
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 (over 500 of you signed up in April), 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 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.

* In the last few years, I've learned that success comes to those who schedule it. Want to know what that means? Read this month's column on organizing your writing life, "Scheduling Success."

* Great stories live in great Storyworlds. Do you know the one thing that brings a Storyworld to life? Find out in this month's column on craft, "Breathing Life Into Your Storyworld."

* My friend Jim Rubart has run his own marketing company since the 1990s. Recently his debut novel hit the shelves and reached #1 in the Amazon Kindle store for over a week. Interested in Jim's thoughts on how to market fiction? Read this month's marketing column, "Interview With Jim Rubart."

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

2) Organizing: Scheduling Success

I met an editor at a writing conference years ago who said something that shocked me. The publishing house he worked for was a small family-owned press that had been in business for decades. They had recently published a novel by an unknown author which took off -- and sold over a million copies.

Here's what the editor told me: "Ninety percent of success comes from just showing up."

I had heard that before, of course, but never from somebody who had just had a stunning success. Usually, people who do the stunning success thing find a way to take credit for it. Or they find a way to give credit to others in a noble and humble way that just happens to also make themselves look good.

But giving credit to "just showing up?" Is that sensible?

Yes it is, I think. Let's remember that the other ten percent of success is most likely due to somebody's cleverness, talent, or wit. I would never want to

minimize the great value of cleverness, talent, and wit. But they're not enough.

The brutal truth is that cleverness, talent, and wit don't get a novel written.

Hitting your quota every day gets your novel written. And you hit your quota by doing the following:

- * Define your quota. How many words will you write today?
- * Meet your quota. Just for today.
- * Schedule time to do it again tomorrow. Every day.

When people ask me what kind of time commitment it takes to write a novel, I give them two numbers: 2000 and 10.

2000 hours is the "typical" number of hours that a novelist spends developing her craft so that she's good enough to get published.

10 hours per week is the minimum number of hours per week that a novelist should be spending in order to write a book in year.

Why those numbers? They're rules of thumb based partly on observation and partly on what other writers tell me.

They're plausible numbers, and the math is really pretty simple. If you spend 10 hours per week writing, in a year you'll have spent about 500 hours. Even a very slow writer can complete a 350-page book in that amount of time, with room left to edit it.

Furthermore, once you sell your first novel, your publisher is going to expect you to revise it -- probably substantially. They'll also want another book from you in about a year. A publisher is simply going to assume you've got time to do all that work. It makes sense to be ready for that by getting in the habit of working at least 10 hours per week before you get published.

10 hours per week is a minimum. 20 hours is better, but not every writer can manage that.

But why does it take 2000 hours to learn the craft of writing?

I don't know, but that just seems to be typical.

I do know a few published authors who sat down, typed their first novel, and sold it right away. Every one of them tells me that their first novel was horrible and they wish they'd learned more before they got published.

I also know a few published authors who took much more than 2000 hours of work to get published. Often, that wasn't because they were bad writers. Most often, it's clear that their category was a tough sell. The one

consolation of being a writer-in-training for a long time is that a fair number of these writers broke in at the top of their game -- either hitting a bestseller list right away or winning an award with their debut novel.

Doing a little more math, 2000 hours of training, at 10 hours per week, works out to about four years to learn the craft. Getting published is a lot like getting a college degree, except that in college, you have a good idea when you're going to graduate.

In the weird world of publishing, you never know when -- or if -- you're going to graduate.

Let's get practical. You can't guarantee you'll succeed. But you can structure your life so you have the best change of getting published.

That structure is very simple. You need to find a way to put in the hours you need. That's what "just showing up" means -- you put in the hours, every day, every week, every month, every year, till you graduate.

Let's be clear on one thing: If you're not putting in 10 hours per week right now, you probably can't instantly start doing so. Real life is there, waiting to burn any free hours you have.

What you can do is ramp up to 10 hours per week over a period of time -- a year or two is fine.

