

Publisher: Randy Ingermanson ("the Snowflake guy")
Motto: "A Vision for Excellence"
Date: June 7, 2011
Issue: Volume 7, Number 6
Home Pages: <http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com>
<http://www.Ingermanson.com>
Circulation: 26140 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 Allies
 - 3) Creating: Old Story, New Story
 - 4) Marketing: Fear, Rejection, and All That
 - 5) What's New At [AdvancedFictionWriting.com](http://www.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 May), 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/ezone>

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.

* Publishing is an up and down business, and you're only as good as your last book. But you have one asset that sticks with you, no matter what. Can you guess what it is? Read my organizing column on "Your Allies."

* One of the most crucial scenes in your novel is your very first scene. Do you know the most common mistake writers make when they write this scene? Read my article, "Old Story, New Story."

* Recently, I had a Skype interview with the phenomenally productive Mary DeMuth about her latest project, a \$2.99 e-book, THE 11 SECRETS OF GETTING PUBLISHED. The interview ran very long, so I've snipped out just one segment, "Fear, Rejection, and All That." I'll run the entire long interview on my blog soon.

Are you reading my blog? Check out the massively popular "Ask A Question For My Blog" feature on my web site. In each blog post, 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: Your Allies

There's an old saying, "Friends come and go, but enemies accumulate."

That may be true in some worlds, but in the world of writing, I'd replace it with this: "Books come and go, but Allies accumulate."

What are "Allies?"

Allies are your writing buddies. They are a combination of friend, colleague, mentor, encourager, and butt-kicker.

My opinion is that you won't get very far in the publishing world without Allies. The reason is simple.

Publishing is a tough industry, and the writer is the engine that drives the machine. If you don't have a support system, the machine is going to break you eventually. Your Allies are a crucial part of your

support system.

Of course your support system also includes other people -- your editor, your agent, your family, and your non-writing friends.

But your editor and agent are business partners, and it's generally not their job to be your friend.

Whereas your family and non-writing friends can love you to pieces, but they generally don't really understand the wacko world of publishing.

If you don't have Allies, that's a problem, or it will be a problem eventually.

I should emphasize that Allies are not tools that you use or rungs on the ladder. They are, first of all, friends. Friends who'll be around for a long time.

But Allies are more than that. You will have plenty of writing friends who will never be Allies. Allies are also your equals or nearly your equals. They're usually at roughly the same level of success you are -- at least when they become your Ally.

It may happen that your career takes off and your Ally's doesn't, or vice versa. It's quite possible to maintain your alliance for a very long time when that happens, as long as you're both good with it. Of course, jealousy or snobbery can kill an alliance pretty quickly, but that's true of any friendship.

An Ally can also start out as your mentor, or vice versa, but if it's a real alliance, then that relationship will grow into something more symmetric, in which each of you mentors the other in some way.

The main reason you need Allies and the main reason they need you is that you both need encouragement from time to time, and you both need to be confronted from time to time. Encouragement is for when you know you have a problem. Confrontation is for when you don't.

Who are your Allies? Do you even have Allies yet? If you haven't been writing long, then you may not have any. Or you may have only a few. Don't panic. You'll find your natural Allies as you progress in your career.

Allies start out as writing friends, but friendship is not enough to form an alliance. Some friends may grow into Allies. Others may always remain just friends. That's normal. You will always have more friends than Allies.

When a friendship turns into a professional mutual dependence, then you have an alliance. Not until.

How many Allies do you need to get along in life? I

don't know. I'm pretty certain that you need at least one. I doubt that you could possibly keep up with more than a couple of dozen. So I'd guess that somewhere between three and ten are the normal number of Allies.

You can, of course, have hundreds of friends. Friends are good. The more, the better. There's no need to be picky about friends.

I think it makes good sense to be picky about your Allies. You'll be joined at the hip with your Allies for a long time. Ten years or twenty or thirty.

Choose them well. It really helps if they get along with each other, but that's probably not an absolute necessity.

There's no action item here. I don't recommend that you go out and start choosing Allies willy-nilly. But it makes sense for you to think about who your Allies are (if you have them) and which of your friends might eventually become an Ally.

This is not something you can push. An alliance has to be good for both parties, or it's not an alliance. It'll happen or it won't happen, and the best you can do is to be aware of it and guide it gently as it matures.

I think there's really only rule to live by with your Allies: Do the right thing by them and they'll do the right thing by you.

3) Creating: Old Story, New Story

One of the biggest mistakes I see in beginning novelists is when they write a novel with characters who had nothing going on until the story began.

