A novel approach to Word
By Michael Amos

Congratulations; you've started writing your first novel. It's a great, satisfying, fun thing to do and I wish you the best of luck. However, by the time you reach 20,000 words you will realise there are a number of practical considerations to be addressed quite apart from the craft of writing a book.

This article looks at ways in which you can take advantage of features present in Microsoft's recent versions of Word (I use Word 2002) and Windows XP which will help you manage your novel once it starts to run into hundreds of pages and multiple drafts.

Navigating around your novel

Finding your way around a 100,000 word document gets very tedious. However, there is a useful **Document Map** facility in Microsoft Word which can make life a lot easier.

If you have thoroughly planned your novel, you will have broken it down into fairly fine sections or scenes. Type a title for each of these scenes into your document, formatting each as a **header style**. It doesn't matter which header style you use but use one style consistently throughout.

To select a style, either use the **Style** drop down which is located by default on the toolbar (see figure 1) or select **Styles and Formatting** from the **Format** menu.

Once you have typed all your scene headers in, select **Document Map** from the **View** menu. Your document will look something like figure 2.

Figure 1

It is also very useful as the document map gives you an overview of the structure of your novel. As you add new scenes, provided you identify them with a header, they will appear in the document map. If you move scenes around the document, their position in the document map will change.
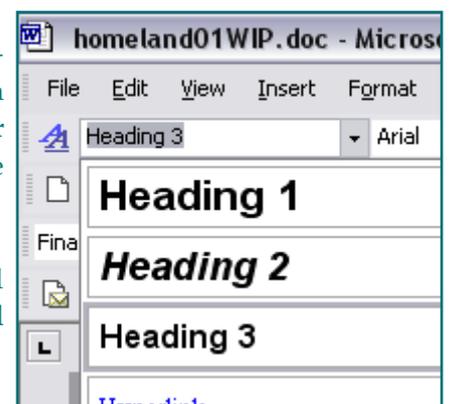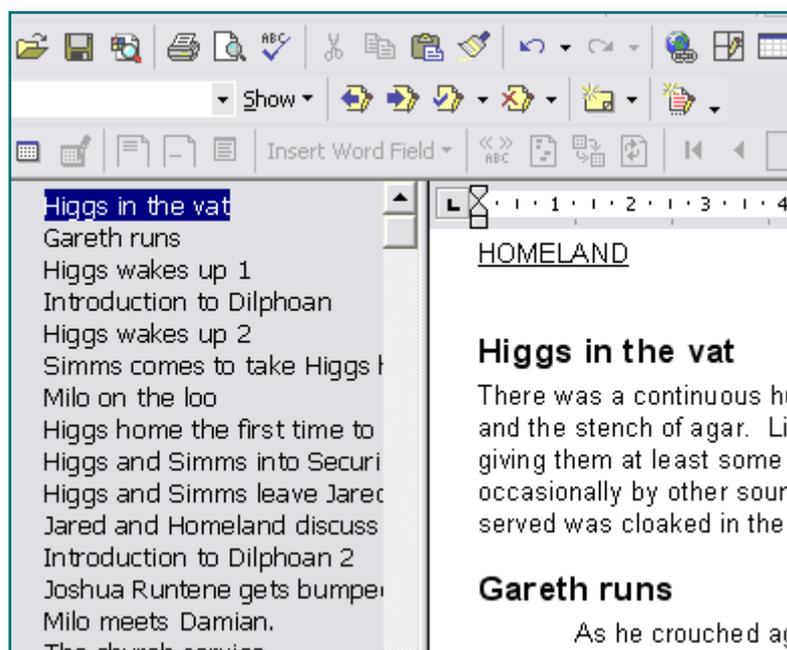

Figure 2

If you click on the headers on the left hand side, you will move to that section of the document - something that becomes invaluable as your novel grows.

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Getting rid of the headers

Once you have completed the first draft of your novel, you will want a version without the scene headers to send out to all those receptive agents and publishers. To remove the headers, follow these steps:

