
The Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine

Publisher: Randy Ingermanson ("the Snowflake guy")
Motto: "A Vision for Excellence"
Date: November 11, 2008
Issue: Volume 4, Number 11 Home
Pages: <http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com>
<http://www.Ingermanson.com>
Circulation: 13317 writers, each of them creating a
Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius.

"Fiction Writing = Organizing + Creating + Marketing"

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- 1) Welcome to the Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine!

Those of you who have joined in the past month (about 300 of you have joined since the last issue), welcome to my e-zine!

You should be on this list only if you signed up for it on my web site. If you no longer wish to hear from me, don't be shy -- there's a link at the bottom of this e-mail that will put you out of your misery.

If you need to change your e-mail address, there's a different link to help you do that.

If you missed a back issue, remember that all previous

issues are archived on my web site at:
<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/ezine>

What's in this issue:

The successful novelist needs good organization, good craft, and good marketing. In this issue, we'll talk about each of these in turn.

You improve yourself either by evolution or revolution. Do you know which is better? I'll tell you the answer in my column "Evolution and Revolution."

Fiction is a lot like chess, for several reasons. Both involve logistics, strategy, and tactics. Can you guess which of these gives you the quickest return on your investment of time? Read my article "Fiction is Like Chess" to get the answer.

If you have a web site or blog, Google and the other search engines can bring you great heaping loads of traffic. Or they can bring you nada. Want to find out how to get the traffic your site or blog deserves? It's all spelled out in the column, "Web Sites and Blogging, Part 8."

Are you reading my blog? Join the fun here:
<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/blog>

2) Organizing: Evolution and Revolution

A major theme of the recent election here in the US was "Change."

Change can be good or bad, so of course you need to think carefully about what kind of change you want. But having decided on the change you want to make, the real question is how to get from here to there.

There are two basic kinds of change, which I usually refer to as "evolution" and "revolution."

"Evolution" is slow change, but it's a special kind of slow change. Evolution is a whole series of slow changes that build on each other to produce something extraordinary. Evolution is compound interest.

"Revolution" is rapid change, but it's a special kind of rapid change. Revolution is a coordinated series of sudden changes which work together to produce sudden change. Revolution is making a decision to use a new system of doing things.

Let's look at examples of each of these.

A classic example of evolution is the compound interest the bank pays you. Imagine that you put \$100 in the bank and they agreed to pay you 1 percent interest per day. How much would you earn in a year?

If you aren't good at math, you might imagine that you'd earn 365 percent in a year. After all, it's 1 percent each day for 365 days.

But the miracle of compound interest is that each day you earn interest on the interest you've earned before. So after one year, you'll earn 3678 percent. Which is a whole lot more than 365.

That's evolution in action.

What about revolution? When I think of revolution, the first thing that comes to my mind is the American Revolution in the 18th century. There were of course two halves to that revolution.

In the first half, a crowd of American rowdies beat up on the best army in the world. Quite an accomplishment.

In the second half of that revolution, a group of rich white men wrote up a document (the US Constitution) that created a new kind of government, with three branches that share power and answer to the people. It's a complex system and yet simple.

It would have been exceptionally hard to evolve that new kind of government, because nobody likes to share power. But once created, that new kind of government turned out to be remarkably robust. It turned out to be able to give power to people who were not rich, not white, and not men. But I digress.

Which of these kinds of change is more important -- evolution or revolution?

That's a trick question, and I hate trick questions. The answer depends on context. The real question is: Which kind of change is more important for you TODAY?

The answer to that will on very rare occasions be "revolution."

A revolution should be rare but not too rare. If you're having a revolution every day, you are way too chaotic to get anything done. But if you never have a revolution in your life, then your existence is very, very, very, very, very dull.

Most days, the kind of change you need is "evolution." Evolution is composed of many small steps, each reversible. You try something, then see if it worked. If it did, then you keep it. If it didn't, you throw it out. Then you try something new, always aiming to get

better.

In the business world, people call evolution "kaizen" which is a Japanese word for a process of continuous improvement. It's a fine word, but it doesn't rhyme with "revolution" so I prefer to just call it "evolution."

Evolution is a great thing for any person in business (and if you are a writer, then you are in business, so you should be constantly evolving to get better in your writing business).

The funny thing is that you can't evolve a scheme of evolution. You are either evolving or you're not. To get evolution going, you really need a revolution, which is just too ironic for words.

There are any number of people who will tell you how to evolve your business processes, but they all have the same goal -- to help you use your time, your energy, and your money more effectively. Those are the only resources you personally have.

A bit more than a year ago, I had my own "evolution revolution" when I started using Mark Joyner's tools to help me evolve my business in the right direction. I've written about Mark and his "Simpleology" program in this column a couple of times already, so today I want to give a status report.

One of the very first things I did in Mark's system was to define some "big picture" goals. I made five of them. These are long-term goals that define what I want out of life. Some are personal and some are business-oriented and they really aren't any of your business, so I won't share them here (with one exception, which I'll talk about in a minute).

The point is that I set myself some very specific targets. And once I had targets, I laid out evolutionary plans to reach them. One plan for each target. And then I began using the Simpleology web site to manage my time every day.

The good news is that I've made very substantial progress on four of those five targets. Let me get specific. One of my main targets is to get out of debt. Like a lot of people, I have a mortgage. It's not a huge mortgage and it's not crushing me, but I'd like to get rid of it. That's my target. These days, I think a lot of people feel the same way.

Because I have a target and because I'm serious about it, I often find opportunities to take action on it. I haven't taken any extreme actions. Just small actions. Opportunistic actions. Frequent actions. Directed actions.

And in just over a year, I've cut my total debt by over

13%. That's not a revolution, that's evolution -- the steady accumulation of many small beneficial changes.

I've made similar progress on three of the other life targets I've set for myself.

It's hard to know who gets the credit for all this excellent evolution in my life. I did all the work. Should I give Mark Joyner and his Simpleology site some of the credit? I don't know for sure, but I think so. Because making the decision to use evolution was a revolution. Strange as that seems.

A few people have taken me to task in the last year for talking about Mark Joyner and his Simpleology stuff in this e-zine. Their issues are usually one of the following:

- * "Mark Joyner is just trying to sell me stuff"
- * "I couldn't figure out how to use Simpleology"

Those are valid concerns. I delayed using the Simpleology tools for about six months after I first learned about Mark because I had those same concerns. So let me answer them.

Yes, Mark Joyner is trying to sell you stuff. So is everybody else in the world. Google wants to sell you stuff. Your brother-in-law wants to sell you stuff. I want to sell you stuff.

Heck, you can't watch the Super Bowl in peace for a measly five minutes without seeing a million-dollar ad aimed at selling you beer, bimbos, or bleach. In some cases, you get the best of all possible worlds, bleached beer-soaked bimbos.

We all know how to ignore ads we don't like. If you don't like the stuff Mark Joyner wants to sell you, then don't buy it. You have lots of practice at not buying stuff. By now you should be very skilled at it. Don't buy stuff you don't want. Simple, no?

You can use the Simpleology time-management tools for free. Forever. What's not to like?

As for that confusing Simpleology web site, here's how to use it:

- * Go to the Simpleology web site. Here's a link:
<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/links/s101.php>
- * You'll see a signup form that asks for your first name, last name, and email address. Fill them in and click the button.
- * You will be taken to the free Simpleology 101 course, which has 20 lessons on how to manage your time to reach your life targets. Each lesson has a couple of icons, one for a movie and one for a quiz. Watch the

movie and take the quiz. Work through them all. The right side of the page contains all the stuff you can buy from Mark Joyner. Ignore it all for now. You can decide later if you want any of it.

* As you go through the 20-day course (which I worked through in about 6 days, because I was a bad, naughty, impatient boy), you'll learn how to use the Simpleology tools. If you are even more bad and naughty than I am, the following will give you a rundown on how they work.

* Click on the "Major Focus" icon in the toolbar at the top. Then click on the "My Ultimate Life" tab and define what you want out of life. You can also do some "backwards planning" to figure out how to get from here to there. I revisit my targets every few months to make sure I'm keeping my targets in focus.

* Every morning, click on the "Daily Target Praxis" icon in the toolbar. This will take you through a wizard to help you plan your day. At the end of the wizard, you'll have a task list of what you should try to accomplish today. I work through the "Daily Target Praxis" every single day. It takes me five minutes most days. I enjoy it, because it helps me say no to many things I shouldn't be spending time on.

* During the day, if you get a brilliant idea while you're working and you don't want to lose it, click on the "Dream Catcher" icon in the tool bar. Make a note of your idea. If you want to act on it today, then click on the "thumbs-up" icon and you'll add this new task to your daily targets. Otherwise, you'll be reminded of this idea tomorrow in your Daily Praxis. You will never lose this idea, so now you can return to what you were doing just before inspiration struck.

* You don't want to clutter up your daily targets list with stuff you can't do today, so every day in your Daily Praxis, you can decide to save away some of your ideas for later in your "Mental Lock Box." You can look at this any time you want. You can move things out of the Mental Lock Box into your Dream Catcher whenever you want.

* Your list of daily targets is always available. Just click on the "Daily Targets" icon. It shows you what you have decided is most important to get done today. Most days I have 10 or 15 items on my Daily Targets list, and I often get most of them done. The rest get saved for tomorrow, when I can decide whether to do them or save for later.

I'm not an organized guy. I'm a chaotic, hyperactive, nonlinear-thinking, creative guy. I hate accounting and filing cabinets and org charts. I tend to get side-tracked on cool new ideas and forget to work on my cool old ideas.

What I've found for myself is that a little

organization goes a long way for me. Bit by bit, I'm getting better at this sort of thing.

Doing it every day -- that's evolution.

Doing it for the first time -- that was revolution.

You need them both.

3) Creating: Fiction is Like Chess

When I was in fifth grade, I learned how to play chess from one of the other kids. He wasn't a very good player and neither was I. Which was fine with us.

By the time I got to seventh grade, I was a confirmed duffer at chess. I could beat some kids. Some kids could beat me. I didn't really understand why I won when I won; nor did I really understand what went wrong when I lost.

Then in the space of a few months, I became a killer at chess. Suddenly, I could beat everyone I knew, including one of my friends, Richard, who kept insisting that I was a terrible player and that there was no good reason why I destroyed him in every game.

Richard said over and over that he couldn't believe my "luck." He said I needed to play someone good, someone who would break my lucky streak. So he took me to the chess club at our school and introduced me to "the best player in the school."

Richard assured me that this guy would demolish me in no time. We sat down and played.

I won two games in rapid succession while Richard looked over my shoulder muttering that I was "incredibly lucky."

What happened? Was it "luck" or ... something else? What made the difference in my play?

The answer is very simple. I bought a book (WINNING CHESS, by Irving Chernev and Fred Reinfeld) and read it. I set up every position in the book, worked at it until I solved it, and then moved on. I mastered that book. All in a couple of months.

So why did Richard insist that I was a terrible player?

Well ... because the book only covered one aspect of chess -- tactics. It taught nothing about position or strategy. Therefore, I knew nothing absolutely about

position or strategy.

Richard had been taught to play for position and strategy. But he didn't know anything about tactics. And I crushed him. Over and over again.

In chess, knowing tactics gives you an enormous advantage. Tactics are those one-move or two-move or three-move combinations that gain you material. Maybe you win the other guy's queen. Maybe you pick off his rook and lose only a knight. Maybe you nail his bishop and lose a mere pawn.

If you do that two or three times in a game, you can hardly help winning. Even if you don't know anything about position or strategy. You'll win because you'll have more and better pieces on the board. Eventually, you'll grind the other guy down.

Thanks to Richard's nagging, I got another book by Chernev and Reinfeld in which they taught me position and strategy. That made me an even better player. And it shut Richard up, because now he could see the reason why I was winning. He congratulated me on finally learning about position and strategy so I didn't have to depend on "luck" any more.

He was right, of course. Knowing position and strategy were good things. But they didn't turn me into a winner. They just helped me win faster.

Writing fiction is a lot like chess. In chess, there are really three levels to your play: position, strategy, and tactics.

Position is about getting your pieces into play where they can move freely and control the board.

Strategy is about setting up an attack that leads to checkmate.

Tactics is about the brute-force business of killing the other guy's pieces and pawns.

Position is good, because it facilitates strategy and tactics. But it isn't a substitute for either of those. Once your pieces are in position, they need to actually DO something. That "something" is either long-term (strategic) or short-term (tactical).

Strategy is good, because the long-term goal of the game is to checkmate the other guy, which ends the game. But strategy is no substitute for tactics, because at the end of the game, you need to have the material to carry out your attack. If the other guy has all the good pieces, then your attack is going to fail.

Tactics is essential. Tactical chess lets you use your position to gain material advantage to make it easy to execute your strategy and checkmate the other guy.

Each of these has an analog in writing fiction. Let's look at these in turn.

Many writers will tell you that story structure is essential to writing great fiction. This is true. Story structure allows you to create the emotional backdrop you need to give your reader a powerful emotional experience.

In that sense, story structure is like position in chess. You need good story structure.

But story structure is not enough. Even if you have a good structure, you still need to DO something with it.

Many writers will tell you that a good ending is essential to writing great fiction. This is true. When your readers close the book, you want them to let out a long sigh and say, "Ah.....! THAT was a great story. I need to tell all my friends."

In that sense, a great ending in fiction is like a checkmate in chess. If you have one, you win.

But a good ending is not enough. The problem is that your reader will never read your magnificent ending unless she first reads your beginning and middle and endgame. You'll have maybe a hundred scenes in your novel. All hundred need to work, not just the last one.

I have long believed that scenes are the fundamental unit of fiction. Each scene is like a tactical combination in chess. It is a sequence of moves and countermoves which ends in a decisive emotional change for the reader. Each scene needs to be giving your reader a powerful emotional experience.

Years ago when I started writing fiction, I didn't understand what made some scenes work and others not. I'd take my work to my critique group. Sometimes they liked it -- sort of. More often, they didn't. They'd explain what was wrong, and I'd fix it but break something else in the scene.

Then my writing buddy John pointed me to a book on writing. The chapters that rang my bell were the ones on tactical writing. I read the book twice in just a couple of months. I started applying what I was learning.

Very quickly, my critique group noticed a difference. They told me my writing was better, but they also pointed out plenty of flaws. But now I could see clearly how to improve the scene, because I now knew what made a scene work. So I could take their advice and fix the scene. For good.

Within a few months, my work got "good enough." By which I mean it would have been good enough to publish.

Not great fiction, but good enough. Yes, I still needed to learn many things. But I had crossed a threshold.

That is the point I want to make here. If you want to radically improve your writing, study the tactics of writing. Those will give you the biggest bang in the shortest period of time.

Why look for quick gains? That's easy. Success breeds success. Once you see that you can write a strong page, you'll be willing to work hard to write a strong scene. Once you can write a strong scene, you'll be gunning for a great structure and a great ending.

And let's face it -- virtually all great writers write great scenes.

The converse is not true. There are a fair number of exceptionally successful writers who are terrific tacticians but who have terrible story structure and terrible endings. Every scene zings on its own, but somehow they never really close the deal.

Do readers care? Yes, of course they care a bit. Every reader would love a great ending. But a story that rips for 300 pages and has a mediocre ending is still a darn good read. It's a book people will talk about to their friends, probably before they even finish the thing.

Don't get me wrong. I believe in delivering the whole deal -- including a great structure and a great ending. That's the ideal.

But if you've got a choice in excelling in only one thing, excel in writing the scene. Be a great tactician.

Please note that I am not urging you to "write great plots instead of writing great characters." That's the wrong way to think about this, because tactical writing is not plot oriented writing. Nor is it character oriented writing.

Tactical writing is about scoring emotive hits with your reader. You can do that in many ways -- by showing great characters or a great plot twist or a great thematic element or even by showing the story-world in a great way. Any of those will work.

The key thing is that a great scene must give the reader a powerful emotional experience, and it must do so in just a few pages.

This is why I spend so much of my time teaching tactical writing. In the language of fiction teachers, tactical writing has two elements:

- * "scenes and sequels"
- * "motivation-reaction units"

I teach these because they work. You can read all about them in the book I mentioned earlier, *TECHNIQUES OF THE SELLING WRITER*, by Dwight Swain. Here's a link to this book's page on Amazon:

<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/blinks/swain.php>

Note how many five-star reviews this book has. It's a long book, and some of my writer friends have complained that Dwight Swain is a tedious writer. I have read his book five times and always found it fascinating, but if you prefer the condensed version, let me refer you to an article on my web site, "Writing the Perfect Scene," which you can find here:

<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/art/scene.php>

Let me reiterate that learning tactical writing will not make you a perfect novelist. Neither will learning tactical chess make you a grandmaster.

But learning tactics will give you a powerful boost in the right direction. It'll show you what you're capable of doing. It'll motivate you to become a more complete writer.

How could any of that be bad?

4) Marketing: Web Sites and Blogging, Part 8

This is the eighth in a series of articles on using a web site and/or a blog to help promote your writing.

In the August issue, I talked about how to help people find you on the web by making your site as useful as possible to the search engines, such as Google. If you help Google, Google will help you. It's as simple as that.

Google wants to index great content. If you have great content on your web site or blog, then Google wants to know how to index it.

You can help Google by figuring out which "keyphrases" are most important to describe your site. Then you just "target" those keyphrases by putting them in the appropriate places in each page, as I explained in the August issue.

Recall that a keyphrase is any series of words that somebody might type into a search engine. Google analyzes each site to figure out how "important" it is for each keyphrase. Then when somebody searches for that keyphrase, Google returns all the "relevant" sites, sorting them by how relevant they are.

There's a missing link in all this that you have to fill in, and that's the subject of this article.

The problem is that there are a very large number of keyphrases that might be related to your site. How do you decide which of these keyphrases to target?

There are two extremes to avoid:

* You should avoid targeting keyphrases that are so rare that nobody ever searches for them. For example, you could target the keyphrase "rude Martians and the exorbitant camel leather wearing martial artists who obviate them". But since nobody in the history of the universe has ever searched for this phrase, it would be pointless for your web site to target it.

* You should avoid targeting keyphrases that are so common that your site would be competing with billions of other sites. For example, if you target the keyphrase "love," you'll be competing with more than two billion other sites. Good luck with that!

What you really want is to choose keyphrases that people search for fairly often, but not too often.

How do you do that?

The answer is that Google will help you. For free.

Why do they do it for free? Simple. Google earns its money by selling advertising. People will advertise more with Google if they know which keyphrases are hot and which are rot. Since Google keeps tabs on which phrases get searched for, it makes that info available free, which encourages people to buy ads on Google.

OK, here's how to get the straight scoop from Google. Go to this link:
<https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal>

Your goal is to figure out keyphrases that are popular on a topic that you cover in your web site. You have two choices here.

* You can type in a topic and let Google figure out a bunch of "similar" keyphrases.

* You can type in the address for your web site or blog and let Google read it and decide which keyphrases are relevant to it.

Let's try each of these in turn. I just now entered the general topic "writing fiction" into Google's keyword page.

Google gave me a list of 200 keyphrases that are related to this topic, along with the approximate number of searches per month for each.

From this, I see that people searched for the keyphrase "writing fiction" about 40,500 times per month during the past year.

People searched for "fiction writing software" about 1600 times per month.

Remarkably, people searched for the rather incoherent phrase "writing a fiction" 1900 times per month.

Any of these would be good keyphrases to target on a site about writing fiction.

I also see that the keyphrase "writing fiction fall out boy" was searched for a mere 16 times per month. This is not such a great phrase to target.

This is clearly a great way to get ideas, but it's also fun to let Google analyze your site and tell you the broad categories it sees. You do this by just typing in your web address. Google will read it and tell you what it thinks the site is about.

I tried this just now with my web site at www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com.

Google identified several broad categories, and gave me a list of keyphrases related to each category. The broad categories include the following:

- * non fiction writing
- * fiction write
- * fiction book
- * creative writing
- * non fiction
- * write a
- * writing contest
- * science fiction
- * writing workshop
- * write
- * fiction
- * book
- * publish
- * writer

Some of these categories surprised me, because they are only tangentially related to my site. But they all made some sort of sense. Google clearly knows that my site is about writing.

If you use Google's keyword tool, you'll get a lot of data. What do you do with all that info?

The answer is that you look at it and you think about it and then you act on it.

In scanning the list of keyphrases that Google gave me, I can instantly see ideas for half a dozen articles that I could write that would specifically target those exact keyphrases. With ten minutes of thought, I'd be

able to come up with ideas for fifty keyphrases I could target.

Which should I target first? Obviously, those that are frequently searched for (but not too frequently).

Let's say you've got a web site or blog and you want to increase traffic to it. What do you do?

Here's a handy punchlist:

- * Type in your site's address to Google's keyword tool
- * Download the results into a text editor or spreadsheet
- * Sort the results by the number of searches per month
- * Pick a keyphrase near the top of the list
- * Write the best article you can, specially written for people who would be searching for that keyphrase
- * Post the article on your web site or blog, making sure to target the page to the keyphrase you chose, using the methods in my August column
- * Repeat forever

None of this is hard for writers. Marketing people endure endless angst over that step where you have to write an article. So they resort to the wretched practice of hiring cheap writers to knock off cheap articles for a few bucks apiece.

But you are a writer. You can write your own articles. It costs you nothing but your time. You can produce something great, rather than having to settle for whatever shlock you can buy from the knockoff artists. And great writing is enormously more valuable than knockoff writing.

This is the incredible advantage any writer has over the great majority of marketers. Most marketers hate writing. But great writing is the key to success in this wired world of ours.

If you have a web site or blog, you have all the tools you need to promote it effectively.

Go to it.

5) What's New At AdvancedFictionWriting.com

I recently posted my fifth monthly humor column in a new online magazine. Sam the Plumber talks about those pesky awards and jealousy in this column, titled "Congratulations, I Hate You." Here's the link:
http://www.ChristianFictionOnlineMagazine.com/biz_rooney.html

I teach at roughly 4 to 6 writing conferences per year, depending on my schedule.

I have finished all teaching for the year 2008. My calendar for 2009 is beginning to fill in.

I will be teaching internet marketing in a major track at the Florida Christian Writers conference in February. Details here:
<http://www.flwriters.org/>

I will be doing an 8-hour mentoring workshop at the Mount Hermon Christian Writers Conference in April. Details will be available here as of November 14:
<http://www.mounthermon.org/writers/>

If you'd like me to teach at your conference, email me to find out how outrageously expensive I am.

If you'd just like to hear me teach, I have a number of recordings and e-books that are outrageously cheap. Details here:
<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/info>

6) Steal This E-zine!

This E-zine is free, and I personally guarantee it's worth at least 3456 times what you paid for it. I invite you to "steal" it, but only if you do it nicely . . .

Distasteful legal babble: This E-zine is copyright Randall Ingermanson, 2008.

Extremely tasteful postscript: I encourage you to email this E-zine to any writer friends of yours who might benefit from it. I only ask that you email the whole thing, not bits and pieces. Otherwise, you'll be getting desperate calls at midnight from your friends asking where they can get their own free subscription.

At the moment, there is one place to subscribe: My fiction site: <http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com>

7) Reprint Rights

Permission is granted to use any of the articles in this e-zine in your own e-zine or web site, as long as

you include the following 2-paragraph blurb with it:

Award-winning novelist Randy Ingermanson, "the Snowflake Guy," publishes the Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine, with more than 13,000 readers, every month. If you want to learn the craft and marketing of fiction, AND make your writing more valuable to editors, AND have FUN doing it, visit <http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com>.

Download your free Special Report on Tiger Marketing and get a free 5-Day Course in How To Publish a Novel.

Randy Ingermanson
Publisher, Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine
