
The Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine

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Circulation: 23324 writers, each of them creating a
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 (nearly 600 of you signed up in October), 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.

* This month, tens of thousands of writers are trying to write an entire novel in 30 days. Is that a smart thing to do or is it all a waste of good electrons? Find out what I think in my column "National Novel Writing Month."

* It's 3 AM and you're reading a novel that you haven't been able to put down. But you've got to get up at 6 AM and go to work. You finish the chapter and . . . decide to read just one more. Why? Find out the secrets of making your reader turn the page, in my article, "Writing Cliffhangers."

* Many novelists fool themselves into believing that they're writing for "everybody." That's a marketing disaster, because a book for everybody is a book for nobody. Do you know who you write for -- and how to identify him or her? Discover how in "Your Ideal Reader."

Are you reading my blog? Check out the massively popular "Ask A Question For My Blog" feature on my web site. Every day, I answer one question in detail from my loyal blog readers. Are you missing out? Join the fun here:

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

2) Organizing: National Novel Writing Month

The biggest mistake fiction writers make is failing to spend enough hours actually writing fiction.

That seems odd, doesn't it? A tennis player gets good by playing tennis. A pilot gets good by flying. Seems like a fiction writer would know that you get good at writing fiction by writing fiction.

The trouble is that it's easy to sit down and start a novel. That hard part is staying seated and continuing to write. The excitement of doing the exact same thing as Stephen King and Nora Roberts lasts about twenty minutes.

After that, reality sets in. A typical novel is 60000 to 120000 words. Even if you could type 100 words per

minute, it would take ten to twenty hours to type it all in.

But very few writers can write fiction at 100 words per minute. A novelist who puts out 1000 words per hour is considered pretty fast. That amounts to fewer than 17 words per minute.

So now the job amounts to 60 to 120 hours -- if you're fast.

If you can only squeeze out 100 words per hour, it's going to run you 600 to 1200 hours to get that first draft done. And yes, some writers have trouble managing that pace. It's slower than two words per minute, or about one letter every six seconds.

Writing a novel is a boatload of work.

What this means is that a lot of novelists never finish their novel. They'll get rolling, type out a chapter or two, take it to a critique group, and then realize that this writing game is a whole harder than it looks.

It's easy to fill up your time doing all the other good things that a novelist needs to do. Reading excellent fiction. Studying the craft. Getting critiqued. Planning the novel.

But never actually writing the darned thing.

That's why I like National Novel Writing Month. The goal of NaNoWriMo is simple: Write 50000 words in 30 days. That's 1666 words per day -- a challenging goal, but doable.

There are critics who'll tell you that, oh sure, you can drill out a crappy novel in 30 days, but it's impossible to write a good one in that length of time.

Sure, it's impossible if you believe it's impossible. But I know a fair number of published novelists who've written a novel in 30 days or less. Good novels -- ready to go to the publisher for editing. Some of these folks are New York Times best-selling authors. Others have won major awards.

If you can write a novel at all, you can write one in 30 days. If your skills aren't up to snuff yet, then no, you can't write a good novel in 30 days. But if you have good craft, then yes, you can write an excellent novel in 30 days.

Either way, fire breeds fire, and fiction writing breeds fiction writing. If you take the NaNoWriMo challenge and meet your goal, you're going to stretch yourself as a writer. You'll come out of it a better and more confident writer.

Most importantly, you'll have done something that only

a small fraction of people on this planet have ever done. You'll have written a complete novel.

Whether the quality is good or not, quantity matters. Having done it the first time is the best indicator that you'll do it again.

You may be wondering if I eat my own dog food. Have I ever written a novel in 30 days?

The answer is yes. I did it once, under a tight deadline. But it wasn't a mere 50000 words. It was 90000 words.

It was hard work, 3000 words per day, and for most of those days I thought I was going to die.

But I didn't die. I wrote the thing in a white fury. The faster I wrote, the easier it came. I finished the book a day early. It was my best piece of work.

Are you doing NaNoWriMo this year?

If so, carry on. Don't stop now. Losers quit. Winners can't.

If you're not doing it this year, think about next year. What have you got to lose by trying? You grow by challenging yourself and then executing the challenge.

You can check out National Novel Writing Month here:
<http://www.NaNoWriMo.org>

3) Creating: Writing Cliffhangers

The secret to writing novels that readers can't put down is simple -- in theory.

All you have to do is making the ending of each chapter so exciting that your reader can't help but turn the page.

That's a nice theory. How do you do it in practice?

The answer depends on the kind of novel you're writing. The purpose of a novel is to give your reader a Powerful Emotional Experience.

Each category of fiction creates its own mix of emotional experiences. Each category makes a promise to deliver a certain kind of emotion at the end of the novel. A romance promises to deliver love. A suspense novel promises to deliver safety. A mystery promises to deliver justice.

As your story progresses, your reader tracks how close you are to delivering the final emotional payoff for your story. If the payoff looks like it's getting closer, your reader's tension eases. If it looks like the payoff is getting further away, your reader's tension tightens.