Look at your calendar right now. When do you ordinarily spend time writing? How many hours per week does it add up to? Be honest here, since it's no good lying to yourself.

If you're writing 10 to 20 hours per week, then that's great! Keep it up. No need to read the rest of this article.

If you're not writing that much yet, then it's urgent for you to figure out how to get to that level -- eventually. Can you carve out an extra hour per week right now? Can you put that extra hour into your schedule? Can you meet that schedule?

Finding the time is actually pretty easy. Most all of us have at least a little slack time in our schedule.

The hard part is meeting the schedule. Life wants to intrude. It just does.

I've come to believe that one of the best ways to meet that writing schedule is to be accountable to somebody. That means doing the following:

- * Find somebody who wants you to succeed.
- * Tell them your new schedule for writing.
- * Commit to hitting a quota of hours MOST weeks.

- * Commit to a penalty that you'll pay if you miss.
- * Commit to reporting in honestly every week.

I typically set a penalty of \$100 if I miss my work quota for a given week. That's a severe enough penalty that I won't miss. Some weeks, when I'm traveling or during major holidays, I simply don't commit to a work quota for that week. So my schedule isn't the exact same thing every week. But when I do commit to a quota, I hit it.

Ninety percent of success is just showing up. Just hitting your quota. Just doing it. You can schedule that.

You can't schedule that other pesky ten percent: The cleverness, talent, and wit. You've either got those or you don't, and setting a quota won't help if you don't.

But assuming you do, you can make that other ninety percent a part of your routine.

Is there any reason not to?

3) Creating: Breathing Life Into Your Storyworld

In my columns over the last two months, I've talked about various aspects of Storyworld -- the need to have some sort of limits within your Storyworld, and the fact that some stories only make sense at one particular point in time (the "opportune moment.")

This month, I'd like to talk about what makes a Storyworld come alive.

In a word, it's people.

More technically, it's people groups -- the cultural groups that populate your Storyworld.

Characters are of course an important element of any story, but I'm not talking here about characters -- individual persons within your story. Instead, I'm talking about the clusters of people who identify with each other in some way.

Some stories gain their power from the inherent conflict between people groups.

Let's look at some examples, which I'll choose at random from some of my favorite novels.

* ENDER'S GAME, by Orson Scott Card, envisions a future in which the human race is threatened by a race of

intelligent ant-like aliens ("Buggers") who have twice tried to invade planet Earth and twice been repelled. All humanity must now work together to destroy the Buggers, but is there any hope to defeat a race of aliens who are telepathic and can therefore cooperate as one single fighting force?

* RIVER GOD, by Wilbur Smith, tells the story of the Hyksos invasion in (approximately) 18th century BC Egypt. The narrator of the story, Taita, is the faithful slave of the favorite wife of the Pharaoh. He's also a genius who instantly recognizes that the Hyksos invaders have two key technological advantages, the recurved bow and the wheeled chariot, which the Egyptians lack. Can Taita reproduce the Hyksos technology and save his people from the invaders?

* THE SPY WHO CAME IN FROM THE COLD, by John LeCarre, is in my opinion the best spy novel ever written. Written in the early 1960s at the height of the Cold War, the story pits British Intelligence (the Circus) against its East German counterpart (the Abteilung). The Brits hatch an extremely risky plan to frame the head of the Abteilung as a double agent, thereby getting him executed. Who will win this battle -- the Circus, the Abteilung, or . . . neither?

* THE CHOSEN, by Chaim Potok, is a coming-of-age novel about two Jewish boys growing up in Brooklyn in the 1940s. You might imagine that the two most important people groups in the novel are Jews and Gentiles. Not so. One of the boys, Danny Saunders, is the son of a Hasidic rebbe. The other boy, Reuven Malter, is the son of an Orthodox Jewish yeshiva teacher. Much of the conflict in the story comes from the intense antagonism between the two communities of Jews. Can Danny and Reuven be friends when they come from two people groups that despise each other?

