

Skive writing

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it's that fraction of a second of not knowing what will come next," Matt Ward says. "That's what makes writing more satisfying than almost anything I do in life.

"I don't write nearly enough, but when I do, I realise how wonderful it is."

Matt would rather be writing but he also publishes the short story magazine *Skive*. He says he's not as enthusiastic about the magazine as he was back in 2003 when he launched it.

"I have tried to give it away several times, but the sucker keeps draggin' me back in," he says.

"Skive kept me from writing. I did an issue every bloody month by myself. I must have been insane. After working

into the small hours on *Skive* I didn't have the passion to write my own stuff.

"Last year I gave it away—there was no issue in February and after a week I got back into writing again, which was wonderful.

"Then a month later, because of many requests from writers and readers, I started it again, but this time as a quarterly—much less pressure."

Two years ago Matt nearly sold the magazine. "I had someone who was prepared to buy it for \$10,000, but, after agreeing, his wife told him not to, and he backed out of the deal."

Then on April Fool's Day one time Matt announced he had sold *Skive* for \$100,000 to a large publishing



consortium. "I was flooded with emails saying: 'Well done! But we'll miss you'. I felt terrible after that and, of course, emailed everyone to tell them it was just a gag."

Skive is British slang for getting out of doing work, and Matt chose it for the magazine because he thought it reflected the laid-back Australian way of life. "The name *Skive* also looks good on paper, from a designer's point of view," he says.

Matt works on the magazine when he's not running his graphic design business based in the Australian east coast city of Newcastle.

His office is a small room with a Macintosh computer hooked up to three

monitors and some printers, a TV in the corner, and a few of his own paintings on the wall. "I had nowhere to lean them, so I hung them up!" he says.

The plus side of running *Skive* is that Matt gets to keep in touch with fellow writers. "I've made some good friends out of it. And I've made some decent contacts in the publishing world, should I again want to get a novel written and published." Matt says he dreams of writing the great Australian novel and failing that, the great American one.

Does his graphic design work and magazine editing influence the way he approaches writing? Matt says that with design he believes in minimalism and balance, plus symmetry.

"The same thing can be said of my approach to writing, with few if any loose ends, and characters that might be different but match a storyline. That's just an answer I thought you'd like...

"I'll start again...

"With design I sketch with a pen or pencil on paper. With writing I do the same. With design I take that sketch to the computer and keep fiddling until I have something. With writing I write the story idea down with a pen, then type it up on a computer and fiddle with it until I have something.

"I actually use numbered counters and dice to determine storylines and characters, much like a role player might (even though I have never played a role playing game). It's something I am trying to perfect. I can do it with short stories. The novel is next!

"My writing has changed in the last 10 years. Initially I wrote filmicly, and I was studying film in the mid-'90s so that's probably why I did that. I would take 3 or 4 or 5 ideas then write from scratch. Certainly the visual was more important than storyline.

"This changed a couple of years ago when I started planning stories meticulously, and then 'walk backwards, brushing the footprints away'. But the stories are still visual, and maybe I do borrow from the design side of my life. Someone called me a mathematical writer, which I thought amusing seeing it took me until Year 11 to start passing maths."



Matthew Ward lives and writes in the Australian east coast city of Newcastle, where, he says, everyone looks happy, especially when they're squinting into the sun. In 2004, his story, *Jake With A Snarly Smile On His Chops*—a tale that questioned the existence of God and championed the ampersand—was published as a novella by *Independence Jones*. In late 2006 *World Audience* published his short story anthology, *Her Mouth Looked Like a Cat's Bum*. His short stories have appeared in several magazines, printed as well as online. He created *Skive Magazine*, now in its frenetic fifth year.