When something happens at the very end of a chapter to make the payoff suddenly look dramatically less likely, that's a cliffhanger.

Lee Child is a master of writing cliffhangers. Child is the author of a series of thrillers starring Jack Reacher, a drifter who left the Army after 13 years as a military cop. Now Reacher hitchhikes around the country, running into one set of bad guys after another and reluctantly putting things right.

Reacher is a skilled street fighter who knows every dirty fighting trick in the book and uses them to get out of trouble. That's a great skill to have when you get in fights with thugs three at a time, or you're threatened by guys with guns.

In one scene in *KILLING FLOOR*, the first novel in the series, Reacher and a businessman named Hubble are put in prison on a trumped up charge late one night. There's been a murder in town, and both Reacher and Hubble are incidentally connected, even though they're not suspects. They're supposed to be put on the holding floor for nonviolent prisoners. By mistake, they've been put on the floor with the hard guys -- lifers.

By the time Reacher realizes the mistake next morning, the guards aren't around and he's got a pack of toughs in his cell, and they've got rape on their minds. Hubble is cowering in the corner and is clearly not going to be any help. Reacher is on his own.

A lot of authors would end the chapter right there. It would be a nice cliffhanger.

Lee Child doesn't do that, because that's not good enough. Instead, he continues the scene. Reacher takes on the first guy, smashes his face with one good head-butt, and then shoos the other thugs out of his cell.

A lot of authors would bring on more hard guys to make some sort of threat against Reacher and end the chapter there. That would make an even nicer cliffhanger, because it would increase the number of Reacher's enemies -- and now they're forewarned that he's a good fighter.

Lee Child doesn't do that either, because it's still not good enough.

Instead, Reacher talks to his cellmate Hubble about the

reason they've been arrested. He learns that Hubble's been involved in something crooked that he can't talk about and he's been threatened by somebody he won't even name. If he tells who, Hubble says, they'll nail his limbs to the wall. They'll cut off certain parts of his body and feed them to his wife. They'll cut his throat. They'll cut his wife's throat. They'll make his children watch. Then they'll do unspeakable things to the kiddies.

That's where the chapter ends. That's a cliffhanger with some bite to it.

The reason this works better than ending the scene with a physical threat to Reacher is because Jack Reacher can take care of himself, and the reader knows it. A threat against Reacher is just an invitation for a great fight scene.

A threat against Hubble, though, creates conflict. Reacher is a drifter who just walked into town, and he barely knows Hubble. Reacher would just as soon walk right on out of town. But now he has to make a choice -- will he get involved or will he leave Hubble in trouble?

The reader doesn't know the answer to that. The reader wants Reacher to get involved, but Reacher hasn't really got a reason yet. He knows he can't be responsible for fixing all the problems of the world, of which there are an unlimited number. So he'd just as soon walk away. Will he or won't he?

In the next chapter, Reacher and Hubble go down to the bathroom. They're trapped inside by five huge guys -- Aryan Brotherhood types. Two of them hustle Hubble out of the way, and the other three single out Reacher. It's clear these guys have come to kill.

Again, Lee Child doesn't choose this as the cliffhanger ending to his chapter. Instead, he lets the fight run its course. There's a guy choking Reacher from behind and a guy in front about to punch his lights into next year. Reacher kicks the guy in front of him where it counts the most, breaks the little fingers of the guy choking him, and gouges out the eye of the third wannabe killer. All in a day's work for Jack Reacher.

Next thing you know, the guards rush in, break up the fight, and take Reacher and Hubble up to the holding floor where they should have been to begin with.

Reacher does a little thinking and it's clear to him what's going on. The whole thing was a setup. The guards must have put the Aryan boys up to killing Reacher. Not just any guards. The head guy. Somebody important wants Jack Reacher dead. Somebody who controls the people who run the prison. Somebody big and nameless.

That's where the chapter ends. Again, it's a good solid cliffhanger. Jack Reacher is in danger from somebody he can't see, can't name, and therefore can't fight. The reader doesn't know if Reacher is up to this kind of danger. Neither does Reacher.

But this puts tremendous pressure on Reacher to get out of town as soon as he gets bailed out of jail. If he doesn't, he'll be in over his head against somebody he's unqualified to fight. Leaving Hubble still in massive danger.

The next two chapters have Reacher getting bailed out of jail with Hubble and talking with the cops. He's planning to leave town, but some of the cops are good guys, and they're trying to get any information they can from him before he goes.

Then the fingerprint information comes in on the murder victim. The cops have a positive ID on the corpse. They show it to Reacher, and suddenly he's got all kinds of reasons for staying in town and getting to the bottom of this mystery.

Because, by some awful coincidence, the dead man is Reacher's brother.

That's a cliffhanger.

Reacher doesn't owe Hubble anything, and he could leave him to his faceless foes. But not when Hubble's enemies are the ones who killed Reacher's brother. Now it's personal. Now Reacher is committed to battling Big Faceless Evil, whether he wants to or not. He's in the crucible now. How in the world is he going to get out?

And the story is launched -- with a cliffhanger.

What makes these cliffhangers work? We can extract several principles from the scenes we've seen:

- * A good cliffhanger attacks the weak character, not the strong one. It was better to end a chapter with a threat to Hubble than a threat to Reacher.
- * A good cliffhanger attacks a strong character at his weakest point. It was better to threaten Reacher with a politically powerful and invisible enemy than to threaten him with a thug.
- * Moral obligations are strongest when they involve people close to your character. Reacher might not stay in town to rescue the stranger Hubble, but he has to stay to find justice for his brother.

You're probably in the middle of reading a novel this week. Keep an eye out for any chapter endings that qualify as cliffhangers. Ask yourself these questions:

- * Why did the author end the chapter where he did?
- * Would the cliffhanger have been stronger if it came earlier or later?
- * What emotional forces is the author using to make you turn the page?
- * How can you use what you learned about this cliffhanger in your own novel?

If it's 3 AM and your reader hasn't finished your book yet, she really has no business going to bed yet. If you can keep her up all night, she'll hate you in the morning.

But she'll buy your next book for sure.

4) Marketing: Your Ideal Reader

When a publishing house considers your novel, one of the first things they ask themselves is, "Who's going to buy this book?"

One answer they won't even consider is, "Everybody."

Every book has a natural audience. When a publisher tries to market your book, they're going to target that natural audience.

This is true, even when a story has extraordinarily broad appeal. The Harry Potter series was massively popular, but even so, plenty of people didn't read it.

I know lots of readers who heard about it and just shrugged and said, "So what?" I know others who read the first chapter and didn't get it and stopped. I know others who read the first book and then quit.

I'm going to bet that very few of them were 11-year-old boys. The ideal reader for the first Harry Potter book was an 11-year-old boy.

True, lots of other people liked the book. Zillions of adults. Zillions of females. But we're talking here about which group loved it best. That group was the set of boys Harry's age.

Why think about these "ideal readers" when they obviously aren't the only readers for a book?

Simple. Every publisher has a limited marketing budget. Their game plan is to market your book to the people

most likely to love it. Then those early adopters will market it to everyone else via word of mouth.

Word of mouth is the best thing going in marketing fiction. The smart marketer tries to get word of mouth going by starting a "brush fire" -- igniting interest in those people most likely to love the book.

If you're writing a novel, then one of the things you must do to get it published is to identify your target audience. Publishers will insist on knowing this information. The better able you are to tell them, the more likely they are to buy your novel.

How do you identify your target audience?

Start by imagining your ideal reader -- one person -- who is "most likely" to love your book. This doesn't mean that other people won't like it, but we're going with the probabilities here. Think of the one person in the world who will love your book most. Now answer these questions:

- * Is this reader male or female?
- * What age is this reader?
- * What ethnic group does this reader belong to?
- * How much education does this reader have?
- * What does this reader do for a living?
- * Where does this reader live? Which country? Which state?
- * What is this reader's goal in reading a novel?
- * What is this reader's deepest yearning in life?
- * What does this reader fear most?
- * What is this reader's most dangerous secret?
- * Who does this reader admire most?
- * Who does this reader hate the most?
- * What matters most to this reader -- sports, clothes, politics, religion, love, fun, cars, career, drugs, money, or something else?

You may find it helpful to give your ideal reader a name and hometown. (My ideal reader is named Bob and he lives in San Diego.)

Now take your answers to the above questions and write up a one-page document named "My Ideal Reader." Pretend

he's a character in your novel and write up his backstory and describe his life, focusing on his hopes and fears, his loves and his hates, and the reasons he likes your kind of fiction.

That's all. You might find it helpful to print out your document and tape it on the wall and read it every day before you start writing. It'll keep you focused on the reason you write.

Remember this. No matter how narrowly you define your ideal reader, there are thousands of people in the world who are a lot like him. There are millions of people who are fairly similar to him.

If you can define your ideal reader, you can write a novel he'll love, and your publisher can find a way to market to him.

5) What's New At AdvancedFictionWriting.com

My book, WRITING FICTION FOR DUMMIES, has been selling well since it began shipping a year ago and is one of the most popular fiction writing books on Amazon. 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>

Currently, my co-author John Olson and I are preparing our back list of novels for publication as e-books.

John and I are also creating some powerful online tools to make it easy for us to market our work effectively and easily. In due time, we'll make those tools available to other authors. More info on that when the opportune moment arrives.

I teach at roughly 4 to 6 writing conferences per year, depending on my schedule. My schedule for this year is now all filled in but I'm already in discussion with

organizers for next year.

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!

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.AuthorTechTips.com>

Thomas is especially skilled at helping authors create an inexpensive but 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.UmstattdMedia.com>

7) Steal This E-zine!

This E-zine is free, and I personally guarantee it's worth at least 483 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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Award-winning novelist Randy Ingermanson, "the Snowflake Guy," publishes the Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine, with more than 23,000 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
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