

By Andrew Atkinson

IF THERE is one thing guaranteed to raise my blood pressure, it is the extortionate cost of purchasing software. Another niggle is that, having bought a nice glossy box from your friendly computer shop, when you get home and open it up, all that falls out is a CD.

Nine times out of ten the software fails to live up to its advertising. So, is there an answer? Well, yes, there is!

I have been earning my living by writing for about the past twenty years. Most of the stuff that I churn out tends to be technical, books and reports of a highly specialized nature.

Occasionally I produce travel articles and magazine features. About six months ago, I thought that I would have a stab at writing a crime novel, little knowing what I was letting myself in for. It was trauma time.

Hitherto, I knew exactly what to write and how to write it. I knew exactly how the work was supposed to be laid out and in what order. Suddenly I found myself in the murky waters known as *creative writing*. There was only one thing for it, get some assistance – preferably technical.

My first stop a local computer warehouse. Hundreds of titles to choose from, but nothing even vaguely useful. Then came searches on Amazon and eBay. A lot better choice, but what a load of rubbish. So, back to the Internet for another search. This time I struck gold. It came in the shape of *Wizards for Word*. This is a mature product with more functionality than I could ever need. It was reasonably priced, backed up with a good guarantee, lots of help and so easy to purchase. I took the plunge, got out my credit card and within a couple of minutes had downloaded the latest version.

At its most basic level, it can be seen as a comprehensive collection of macros and databases written around the ubiquitous Microsoft word processor. This brief description, however, belies the power

Wizards for Word is undoubtedly one of the biggest advances in software development for authors. Easy to install and use, without getting in the way of creativity. It offers immense functionality and flexibility. The future looks even brighter, with a major new release planned which could become an essential tool.

Here's a wizard piece of software for authors

and strength of the product.

What the author of this software has done is to draw together all that is best in terms of functionality and then couple it with the actual needs of authors.

Having downloaded the software (which takes only a minute or two at most), installation is as simple as double-clicking on an icon. No rebooting necessary, just fire up Word, enter your registration information and you are ready to go. If it is

to be of any benefit to me, software must be intuitive to use – and *Wizards for Word* is just that. If you really need help, worry not, there are acres of it. If you get really stuck, an email to the company will bring you a speedy response. Their service is quite remarkable and unlike any experience I have

had with other software vendors.

What does this package do? Well, just about everything you could possibly imagine in terms of reviewing your writing for errors to assistance with characters and plot. This sounds rather far-fetched, but it is not. It covers synopsis, novels, non-fiction, short stories, citations, proposals, covering letters, memoirs, articles, finding an agent and just so much more besides. For a full list, check out the web site at www.recipes4word.com.

The first 30,000 words of my embryonic novel were sent off to literary editor recently and, although I was highly flattered by the resulting appraisal, I could have saved myself the cost by using *Wizards for Word* instead. By using the Book Doctor and Ghost Reviewer, I would have found (and corrected) all of the errors that that the trained human eye found – and quite a few more besides.

A fellow author asked me the other day what the downside was and I was hard put to provide an answer. I suppose, on reflection, it is probably the fact that the software was written with the American market in mind, so there are some quirks that we, on this side of the Atlantic, might take issue with. Having said that, I recently had a conversation with the company who are more than happy to provide a 'Brit' version if we would only tell them exactly how we would like it to be tailored more specifically to our needs.

This is definitely something that I intend to turn my attention to, as it will result in nothing but good news for us.

One of the most important aspects for me is longevity and future development of software. Given the success that they have achieved thus far, with several thousands of sales, it is in the company's interests to continue to develop and enhance *Wizards for Word*. They have, within the past few weeks, released version 3.0 which provided a host of additional features – many of which I am now using on a daily basis.

I spoke to the software author and asked the question. I quote his reply: "My next major project is 'Self-Editing a First Draft into a Blockbuster'. While there are software programs and books that tell you how to write a book from scratch, there doesn't seem to be anything that helps you take that first draft and fix it.

Most writers read their first draft through and correct the grammar and spelling. If they have Ghost Reviewer, they'll run that. They'll send it to a literary agent or editor and receive the standard rejection slip. There has got to be a better way.

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

COST:

Wizards for Word V3.0	\$89.99
Wizards for Authors	\$119.99
Wizards Deluxe	\$139.99

WHERE TO GET IT:

Download from www.recipes4word.com

COMPATIBILITY:

Only compatible with PCs at this time
Works on the following operating systems
– Windows 98, 2000 Pro, ME, NT or XP
Compatible with Word 97, 2000, 2002 or
2003 versions of MS Word

Writing is rewriting, and many writers fail at this step. We intend to attack the problem in a methodical and structured way. To avoid being formulaic, there will be multiple paths and structures available to the user. We won't require that the writer follow rules, but be aware of them, and knowingly choose to violate them. We intend to look at the macro levels such as the story arc and character arc, does it comply with a story telling guide like Campbell's Hero's Journey. It will look at things like dialogue tagging, to differentiate different characters, so they don't all sound the same.

It will examine dramatic tension, or lack thereof. Does the first sentence grab you or put you to sleep? Wherever possible, it will automate the task or at least assist the writer to stay focused. It'll look at characterization, imagery, plot, technique and style. Where a computer can assist, we'll use it. Don't get me wrong, the computer won't rewrite your story, but it can highlight possible weakness, aid in keeping you focused on the problem, and generally make the task less overwhelming".

With a major release such as this planned for next year, it gives me all the reassurance that I need that the product is going to be around for a long time to come. So, all you need is a fairly low specification PC running a copy of Word and the germ of an idea. Together with *Wizards for Word*, you are ready to create your next best-seller. ■



Andrew Atkinson has been a freelance author on IT for more than 20 years. He is currently working for a major European bank, providing contingency planning and disaster recovery documentation.

He has had three books published on specialist computing subjects and is now halfway through his first novel.