
The Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine

Publisher: Randy Ingermanson ("the Snowflake guy")
Motto: "A Vision for Excellence"
Date: January 5, 2010
Issue: Volume 6, Number 1
Home Pages: <http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com>
<http://www.Ingermanson.com>
Circulation: 19021 writers, each of them creating a
Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius.

"Fiction Writing = Organizing + Creating + Marketing"

What's in This Issue

- 1) Welcome to the Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine!
 - 2) Organizing: Your Board of Directors
 - 3) Creating: The Art of War For Writers
 - 4) Marketing: Why I Love Writing Conferences
 - 5) What's New At AdvancedFictionWriting.com
 - 6) Randy Recommends . . .
 - 7) Steal This E-zine!
 - 8) Reprint Rights
-
-

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

Those of you who have joined in the past month (more than 500 of you signed up in December), 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:

The successful novelist needs good organization, good craft, and good marketing. In this issue, we'll talk about each of these in turn.

* I've been working more effectively in the past year. I believe that a big part of the reason is that I now have a Board of Directors to answer to. Want to know how to get your own Board of Directors? Read all about it in my article "Your Board of Directors."

* It's rare when you can pick the mind of a successful novelist. Writing is war, and most writers zealously guard their secrets. This month I interview a writer I admire very much -- James Scott Bell, award-winning, best-selling novelist and author of the brand-new book THE ART OF WAR FOR WRITERS. Want some key insights from the book right now? Check out my interview, "The Art of War for Writers."

* Writing conferences have been part of my life since I began writing. Why? Because they work. It's that simple. I believe that a writer's best chance to break in as a published author is at a writing conference. Want to know why? I spill the details in my article, "Why I Love Writing Conferences"

Are you reading my blog? Join the fun here:
<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/blog>

2) Organizing: Your Board of Directors

2009 is over, and aren't you glad? If ever a year felt like a mugging, it was 2009.

Now 2010 is upon us. Have you made any resolutions for the New Year? Or have you gotten old and cynical because you know that resolutions hardly ever last into February?

There's a way to get the benefits of New Year's Resolutions 365 days out of the year, but without actually making any resolutions. Here it is:

Appoint yourself a Board of Directors.

What's a Board of Directors? How do you find them? What do they do for you that you can't do for yourself? Do

you have to pay them?

A Board of Directors is a group of people that you're accountable to.

I got this idea from my friend, novelist Tosca Lee, who works as a consultant for the Gallup Corporation and who teaches business people how to be more effective. Awhile back, Tosca told me that I needed to appoint a Board of Directors.

As I thought about it, I realized that I already had the beginnings of a Board of Directors, but it was incomplete. So I filled it out by appointing one new member to oversee things. Let me tell you who's on my Board and what they do.

* My wife Eunice has been on my Board for several decades now. Her role is to be my best friend and to be a sounding board for ideas. When I formed my corporation a few years ago, she took on the formal role of Treasurer. In day to day operations, she's my administrative assistant.

* My agent Lee Hough is a crucial member of my Board. I met Lee at a writing conference more than 10 years. At the time, he was an editor and I was unpublished. He's been my agent now for several years. His role on my Board is to give me career advice, which includes telling me what he knows he can sell and what he knows he can't.

* My accountant Nancy Iannarone joined my Board about three years ago when I formed my corporation. Her role is to help me navigate QuickBooks quicksand and do my taxes. She also serves as a sounding board for financial issues. I meet with Nancy every month for about an hour and she has massively reduced my stress level on all matters with dollar signs in front of them.

* My freelance editor Meredith Efken became part of my Board gradually. Several years ago, she e-mailed me and volunteered to critique my next manuscript. At the time, I knew nothing about her, but she quickly proved that she not only gets my fiction but she knows how to explain the female mind to a rather dense guy. It also helps that her husband is a physicist like me, so she speaks geek fluently. I've come to value her advice and her friendship.

* My long-time writing buddy John Olson serves on my Board as all of the above -- friend, career advisor, financial whiz, critiquer, and all-purpose motivator. He's the newest member of my Board, and he oversees things. I serve on John's Board with the same duties, with the one exception that John doesn't need my financial advice and I'm incompetent to give it. I brought John onto my Board because it was incomplete without him and I needed somebody whom I could talk to daily.

That's my full Board of Directors, and they keep me on track. My life is immeasurably better because of them.

Now let's talk about you.

As your writing career advances, you'll need a Board of Directors. You need people who can give you the following:

- * Friendship
- * Financial advice
- * Editorial services
- * Career advice
- * Motivation

Your Board of Directors is complete when it can provide as much as you need of all of the above.

You may be wondering about that pesky money thing. Do you have to pay your Board?

I pay mine. My wife Eunice is a stockholder in my corporation and she also draws a salary as my administrative assistant. My agent Lee gets a commission on my books. My accountant Nancy invoices me for her time. Meredith is a professional freelance editor and I pay her standard rate for her work. I don't pay John for his service on my Board; instead, I serve on his Board.

Is your Board of Directors complete yet? What is your most pressing need for your Board? Who do you know who might be able to fill that role? Who do you know who might know somebody who could fill that role?

The most important thing you do in 2010 might be to fill a critical gap in your Board of Directors. I can almost guarantee that a Director will last longer than a New Year's resolution.

Take action now. Nothing happens unless you take action.

3) Creating: The Art of War For Writers

I'm currently reading a new book from Writer's Digest Books, THE ART OF WAR FOR WRITERS, by James Scott Bell. The book is packed with the hard-earned wisdom of a guy who's been around the block even more times than I have.

Jim's book is modeled after the classic book, THE ART OF WAR by Sun Tzu, a Chinese general of the 4th century BC.

I asked Jim and Sun if they'd be willing to do a joint interview for this month's e-zine. Jim readily agreed. Sun was unable to join us.

About Jim:

James Scott Bell is the bestselling author of DECEIVED, TRY DYING, TRY DARKNESS, TRY FEAR and several other thrillers. He is a winner of the Christy Award for Excellence and was for several years the fiction columnist for Writers Digest.

Here's how the interview went:

RSI: Why does the world need yet another book on writing fiction?

JSB: This one is a little different. I thought new and veteran writers could use a sort of "field manual" for many of the challenges they face on the road to getting -- and staying -- published. The idea came to me that it could be like Sun Tzu's classic on war, with some commentary thrown in. Every writer will find something new in it, or at least a fresh perspective.

RSI: It's definitely fresh. I'm really enjoying it. The first section of your book is on "reconnaissance." What does that mean for the fiction writer?

JSB: It means having a knowledge of the publishing business. You can't plot your course if you don't know the terrain. I also cover the "mental game" here, because so much of a writer's success depends on a certain amount of self-discipline.

RSI: My own experience is that the mental game is the most important part of this writing thing. Can you give one example of reconnaissance for a novelist?

JSB: One thing the writer must do is have a look at his or her own writing weaknesses, and form a plan to improve them. So I talk in the book about putting together a writer's notebook, as a way of being intentional about this. Another benefit is that you feel good about your writing life when you are deliberately working on improvement.

RSI: And if you quit improving, you start dying as a writer. The middle section of your book covers "tactics." What are tactics and why does a novelist need to know them?

JSB: This is primarily a craft section, and I've tried to "fill in some cracks" in what is normally taught in writing books -- tips and techniques that can elevate your manuscript to that next level.

RSI: Can you give one example of tactical fiction writing?

JSB: One of my favorites is the Voice Journal. This is what I use to get in touch with my characters on a deep level. It's a stream of consciousness document that you do in the voice of the character, talking about anything (you can prompt the character with questions, too). You just let the words come, until you start writing in the actual voice of the character. It will happen. The best part is when something pops up that surprises you. Then you're really creating a fresh character.

RSI: The last section of your book covers "strategy." What does strategic fiction writing include?

JSB: Strategy is for the long term, the career plan, the setting of goals. I want to help writers be intentional about this, because those who do it are going to have more success than those who don't, as a general rule. I'm all about advancing careers.

RSI: Can you give one example of strategic thinking for fiction writers?

JSB: Here's a basic one: don't be quick to quit your day job. Writers who do this can find themselves in a pressure situation that doesn't produce their best work. I advocate having two books under contract, royalties coming in (not counting advances) and then a realistic budget worked out before you take that leap.

On the other hand, a day job can keep you grounded and secure, so you're freer in your writing. Financial peace of mind is not something to sneeze at. Someone was once asked, "How can a person make a small fortune as a fiction writer?" The answer is, "Start with a large fortune." A steady climb up the publishing ladder is to be preferred.

RSI: Well said! Financial stability is the foundation for any writing career. Thanks for joining us today, Jim! The book is brilliant.

If you're interested in checking out THE ART OF WAR FOR WRITERS, here's a link to the book on Amazon:
<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/blinks/bell/war.php>

Let's be clear about one thing -- the publishing world is horribly, savagely, cruelly unfair.

If you're an unpublished writer, your odds of selling your novel are far less than if you were a published author.

Nothing I say can change that fact.

The publishing world is a jungle. It always has been. It probably always will be.

And yet there's a sense in which it's also incredibly fair.

Every published author was once unpublished. They all faced those horrible, savage, cruel odds. They all found a way to beat those odds and break in.

I've met hundreds of authors and I know many dozens of them well. I've seen just about every conceivable path to publication.

After years of watching writers kick, bite, and claw their way into that pesky jungle, here is the most important thing I've learned:

Writing conferences tilt the odds in your favor. By that, I mean that writers who regularly go to writing conferences have a better chance of getting published than those who don't.

Why is that? After all, it's extremely rare to go to a conference and sign a contract on the spot. (I only know one editor who ever offered a first contract for a novel at a conference, and she technically didn't have permission to do so, but she did it anyway.)

So what's so special about conferences? Several things:

- * You get to know real editors, agents, and writers.
- * You learn the current state of the industry.
- * You learn the craft of writing from the pros.
- * You have a chance to pitch your work -- and this can eventually lead to a contract, months or years down the road.
- * You come home freshly motivated.

Different writers get different things out of a conference. A lot depends on where you are in your career, what sort of book you're writing, and how well you interact with people.

I've seen writers go home from a conference practically floating on air because of the great connections they made. I've seen other writers leave the same conference in tears.

I've been on both sides of that fence. I've really enjoyed most of the conferences I've been to. But I've also gone to a couple that depressed me mightily. The way you leave a conference has a lot to do with your expectations and preparation going in.

The bottom line, though, is that conferences work.

I sold my first book without an agent as a direct result of contacts I made at a writing conference. Ditto my second book. And my third. After that, I had an agent and a track record and I didn't really need conferences to sell books.

A lot of my author friends can say the same thing. That's why I love writing conferences -- because they help writers make those crucial connections. Not instantly, of course. But over the course of a few years, writing conferences make a massive difference to writers.

That's also the reason I teach at conferences.

I like hanging out with other authors. I like meeting editors and agents and learning what they're looking for. I like critiquing writers and discovering new talent and connecting them up with the right agent. For me, that's fun.

Is there a conference in your future for this coming year? That's a tough question, because conferences aren't cheap.

To go to a conference, you have to take time away from family, friends, and job. You usually have to travel, and if you have to cross international borders, that can be a huge expense.

If you think you might want to go to a conference this year, now is the time to start planning. You need to choose your conference, sock away some money for it, prepare your manuscript, and get your head in the game.

Don't let that overwhelm you. If you think this is your year to go to a conference, but you don't know how to prepare for it, then I've got a 60-page e-book on my Web site that spells out just about everything.

It costs \$15, which is dirt-cheap as an investment in your future.

This e-book was written by Meredith Efken, the freelance editor on my Board of Directors.

If you want to know more, you can get all the details here:

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

Let me make it clear that you can get published without ever going to a conference. Some of my author friends

have done it. But my observation is that it takes more time, more work, and more luck that way.

Let me also make it clear that going to a conference is no guarantee of getting published. You need talent, hard work, and persistence to sell a novel. If you lack those, a writing conference is just a nice vacation with some of the coolest people on the planet -- other writers.

The odds of getting published are long. Writing conferences shorten those odds. If you're going to a conference this year, now is the time to start planning for it.

5) What's New At AdvancedFictionWriting.com

My new book, *WRITING FICTION FOR DUMMIES*, began shipping in late November and is now in bookstores just about everywhere. The book had a terrific launch and spent several days in the top 1000 on Amazon. You can find out all about *WRITING FICTION FOR DUMMIES* here: <http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/info/wffd>

I recently released my latest software product, "Snowflake Pro," which makes it fast, easy, and fun to work through the steps of my well-known Snowflake method for designing a novel. You can find out more about Snowflake Pro at: <http://www.SnowflakeProSoftware.com>

I teach at roughly 4 to 6 writing conferences per year, depending on my schedule. My schedule for next year is already beginning to fill in.

In March, 2010, I will be doing a small group mentoring workshop at the Mount Hermon Christian Writers Conference. More info: <http://mounthermon.org/adult/professionals/writers-conference>

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) 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.

Margie will be teaching Master Classes at the following locations in the next few months:

- * January, 2009: Portland, Oregon
- * February, 2009: Silicon Valley
- * April, 2010: St. Louis

See Margie's web site for details.

Margie will also be teaching several online courses next year:

- * January: Defeat Self-Defeating Behaviors
- * March: Empowering Characters' Emotions
- * May: Deep Editing: The EDITS System, Rhetorical Devices, and More
- * June: Writing Body Language and Dialogue Cues Like a Psychologist.

If you want to buy these courses in electronic form, you can get them at Margie's site NOW: <http://www.MargieLawson.com>

7) Steal This E-zine!

This E-zine is free, and I personally guarantee it's worth at least 1729 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, 2009.

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>

8) 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 2-paragraph blurb with it:

Award-winning novelist Randy Ingermanson, "the Snowflake Guy," publishes the Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine, with more than 19,000 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.

Randy Ingermanson
Publisher, Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine
<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/ezine>
