
The Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine

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Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius.

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

Those of you who have joined in the past month (about 250 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 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>

What's in this issue:

In recent issues, we've talked about development of your setting, the "StoryWorld" of your novel. In this issue, we'll talk about certain parallels between your StoryWorld and your characters, and how you can exploit

that to write a better novel.

These days, every publisher dreams of having authors who promote their books effectively -- using a minimum of time, energy, and money to produce maximum sales. One traditional method of book promotion is public speaking. We'll see why that's as viable as ever.

2) Treating Your StoryWorld Like a Character

Who's the main character in THE LORD OF THE RINGS?
Frodo? Gandalf? Aragorn?

For a long time, I've thought that the answer to that question is "Middle Earth." The StoryWorld itself is the main character, and the War of the Ring is only one chapter in Middle Earth's long story.

In the Harry Potter series, no doubt the main character is the intrepid boy wizard, Harry. But one of the critical characters in the story has to be Hogwarts, with its staircases that move on their own, paintings of people who won't stay still, and that remarkable Room of Requirement that provides you whatever you need.

In RIVER GOD, a historical novel set in 18th century BC Egypt, the narrator Taita tells a tale of love and suspense against a backdrop of change -- the arrival in Egypt of the Hyksos conquerors. Numerous characters cross the stage in the novel, but Taita never misses a chance to praise "this very Egypt," the land he loves.

In each of these novels, the StoryWorld itself is a character. Like any good character, the StoryWorld needs to be developed by you, the author. The question is how to do that.

Of course you can leave it to chance, but why should you? Why not be proactive in creating your StoryWorld? What if you pretended that your StoryWorld were just another character? What if you worked through the process of character creation for your StoryWorld? Would that help or hurt?

Let's pretend for a moment that it would help. How would you go about it?

There are many ways of creating characters, but I like the process outlined in James N. Frey's series of how-to books, beginning with HOW TO WRITE A DAMN GOOD NOVEL. Frey didn't invent this process, but he makes an extremely good case for using it.

We've been discussing these ideas lately on my Advanced Fiction Writing Blog. If you missed them, check out the late September entries at:

<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/blog>

In this process, a character has three important attributes:

- * "Physiology"
- * "Sociology"
- * "Psychology"

"Physiology" for a character is a broad term that covers physical and mental traits, scars, inherited talents, acquired skills, etc.

"Sociology" refers to the environment in which the character is raised, including family relationships, education, politics, religion, and history.

"Psychology" is the way a character responds to his "sociology," given his unique "physiology."

How do these apply to the StoryWorld?

First, a StoryWorld has a "physiology" just as much as any person does.

A person has a particular body, which may be thin or thick, dark or light, soft or hard, blue-eyed or brown-eyed or green-eyed or differently-eyed.

In just the same way, a StoryWorld has its own peculiar geography. What planet does your StoryWorld take place on? Where on the planet? Is the terrain mountainous or flat, dry or soggy, hot or cold? What flora and fauna infest the place? What kind of weather goes on there? What scars on the land have been inflicted by its inhabitants?

No doubt about it, a StoryWorld has a "physiology."

The second attribute, "sociology," is a little less obvious. Can a StoryWorld have a "sociology?"

Well, yes, of course it can. All you have to do is ask "Who acts on the StoryWorld?" There are many possible answers. For example:

What gods or goddesses inhabit the land? In ancient Egypt, they are Isis and Osiris and Seth and Horus and Hapi and a score of others. In Middle Earth, the Valar shape the destiny of the planet, while Sauron the Great tries to twist it to his own ends. In Harry Potter, magic is real, an impersonal force waiting to be tapped by those with magical ability. Even our ordinary world is guided by the laws of physics.

What other StoryWorlds live outside the boundaries, competing with your StoryWorld? Ancient Egypt lived side by side with Sumer, with Ethiopia, with India.

Hogwarts competes with other schools, such as Beauxbatons and Durmstrang. Even if you set your novel in San Francisco, it still lives in an unruly neighborhood with Richmond, Albany, Berkeley, Oakland, Emeryville, San Leandro, and a dozen others.

What previous StoryWorlds does yours inherit from? Just as people inherit from their parents and grandparents, your StoryWorld inherits from its forebears. Modern Europe inherits from Enlightenment Europe which inherited from Renaissance Europe which inherited from Medieval Europe which inherited from ancient Rome, which inherited from the Greeks and Etruscans, ad infinitum.

So a StoryWorld has a "sociology."

What about the third attribute, "psychology?" Can a StoryWorld have a "psychology?"

That seems like a pretty silly question, because in most cases, your StoryWorld is not actually conscious. You can't have much of a "psychology" without being conscious, now can you?

But pretend for a minute that your StoryWorld IS conscious. You're a novelist, so it's easy for you to pretend that impossible things are possible. If your StoryWorld WERE conscious and could have thoughts and feelings about its "physiology" and "sociology," what would it think and feel?

How would ancient Egypt feel about the humans that lived off the bounty of its Nile and built stone monuments and pyramids? Would it love these strange children of the dust, or hate them? Would it mock them or curse them?

What would Middle Earth think of Sauron's bid to bring it under darkness forever? Would it work against him or for him? Isn't it true that Mount Caradhras kept Gandalf and the fellowship of the Ring from passing? Didn't Barad Dur belch smoke and flames as the Dark Lord's power grew?

If your StoryWorld were conscious, what would it do to help or hinder your characters? It's worth thinking about, even if you think your StoryWorld really can't do anything. Because actually it can. Earthquakes, tornadoes, lightning storms, floods -- your StoryWorld can and does act on your characters. The way you write about your StoryWorld's actions can create a powerful mood for your novel.

One way that many authors get in touch with their characters is by interviewing them or asking them to write a journal. You can do the same with your StoryWorld.

An interview is a series of questions and answers. You

ask the questions. Then write out the answers that your StoryWorld would give if it were conscious. Don't be surprised if it fibs now and then. Interviewees do that sometimes.

A journal is the written record of someone's inmost, secret, truthful thoughts and feelings. What would your StoryWorld write in its journal if it thought nobody could ever read its secret thoughts? Write them down and see what you learn!

Do you have to do all this hard work? Can't you just write your novel and leave all this weird stuff to the weirdos?

No, you don't have to work hard. Yes, you can just write. You can and should do whatever it takes to write the best novel you can write.

If you think you'll write a better novel by imagining your StoryWorld as a character, then do so. If not, then don't. It's that simple.

3) Public Speaking To Market Your Fiction

There's an old proverb that says: "Everybody wants to go to heaven, but nobody wants to die."

Can you relate to that?

I think a similar proverb applies to novelists: "Everybody wants to write a bestseller, but nobody wants to market it."

Can you relate to THAT?

It's easy to take the attitude that "My publisher is going to do all the marketing for my book and all I have to do is rake in the big bucks."

Sorry, Virginia, but that's awfully naive. Your publisher would love to market your book, IF it had the resources. But resources are in short supply at all publishers these days.

Remember, there are only three resources anyone can use in book promotion: time, energy, and money. Effective promotion requires one or two or three of these resources.

Unfortunately, the marketing and publicity folks at your publisher are vastly overworked. They will put SOME time, energy, and money into your book, of course.

But they will put far more time, energy, and money into the books by authors who are THEMSELVES committing time, energy, and money.

Why? Because the smart publisher will only back the winners, and a book is far more likely to be a winner if its author acts like it's a winner. Meaning that the author is effectively putting time, energy, or money into promoting the book.

Authors have numerous ways to promote their books. We've talked about many of these methods in this e-zine over the last few years.

But there's one I've not talked about much, because it's so darned obvious. It's a method used by a zillion authors over the years to earn money AND promote their books.

I'm speaking about speaking, of course. Public speaking.

Let me tell you a little story about a friend of mine, Bryan Davis.

I met Bryan a few years ago when a mutual friend connected us by email. Bryan was working on a novel, and he emailed me to ask if I'd be able to read the book for possible endorsement.

I have a standing policy to say NO to all such requests from people I don't know. My agent gave me this policy years ago to protect me from being overrun with requests.

I do make one exception, though, for people I meet at writing conferences. I teach at a lot of conferences, and I allocate most of my non-teaching time to helping writers. As it turned out, Bryan and I both had plans to attend a major conference, so we agreed to meet there to discuss his manuscript.

At the conference, I critiqued a chapter with Bryan. I liked the writing, mostly, but pointed out some problems in his craft. I told him that if he fixed those problems AND sold the novel, then I'd read it for possible endorsement.

Not too long after that, Bryan sold the book to a publisher that had worked with him on his nonfiction books. Eventually, I received an Advance Reading Copy, read the book, liked it, and wrote an endorsement.

Truth to tell, I thought the book wasn't going to do very well in the marketplace. It had three major strikes against it:

*) It was a young-adult novel written for the Christian market, at a time when YA novels weren't doing well.

*) It was a fantasy novel, and everybody "knows" that fantasy doesn't sell in the Christian market.

*) The publisher had never done fiction before.

Any of those, I thought, would doom the book to mediocre sales. All three of them together would be the kiss of The Reaper. Which was a bummer, because Bryan's a great guy and I really like him. But "three strikes" is still three strikes, even for great guys.

Well let me tell you something. That book did well. Very well. Extremely well. So did the sequel. So did the next sequel. So did the NEXT sequel.

That's right, Bryan wrote a four book series that did Xtremely well in a tough, tough market niche.

How well?

A recent article in Publishers Weekly mentioned Bryan and his series and quoted sales for the series of 150,000 copies.

You've got to be asking right now, "How the HECK did Bryan sell 150,000 copies in a series of YA Christian fantasies by a publisher who never did fiction before?"

Good question. I can tell you it wasn't because of the endorsements, because endorsements usually don't have much effect.

From what I can see, here's the answer:

Bryan is a talented and hard-working public speaker. He speaks in schools all the time and brings books to sell at the back of the room. Kids buy his books and then talk about them. Word of mouth takes it from there.

It's a simple strategy, but it takes a lot of that pesky time and energy to do it. Luckily, it doesn't take a lot of money.

In fact, it earns money, because most public speakers get paid to speak. They get paid quite decently, in fact.

Public speaking is a GREAT way to help pay your bills AND promote your books, both at the same time. Many nonfiction writers and a fair number of novelists over the years have used speaking to create a powerful platform for promoting their books.

Of course, many writers don't want to speak in public. When I started writing, that was the LAST thing I wanted to do, because I had general anxiety disorder/panic disorder. Getting up in public to speak gave me massive anxiety attacks every time. Radio interviews were a nightmare. Ditto for TV.

As many of you know, I solved that problem a couple of years ago with the help of a good counsellor. I had to, because I was getting so many requests to teach. Now I actually LIKE public speaking. My platform for teaching fiction has grown amazingly as a result.

My next step is to build a similar platform for my fiction. Because I wanna be like Bryan Davis someday.

Bryan uses his resources intelligently. He expends time and energy on his public speaking. In return, he brings in money AND he sells books. That's a great combination.

The next question is: How do you do that? How do you build a platform as quickly as possible? How do you avoid wasting vast amounts of time and energy?

I'm not an expert on those questions. So I've hired an expert to tell me the answers. I've hired her to tell you the answers too. Mary Byers has been a public speaker for nearly 20 years, and I've persuaded her to spill the beans on how to make public speaking work as a business.

There are writers who speak and there are speakers who write. I chose Mary because she's a speaker who writes. She knows the speaking business inside out. I want to learn everything she knows.

If you do too, then watch your in-box in the next week for details. If you don't care about promoting your books via public speaking, then hit the DELETE button.

But if you do care . . . watch that in-box!

4) What's New At AdvancedFictionWriting.com

September has been a busy month for me. I've been forging ahead on creating the new Fiction 301 product. That has entailed weeks of research and serious thinking about what makes fiction work at a deep level.

I also made strides on "Secret Project X", which I mentioned here last month. This project is so secret that any electrons I might use to describe it will be instantly vaporized, causing havoc on your computer.

I spent nearly a week in Dallas at the ACFW conference where I taught a major track on internet marketing for novelists. I've been in recovery since then.

I'm currently putting the final touches on a teleseminar series with guest expert Mary Byers. I'll

interview Mary on how writers can generate revenue while promoting their books through public speaking.

5) My Speaking Schedule

Oct. 6: I will be teaching a one-day event on "Tiger Marketing" in Seattle.

<http://www.NWChristianWriters.org>

Oct. 20: I will be the keynote speaker at the one day Oregon Christian Writers conference in Portland. My theme will be "Write With All Your Might."

<http://www.OregonChristianWriters.org>

6) Steal This E-zine!

This E-zine is free, and I personally guarantee it's worth at least 2010 times what you paid for it. I invite you to "steal" it, but only if you do it nicely . . .

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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>

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Randy Ingermanson
Publisher, Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine
