
The Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine

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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 (more than 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 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:

I believe that success in fiction writing comes from balancing three aspects of the writing life: organization, creativity, and marketing. I'll discuss each of these in one of my regular columns.

In the organization column, I'll talk about making a mid-course correction. But you can't revise what you don't have. Do you have a plan for your year?

In the creativity column, I'll talk about a technique for adding more conflict into your dialogue. Are you using this method already?

In the marketing column, I'll talk about getting traffic to your web site. Unlike in the FIELD OF DREAMS, building a web site is no guarantee that "they" will come. Do you know why people come to some web sites and not to others?

Are you reading my blog? Join the fun here:

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

2) Organizing: Do You Need A Mid-Course Correction?

It's July already and we are midway through 2008. Are you where you hoped you'd be when you planned out your year in January?

Almost certainly not. Things change. Life happens. Obstacles and opportunities come up, both of which can sidetrack a plan.

My year has played out differently than I expected. An interesting opportunity came up a few months ago, and I've pursued it. That's turned out very well, but . . . it means that some projects I had planned for the year have been delayed.

The thing is that I'm OK with that. I spent ten minutes today reading through my annual plan and mentally restructuring the second half of the year.

One project is already done (which always calls for a celebration). One project that I thought would be done by now is just ready to begin, but I expect that it will go quicker than planned because I've gotten some extra training (and been well-paid for it) as a result of those pesky unexpected opportunities. And a couple of projects are going to get pushed back to later this year, or maybe even next year. One of my projects was

just to teach myself the skills needed for a big project next year.

That's just how life is. Things change. Therefore plans change.

What about you? Do you have a plan for the year? (My plan is nothing more than a list of 5 projects that I want to get done this year, along with some details on each.)

If you don't have a plan for the year, it's not too late to make one. You could do it right now if you felt like it. You could slam one out in half an hour.

Not in the mood? OK, then let me recommend a couple of ways to get in the mood:

* Check out the teleseminar series I did with strategic planning expert Allison Bottke last year. (Allison and I called it the "Clean Up Your Act!" series because her methods inspired me to clean up my act. They've also inspired hundreds of other writers to clean up their acts. If you want to clean up your act, check out this page now:

<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/links/clean.php>

* Check out the planning tools on the Simpleology web site. (I spent six months NOT using these tools because the name "Simpleology" sounded kind of silly to me. Then I started using the tools and discovered that they work, silly name or no silly name). The Simpleology 101 course on time management is free. (Simpleology 102 and 103 on money and energy management are not free.) My productivity has shown continuous improvement since I started using Simpleology and I no longer care if the name sounds "silly" or not. Sign up and start using the tools here:

<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/links/s101.php>

Nothing happens unless you take action, so I'm cutting this article short right now. If you want things to change, then take action. It's that simple.

3) Creating: Subtexting in Dialogue

In a recent post on my Advanced Fiction Writing blog, I talked about "subtexting" in dialogue. I'm going to expand on that post here.

Roughly speaking, subtexting refers to the art of putting a whole different layer of meaning under the surface, so that the dialogue is not really about what the dialogue appears to be about.

Let's look at an example. This is from Book 4 of the Harry Potter series. Harry and his friend Ron are at the Yule Ball, very much NOT enjoying themselves, when they're joined by their friend Hermione, whose date for the evening is Viktor Krum, a student from the rival school Durmstrang:

"It's hot, isn't it?" said Hermione, fanning herself with her hand. "Viktor's just gone to get some drinks."

Ron gave her a withering look. "Viktor?" he said. "Hasn't he asked you to call him Vicky yet?"

Hermione looked at him in surprise. "What's up with you?" she said.

"If you don't know," said Ron scathingly, "I'm not going to tell you."

Hermione stared at him, then at Harry, who shrugged.

"Ron, what--?"

"He's from Durmstrang!" spat Ron. "He's competing against Harry! Against Hogwarts! You--you're--" Ron was obviously casting around for words strong enough to describe Hermione's crime, "fraternizing with the enemy, that's what you're doing!"

Randy sez: Subtext is tricky, because a lot of times you need to know the context, and that's often not apparent in a short segment like this. The context is this:

Both Harry and Ron dithered around for a long time before asking girls to the ball. Harry asked Cho Chang, who he's had a crush on all year, and she turned him down because she'd already been asked.

