, alter civilization, or save humanity are bad, bad goals. However, writing to pass on your own experiences is life-affirming, and can let you make the world a better place for those few of your readers who WANT to have their lives changed. When you're writing from experience, you will manage to reach people who needed to read what you wrote, who were looking for answers, and who found them in your words. You will be a candle making your corner of the world brighter. And you won't have to get up every day, put on

your superhero tights, and trudge off to carry the future of civilization on your shoulders. Nor will you turn into a pompous ass while carrying it.

And thank you for that, too.

NOTE: If this article resonates with you, and you want to meet other writers who share your passion and who are working in a friendly, supportive environment, come hang out with us and make progress on your writing in my free writing community.

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