- Go to the top of your novel
- Go to the Edit menu and choose Replace
- Click on the More button, then the Format button and select the Style option from the drop-down menu (see figure 3)
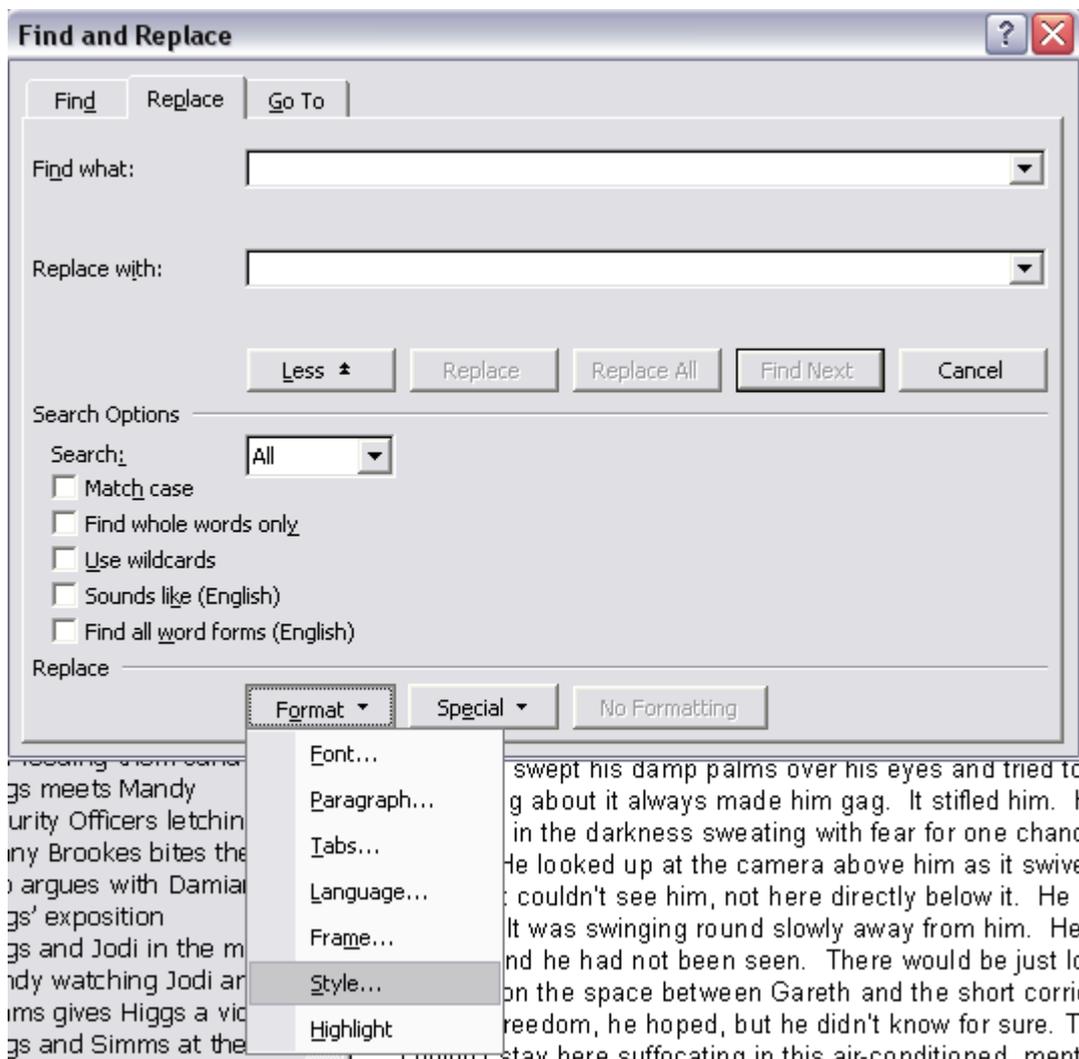
Figure 3

- On the Find Style dialogue box that appears, choose the heading style that you have used and click OK
- Now click on the field on the Find and Replace dialogue box and then click on the Special button
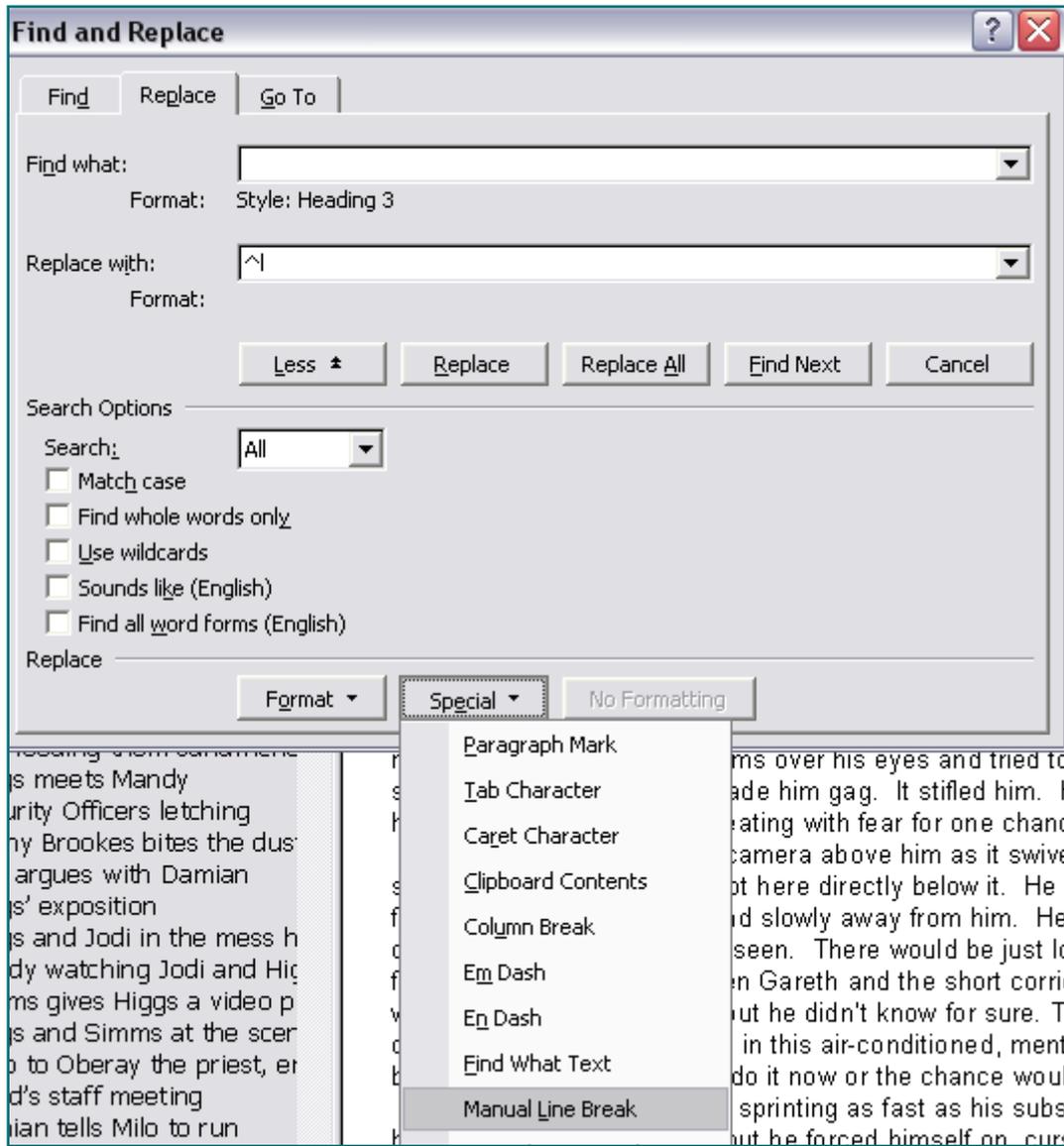- Chose Manual Line Break from the menu of options and hit return (see figure 4)

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Figure 4

The Find and Replace dialogue should now have nothing in the Find what: field and a ^l (i.e. a line break special character) in the Replace with: field (as per figure 4). The reason the line break is needed is that when you remove all the headers, there will be no gaps between the sections unless you put one in.

If you now click on the Replace All button, all of your headers will disappear from the document. You should now save the file under a different name so that when you come to do your next draft, you have a version with headers still in place to start from.

Naming your files

Once the first draft of your novel has been completed and you start on re-drafts, you need to get organised about file names. It is sensible to save each draft of your novel as a separate file. It is also nice to be able to list these in a sensible order and to distinguish versions of the novel which have the headers in from those that don't.

The naming convention that I use is to call the first file MyNovel01WIP.doc for the version which has headers in place and MyNovel01.doc for the version with the headers removed. The WIP part of the file name stands for Work In Progress. To avoid confusion, only edit the WIP files.

The number part of the file name is the draft number so the second draft is saved as MyNovel02WIP.doc and so on. If you not have the leading zero in the file name, you will find that the files won't order properly by name once you get to draft number 10.

Extra File Information

Windows XP has a useful set of extra information which can be stored against a file and displayed when you list the contents of a folder. This is useful for storing comments against a version of your novel.

If you right-click on your novel file and then select the Properties item from the menu, the Properties Dialogue Box will be displayed (N.B. you can get the same information up while editing the document by selecting the File menu and then Properties).

Select the Summary tab and you will see a number of fields which you can fill in, including Title, Subject and Comments. I illogically use the Title field to store comments.

Once you have filled these fields in, you need to make the folder display them. Navigate to the folder which contains your novel and make sure that you are displaying file details either by using the Views icon at the top of the folder or by going to the View menu and selecting Details

Once you have done this, select the View menu and then select Choose Details. The Choose Details dialogue box will be displayed, allowing you to chose which file property fields you want to be displayed when you view the contents of the folder.

These settings will be specific for the folder that you are in. If you wish to set them for all folders, go to the Tools menu and select Folder Options. In the Folder Options dialogue box which comes up, select the View tab and click on the Apply to All Folders button.

Conclusions

Using the above techniques should help you to manage the writing of your book through to the final draft. Getting the book out to publishers and agents is the next step and here too, Word can help with its Mail Merge facility.

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I use a card-based methodology for planning my novels and this works very well with the above-mentioned features of word. The article "A Card-based Methodology for Planning a Novel" goes into this and can be found here: http://www.michaelamos.net/articles.php?aid=2

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You can even buy one of his books if you're feeling really flush.