Ron asked Hermione, who turned him down, claiming that she'd already been asked also. Ron didn't believe her, but she refused to say who had asked her out. So he didn't find out until he got to the ball and learned that Hermione's date was Viktor Krum, one of the best Quidditch players in the world.

Why is Ron so mad at Hermione? It has nothing to do with "fraternizing with the enemy." It has everything to do with Ron being rather sweet on Hermione, and just assuming (since she's rather a plain girl) that nobody else is particularly interested in her.

So Ron's angry at Krum for horning in on the girl he likes; he's really angry at Hermione for not knowing it (oh, but she does); and he's perfectly furious with himself for waiting so long to ask her out (as he

should be).

Ron can't say any of that, because it would mean admitting to emotions that he barely understands, so he makes up a rather stupid excuse to be angry.

Hermione knows all this, of course, but she can't say anything, because this is something Ron is going to have to figure out for himself. If she explained it to him, it would ruin the game, and the game is that Hermione likes Ron at least as much as he likes her.

Harry doesn't get any of this. Like Ron, he's way slow on the uptake, so he takes the entire conversation at face value.

And at face value, it's rather silly, because Viktor Krum isn't really the enemy. The rival school Durmstrang isn't the enemy.

The enemy is the evil Lord Voldemort. The enemy is the irrational rivalry between schools. The enemy is hatred. In that sense, it's Ron who is fraternizing with the enemy, not Hermione.

That is subtexting--two different dialogues going on at the same time, one visible, one invisible. The subtext is often a powerful hook on which to hang the theme of your story.

Now it should be obvious that you don't want to be using subtexting everywhere in your novel. If you do that, it's going to be Xtremely irritating to your reader.

What you DO want everywhere in your novel is conflict. If you have a dialogue in your novel without conflict, then you need to seriously ask if it is pulling its own weight. A novel is "characters in conflict."

Subtexting is one of many ways to achieve conflict. You use it when, for one reason or another, the characters can't say what they really mean.

You don't use it when the conflict is overt. In the DIE HARD movies, for example, when Bruce Willis says, "Yippie kiyay <expletive deleted>!" that is NOT subtexting. That is the prelude to a powerful and very satisfying explosion.

There is a time and place for everything. An explosion tends to settle conflict permanently (especially if accompanied by the "Yippie kiyay" incantation.) In DIE HARD, you want that. The purpose of movies like DIE HARD is to reaffirm that there is justice in this world.

In the case of dear Hermione and dense Ron, however, there are still thousands of pages to go before the dust settles. Given that, you want to keep the conflict alive for a good long time.

Suppose that in the scene I showed above, Hermione decided to say what she really thinks.

She'd say, "Ron, you're just jealous of Viktor and mad at yourself for not asking me sooner."

That would be the truth, but it would massively screw up the storyline. Ron's pride would be irrevocably injured. He'd laugh in Hermione's face and say, "You're mental." Then he'd stalk away and never, ever, ever ask her out again. He'd probably end up with the dippy Lavender Brown.

If Hermione didn't like Ron, that's the way she'd handle the situation. But the fact is that Hermione likes Ron very much. She can't tell the truth, so she has to play dumb while Ron says things he doesn't really mean. The conflict continues for a full scene and their relationship lives on another day.

As I said, there's a time and a place for everything. Even the DIE HARD movies use subtexting. Practically everything Bruce Willis says to his wife is packed with subtext. (In DIE HARD #4, the subtext is there, but now it's with his daughter instead.)

I leave it as an exercise for the reader to explain what the subtext is in the DIE HARD movies and why it's necessary. If this means that you have to watch them several times in order to figure it all out, well . . . yippie kiyay.

4) Marketing: Web Sites and Blogging, Part 6

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

A web site or blog can be a powerful marketing tool, but only if potential readers actually visit your site.

And the sad truth is that if you build it, "they" won't necessarily come. You can spend big bucks on a web site that hardly anyone ever visits.

It's also possible to create an inexpensive site that is visited by enormous numbers of people.

Life just isn't fair. Your goal is not to make life fair. Your goal is to make life as unfair as possible -- in your favor.

How do you make "them" come to your web site or blog?

You can't. You can't MAKE people do anything they don't want to do. Not for long, anyway. And not more than once.

You don't make people come to your site. You get the search engines to enable them to come. Then you make it Xtremely attractive for them to come.

If they still don't come, maybe you should seriously consider opening a Krispy Kreme shop instead. Think about it. When you build a KK shop, "they" come in droves.

Still intent on having "them" come to your web site or blog? Then it's time to deconstruct a few buzzwords.

One of the most over-hyped buzzwords in the internet marketing world is the phrase "Search Engine Optimization." The acronym for this is "SEO" and the basic idea is to design your web site to help the search engines bring the right people to your site.

I've learned to cringe when I hear the term "SEO." The reason is that this is usually attached to a hefty price tag, payable in advance to an SEO expert. There are usually a lot of buzzwords tossed around. My three least favorite are these: "analytics," "keywords," and "monetization."

These buzzwords actually mean something, by the way. Let's talk about those briefly.

"Analytics" are measuring tools to count how much traffic comes to your web site. You can sign up for Google Analytics free on Google's web site and get all the measurements you can imagine, along with even more that you never imagined.

"Keywords" are the words or phrases that people type into search engines when they want to do a search. You can learn which keywords are commonly searched for by using Google's free keyword tool, or using the payware tool at www.WordTracker.com.

"Monetization" means making money from your web site. If you are a writer, then you likely have info about your books or your speaking skills on your web site, and so one very effective way to monetize your site is simply to get site visitors to visit the pages with that info.

The above are three of the many buzzwords that get thrown around, and they're the three I hate the most because they're so simple and are often made to sound so complicated.

Let me give you the SEO secret that lies at the core of everything. If you screw this up, then all the other SEO trix you play are going to be smoke and mirrors.

Here's the secret: Content Is King.

If you have great content on your web site, then "they" will come.

Who are "they" by the way? "They" are the people interested in your great content. "They" will find you. "They" will read your great content. "They" will be watched with great interest by the search engines. "They" will tell their friends about you. "They" will blog about you. "They" will add links to you from their web site.

If you don't have great content, then none of that will happen. If you don't have great content, you are still free to pay SEO experts big bucks to write an SEO report filled with SEO buzzwords. (For the right price, you can even pay ME those big bucks, although I will go light on the buzzwords and heavy on the "great content" sermon.)

If you don't have great content, you can still play SEO trix and squeak out a bit of traffic for a while. I don't recommend it, but you can do it.

The reason I don't recommend it is because if you don't have great content, that traffic simply won't keep coming. You'll have to keep playing ever more complicated SEO trix to get "them" to come to your site.

Luckily, you are a writer, and by definition, writers are able to create great content.

What is "great content?"

Great content is the following:

- * Great content is valuable
- * Great content is understandable
- * Great content is unique
- * Great content is entertaining
- * Great content is free

Great content is the foundation for everything. Once you realize that great content gives you the keys to the kingdom, you can focus on creating as much great content on your web site or blog as you have the time and energy to create.

If you have great content on your web site or blog, then "they" will come for it.

Eventually.

The only problem is that "eventually" can mean many things -- days, months, years, centuries. Being an impatient devil, you'll want to speed things up a bit. You do that using those pesky SEO trix.

SEO trix are not bad. They are frosting. If you have all frosting and no cake, then you have a truly

revolting dessert. But once you have a good cake, it makes sense to put a reasonable amount of frosting on it. In exactly the same way, if you have great content on your web site, then it makes sense to use a reasonable number of SEO trix.

Next month, we'll talk about some of those SEO trix and how they work to bring you the traffic you deserve.

5) What's New At AdvancedFictionWriting.com

I now have a humor column in a brand-new online magazine, Christian Fiction Online Magazine.

Am I qualified to write humor? You decide! Check out my first column here:

http://www.ChristianFictionOnlineMagazine.com/biz_rooney.html

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

If you want to hear me speak on fiction writing, there will be a couple of opportunities in coming months.

I will be teaching for several days on marketing for novelists at the Oregon Christian Writers conference at the end of July. Details here:

<http://oregonchristianwriters.org>

I will be teaching on those pesky Motivation-Reaction Units at the ACFW conference in Minneapolis in September. Details here:

<http://www.ACFW.com>

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 92117 times what you paid for it. I invite you to "steal" it, but only if you do it nicely

. . .

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this E-zine to any writer friends of yours who might
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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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Publisher, Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine
