



Carindale Writers' Group Meeting
8th October 2009

Start 9:30

Welcome to: We said hello to two guests this morning. Frances and I have had an email relationship going back for quite some time and finally she had the morning free. Nice to meet you, Frances, and we hope you will come along whenever your working schedule permits. We also met Sandy for the first time. Sandy came as guest invited by Dawn. Hope you enjoyed the morning Sandy, and that we will see you at the next meeting.

Present: Naomi, Frances, Dawn, Sandy E, Judith, Debby, Mike, Leslee Anne, Marilyn, Dorothy, Sandy S, Annette, Chip, Jeff, Wendy, Brian, Beverley A, Shirley, Len

Apologies: You know who you were; I've lost track. But I do remember that Nick is in the U.S. and Debby is going to Ireland and neither will be with us for a little while. For *anyone* lucky enough to have a holiday: Enjoy your trips, wherever you go, and come back safely.

Should also mention, while we're talking about apologies, Brian attended the meeting, in spite of feeling decidedly off colour, just so he could get 'marked off the roll'. How's that for dedication? We hope you are feeling better now, Brian.

News/ challenges/ discussions/correspondence:

- Most important issue first: We've decided to forgo Christmas break up lunch at a restaurant in favour of staying in this year. We'll have all the usual games and quizzes, but instead of racing out at 12 o'clock stuffed with finger food to, eat even more food, we'll bring a plate with food to share that's suitable for lunch. Not permitted to drink alcohol in the library without a permit though so it will have to be a 'dry' party. The date for the final meeting is December 10th. No date yet for first meeting next year as still waiting on Library booking to be approved.
- Approval was given to respond in the affirmative to a request from the Ormiston College Senior English Teacher for a 'letter in principle' in support for the establishment of a writers group in the school. (*This was done and we have had a 'thank you' email back.*)

- We made a decision that the joining fee will be charged on a pro-rata base for anyone joining the group this late in the year. Fees for existing members are due at the first meeting of each year. The money is used to pay for our subscriptions and web-hosting.
- Dorothy is having her house warming on Thursday 14th October and everyone is welcome to attend. Bring a 'plate' and a chair. Please email Dorothy for more details.
- Chip spoke again about the dangers of the internet and how 'hacking' has infiltrated sites previously thought to be secure, such as Hotmail. Chip especially warned of the dangers in giving too much personal information on social networks like 'Facebook'. The scary part is, whatever goes on these sites is in the public domain *and stays there* – maybe to your detriment.
- On a cheerier note, Leslee Anne shared some of the insights she gleaned from a seminar she attended at BWF and hosted by the popular children's author, Colin Thompson. Mr Thompson has written prolifically, having had fifty-six books published in fifteen years, so it would seem anything he could share with new writers would have to be taken on board. Leslee Anne said he doesn't have an agent and he believes titles are very important to sell the book. He suggested, as there isn't any copyright on titles, taking a title from a popular television series, such as "Friends" works well. Also said (and we all agree), that humour adds impact to stories written for young readers (and even the not so young, wouldn't you say?)

Feature Readers:

Dorothy took to the podium before morning tea to read another chapter from "The Byrd's Nest". This one had the amazing title 'Blooming Aunts', which we found might be interpreted more than the literal meaning. As always, Dorothy's reading was entertaining and captured the era and characters brilliantly, with only minor syntax correction needing attention.

Following morning tea, **Leslee Anne** read from the story she's busily pulling into order for the Great Aussie Jigsaw collection. Obviously taking her cue from her seminar with Colin Thompson, Leslee Anne has used the popular title of a war time song "Pack up your Troubles" to set the scene for her story, which moves from war-torn London to post war Australia. Leslee Anne has captured the stoicism of the British spirit to appear strong in the direst of circumstances and the whole story is coming together very nicely indeed. The feedback for Leslee Anne mostly was about the need to use an active voice, to use shorter sentences to highlight danger, and to perhaps show the mind-state of her characters more extensively.

Morning Tea: Mmmmm, loved the curry puffs and little cheese and spinach quiches made in the home kitchen of Naomi. I was told the spinach was grown in her garden as well. How clever is that! The carrot cake bought by Dawn at a local cake-shop was equally tasty and went down a treat too. Thank you, Naomi and Dawn.

New Writer's Reading:

Sandy E shared one of the short personal 'slice of life' pieces from the collection she's been writing for some years now. This one was about sky diving. We all enjoyed the reading and look forward to hearing more from this collection. The feedback for Sandy was to watch out for changes in tense and keep the sentences shorter and sharper when she wants to show tension.

Exercise to work on if you have time:

Well, as only two of you came with last meeting's exercise, then it stays the same (see our website for last meeting report if you've deleted it from your computer) or you may choose to complete this story.

It begins: *Last night, it seemed like a good idea...*

Sandy S. did a fantastic job of writing to meet the criteria of the set exercise. Her story was entitled "Vaccine" and left a mystery about who was the good character and who was the bad one. I'm still thinking about it. Was the nurse doing the right thing for the soldier? Or was she as bad as the soldier suspected?

Chip wrote two stories. One was very much in tune with his earlier talk on the dangers of internet hacking and phishing. Both stories had the chill factor!

(You will be able to read these exercise stories on our website)

Feature Reader for next meeting 22nd October: Leslee Anne is going to continue to read "Pack up Your Troubles". I believe Judith has a story to share. And of course there will be all those 'exercise' stories to read, as well as the chapters you'll tell me you've brought along especially for the expert feedback.

Chip's Computer Tips

Extracted from 'Windows Secrets'

Sponsored search results lead to malware

The ads served by Bing and Google along with your search results are linking more and more often to sites trying to infect your machine.

Neither Bing nor Google effectively prescreens these bogus advertisers, so it's up to us to detect and avoid them.

You may recently have used either Google or Microsoft's new Bing search engine to find the popular Malwarebytes Anti-Malware utility. If so, chances are good that the sponsored ads alongside your search results contained links to the very malware that the security tool is designed to remove.

The three largest search sites — Google, Yahoo, and Bing — regularly sell security-related keywords to criminals looking to trick you into downloading and installing fake anti-malware products. The crooks then steal your personal information or hold your system for ransom before letting you remove their malware from your machine.

The search providers have been aware of this for years. To their discredit, they've done little to end the practice, even though it's in their power to do so. The reason? They're making money hand over fist from those sponsored text ads and don't want to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs.

Case in point: A Windows Secrets reader searched Bing for Malwarebytes Anti-Malware. He clicked the first link displayed and ended up on a site that installed a rogue antivirus program on his PC. (See Figure 1.)



Figure 1. Malicious sponsored ads are interspersed with links to legitimate companies when you query search engines for the Malwarebytes security program.

Rather than getting a tool to clean up a friend's infected computer, this Web surfer ended up having to disinfect his own. He and several other people I've heard from recently were hit with the result of search services' selling sponsored links without validating those links' legitimacy.

As search terms become popular, scammers jump at the chance to have their bogus ads appear among the results. To get their deceptive ads into these highly visible search results, these criminals simply buy these high-traffic terms from the search engines.

Big-name sites still serving up malicious ads

Another form of dangerous Web ads appears on otherwise legitimate sites.

WS contributing editor Scott Dunn described a year and a half ago in an [April 17, 2008, Top Story](#) infectious Flash ads that achieved space on well-known sites. I also reported on drive-by malware downloads in the [June 11, 2009, Top Story](#). In the most-recent case, NYTimes.com and other established sites hosted malware-infested ads. The New York Times described the attack in a [Sept. 14 article](#).

When malicious ads — or "malvertisements" — enter the rotation on these sites, your system may become infected if you merely view the page. This is especially true if your versions of media players based on Java, Flash, or QuickTime are out-of-date.

It's getting so bad that even top officials at Google acknowledge the problem, though they haven't yet taken steps to halt it. Eric Davis, head of anti-malvertising at Google, stated at the 2009 Virus Bulletin Conference that the industry needs to work together to combat this problem.

As [reported](#) by Dennis Fisher on Kaspersky Lab's Threat Post site, Davis called for the creation of an industry clearinghouse that would certify ad servers. Such an organization would allow all search vendors and other sites to use online-ad agencies without fear that a malicious ad would insert itself into rotation.

Microsoft has decided to use the courts as a weapon against malicious advertisers. A Sept. 18 Associated Press [article](#) posted on the MSNBC site states that the company is attempting to go after several suspicious ad vendors.

Even using Yahoo or a smaller search index won't prevent such attacks, because second-tier engines have been hit with malicious ads, too, as a Sept. 25 [story](#) by Deborah Hale on Incidents.org reported.

Ways to fight back against online attack ads

Following my investigation of the malicious ads on Bing, I contacted the Microsoft Security Response Center, which can be reached via **secure at microsoft.com**. Within a few days, the offensive ads were removed.

However, searching on the term **malwarebytes** combined with such words as **virus** and **antivirus** continued to return dubious destinations in Bing's sponsored-links section.

The same type of ads appears among Google results when you search on similar terms. Depending on the location you search from, you may see a link to Cyberdefender.com among the results. This company is listed on the [hpHosts](#) site as selling fraudulent software.

I reported this site to Google via a Web form on the Google site. But to date, no action has been taken to remove this and related malicious links.

Unfortunately, balancing the scales of justice takes time. What can you do in the meantime to help protect yourself from these malicious ads?

- **Don't expect flawless protection from your Web browser of choice.** Internet Explorer, Firefox, and other browsers now support bad-sites lists, but every malicious ad server may not be known. Nor are browser security add-ons perfect. McAfee SiteAdvisor, for instance, may include results that are up to one year old, as WS contributing editor Mark Edwards reported on [Feb. 12, 2009](#).
- **If you're not sure, verify the URL.** Microsoft and Google have large payrolls, but the search giants don't employ literal armies to review ad submissions. If you're at all suspicious of an ad's legitimacy, check the URL via a service such as [hpHosts](#), which tracks domain names that researchers have reported as malicious.
- **Help vendors by reporting malicious advertisers.** To report bogus ads on Google, e-mail **security at google.com**. This is likely to be more effective than reporting the site via the search giant's online form. If you discover malware purveyors advertising in Bing's results, e-mail **secure at microsoft.com**. Yahoo, however, offers only a [Security Phishing Report Form](#).

I do hope that Google, Microsoft, and Yahoo can put their differences aside and correct this situation. In the meantime, be careful when you search and be suspicious of sponsored links. Too many of them are fictitious these days — and dangerous.

Happy Writing Everyone!