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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 (about 600 of you signed up in January), 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.

* Are you too busy to get it all done? Is it time to hand off some of that work to somebody (or something) else? For some simple ideas on that, see my article, "Outsourcing U."

* A basic rule of fiction writing is "Resist the Urge to Explain." But some things have to be explained. How do you know slip in information without taking time to explain? I'll, um, explain one way to do that in my article, "Presuppositions."

* It's hard to keep track of everything going on in the publishing industry. What deals are agents making right now? What books are publishers buying right now? Which agent represents your favorite author? I'll discuss one source for answering these questions in this month's marketing column, "Studying the Industry."

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: Outsourcing U

Modern life is busy, busy, busy. That's the nature of the beast. There are an infinite number of things that we're supposed to do. You already know what they are, so I won't list them here.

On top of that, we writers have to carve out time to write.

Last month, I talked about a common technique, "divide and conquer," for planning your life in a way that helps you do big things first and little things last.

This month, I'll talk about a touchy subject -- outsourcing -- that can also help squeeze more time out of the day. Touchy because many people equate "outsourcing" with "sending jobs to foreign countries."

That may be what outsourcing means to Big Corporate, but it isn't what I'm talking about. There are three simple methods of outsourcing that you can use to get things done cheaper, faster, and usually better.

Here they are in a short list:

- * Automating your life
- * Training yourself
- * Hiring others

Automating your life

You're probably doing a lot of things the hard way. I know I am, because I'm constantly discovering things I do that could be done quicker by my pesky computer.

Let's look at a few tasks (out of zillions) you can outsource to your computer:

Aggregating blogs. When blogs were new, you had to remember the address of the ones you liked and type them in (or click on their bookmarks) periodically to see if there was anything new.

Before long, people started writing software to check blogs automatically and show you only the new entries that you hadn't yet read. If you read a lot of blogs, this can speed up your blog-reading enormously. Most people don't use a blog aggregator because it takes time to set one up.

Filing e-mail. Your e-mail comes to your in-box. You read it and then you either leave it in your in-box (which leaves things cluttered and mixes up the unread items with the read ones) or you move it to a new folder, which takes time.

Virtually all e-mail systems let you define rules so that e-mail goes directly to the folder where you want to file it. You can read the unread email there and then it's already filed. This is very handy for certain types of e-mail, such as newsletters, where it's not necessary to respond to the e-mail or even to read it right away. Most people don't define rules because it takes time to set them up.

Styles. Word processors let you define styles for your writing so that you don't have to manually change the size, font, alignment, indentation, etc. for titles, chapter headings, section headings, quoted material, and other special parts of your novel. You can also change these settings for normal text.

The advantage of setting up styles is that if you decide to change a style, your word processor will then apply your changes to any part of your book that you've already applied the style to. So if you change the font-size of your chapter heading style, all your chapter headings will instantly resize themselves.

A surprising number of writers either don't use styles at all or else use the default style and then manually change it on each paragraph. For example, many writers hit the tab key to indent every paragraph instead of changing their default paragraph style so that it automatically indents. Your editor will hate you for this, because she'll have to remove those tabs if you put them in.

Automatic word-substitution. If you're writing a book with a character named "Zechariah Rasputimovsky," you'll probably type that name hundreds or even thousands of times during the course of writing your novel. That's a lot of typing! It's tedious and error-prone.

You could save a lot of time by buying software that lets you define shortcuts for long words that you type often. Very few writers do this because it costs money and it takes time to learn how to use it.

If you've ever done something on your computer and thought, "Dang, that's tedious!" then somebody somewhere has probably already made a tool to make that task a lot simpler. That tool is only a Google away.

Your computer is one of the very best ways to outsource boring jobs because you've already got it, so there's usually nothing to buy.

Training yourself

Even when you have the tool you need, you may not be using it effectively because you don't know how. (I can almost guarantee that you don't use all your tools effectively. I certainly don't. I'm constantly learning new tricks.)

Most writers aren't techie geniuses and don't think it's worth the time and energy to learn to use their tools better. And plenty of writers just don't know what tools are available or don't have the energy to figure it out.

What's a writer to do?

Last week, I watched one of my writer friends show another how to use e-mail effectively and how to clear out his in-box and keep it clear. (Want to guess which one had the Ph.D.? It wasn't the one doing the teaching.)

The key to using tools well is to get training. You can try to figure it out yourself, but that takes time. It's much quicker to get someone who knows how to show

you.

When you have an expert teach you to use a tool well, you're using double-outsourcing. You're outsourcing the work to your computer. And you're outsourcing the learning to your expert.

Hiring others

Nobody is good at everything. Nobody likes to do every kind of task. When you find a task that you're not good at or that you hate doing, it may be time to outsource the job to somebody who likes it and is good at it.

This frees you up to do the kinds of things you like to do and that you're good at.

I long ago outsourced my accounting to a CPA. She's much faster than I am. She's much better. And the bizarre thing is that she enjoys the work. She's expensive, but not as expensive as I would be in doing it slow and doing it wrong. The day I hired my accountant was one of my happiest days ever.

This month I'm hiring an administrative assistant to help me with various tasks. I could do them myself. In fact, I have been doing them myself for a long time. But I have an enormous amount of work on my plate, and the best way to get it all done is to pay someone to do part of it.

This is hard for me. I don't like to let go of control of my business. But I need to. My new assistant is a trusted friend with a proven track record in getting things done well and fast.

What about you? Are there things in your life that you might outsource in some way? Things that match one or more of the following criteria:

- * They are time-consuming
- * They are tedious
- * They are error-prone
- * You hate them
- * You aren't very good at them

Make a list of several of these tasks. If you don't have any tasks like these, then check your pulse, because it's possible you don't have one.

Is it remotely possible that you might outsource these tasks? Maybe, maybe not.

First, ask yourself if there's a tool you already own or that you can buy to make this task easier. Would this tool be worth it to you? If so, then get it.

Second, ask yourself if you can easily figure out how

to use the tool. If so, then take an hour and do so. If you're lucky, it might only take you five minutes. If it turns out to take more than an hour, it's probably time to get some help. Ask around and find out who could train you to use the tool. If you have a friend willing to teach you, ask for help. If you have to pay for the training, ask yourself if it's worth the money. If it is, then get it.

Third, if you still have too much work, it may be time to consider hiring somebody. No matter what the task, somebody somewhere knows how to do it fast and well. They may be cheap or they may be expensive, but it's almost certain that they can do it better and cheaper than you can. Is it worth hiring them? (If you hire somebody, you still need to spend time managing them. Factor that in.) If so, then hire them. The word I hear from my most successful friends is that outsourcing has ALWAYS been worth it when they could find the right person.

Remember what the point of outsourcing is.

Outsourcing lets you get more done in less time. And time is freedom. Freedom to write.

3) Creating: Presuppositions

One of the biggest problems I see in fiction manuscripts is a big glop of backstory in the first two or three chapters of the novel.

Every novelist who has ever committed this sin justifies himself by claiming that the backstory is necessary because otherwise the reader won't know what's going on.

This isn't true. Readers don't read your novel for your marvelous backstory. They read it to get immersed in your main story. Once you get them hooked on the story, they'll begin to get interested in the backstory and you can start feeding it to them in small doses.

You may be thinking, "That's great advice for everybody else, but I'm different. My story is different. My readers HAVE to know my backstory."

The answer is yes, but.

Yes, you're different. Yes, your story is different.

But your reader really doesn't care that 35 years ago your main character Luke got beat up every day in kindergarten.

Your reader cares that RIGHT NOW Luke is peering through the sights of a sniper rifle. Which happens to be trained on the head of the state governor. Who happens to be 40 years old. Who happens to be a bully. Who happens to have gone to kindergarten with Luke.

NOW your reader cares just a wee bit about what happened way back when. But your reader still cares a whole lot more about Luke's trigger finger than about his horrible childhood.

It's true that your reader is going to need to know a little about your backstory. How do you provide that without losing momentum in your frontstory?

One way to do that is by inserting "presuppositions" into your sentences.

And just what exactly is a "presupposition?"

Loosely speaking, a presupposition is a statement that is implied by a sentence. If the cop asks, "Have you quit beating your wife?" there's a presupposition that in the past you beat your wife.

A classic example of how presuppositions work in language is the following sentence, which Bertrand Russell analyzed many years ago:

"The present King of France is bald."

Is the above sentence true or false?

Since France is a republic, there is no present King of France, so the sentence can hardly be true.

But is it false? If it were false, would it be true that the present King of France has a full head of hair?

Obviously not. Russell pointed out that this sentence carries along with it some unspoken presuppositions:

- * France has at least one king
- * France has no more than one king

When you say that the King of France is bald, you are also implicitly asserting these presuppositions, and the combination of the three statements is false because they aren't all true.

Some people would say that it's simply meaningless to say "The present King of France is bald."

But if you were watching a movie set in 1753 France, and if one of the actors said, "The King of France is bald," everybody would know exactly what he meant.

Context matters. Presuppositions imply context. And another word for "context" is "backstory."

Now here's the point for fiction writers. Many of the sentences you write in your novel carry along with them certain presuppositions. When your reader reads your work, she unconsciously analyzes those presuppositions and makes conclusions about your Storyworld and the backstories of your characters.

When Han Solo brags about his ship in the original STAR WARS movie, for example, he says, "You've never heard of the Millennium Falcon? It's the ship that made the Kessel Run in less than twelve parsecs."

Here are some presuppositions which are implicit in this line:

- * The Millennium Falcon is famous
- * The Kessel Run is long or treacherous or both
- * A parsec is a unit of time
- * Twelve parsecs is an excellent time for the Kessel Run

Notice that these presuppositions may be false (parsecs are units of distance) but they still tell us something about Han Solo and the world he lives in. Solo is not only egotistical, but he's also sloppy in his use of language.

Writers constantly try to explain too much. This is true for the greenest novices and the most advanced experts, and it provides unending employment for editors, who earn their keep by scrawling "Resist the Urge to Explain" in the margins.

How do you fix things when you're explaining too much?

The first step is to cut out the backstory. (Don't throw it away. Save it to another document so you'll have a record of it. Then delete it from your main story. Yes, all of it.)

The second step is to look for those places in your story that are now confusing to your reader because she lacks some essential context -- some piece of backstory. Insert ONLY the fragment of backstory that your reader needs in order to make sense of the story.

One way to do that is to imply a chunk of backstory by rewriting a frontstory sentence so that it now contains a few well-chosen presuppositions.

Your reader is smart. When she reads a sentence that carries presuppositions, she immediately assumes these presuppositions are true and are part of your backstory. If she knows or learns that these presuppositions aren't actually true, then she concludes that your character is unreliable.

We've already seen how George Lucas used a few presuppositions to characterize Han Solo. Let's look at a couple of examples of how other writers have done it.

Here's the beginning paragraph of a scene in ENDER'S GAME by Orson Scott Card, in which we meet Ender Wiggin:

The monitor lady smiled very nicely and tousled his hair and said, "Andrew, I suppose by now you're just absolutely sick of that horrid monitor. Well I have good news for you. That monitor is going to come out today. We're going to take it right out, and it won't hurt a bit."

This only makes sense if the following presuppositions are true:

- * Ender is a fairly young boy
- * He's had a monitor installed for quite a long time
- * The monitor is unpleasant to wear
- * Ender has had some painful medical procedures before
- * Monitors are managed by a bureaucracy

We can also deduce from all of these that the story is set in the future.

Card could have told us all those things and a whole lot more about the history of monitors and why they're necessary and thereby slowed down the story. Instead, he let us figure out only what we need to know right now. With presuppositions.

Here's an example from the opening two paragraphs of THE KEY TO REBECCA, by Ken Follett:

The last camel collapsed at noon.

It was the five-year-old white bull he had bought in Gialo, the youngest and strongest of the three beasts, and the least ill-tempered: he liked the animal as much as a man could like a camel, which is to say that he hated it only a little.

The first paragraph carries with it this presupposition:

- * More than one camel has died already

The second paragraph has these presuppositions:

- * The owner of the camel is a lone man
- * He is no longer in Gialo
- * He is familiar with camels

We can also deduce that the owner of the camel is making a long and dangerous journey across the desert. This isn't a presupposition, but it follows pretty readily from the presuppositions and from the first sentence.

Presuppositions are useful because they let you say more with fewer words. That is a worthy goal for any novelist.

If you'd like to see some more examples of how presuppositions work, check out the Wikipedia article here:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Presuppositions>

4) Marketing: Studying the Industry

The publishing industry is huge and changing rapidly. One way to keep track of what's going on is the very nifty web site Publishers Marketplace:
<http://www.publishersmarketplace.com>

Publishers Marketplace is a membership site, which means you have to pay a monthly subscription fee to get access to most of the information.

Some of the info is free. You can browse through the members who are agents, editors, publishers, etc. Currently, over 400 agents are listed, and you can easily search for them, read their profiles, and find a link to their web sites.

You can also read the daily "Publishers Lunch" (or subscribe to it in e-mail) to get news items about industry professionals.

There's also a job board listing recent job openings.

But the real meat on the site is reserved for paid members.

For starters, you get access to "Publishers Lunch Deluxe," an extended version of "Publishers Lunch."

You can find a listing of recent deals reported by members. There are an enormous of these, which are listed in reverse order, so the most recent ones are first.

If you're looking for an agent, you may find it exceptionally valuable to scan the "dealmakers" list. This gives information on the people making the deals (individual editors or agents) and the companies sponsoring them (imprints or agencies).

While not all agents are members of Publishers Marketplace, quite a large number of them are, so the listing gives a good idea of who's making the deals.

You can also select the category of deal you're interested in. If you want to know the agent reporting the most fiction deals in the YA category or the editor who acquired the most true crime books, you can do that very quickly. If you're interested in looking at those

who did the most six-figure deals, you can do that.

You can also search numerous best-seller lists and track the performance of selected books that have been on various best-seller lists since about 2003.

This kind of knowledge is power. It's not easy to sell your novel to a traditional, royalty-paying publisher. It's very difficult to do so without an agent. Publishers Marketplace gives you the information you need to make intelligent decisions.

Publishers Marketplace is not cheap. It costs \$20 per month. But if you're ready to find a publisher and you want to know which editors or agents are likely to be interested in your book, it looks like a bargain to me.

If you need this kind of information, then you know it. If you don't, then you also know it.

Here's the web site once again:
<http://www.publishersmarketplace.com>

5) What's New At AdvancedFictionWriting.com

My book, WRITING FICTION FOR DUMMIES, has been selling well since it began shipping more than 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 normally teach at roughly 4 to 6 writing conferences per year, depending on my schedule. For 2011, I have decided to cut back on my teaching so I can focus on a major project I'm working on. My schedule for 2011 is now all filled in.

I will be teaching at these conferences in 2011:

Mount Hermon Christian Writers Conference, (April)
8 hours mentoring a group of no more than 10 novelists
<http://mounthermon.org/adult/professionals/writers-conference>

Oregon Christian Writers Conference, (August)
6 hours teaching a lecture series named "Fiction 101"
<http://www.oregonchristianwriters.com/summer-conference/>

American Christian Fiction Writers, (September)
4 hours teaching a lecture series on the Snowflake method
<http://www.acfw.com/conference/>

If you'd like me to teach at your conference in 2012 or beyond, 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 Umstatted'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.UmstattMedia.com>

7) Steal This E-zine!

This E-zine is free, and I personally guarantee it's worth at least 951 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, 2011.

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>

8) Reprint Rights

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Award-winning novelist Randy Ingermanson, "the Snowflake Guy," publishes the Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine, with more than 24,000 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.

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