* THE CURIOUS INCIDENT OF THE DOG IN THE NIGHT-TIME, by Mark Haddon, is the story of a teenage autistic boy trying to solve the puzzle of his neighbor's dog, murdered with a garden fork at midnight. The boy, Christopher, doesn't understand his family or neighbors because they're "normal" and he's not. He doesn't understand their metaphors, their casual lying, or they're illogical way of looking at the world. This conflict drives the story. Can Christopher ever make sense of the illogical people around him and solve the mystery of the murdered dog?

Cultural differences come in many varieties:

- * Different species, as in ENDER'S GAME.
- * Different ethnic groups, as in RIVER GOD.
- * Different political units, as in THE SPY WHO CAME IN FROM THE COLD.
- * Different religious groups, as in THE CHOSEN.
- * Different wirings of the brain, as in THE CURIOUS

INCIDENT OF THE DOG IN THE NIGHT-TIME.

* And more.

When defining your cultural groups, think about the things that make them different. There are an endless number of aspects that differ across cultural boundaries:

- * History, myths, and legends.
- * Language.
- * Religious beliefs -- theology and practice.
- * Foods, methods of preparation, favorite spices.
- * Attitudes to war and peace.
- * Social customs and social structures.
- * Clothing (or lack of it).
- * Employment, sports, literature, arts.
- * Legal systems.
- * Science and technology (or lack of it).
- * Economic systems.
- * And many more.

Any of these can be the basis for intercultural conflict. In ENDER'S GAME, humans and the Buggers both want planet Earth for themselves alone. In RIVER GOD, the Hyksos want to share Egypt, enslaving the native population. In THE SPY WHO CAME IN FROM THE COLD, the two intelligence organizations are driven by fundamental political differences -- Marxist-Leninism versus western democracy. In THE CHOSEN, differing religious interpretations divide two communities that look almost identical to the outside world. In THE CURIOUS INCIDENT OF THE DOG IN THE NIGHT-TIME, the autistic Christopher drives his family and neighbors crazy and they make no sense at all to him.

Take a look at your own story. Do all your characters come from a single cultural group? If so, do the cultural differences add conflict to the story, or can you exploit them to add conflict? If not, does it make sense to add in some characters from another cultural group?

If you think of your Storyworld as a person, then each cultural group is a separate personality, and the conflict between those groups is analogous to the internal conflict that a person feels.

4) Marketing: Interview With Jim Rubart

I met Jim Rubart at a writing conference about four years ago. He sat at my table for lunch one day and I asked him what he was writing.

When he described his novel ROOMS to me, I thought that it sounded either hopelessly weird or incredibly cool. So I asked him to bring a chapter to the critique table later that day for me to read. He did, but I didn't do much critiquing because it was clear that his writing was excellent. So we talked mainly about how to get it published. Since then, Jim and I have become good friends and have spent many hours talking on the phone and hanging out at conferences.

Jim sold ROOMS a couple of years ago (to B&H Publishing) and I've been eagerly waiting to see how it would do in the marketplace. It recently hit the stores and has had a terrific launch. The paper version of the book has been selling briskly on Amazon and the Kindle version is, at the time of this interview, #1 in the Kindle store on Amazon.

That's a remarkable achievement, particularly since ROOMS is in a niche category -- it's a Christian novel and the topic is fairly theological. I have no doubt that some people may even call it heretical. What I like about the book is that it makes me think. If you imagine "THE SHACK meets THE MATRIX," you'll have some idea of what ROOMS is like.

I asked Jim for an interview and he's agreed. Here's the result:

RI: First, tell us a little about yourself and how someone might get hold of you.

JR: I grew up in the Seattle area, went to the University of Washington and graduated with a degree in Broadcast Journalism. I went into advertising and marketing in '94 and currently own Barefoot Marketing. I'm a husband, dad, author, and follower of Jesus. My wife and I live with our two teenage boys in the Pacific Northwest.

Web sites:

<http://www.JimRubart.com>

<http://www.BarefootMarketing.com>

Facebook: James L. Rubart

Twitter: jimrubart

RI: Every novelist needs a one-sentence storyline about their book that hooks people's interest -- or turns them away. What's your storyline for ROOMS and how did you come up with it?

JR: A young Seattle software tycoon inherits a home on the Oregon coast that turns out to be a physical manifestation of his soul.

The initial inspiration for ROOMS came from a little pamphlet I read in my teens. A man chooses to follow

Jesus so Jesus comes into the person's life and examines the rooms of their heart. I thought you could inject that idea with steroids and make it into a killer novel. I mixed in a little TWILIGHT ZONE, a little C.S. Lewis, a little of THE MATRIX, a little IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE, a little romance -- basically all the stories, movies and themes I love -- and out came ROOMS.

RI: It's a fairly weird idea for a novel, but in practice, it works Xtremely well. Kudos on the writing! In real life, you're a marketing guy. Marketing fiction isn't like marketing underwear. What's your philosophy of marketing fiction?

JR: This will sound flippant, but honestly it's not. Here are the three key components of selling fiction successfully:

1. Write a book that blows people away.
2. Get those people to tell other people about it.
3. Get a few people to hate your book.

Point 1: The majority of authors' marketing efforts should go into writing books that makes jaws drop and makes readers say, "Ooooooo, that was wonderful." There are a lot of novels out there that people like, there are far fewer books that readers love. If someone had \$500 and asked me if they should spend it on advertising/marketing or on your products or other how-to-write resources I'd point them toward the craft products every time. What's a restaurant's best marketing tool? Amazing food. Same thing with novels.

Point 2: If you accomplish the first key, the second will come automatically. Donald Mass says 80% of a novel's sales come from word of mouth. I agree. On the positive side it's easier than ever to spearhead word of mouth via the Internet. On the negative side, the firehouse of information has grown so vast, our tea cups are being knocked out of our hands. But if you have enough people who love your novel they'll cut through the noise and start some serious buzz.

I've been an effective marketing professional for over 20 years, because I understand all I can do is cause the inevitable to happen more quickly. Good advertising and marketing will cause a poor company to go out of business quicker. I can teach authors how to get large numbers of people to check out their books more quickly than they could on their own, but if the novels are lousy, there's nothing I can do to help increase sales. Word of mouth is too powerful.

Point 3: Do you think Paul Young (THE SHACK) is upset with preachers standing on their pulpits screaming about how evil his book is? I don't. "Don't buy this book! This book, right here, the one in my hand! THE SHACK! Stay out of THE SHACK! It's evil! And it's in

every bookstore. It's without a doubt in the bookstore you'll drive by on the way home from church! Don't buy THE SHACK!" You know where people are stopping on the way home.

Controversy causes investigation. It raises awareness. People aren't stupid. They can make their own decisions. As of this writing I have 57 five-star reviews on Amazon and 40 one-star reviews for ROOMS. Do I like the one stars? No, but I understand that it is drawing more attention to my novel. As I tell my marketing clients, "Love me, hate me, just don't ignore me."

RI: Authors are continually told to do more marketing for their fiction, but over and over, I hear that most marketing by most authors seems to be fruitless. Why is that and what can we do about it?

JR: If I said, "Randy, you need to get in shape. So let me tell you about Sumo wrestling. Those guys might be heavy, but they're in incredible condition." If you had no knowledge about fitness, you might take my advice and join a group of Sumo wrestlers and try to train with them. Soon you would come to me and say, "Uh, Jim I have a lean body type, and I don't like all the slamming into each other . . . in fact this whole Sumo thing isn't working for me." Why? It doesn't fit your body type, your skill set, and your desire. You're not made for Sumo wrestling.

But this is what we do to authors all the time. We tell authors, "You have to blog! Do Facebook! Twitter! Do a newsletter! Speak! Do articles! And if you can ever get on radio and/or TV, do it!"

Can you do everything well? Unlikely. Let's look at radio and TV: The reality is some people should NEVER get on the radio or TV. They will leave those interviews with fewer readers, not more. If you're going to be on TV or radio, you have to know how to speak in sound bites, you have to be entertaining, you better have a quick wit and you better have a nice voice.

Can you train yourself to be effective on radio and TV if you don't already have that ability? Absolutely. But authors need to realize there is a skill set needed in radio and TV as well as for all the other marketing venues mentioned above.

When I work with my author clients we find out what works for THEM. What marketing things are they good at naturally? What do they like to do? I customize a plan that fits their gifts which is what makes it effective.

One size fits all doesn't fit anyone.

RI: ROOMS is currently #1 in the Kindle Store on Amazon. Like many other Kindle books, it's free, but those other books aren't #1. What made the difference with ROOMS?

JR: Based on my Amazon reviews it's a love or hate it book. As you said in your intro "it sounded either hopelessly weird or incredibly cool." I'm fortunate that more people think it's incredibly cool than hopelessly weird. ROOMS is a high concept book. It's not like anything else out there. This hurt me at first. Publishing houses liked the writing, liked the uniqueness of the plot, but didn't know what to do with it. Everyone turned it down the first go around (even B&H who eventually bought it). Now readers are calling it better than THE SHACK and better than Dekker. Which brings us back to point # 1 about trying to write books that stand out from the crowd.

RI: What are your thoughts on e-books? Are they a threat to the book industry or its salvation or something else?

JR: Right now they are its salvation. ROOMS was averaging an Amazon ranking of 15,000 before we did the free Kindle promotion. Two days after launching the promotion ROOMS dropped into the low 2,000s and has stayed there.

Depending on who you believe, e-readers are 3%-4% of the market. If the key to fiction marketing is spreading word of mouth, it makes sense to give away the book to 4% of the market in hopes that they'll tell the other 96% about this cool new book they've read which will build hard copy sales.

That being said, I might change my tune in two or five or seven years. When e-readers are 40% of the market, I believe the free e-book strategy will be much less effective.

RI: What's next on the agenda for you? When is your next book coming out and what's it about?

JR: On the marketing side I'm working on a number of products that will teach authors how to market their fiction more effectively. On the fiction side, my next novel, BOOK OF DAYS will hit shelves in January 2011. It's the story of a man who goes on a quest to find God's Book of Days -- described in Psalm 139 -- that has recorded the past, present and future of every soul on earth.

RI: Sounds weird! I'm looking forward to reading it. Thanks for your time, Jim. I know you've been busy lately.

JR: Thanks for having me, Randy!

Randy sez: Well, there you have it. Love him or hate him, Jim Rubart stands out from the crowd. He's certainly given me something to think about, and in the next few months, I'll be twisting Jim's arm to help me with my own marketing strategies for . . . the next big thing I'll be launching. But more of that later.

5) What's New At AdvancedFictionWriting.com

My new book, WRITING FICTION FOR DUMMIES, has been selling well since it began shipping last November. 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 wrote an Amazon review. Thanks to those of you who already have! I appreciate you!

I've also been gratified at the response to 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 this year is now mostly filled in.

In early August, I'll be doing a small group mentoring workshop at the Oregon Christian Writers Conference. More details when they're available online.

Immediately after that, I'll be attending the Willamette Writers Conference. I won't be teaching; I'll just be hanging out and learning. Won't that be fun?

In October, I'll be teaching an all-day series of lectures for an RWA group (RWA = Romance Writers of America) in Houston. More details soon.

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. Check her out on her web site!

7) Steal This E-zine!

This E-zine is free, and I personally guarantee it's worth at least 102 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, 2010.

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

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