
The Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine

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Circulation: 9000+ writers, each of them creating a
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 (more than 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 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:

Last month we talked about the importance of building a great StoryWorld for your fiction. A prime example of the power of StoryWorld is the Harry Potter series. But StoryWorld is important in all genres, not just

fantasy. This month, I'll look at a mystery series that rises far above the norm by showing the world of cons and scams -- from an author who's an expert.

As the world of publishing gets ever tougher, we authors are pressed harder and harder by our publishers to market ourselves effectively. In this issue, I'll argue that great marketing is built on a strong foundation -- the authority of the author. Puzzled by that claim? Read on!

2) A House-of-Cards StoryWorld

Last month, I talked about the importance of StoryWorld for writing fiction, and I gave as an example the Harry Potter series. Creating a StoryWorld is extremely important in writing fantasy, science fiction, or historical fiction.

But what if you don't write any of those? What if you just write plain old ordinary fiction?

Well, that's the question, isn't it? Do you want to write plain old ordinary fiction? Or do you want to write extraordinary fiction? Extraordinary fiction happens when you create a StoryWorld so real that your readers believe they've been there.

Over the weekend, I read MR. LUCKY, the latest gritty mystery by magician/author James Swain. I don't read many mysteries (suspense is more down my alley than mystery) but I buy everything James Swain writes.

Why?

Because of the StoryWorld Swain creates.

James Swain writes novels about the gambling world. These aren't just any novels about gambling, though. They're about CHEATERS in the gambling world. Swain's lead character, Tony Valentine, runs a consulting business that catches cheaters. That's a great angle, because everybody loves a good con story.

Swain knows what he's talking about. He's a magician who's spent years studying crossroaders, grifters, and scammers to learn a zillion different ways to cheat at gambling. His insider knowledge helps him create an awesome StoryWorld.

When you read one of Swain's books, you feel like you're wallowing in the muck of Las Vegas (or Atlantic City or whichever sleazo cheezo casino sets the stage for the story). When you finish reading, you want to

take a shower, preferably with a firehose. You feel like you've been there -- and survived.

That's part of why we read gritty fiction (for those of us who read it). To vicariously visit a place that we really wouldn't want to go in reality. To imagine doing crazy stuff that would be foolish, frightening, or fatal in reality. To live life at its wallowing worst.

In Robert McKee's famous book on screenwriting, *STORY*, he makes the rather startling claim that all cliches in writing are due to a failure to do research. McKee argues that when you show your characters eating or shopping or working or goofing off or doing anything else, you'll fall back on cliches -- the dreary average of every novel you've ever read or movie you've ever watched. Unless you've done your research. When you've done your homework, you'll know those surprising details that bring your StoryWorld to life.

If you're Tom Clancy writing *PATRIOT GAMES*, you'll know, for example, that the folks who sell food at the concession stands inside CIA headquarters are blind.

If you're John Grisham writing *THE FIRM*, you'll know that most lawyers hate research.

And if you're James Swain writing *DEAD MAN'S POKER*, you'll know that a con man can win a bet on which sugar cube a fly is going to land on just by ... oops! Sorry, I'm not going to give that one away. You'll have to read the book to find out.

See, that's what I like about James Swain's books. I love a good con story. Maybe I have a personality defect, but I like them a lot. Swain's books are full of cons, from simple little sucker bets all the way up to full scale high-tech scams that rip off casinos for millions of dollars.

Many of them are real scams, used by hustlers around the world to separate bucks from marks. Swain didn't make these up. He researched them the hard way -- by talking to hustlers and watching them work.

Some examples will show what I'm talking about.

In *DEADMAN'S POKER*, a seventy two year old man bets a group of gamblers half a million dollars that he can beat a racehorse in a footrace over 100 yards. How much would you bet against him?

In *SUCKER BET*, a blackjack dealer is winning big. He's not stacking the deck, not false shuffling, not dealing seconds, and not marking the cards. Would you play at his table?

In *LOADED DICE*, two women are playing roulette. One of them keeps trying to place her bets after the ball drops, but the dealer won't let her. The other woman is

raking in money like there's no tomorrow. Which one would you arrest?

These are simple, ordinary scams, and Swain's books are full of them, with numerous examples in every book. Generally, the storyline hinges on solving some far more complex and outrageously brilliant con -- a ripoff scheme that turns on the little details that only a gambling insider would know.

A few examples:

In MR. LUCKY, a gambler goes on a hot streak at the blackjack table and wins EVERY hand he plays. Statistically, that isn't possible, and yet it's happening. He isn't marking the cards or even touching them. He isn't a card counter. He's just changing the number of hands he plays on every round. Is he cheating, or is he just ... lucky?

In DEADMAN'S BLUFF, a blind man is leading a major poker tournament in Las Vegas. He's smashing the competition, and some of the other disgruntled players think he's cheating. Is he or isn't he?

In GRIFT SENSE, a player is taking a casino to the cleaners night after night, and flaunting his success. Which is the exact opposite of what a cheater should be doing. Cheaters want to keep winning, which means not letting the casino know it's losing. Why is this guy different?

Reading James Swain's books, you get the feeling he's been in every casino in Vegas and Atlantic City a zillion times, that he's seen every crummy gambling joint in the country, watched every scam, knows every possible trick. It's an illusion of course, because nobody could know everything, but it feels like Swain does.

Building a realistic StoryWorld isn't just about getting the geography right. It's about getting the language and the mindset right. It's about insider knowledge. It's about those surprising little details that most people wouldn't guess, because they're counterintuitive.

No matter what kind of novel you write, your StoryWorld will be ever so much stronger if you bring insider knowledge to the table. Whether you're making the world safe for muggles ... or saving sleazy casino owners from the greed of those greasy grifters.

Interested in reading some of James Swain's books? Here are a couple of Amazon links. (I give these books an R rating on several counts apiece, so if that's an issue for you, you have been warned.)

GRIFT SENSE (first in the series):

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

MR. LUCKY (latest in the series):

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

Have fun!

3) Using Your Authority To Market Your Fiction

Imagine that your job is to market the fiction of James Swain, whom I profiled in the article above on StoryWorld. How would you market this series? Think about that for a minute, and then read on.

Got some ideas? Here's where I'd start:

James Swain is a magician who writes novels about scams. He's an authority on scams. That gives him instant credibility, and gives you a reason to want to read his fiction.

That immediately suggests the general nature of his brand. Swain is "the scam expert." Given that, it would be easy to create a unified strategy for marketing and publicity. For example ...

If you were a web designer trying to create a web site for Swain, you could ask him to write an article on how to avoid being cheated in poker. In fact, he's already done this. Check out his page on <http://www.jimswain.com/pokertips.htm>

If you were a publicist trying to get him on the radio or in the newspaper, you could easily generate a dozen ideas on interview subjects. Nonfiction interview subjects that would lead very naturally to a discussion of his fiction.

Likewise, if you wanted to put Swain on TV, you could pitch an interview in which he SHOWS how to cheat a casino or beat a blackjack dealer or spot a scam. Again, he's already done this: <http://www.jimswain.com/tv.htm>

It's not hard to think of plenty of ideas. Notice that all of these spring from one thing -- authority. Jim Swain is an authority on magic, gambling, and scams. People are always interested in hearing what experts have to say on fascinating topics like those.

All of which brings us to you. What subject are you an authority in?

I'm not asking whether you're the world's leading expert on any subject. There aren't very many people who are the best in the world at ANYTHING. But if you know more about your subject than 999 out of 1000 people, then you can probably call yourself an "expert." If you know more than most "experts," then you are very likely an "authority." If you're one of the best known "authorities" in your country, then you're a "national authority."

What are you an expert in? Data encryption? Hog breeding? Political theory? Practical plumbing? Etruscan literature? Divorce recovery? Selling a house? Quark physics? Medieval art? Adoption? Dog training? Foot maintenance for runners? Speed dating? NFL handicapping? Doll collecting? Grateful Dead music?

Almost certainly, there's something you know about more than most people do. Almost certainly, you could spend some time honing your knowledge to become a bona fide expert. By working hard, you might advance to the level of an authority. Depending on your intelligence and your ability to learn, you could conceivably become a national authority on your subject.

Remember that the higher your level of authority, the easier you are to promote. And the easier it is to market your fiction, IF your fiction is tied to your expertise.

That's an important caveat. As we noted above, James Swain is a national authority on gambling and scams. It's easy to promote his books on gambling and scams. Imagine that Swain decided to write a coming-of-age novel set in a small town in Kansas in the 1950s. With no gambling, no scams, no cons.

In other words, no nothing. Poof! There goes all that authority.

Your authority does you very little good when you write fiction that's outside your area of expertise. You'd be amazed how often writers want to do that. (I've done it, and so have a lot of writers.)

If that's what you want to do, then do it. But find a way to link it SOMEHOW to your expertise. Years ago, I wanted to write a historical novel set in ancient Jerusalem. I'm a physicist. On first glance, it appears that the novel had nothing to do with what I know. But I sold that novel, because I made it a time-travel novel. Who BETTER to write a time-travel novel than a physicist? I turned a liability into an asset.

It's easy to think of novelists who've had enormous expertise in some aspect of their subject area.

J.R.R. Tolkien was an expert in Norse and Icelandic mythology, and he drew heavily on that in creating the mythology of Middle Earth that drives THE LORD OF THE

RINGS.

John LeCarre (whose real name is David Cornwell) was a member of the British Foreign Service and worked in Germany, which gave him plenty of grist to write his spy novels, including THE SPY WHO CAME IN FROM THE COLD, probably the best spy novel ever written.

Michael Crichton earned his MD from Harvard and did postdoctoral work at the Salk Institute. He sold his early bestseller, THE ANDROMEDA STRAIN, while he was in med school.

If you were in charge of promoting the novels of each of these gentlemen, do you think you'd have an easy job?

Now here's my point. You ARE in charge of promoting your own novels. You are. Nobody else is. It's you.

Over the course of your writing career, you may well work with several publishing houses, dozens of editors, and untold billions of overworked publicity and marketing folks. I guarantee that you care far more about the success of your fiction than any of them do. You know far more about your work than they do. You can spend far more time promoting yourself than they can.

What's your expertise? Is it tied in to your fiction? How can you strengthen your level of expertise? Can you tie it more strongly to your fiction? What ammo can you give the marketing and publicity people at your next publisher to help sell your book? Can you use your authority to help market yourself as an author?

If you can't, who can?

4) What's New At AdvancedFictionWriting.com

After returning home from teaching at a writing conference in early August, I spent the rest of the month working on several projects that I'm really excited about.

For starters, I'm creating a new product, Fiction 301, for advanced writers who are getting close to writing publishable fiction. This is of course a follow-on to my courses Fiction 101 and Fiction 201.

I'm also working on a series of teleseminars with a talented speaker, Mary Byers. I'll be interviewing Mary on how to create a business as a public speaker.

An idea for a series of novels has been bubbling in my

brain for the last few months, and it's starting to gell now. I hope to turn it into a proposal shortly.

Finally, in my spare time, I've been working on "Secret Project X." I won't say much about it, other than that it ties together almost all my interests into one killer idea. Whether it will actually pan out is an open question, because it requires solving a logic puzzle that has defied solution for centuries, but I'm having a lot of fun on it right now.

5) My Speaking Schedule

Sept. 20-23: I will be teaching a major track on "Internet Marketing" at the American Christian Fiction Writers conference in Dallas.
<http://www.acfw.com>

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 814 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>

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 blurb with it:

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Randy Ingermanson
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