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The Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine

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

Those of you who have joined in the past month (over 400 of you are new since my 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 email that will put you out of your misery.

If you missed a back issue, remember that all previous issues are archived on my web site at:  
<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/ezine>

This month, the focus is on taking your writing career to that pesky "next level" that everyone keeps talking about. So I have three special articles on that.

First off, we'll face the dreaded question, "What exactly do you want to accomplish in the coming year?"

Secondly, I'll talk about getting your act together. In the last month, I've REALLY made major progress in my own writing life at this, and I want to share what I've learned from my mentor.

Third, I've invited a tax pro to write an article on taxes and what you MUST do in order to deduct this or that expense. Your government deserves its fair share of your money--but not a penny more. Do you know what that fair share is?

We'll also continue the discussion on how to write a book proposal that I began a few months ago.

Finally, I'll whet your appetite for what's coming down the pipe on my new e-zine for all writers who want to market their own work. I intend to open it up for signups THIS WEEK. Find out what's cooking today!

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## 2) Planning Your Year

The New Year has arrived, and some of us are still trying to figure out what to do with the dregs of the last one. One thing I've learned in the last year is that twelve months blip by before you know it, and you won't get much done unless you PLAN to get a lot done.

I began having serious anxiety about this last spring, when I realized that I was spinning my wheels on a whole pile of different projects -- despite no longer having a day job. I could no longer blame my Bossbert for the fact that I didn't get stuff done. I'm Bossbert now. If I don't achieve my dreams, then it's my fault and nobody else's.

I ran a series in this e-zine from May to October detailing what I was learning on how to manage my time. I believe I've succeeded, mostly.

My To Do Lists are now manageable. Of the seven Big Tasks on my list for last year, I completed five of them. I finished 2/3 of the sixth Big Task. And I deferred the seventh Big Task by a few months, because . . . I found an eighth Big Task that was far more pressing.

What could be so pressing that I'd change my sacred Annual Plan?

I'm glad you asked. See, it's not just my schedule that's been all screwed up. It's been my whole way of working. My workspace was out of control. My financial accounting system was enough to make my accountant cry -- and the horrible thing was that my accountant was me. And my strategic planning was practically nil.

In short, things were a mess. Toward the end of November, I realized I needed to clean up my act. And I did, with the help of an amazing mentor. More on that in the next article.

Here, I'll simply report that my workspace is cleaned up enough that it's actually USEFUL for the first time ever. I have an accountant who isn't me. I've formed a corporation, written a mission statement, and created a strategic plan for my writing business. I have a 5-year plan and a 10-year plan, and I intend to create a 15-year plan.

In the coming year, I have some big projects coming up -- and I'm free at last to pursue them without getting all tangled up. Let me tell you something. It feels good to be free. Really good.

Now what about you? Do you have a rough plan for the coming year? Do you have a WRITTEN plan? Are you accountable to anyone for that plan?

Mind if I make a suggestion? Here are three things you can do TODAY to get yourself rolling for this fantastic new year we have waiting for us:

- \* Write a list of five to ten Big Tasks for the year
- \* Post that list next to your workspace
- \* Show your list to a few trusted friends

Few things are as powerful as the written word. We're WRITERS, fer crying out loud. We know how powerful a written word is. So WRITE DOWN your list! Choose things that are worth doing. Choose things that are substantial. Choose things that are doable. Choose things that are specific.

You want to post your list at your workspace because you need to remind yourself EVERY DAY what the game plan is. It's way too easy to get sidetracked when the phone's ringing and the blogs are calling your name and the cat is eating your first-born child's kidneys. You need to remind yourself EVERY DAY why you're doing all the Little Tasks that will snowball together into one of your Big Tasks.

And there's nothing like telling somebody else what you're up to. For one thing, they can nag you when you fall off the wagon. For another, they can celebrate when you succeed. But most important, they can HELP you reach your goals -- but only if they know what your goals actually are.

If you're going to do this, do it now. No time like the present, right? Take five minutes and just do it.

I eat my own dog food, so while I was waiting for you to do your assignment, I took five minutes and did mine. I just now wrote down seven items on my To Do List for this coming year. I'm going to show it to my wife and my MasterMind group. I think I can do all seven this year. It's a very doable list, and I left room for other things that might come up.

It's not a hard list. Even so, it's an AMAZING list. If I cross all these off by the end of the year, I'll do seven things that I REALLY WANT TO ACHIEVE, and I'll earn quite a bit of money.

Money is not the whole game. The money's nice, but I had good money when I worked for Bossbert, too. Money is sweetest when you earn it doing the things you want to do -- not the things Bossbert wants you to do. I prefer working for Ranbert than Bossbert.

Make your list. Post your list. Show it to people who can hold you accountable. What have you got to lose?

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### 3) Are You Acting Like a Professional Writer?

As I wrote in the previous column, I spent part of November and all of December cleaning up my act. That wasn't all I did. I've been working on several joint ventures and creating a new web site and preparing it for launch. More on all those later. But the one task I really wanted to get done in December was to start acting like a professional writer.

It's a little late, because I've been writing for over 18 years and I've been published for the last 7. I have 7 books under my belt and numerous awards. Some would say I'm well on my way to Total World Domination.

But recently I realized that I had a huge problem in my way. That problem was me. I was running my business like an amateur. Until I fixed that problem, I was never gonna rule the world, because I'd be tripping over my feet.

Luckily, I have a friend who teaches at writing conferences all the time on how to fix that problem. Allison Bottke is an expert in stuff like branding, mission statements, strategic planning, organizational skills. All the stuff I'm not an expert in.

Remember I told you I published 7 books in the last 7 years? Allison did 21 in the last 5 years. Sure, some

of them were compilations, but those take a lot of time to produce...especially considering every contributing author needs contracts, edits, approvals, and a host of stuff requiring more paperwork (and organization) than any of us can imagine!

Before she became a writer, Allison used to do strategic planning sessions with the boards of large nonprofit corporations. She even worked for a few Fortune 500 companies. Usually, they were pretty dysfunctional boards. Did you know 10 people can have 15 different Mission Statements between them? So Allison would charge these folks two arms and two legs for a weekend of her time helping them clean up their acts.

When Allison decided to take up writing, she did it like a pro. She created one of the best recognized brands in her niche market (Christian inspirational nonfiction). She formed an LLC and trademarked her brand -- "God Allows U-Turns" -- to protect her rights. She put out a series of ancillary products in addition to her books. And she's done a lot of public speaking to promote her brand.

Wow!

I'm not jealous of Allison and her success. But in November, I decided that I wanted her on my side, helping me learn to do that. After I talked with her on the phone several times, Allison sent me some of her tapes and CDs. That's when I realized something extremely important:

"I can do this stuff."

Listen, getting organized is not rocket science. (I've done a bit of rocket science, so I should know.) Getting organized is a matter of deciding to just get it done and then keep it that way.

Allison gave me a checklist of 7 things to do. Of those, I was acting like a professional on only 2 of them. In the other 5 areas, I was a rank amateur. Here are Allison's magic 7 items:

- \* Learn to manage your time
- \* Clean up your work space
- \* Buy the supplies you need
- \* Develop systems for boring tasks you do all the time
- \* Do your legal stuff first
- \* Write your strategic business documents
- \* Make a plan for the next 6 months, with deadlines

Of those Magic 7, I was doing OK on managing my time and on buying office supplies. So I decided to get the other 5 done by the end of the year.

My work space has always been a mess. I recently moved into a new house, so my office had about 30 boxes of

stuff stacked up. I could hardly turn around! How can you do anything when you can't even find it? After I listened to Allison's first CD, I started unpacking boxes. In a week, it was mostly done, and I've got it ALL done now. ALL. That is a tremendous feeling.

As for systems, the key thing is figure out what your boring tasks are and either delegate them or find a way to do them as quickly and mindlessly as possible. So I hired an accountant to deal with my financial stuff. I hate accounting. I got some stacking trays on my desk to handle incoming mail, outgoing mail, and stuff to be filed. I cleaned up my filing cabinet. My systems are almost in place. This past week, Allison helped me figure out how to optimize my desk so it'll only have stuff I use all the time. That's the last thing left to do to get my systems in place.

