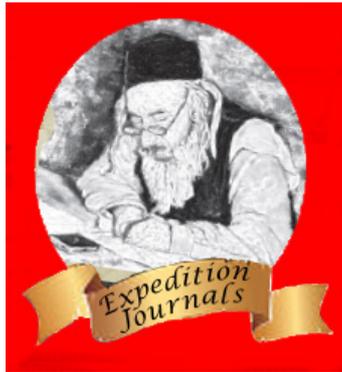


## One Gazetteer Writer's Perspective: Guest Blog Post by Tim Loya

This month the World Building Academy is publishing a book we're really excited about: *The Gazetteer Writer's Manual: Creating Travel Guides for Fictional Worlds*[1]. Gazetteer writing can be both a master blueprint for documenting a world, and a nifty way to showcase aspects of it and inject bits and pieces of a setting (or the whole enchilada!) into other people's games, fiction writing, and imaginations.



Last year a game product came to my attention that was taking an innovative gazetteering approach to exploring an rpg setting. *The Expedition Journals of Amestus Armen* was the subject of a successful Kickstarter campaign in the summer of 2012, and lead creative Tim Loya has been kicking around the halls of the World Building Academy since just about that same time frame.[2] For our launch of the GWM book (which is starting right now as I post this blog post!), I thought Tim's Journals offered a complementary take on our subject matter. So I asked if he would be part of a special promotion to WBA members and friends, and if he would kindly share some thoughts on his creative process during his work on the Journals series.

He graciously obliged, so here, without further ado, let me share with you some very down-to-earth observations from the man behind *The Expedition Journals of Amestus Armen*.

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My name is Timothe Skye Loya, owner and creative lead for Tim Loya Games, obviously, as well as the writing and design lead for the Expedition Journals of Amestus Armen. Gazetteering and travel writing are my favorite entries into the worlds of table top roleplaying gaming, mostly because these are much more fluid approaches to adding content in to existing games without giving the impression that you should use this new fiction instead of your existing fiction. Whether taken “as is” or used to spark another writer, designer, or game master’s imagination and provide inspiration, this style of writing has a much gentler approach to introducing new information into roleplaying games, compared to the more formalized and all-inclusive campaign setting.

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is so that people will read it?"*

Why is any of this important? Well, I was asked to write to you all about my process as it came from the Expedition Journals. Part of that is knowing where I come from ideologically. And then. . . well there's a few more parts, so let's continue.

One of the biggest parts of writing for me in general is self-esteem. And I know that sounds bit more touchy-feely than an analytical how-to, but bear with me for a moment. If you don't believe in what you're writing--if you're just clacking away at the keyboard because of what your boss, or some publisher, or your readers or players expect--they'll be able to tell. Anyone who's read anything more than what they've been assigned by a teacher or professor or parent will be able to tell. And the biggest part of believing in what you write is believing in yourself and that what you're writing is worth it.

Next is maintaining a theme. Countless are the home-brew travel logs and gazetteers out there strung across the internet that readers will ignore because of their tendency to wander in theme. Of course one of the simplest solutions to this is to create an outline, but contrary to what your English teacher has told you, this doesn't work for everyone. Some of us are a bit more spontaneous, so if you write like I do in this regard, let me offer an alternative. I put small notes about what I'm currently writing on a post-it note, or if I'm traveling, then in Notepad in the background, and occasionally looking at this note will help make sure that I don't wander in my writing.

Also, remember to maintain your focus--and this differs highly from theme. Theme can change from chapter to chapter, or release to release, or however you choose to distribute your work, but the overall focus of a person or team rarely changes, even between projects. However, small fluctuations in focus can lead to a loss of any sort of fan base you've accumulated. While this may seem more business related, can we all admit the core reason we're writing is so that people will read it?

So, how do we deal with focus? To me, it's all about finding the right level of passion. That may be oversimplifying the concept, and it may make passion for your project seem potentially negative, but let's take a look at the idea intellectually. The more passionate you are about a piece of subject matter the more accurate it will be; the more likely it will take on depth and quality and the intangible "touch" that makes some writing pass and others fail. Unfortunately, it also has the downside of potentially creating a huge gap if people disagree with you. So finding that perfect level of passion for your own projects can be very important. As important, and synonymous, with the question: are you trying to reach a broad range of gamers or fill a niche that will have a smaller audience?

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One of the most fun, and in my mind most important, things I do as a writer is what I call "living the experience." I take the time to lose myself in the worlds of my own creation. For me this translates into what the character would see. Instead of trying to cover every possible description, or rule, or contingency, I write as though the character whose shoes I'm in is experiencing the topic I'm currently covering. Even if you're not writing from the point of view of the character, experiencing the world through their eyes for a bit will allow you to realize more effectively what you should be writing about.

Another important part of my process is not writing at all. Or at least not writing on my current project at all. "Burning out" can affect your writing as negatively as not having a good amount of self-esteem. It happens at different times and for different reasons in all of us, but we all can fall

victim to it. So take a break.

What you do during this break is up to you, and just as the cause of feeling stressed, or tired, or unfocused differs, so too does the cure, from person to person. Regardless, here are some of the things that work for me, in case they spark some thoughts for your own breaks. Of course I turn to reading and speed writing, then there's video game playing--any kind of play can be good, like playing with children if you have them around (I do), and taking a break to do something physically different. For me, one of the best breaks is not just going for a walk but paying attention to the street signs I pass. The random names I see printed can sometimes spark a hundred creative thoughts.

Last, but not least, in my process is getting reviewed. Maybe not professionally, but we all have "annoying" friends who fall into the spelling police or grammar fascist category. If you want to take this route, now is the time to approach those friends and turn those traits into a strength for your writing. If you're lucky enough to be writing in a team, you may even already have a person like this intimately involved in your writing. Also, find a blogger involved in what you're writing about. These people read and write about projects like yours for a living, and a great majority of them started out just like we did, just from a different direction. Consider it a symbiotic relationship. They have no vested interest in telling you your writing is good if it isn't, and they have read a lot. Take their tips and advice and remember their role almost as gatekeeper between your work and the general public.

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And that is my writing process. Let me be clear. As much as this may read like a "how-to," take it instead as a number of options to increase your potential. Writing can be as individual as the person doing the writing, their processes, what makes them tick, and the reasons for them getting into writing in the first place. All I hope is that I've positively affected your writing potential in some way, given you some choices you may not have thought about before, and shown you a bit about the writing world you may not have already known.

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1 Yes, we surmounted all kinds of hoo-haa to do it, but The Gazetteer Writer's Manual is now on sale, with special pricing for this week only, before it appears at Amazon and we have to stick to the list price. Click here for the book page: <http://bit.ly/gwmbbookpg>

2 I understand Tim's company website is under development, but in the meanwhile you can find his products at DriveThruRPG, can read more about them (and ask questions) through the [Kickstarter](#) page, and of course, you can take advantage of a great offer he's making to WBA readers only through April 10. [Click here for more.](#)