

The Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine

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Circulation: 32216 writers, each of them creating a Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius.

"Fiction Writing = Organization + Craft + 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 200 of you signed up in February), 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 at the bottom to let you update your address on my system.

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.

* If you're a writer, you get all kinds of advice, some of it contradictory. What are you supposed to do with it all? If you need a little advice on how to handle advice, check out this month's organization column, "Meta Advice."

* Want to know a powerful technique to make your dialogue zing? Check out my craft article for this month, "Naked Dialogue." No, it's not what you think.

* The hard part of marketing your fiction is learning to think like your customer. There's a simple way to jumpstart the process, and I'll tell you how in this month's marketing column, "Why Did You Buy THAT Book?"

2) Organization: Meta Advice

This month, a little advice on how to deal with advice.

Over the years, you're going to hear every possible kind of advice on your writing:

"Your pace is too slow. It puts me to sleep."

"Your pace is too fast. I can't catch my breath."

"Your main character is a wimp. Make him more manly."

"Your main character is too macho. Rein him in."

"You have too much dialogue and not enough action."

"You have too much action and not enough interior monologue."

"You have too much interior monologue and not enough dialogue."

At a certain point, you're going to throw up your hands and ask whom you can trust. Not all of this advice can be right.

When people critique your work, they always filter it through their own set of likes and dislikes.

Those may or may not be the likes and dislikes of your target reader. If you know for sure that your target reader is going to like the way you've written it, then ignore advice that tells you to change it to something your target reader won't like.

But what if you don't really know whether your target reader would agree with the advice you're getting?

In that case, you are the final authority. It's your book. You get to decide.

If the pace feels right to you, but people are telling you it's too fast, then you don't have to slow it down for them.

If you like your main character, but people tell you he's a wimp, then you don't have to change him.

If you like your dialogue the way it is, but people tell you it's too much, then you don't have to cut back for them.

I'm not saying you should always ignore advice.

I'm saying the opposite.

When you get advice, try it on for size. Think about how it'll change your fiction. Will it make your novel a better or worse experience for your target reader? Will it make YOU like your fiction better?

If the advice will improve your fiction, then run with it.

But if you don't like what the advice will do to your book, walk on by.

It's your book. You get to decide what advice you'll allow to mold it.

Choose the advice that makes you proud of your work. Ignore the advice that doesn't.

It's that simple. It's just not easy.

3) Craft: Naked Dialogue

"What's naked dialogue?"

"It's dialogue without any action, description, interior monologue, or interior emotion."

"Can you do that?"

"In short stretches."

"Why would you do that? It sounds stupid."

"If the main conflict is in the dialogue, then adding anything else takes the edge off the conflict."

"I don't believe that could work. Give me three examples where you'd use it."

"Courtroom scenes. Interrogations. Um ... can't think of a third example."

"Maybe a Socratic dialogue?"

"Oh, right."

"So you can actually make this work without even one tag to tell me who's talking?"

"If it works, it works."

"What if it doesn't work?"

"Then add in the minimum amount of other stuff necessary to make it work."

"I suppose you'd call that bikini dialogue then?"

"You're stretching the metaphor too far."

"And you somehow imagine this kind of dialogue works?"

"I know it."

"Could you do a whole scene that way?"

"Orson Scott Card did several scenes that way in ENDER'S GAME."

"How did the reader know who was talking?"

"Readers are smart."

"Don't be ridiculous. Don't readers have to see at least one tag so they know the names of the speakers?"

"Not unless they need to know the names."

"But you'd have to limit it to two people, right? You couldn't possibly do this with three people, could you?"

"Hey guys! Whatcha talking about so violent-like over in the corner? Gretchen, are you practicing your interrogation skills on poor Grendel?"

"Get lost, Goober. I'm just trying to get the bare facts."

"Whoa, whoa, whoa! I get the message. I'm not wanted, so I'm outta here. Give her heck, Grendel."

"So what was your question again? Something about three people?"

"Never mind, I figured it out."

"Any more questions?"

"Well, naked dialogue sounds difficult. Is it worth it?"

"You have to decide that after it's all written. You can always throw the scene away if you don't like it."

"Have you ever tried it? In your own scene?"

"Just once."

"When?"

"Just now."

"Oh, man, are you going meta on me? Mixing planes of existential reality again? You are so weird!"

"Admit it, Gretchen, you love me."

"That's it. We're finished and I'm leaving."

"It ain't over till I say it's over."

"You can't keep me here against my--"

"It's over."

4) Marketing: Why Did You Buy THAT Book?

A big part of marketing is learning to think like your customer.

More than a hundred million books have been published since Gutenberg did that neat trick with movable type.

Out of all those choices, why would any reader choose yours? What would be her motivation? What would be the actual process she follows from the initial state where she knows nothing about you to the final state where she pays for something you wrote?

That is a scary question, and if you let it, this question will paralyze you into never writing another word.

So let's turn the question around and make it unscary. Take five minutes and think about the last book you bought. Why did you buy it? Why THAT book out of a hundred million others?

This is a fun game that can teach you a lot. I'll play first.

The last time I bought a book was yesterday. A bunch of

friends and I were talking online about standing desks. Some of these friends already have one. I've recently ordered one. A standing desk is supposed to be good for your long-term health. People who do a lot of sitting tend to end up dead sooner than those who don't.

One of the friends in the group asked, "Did you guys read DROP DEAD HEALTHY?"

I'd never heard of this book. She explained that it's a hilarious book by a guy who decided to spend one year trying to do all those things they say we're supposed to do to get healthy. He wanted to become the healthiest person on the planet. This is the same guy who wrote a humorous book called THE YEAR OF LIVING BIBLICALLY, which I'd heard rave reviews about.

It sounded like an interesting book, so I popped onto Amazon, read the product description, and clicked the Buy button. It all took about two minutes. The main driver was a product recommendation from a friend. I'm reading the book today. It's good so far.

What do we learn from the above? If anything, it's the power of word of mouth. The author of this book did nothing -- nothing active anyway -- to earn my sale. One of his fans did most of the work. Amazon did the rest. The author gets the money, no matter how the sale happened.

OK, that was actually informative, so I'll play again. I have another book on my stack that I'll probably read next. It's titled CITY OF BONES, by Michael Connelly, one of the best writers of police procedurals out there.

I got an email recently, either from Amazon or from BookBub, saying that CITY OF BONES was on sale at a special price. I don't remember the price, but it was lower than normal. I had read several of Connelly's books and found him to be a terrific writer. Police procedural is not my absolute favorite category, but I read it some.

I figured I might as well get it now at a good price, so I clicked through and bought it.

That's the end of the story, but it's worth asking about the beginning. I knew Connelly would be worth reading because I had already read several of his books. But how did that happen originally?

Well, I had first noticed his novel THE LINCOLN LAWYER on the top of the best-seller lists a couple of years ago. Then a friend of mine who writes thrillers mentioned that Connelly is one of the very best writers in his category. So I bought a few of his books and found them to be outstanding.

What do we learn from this? My purchase was a result of a combination of several things:

- * Name recognition -- I had seen the author on a best-seller list.
- * Word of mouth -- my friend mentioned Connelly was outstanding.
- * Experience -- I read a book by him and found that he really is excellent.
- * Branding -- Connelly writes in a clearly defined niche, so I know that today's book is going to be similar to what he's done in the past.
- * A sales trigger -- I received an e-mail with notification of a special price for a limited time.

We learned something new with that one, so I'll play one more time. Just last week I finished reading THE INDIGO SPELL by Richelle Mead. It's a young-adult vampire suspense novel. What led me to buy it? Here's what happened.

Last summer I was Skyping with a friend who mentioned that she'd been reading Richelle Mead's VAMPIRE ACADEMY series. She said it was her daughter's favorite series, and her daughter reads a ton of YA fiction. My friend said it was fabulous, so I opened a web browser, went to Amazon, and did a search for the title.

I found it pretty quickly, read the product description, and then clicked on the Look Inside feature. I read the first chapter and found it extremely engaging. I'm not a huge fan of vampire fiction, but I had read the TWILIGHT series, and vampires can be fun. VAMPIRE ACADEMY looked like a terrific read, so I clicked the Buy button.

I read the book quickly, loved it, and raced through the other books in the series. Then I started the next series, featuring one of the minor characters who now becomes a major character. That series is incomplete, and after the first two books, I ran out. But I got an e-mail in December from Amazon mentioning that the next book, THE INDIGO SPELL, was due to release in February and if I preordered it, I'd get it the day it released.

So I clicked the link and preordered the book. A couple of months later, exactly at midnight, the book magically appeared on my iPad. And I started reading it the next day.

Again, there is something to learn from this chain of events. Here's how I bought that book:

- * Word of mouth alerted me to the existence of the author and gave me a title.
- * A search on Amazon brought the title up.
- * The sample chapter and product description made the initial sale.
- * Great writing got me to read the sequel.
- * Strong branding throughout the series assured me that each book would be "the same but different."
- * Good characters pulled me from one series to the next.
- * An e-mail from Amazon got me to pull the trigger on the sale two months before the book was actually available.
- * Automatic delivery put it at the top of my To Be Read list on the day the book was released.

OK, I've played the game three times and I'm starting to see the common threads. Word of mouth. Sample chapters. Great writing. Clear branding. E-mail notification. Easy electronic distribution.

Those are the things that get a sale from me.

Now what about you? Play the game several times, writing out how and why you bought the last few books you've bought. Then analyze the results.

What are the common elements that trigger a sale to you?

Not all readers are like you, but some of them are. You might want to get some of your friends to play the game. Choose friends similar to your target audience. Look for common elements.

Now here's the point of this game.

What can you learn from this game about how you should be marketing to your target audience? Where should you be putting your marketing effort -- your time, your energy, and your money?

5) What's New At AdvancedFictionWriting.com

I'm currently working on a new edition of my novel DOUBLE VISION, to be released in e-book format. I'm in the final stages of revamping both of my web sites. I'm sick to death of all of these projects and just want to check them off my list as "done."

My book, WRITING FICTION FOR DUMMIES, has been selling well since it began shipping three years ago. For the last couple of years, it's been the hottest selling fiction-writing book in the Kindle store.

You can find out all about WRITING FICTION FOR DUMMIES here:

<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/info/wffd>

If you've already bought the book and like it, I'd be delighted if you went to the Amazon page and posted a review:

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

I've also been gratified at the response to my flagship software product, "Snowflake Pro," which makes it fast, easy, and fun to work through the steps of my wildly popular Snowflake method for designing a novel. You can find out more about Snowflake Pro at:

<http://www.SnowflakeProSoftware.com>

I normally teach at four to six writing conferences per year. I am currently booked to teach at only two this year, which should giving me a bit of breathing room.

Why don't I teach at more conferences? Because teaching is an incredibly demanding blood sport and it sucks a huge amount of energy out of my tiny brain. I prefer to put my absolute best into a few locations than to muddle through at many.

I will be on the critique team at the Mount Hermon Christian Writers Conference in central California.

Details here:

<http://mounthermon.org/event/122>

I will also be teaching a six-hour class on marketing for writers at the Oregon Christian Writers Conference in Portland. Details here:

<http://ocwsummerconference.com/>

If you'd like me to teach at your conference in 2014 or beyond, 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) Randy Recommends . . .

I don't take paid ads for this e-zine. I do, however, recommend people I like.

I'm a huge fan of Margie Lawson's courses, both the ones she teaches in person and the ones she sells on her web site at

<http://www.MargieLawson.com>

Margie is a psychologist who applies what she knows about human psychology to writing fiction. I believe her material is brilliant. Check her out on her web site!

I've also become a fan of Thomas Umstattd's terrific uncommon-sense thoughts on internet marketing. You can read Thomas's blog at:

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

Thomas and his team are especially skilled at helping authors create a powerful web site using WordPress blogs. I am a huge fan of this approach, since it gives the most bang for the buck in an author site. Find out more about this at:

<http://www.AuthorMedia.com>

I'm watching Thomas's latest venture with interest: The BestSeller Society. I don't know enough to have an opinion on it yet, but wanted to mention it because Thomas is a bright guy who usually has smart things to say. More info on it here:

<http://www.bestsellersociety.com>

Please be aware that in this section I ONLY recommend folks who have never asked me to do so. Tragically, this means that if you ask me to list you here, I will be forced to say no.

7) Steal This E-zine!

This E-zine is free, and I personally guarantee it's worth at least 1729 times the price. I invite you to "steal" it, but only if you do it nicely . . .

Distasteful legal babble: This E-zine is copyright Randall Ingermanson, 2013.

Extremely tasteful postscript: I encourage you to e-mail this E-zine to any fiction writer friends of yours who might benefit from it. I only ask that you e-mail 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.

Of course you should not forward this e-mail to people who don't write fiction. They won't care about it.

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

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Award-winning novelist Randy Ingermanson, "the Snowflake Guy," publishes the free monthly Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine, with more than 32,000 readers. 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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