The legal stuff was the terrifying one for me. Lawyers are scary and expensive people, and who wants to deal with them when you could be doing something safe like juggling chainsaws? But I did it. I talked to a trademark attorney. I talked to a business attorney. I paid LegalZoom.com to help me incorporate my writing business. My incorporation papers will arrive today, and then I'll wrap things up with my accountant and that task will be DONE.

I never thought I needed a Mission Statement. Then something Allison told me caught me cold. She said, "A Mission Statement gives you a reason to say no." And I realized that I'm not a guy who likes to say no. If somebody wants me to join them on a project, I often say yes. Even when it's way outside my mission. So I took an hour one day and I wrote a mission statement, a vision plan, and the first cut at a 5/10/15 year plan. No kidding, I jammed those puppies out in an hour. I'll refine them as my life develops. But now I have a reason to say no when I should say no. And a reason to say yes when I should say yes. That's cool, no?

I'm not big on deadlines. Oddly enough, publishers are. When they want a book done, they want it done ON TIME. I've always been very good at meeting publishers' deadlines. But I've always been terrible at meeting my own. It's like I'm not important enough for my deadlines to matter. I can do it manana. Those days are over, baby! I'm working on a project with Allison right now, and we have a schedule. And deadlines. Like Allison says, deadlines are all about commitment.

It ain't over, of course. Getting your act together is one thing. Ya still gotta keep your act together. But the fact is that keeping your act together is ten times easier than putting it together in the first place. And the point of it all is that running a writing business is a LOT easier when you've got your act together.

Want to hear a true story? When we bought this house, we bought a lawn tractor too. We've got well over an

acre of lawn, and so I need a lawn tractor to mow all that grass, right?

I bet you're wondering how well my shiny new lawn tractor cuts grass. Well . . . I don't know. When we moved in, I stuck the keys in a safe place. A very safe place. REALLY safe.

Then I couldn't find them.

I looked everywhere. All over the house. In the barn. In the car. Yes, I even looked in the tractor. No keys. Finally, just before it snowed, we went to the dealer and got a new set of keys. Which was a little late, because the grass isn't growing when it's this cold.

And you can guess the sequel to this story. Allison got me working on cleaning up my act. I unpacked every box in my office and found a place for it.

And I found my keys. They were in a nice safe place. A place I had looked three times, but I missed the keys because of all the clutter.

I've been talking to people lately about how Allison's got me inspired to clean up my act with my writing business. And the first thing they ask is, "Does Allison teach this stuff in my hometown?"

The answer is both no and yes.

No, Allison can't come to your hometown and teach you this stuff. She teaches at a fair number of writing conferences per year, but probably NOT in your hometown, and definitely not this week.

Yes, Allison can teach you this stuff. I took a chance and asked her if she'd be willing to consider doing some teleseminars on "Cleaning Up Your Act." Just for writers, not for other people.

I'll tell you, I was afraid to even ask her. See, Allison used to work for large companies. She'd charge them as much as \$15,000 for a weekend of her time. And I don't have that kind of money in my back pocket.

So I made her an offer that a bright gal like her would be crazy to refuse. I suggested we sell access to the teleseminars at a bargain price. Then we could continue to sell the recordings on our web sites. We wouldn't make much per person, but over time we could make it up on volume.

Allison said yes! (It fits her mission statement.)

We're working on the details now. We have a schedule. We have deadlines. We're almost ready to roll things out.

Do you want to clean up your act?

If so, stay tuned, because in a week or so, I'll be sending you an email with an offer that YOU'D be crazy to refuse.

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#### 4) Taxes For Writers -- Guest Article

Like they say, the only two things that are certain are that pesky death and those pernicious taxes.

Of the two, personally I prefer to keep meeting the tax man year after year, rather than facing Dr. Reaper. But that's not a choice any of us gets to make.

In any event, after my most recent note to y'all on my "Beat The Tax Man Special," one of my loyal readers, Sandy Cathcart, emailed me to say that I didn't have it quite right.

Sandy Cathcart is a freelance writer and former licensed tax preparer with the State of Oregon. She writes about taxes under the consultation of her son, Clayton Cathcart, who is a currently licensed tax consultant.

Sandy wanted to let me know that the question of tax deductions is fairly nuanced. Enough so that she's written a small book on the subject.

I asked Sandy if she could give me the highlights for today's e-zine, since I wanted to set the record straight. The issue for the tax man is whether or not you are writing as a hobby (in which case writing expenses are not tax-deductible) or writing as a business (in which case they are tax-deductible).

There is of course no way to condense a full book into 300 words, but Sandy sent me the highlights. Here they are, in her own words:

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"Ten Things The IRS Looks For in Proof of A Writing Business", by Sandy Cathcart

If you can show you made a profit from the activity of writing in three out of the last five consecutive years, the IRS will consider your writing activity to be a business. If you cannot, the IRS will consider the following factors in determining whether you are operating a writing business or a hobby.

Note: All the facts should be taken into account. No one factor alone is decisive.



Here they are in shortened form:

1. You carry on your writing activity in a business-like manner.
2. The time and effort you put into the activity indicate you intend to make it profitable.
3. You depend on income from the activity for your livelihood.
4. Your losses are due to circumstances beyond your control (or are normal in the start-up phase of your type of business).
5. You change your methods of operation in an attempt to improve profitability.
6. You, or your advisors, have the knowledge needed to carry on the activity as a successful business.
7. You were successful in making a profit in similar activities in the past.
8. Your writing activity makes a profit in some years (and the amount of profit it makes).
9. You can expect to make a future profit from the appreciation of the assets used in the activity.
10. The elements of personal pleasure you receive from your writing activity and your history of income or losses with respect to your writing business.

I explain each one of these steps in simple language and how they apply specifically to writers in my book, "Totally Honest Tax Tips For Writers." The book is helpful for both beginning and advanced writers and contains forms for good record keeping, surprising deductions you can claim in your writing business, a good business plan, and much more. You can purchase it for \$10.00 (US) at my site:  
<http://www.sandycathcart.blogspot.com>

Sandy Cathcart

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Randy sez: Wow, there's a lot more to know about this issue than I'd have guessed! I hopped onto Sandy's blog this morning and bought a copy of her book, "Totally Honest Tax Tips For Writers," because I'd really like to be fully up to speed on this.

In any event, it appears that my note to you all last week was overly optimistic. I gave you my best understanding, but that opinion may have been incorrect for some of you.

**IMPORTANT:** You may have bought either Fiction 101 or 201 in the past week thinking it was a tax-deduction, when (for some of you) it may NOT be. If that's the case, then I need to make that right and issue you a refund for the amount of the tax-deduction you won't get. If you bought either course in the last week, I have already sent you an e-mail to give you the details.

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## 5) On Writing Proposals -- Part 4

This is the fourth in a series of columns on writing a book proposal. In the last three columns, I've talked about endorsements, writing the cover letter, and writing the summary page. Now I'd like to talk about how to write your author bio.

The purpose of an author bio is to show the publisher that you are the right person to write this book.

You may be thinking, "But it's a novel! I can write a novel about anything I want."

Yeah, true. But imagine you're an editor who publishes mysteries. You have two manuscripts sitting on your desk. Both of them are gritty police procedurals set on the mean streets of L.A. One is by a 16 year old home-schooled girl from Maine. The other is by a 55 year old L.A. homicide detective with 30 years of experience on the force.

Without knowing anything else about these manuscripts, which of these would you be more interested in?

Now let's say the two prospective authors are the same two people, but instead the story is a coming-of-age chicky novel set in upstate Maine.

NOW which writer are you more interested in?

The basic rules for your bio are these:

- \* Keep it short. A couple of hundred words is plenty.
- \* Keep it relevant. What aspects of your life tie in to your story?
- \* Make it zing. Zing is always good. It shows you can write. It shows you can market yourself effectively. It shows you can be an asset to your publisher.

The proposals I've written for my novels have always highlighted my special knowledge as a physicist.

As an example, I have three historical novels in print. I have no academic qualifications in history. (Just a LOT of research.) BUT, these aren't just any historical novels. They're time-travel novels. And I'm a physicist. I put that fact into my author bio. Zing! Ka-ching!

I also wrote two novels with my buddy John Olson about the first human mission to Mars. In our author bios, we highlighted the fact that I have a Ph.D. in physical science and John has a Ph.D. in life science. Both of those are HIGHLY relevant to a novel about Mars. Our

qualifications helped us sell our books.

I ran a mentoring session at a writing conference last year. One of the women was writing a historical novel set in South America and one of her viewpoint characters was a llama. That may sound a little weird, but it was actually rather cool. It became much cooler when I talked to her and discovered that she raises llamas and has access to a registry of llama breeders with about 50,000 names in it. Think a publisher would want to know that? You better believe it! A fact like that should go in the author bio (and the cover letter and the summary sheet).

When you're writing your author bio, here are some things to consider in deciding what exactly you want to say:

\* How many books have you written and did any of them win awards or reach a bestseller list? That may drive your first sentence. It's better to start out "Joe Schmoesky, award-winning author of six novels, ..." than to start out "Joe Schmoesky..."

\* Do you have academic qualifications, work experience, or ANY relevant life experience that makes you unusually qualified to write a book on your topic? It's better to say, "L.A. homicide detective Joe Schmoesky's debut novel, set on the mean streets of L.A., ..." than to say, "Maine schoolgirl Tiffany Schmoesky's debut novel, set on the mean streets of L.A., ..."

\* Have you done any special research for your book? Read the acknowledgments in *THE CLAN OF THE CAVE BEAR*, by Jean M. Auel, to see a hint of the Xtreme research Ms. Auel did. Or read the Author's Note at the end of Anne Rice's novel *CHRIST THE LORD: OUT OF EGYPT* to see an example of research far beyond what most writers dream of. If you have done research at this level, highlight that in your bio.

\* Is there anything unusual about you that makes you a story all on your own? Christopher Paolini was 15 (if my memory is correct) when he wrote his fantasy *ERAGON*. And homeschooled. That's a story all by itself. James Frey's (alleged) past as a drug addict, alcoholic, and criminal helped propel his book *A MILLION LITTLE PIECES* to stardom.

\* Tell the truth! Tell the truth! Tell the truth! In an author bio, you are expected to put your best foot forward. You are also expected to not lie. This is what took James Frey down. Not merely his author bio, but big chunks of his book, were fabricated. Make sure every word in your author bio is true and that every implication is also true. Because if you lie in your bio, somebody, somewhere, will notice and you will get shredded--usually just when your career takes off.

It won't hurt to read a few author bios. You'll often

find them on the back cover or the inside back flap of published books. See what kind of copy works for these folks. Then go write a bio that zings.

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6) Tiger Marketing is Dead! Long Live \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_ !

As I mentioned in the last issue of this e-zine, I'm branching out a bit. I've realized that the Tiger Marketing column I've written in this e-zine for the last couple of years has appeal far beyond fiction writers.

Within a few days, I'll be launching a new e-zine, titled "The Mad Genius Writer." The new e-zine will be ONLY about marketing. It will be written for ALL writers, whether you write fiction or nonfiction. Editors, agents, publicists, publishers, etc., are also invited to read The Mad Genius Writer.

I had intended to call the new e-zine "The Mad Genius Marketing Report." Unfortunately, that is too close to an existing trademark for my attorney's comfort, so I nixed that idea. So it'll be "The Mad Genius Writer."

I've been working furiously to create a new web site for "The Mad Genius Writer." It's not quite ready, but it will be soon. Watch your e-mail inbox for a note from me.

"The Mad Genius Writer" will be a free monthly e-zine that comes out on the second Tuesday of each month. (One week later than The Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine.)

Watch for my next Special Notice!

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7) What's New At [AdvancedFictionWriting.com](http://AdvancedFictionWriting.com)

Drat, I've already told you everything that's new in the columns above. I'm launching a new e-zine. I'm cleaning up my act in running my writing business. I'm creating a new teleseminar series with my expert mentor. And I have a plan for 2007.

I'm looking forward to an exciting year! Hope you are too!

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8) Steal This E-zine!

This E-zine is free, and I personally guarantee it's worth 7 billion 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, 2007.

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 are two places to subscribe:  
My personal web site: <http://www.RSIngermanson.com>  
My new web site: <http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com>

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9) 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 blurb with it:

Award-winning novelist Randy Ingermanson, "the Snowflake Guy," publishes the Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine, with more than 6000 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.

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Randy Ingermanson  
Publisher, Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine

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