I mean nothing. No plans, no ambitions, no goals. These characters are having a completely uneventful life until the story starts. Then BOOM -- suddenly they have a whole lot going on.

That's not the way the world works and it's not the way a novel works.

In the real world, when something big and exciting and dangerous happens to you, it always interrupts something. Maybe not big and exciting and dangerous, but something important to you.

Just as an example, I have a friend who was in New York

City on September 11, 2001, when a big, horrible, dangerous story erupted. But my friend didn't go to New York for that story. He was there to launch his next novel.

That book launch got interrupted, and it never really got rolling, because it was overtaken by a much bigger story, a story which is still going on.

When a new story starts, it always, always, ALWAYS interrupts an older story already in progress.

The old story is generally something fairly normal. The new story is much bigger and quickly pushes it out of the way.

Before long, the old story is mostly gone, although old stories have a funny way of intruding on the new stories, and pushing them in unexpected directions.

The usual term for the old story is "the ordinary world." This is a misleading term. It makes it sound like the old story actually has nothing going on -- that it's all setting and no plot.

Not true. The old story has a very definite plot. It's just not nearly as exciting as the plot for the new story. But it has the same lead character.

When you write a novel and there is no old story going on, it feels weird. Like your characters are just sitting around twiddling their thumbs and waiting for a story to come along and give meaning to their vacant little lives. Characters like that are dull.

Maybe an example will help.

I have this friend named John who was having trouble with his wife awhile back. A lot of trouble. They were fighting all the time. Finally, she picked up and moved from New York to LA because her boss offered her a big promotion. She moved across the country with their kids. Leaving John behind.

John is a cop. He can't just drop all his cases and move across the country because wifey got a promotion. And anyway, he's the kind of guy who likes to wear the pants in the family. OK, so maybe he's a bit of a chauvinist. John is old school, and maybe having a wife who's a hotshot in the business world makes him feel threatened.

Anyway, after six months of screaming fights by phone, John decides to eat his pride and go to LA and visit his wife. Try to make peace. Patch things up. See if she'll come home. He takes some time off from his crazy caseload at work and flies to California. Did I mention John hates to fly?

But he does it. For his wife. Because he really, really, really wants to make this marriage thing work.

When he gets to LA, there's a limo driver there to meet him. Compliments of wifey's boss, who happens to be Japanese and a very polite guy. John gets in the limo and tells his troubles to the driver on the way in.

Did I mention this is Christmas Eve? And there's a Christmas party going on at wifey's office? And one of her co-workers is hitting on her? And she's not all that jazzed that John's coming to town? And she'd sorta like to make up with John if it's not too inconvenient, if he'd just stop being a jerk?

The problem is that the office building where the party's going on just happens to be the target of a terrorist attack that begins ten minutes after John gets there.

And now John's wife is a hostage and he's alone in the bathroom, barefoot, armed with only his standard issue cop gun while he listens to machine guns firing out in the hall.

That's where we transition from the old story to the new story in the movie DIE HARD, starring Bruce Willis as New York cop John McClain.

The old story takes maybe 10 minutes of the movie. The new story takes the rest of the two hours. But all through the movie, the old story keeps popping its head up, making complications for the new story.

John's wife is ticked off when she realizes that he's trying to save the building single-handed. He could get them all killed!

When her slimy co-worker realizes this, he tells the terrorists who John is and tries to negotiate a "truce" that would get John killed.

John gets in more and more trouble as the story moves along, and he really ought to just pack it in and give up. But he can't give up because he wants to reconcile with his wife, and he can't do that if she's dead.

The old story makes the new story deeper. A lot deeper. Without the old story, the new story wouldn't work nearly as well.

OK, maybe another example.

I have this other friend named Claire. She's a nurse married to a guy named Frank. It's a little hard to tell how their marriage is going because it was on hold for a long while.

What happened is that Frank was in the military and so they were separated for several years because there was a war going on. Claire can't help wondering if maybe Frank had a girlfriend while they were apart, but that's just not something she can ask him.

In any event, Frank is out of the military now and has a junior position in academia. Claire and Frank are on vacation trying to do one of those marriage enrichment things. And hopefully get a baby started.

Maybe I forgot to mention that both Claire and Frank live in England. They're staying in a bed and breakfast place in Scotland. Frank is doing a spot of research about one of his ancestors who used to live in the area a couple of hundred years ago.

While Frank's doing his research thing, Claire meets the local ladies. It seems that some of them have very weird talents, but Claire can't quite figure them out. There's something very odd about these folks, and she's just an outsider who can't seem to break in.

Claire and Frank manage to spy on the local women doing a weird sort of ritual dance at the site of some standing stones. Next day, Claire revisits the site and ... somehow finds herself transported back to 18th century Scotland.

At this point, the old story transitions into the new story of the time-travel romance novel *OUTLANDER*, by Diana Gabaldon.

The old story was about Claire and Frank putting some fire back in their marriage after several years on ice.

Now Claire is in a new story, in which her main goal is to survive and get back to her own century.

But the old story keeps intruding. The first person she meets is Jack Randall, her husband's ancestor from long ago, a captain in the hated British army and not a nice man.

The new story is a long story, with many twists. It's a better story because of the old story that it interrupted. Claire really does want to get back to Frank and finish up her marriage enrichment.

But it's not so easy to get back to the standing stones, what with being mistaken for a prostitute, getting captured by the suspicious locals, and then being married off against her will to Jamie, a towering hunk of a man who is in all kinds of trouble because of his past run-ins with Captain Jack Randall.

The old story takes up only 35 pages of *OUTLANDER*. The new story takes up nearly 600 pages. The new story is a lot more interesting than the old story, but it works a whole lot better because there is an old story.

Now what about your novel? You probably have a pretty good handle on the new story -- the main plot of your book. But what about the old story -- the story that the new story interrupts?

What is your old story? How does the new story overshadow the old story? How does the old story complicate your new story?

Don't confuse the old story with the backstory.

Backstory is everything that happened before your novel begins. It covers your lead character's entire lifetime and maybe several generations before that.

The old story is not that. The old story is what's going on right when your novel starts. Your lead character has plans. Those plans are going to be horribly interrupted by the new story, which breaks in on the old story and sends it to the back of the bus.

The old story is important because, for most novels, your old story is where your book begins. It's a rare novel where the new story begins on page one, paragraph one. Normally, you begin with the old story, with small plans, small ambitions, small goals.

If you don't have an old story in your novel, then it's going to feel strange. Like your characters were taken out of a deep freeze just for your novel.

What's your old story? In chapter one of your novel, what do your characters have planned for today, for this week, this month, this year?

How does your new story break in on the old story and smash all those plans to bits?

Most importantly, how does the old story keep jamming itself into the gears of the new story, creating problems?

If you're having problems figuring out what your old story is, here's an exercise you can do:

- * Make a list of your five favorite novels.
- * For each one, write a one-sentence summary of the new story -- the main storyline of the book.
- * Write a one-sentence summary of the old story -- the storyline that your lead character THINKS is the story in chapter one.

Doing this exercise will show you how your favorite authors have solved the same problem that you need to solve. You'll learn something from this exercise.

Now go apply it to your own novel.

4) Marketing: Fear, Rejection, and All That

My friend Mary DeMuth recently published an e-book with the title THE 11 SECRETS OF GETTING PUBLISHED.

Given that the price is only \$2.99, I assumed the book would be about 50 pages with a few simple tips on breaking into publishing.

When Mary sent me a copy, I was astounded to find that it ran to 229 pages of solid information on breaking in. Developing your craft. Learning discipline. Learning to accept critiques. Writing a query and a proposal. And tons more. Mary packed this book.

The chapter that hit home for me was titled, "Overcome Fear and Rejection." You'd think I'd be good at that after 23 years of this writing game, but I still hate rejection and I still battle fear.

Last week, I did an interview on Skype with Mary for over an hour. We talked about several topics from her book. In this column, I'll run only the conversation we had on fear and rejection. (I'll publish the full conversation on my blog soon.)

Here's our dialogue:

RI: One of the main sections of your e-book is about overcoming fear and rejection. That sounds a little like, "Don't think about pink elephants." You can't do that by thinking about it. So how do you do it?

MD: As I said earlier, rejection is a sign of growth. If you're not submitting, you won't be rejected. But if you are submitting, you will be.

RI: Well, aren't you Miss Sunshine today?

MD: You have to settle your own issues of personal worth as you head into publishing or those rejections will mess with your mind.

RI: Expand on that personal worth thing. That's something I wrestle with.

MD: Well, if I believe that publishing is the validation of my life, if I'm rejected, suddenly I have no validation. But if I realize my worth isn't what I do but who I am, I can learn to weather rejection. It doesn't have to devastate me.

RI: Personal worth for me is tied to achievement. So if I haven't achieved anything yet, what's my personal worth?

MD: Ah, Randy. All of us here would heartily agree that you're worth your weight in gold (to use a cliché). I think this journey has been placed in front of me so that I'll learn the important lesson that I am much more than what I produce and achieve.

RI: It seems like there are two mistakes to make though. The other error is the whole "self esteem" thing. So everybody gets a trophy, whether they did anything or not. It seems like we have to strike a balance.

MD: Yeah, and that's what self publishing has done to publishing. I will run into people who have basically sent a Word file to a company and had it "published" with 100 typos and they feel like they're published. Without any sweat or effort. Makes me a little crabby.

RI: I see a lot of writers with a misguided belief that just because they typed a story, it's going to be a bestseller, just cuz. "Because I'm the center of the universe." Well, they've certainly published, but not necessarily anything worth reading.

MD: Yeah, and I'm here to say that is truly not the reality. Everyone needs to grow. Not everyone can write a bestseller. You can even write award winning books and not sell.

RI: But let's get back to that self-worth thing. We need it in order to handle rejection. But if we have an exaggerated self-worth, then we ignore the very real critiques of our work that would force us to grow.

MD: Yes. You have to settle your calling. That's what helps me weather the ups and downs of publishing. I know-know-know that I am gifted to write. That I'm supposed to write. Because of that settled knowledge, when I'm rejected, I can dust myself off and keep at it.

RI: How do you develop a realistic self-worth that will get you through the hard times without being crushed? What I mean is, how do you "know" that?

MD: That's a good question. For me it's been looking back over my life and seeing all the input I've received over the years. Folks told me I could write when I wrote Christmas letters. My teachers saw the gift. And, yes, mentors have helped me hone the gift and encouraged me to continue.

RI: Maybe it comes down to a trusted editor or coach or friend? I critique a lot of writers at conferences. What I notice is that most of them either think too

highly of their own work or else too poorly. Very few have an accurate idea of how well they write.

MD: And I find when I meet someone who has a balanced perspective, he/she is most likely the person who will be published. We must be teachable, yet confident in our calling to write.

RI: Right, I was just thinking of Jim Rubart, whom I met a few years ago at a conference. I think he knew he had the goods, but he also knew that he needed some guidance. What I saw right away was that he was very well balanced.

MD: He's a good example. And then he published a bestselling book with B & H publishing! But it took several years. That balance is a rare thing. He paid his dues. Learned the craft. And eventually published. He also is a marketer, so I think that helped too.

RI: I think most writers I run into suffer from the "I am dirt" mentality. But the ones in the most trouble are the "I am gold; kneel before me" writers. You can't tell them anything.

MD: Note to writers who think they are dirt: You're not. Rest there. Learn now, be teachable, and keep at it. True.

RI: I've only seen a very few writers who really were horribly bad writers. And oddly enough, I think all of them thought they were spectacular.

MD: I've seen a few. Yes, they thought they were awesome.

RI: I'd much rather coach an "I am dirt" writer. They can be taught, usually. Do you ever suffer from those feelings that your writing totally sucks and that you're a fraud?

MD: Totally. Every time I hand in a manuscript, I panic. That happened recently. I wrote a book that I thought was schlock and that I'd surely be found out.

RI: Yeah, you get that horrible feeling that "This book is the train wreck which will expose me for the fraud I've always been."

MD: I was very surprised when the editor emailed me praising the book, calling it a classic. Absolutely floored me. Yes, I think we all think that way. I wrote an article once about that for Writers Digest:
<http://www.writersdigest.com/article/inspiration-vs-perspiration/>
About how inspiration doesn't always mean the prose is good. Nor does perspiration mean it's bad. Often the best prose comes when we push our way through, painful word by painful word.

RI: Gack, that sounds . . . painful. So what's the

bottom line here for writers? On the fear and rejection thing?

MD: Perspire until the inspiration comes. Not vice-versa. On fear and rejection: it will come, but don't wallow there. You have to be a bootstrap writer.

RI: I just had an insight. Maybe the best way to deal with fear and rejection is to know that other writers also have fears and hate rejection. Real writers. Published writers. Award-winning authors. Best-selling authors.

MD: Yes, we're in community. And honestly, when I suffer from a big rejection, I go to my writer friends and ask them for advice. Usually I get encouragement back. And that makes me want to keep at it.

RI: So maybe the real answer isn't "Suck it up." Maybe the real answer is "Misery loves company."

MD: True. The best thing you can do as a writer is form a community of like minded writers around you.

RI: A topic for another day. I just wrote a column on that in the June issue of my e-zine on the subject of what I call "Allies."

Well, Mary, that about does it for today. We've talked just a little about one of the 11 topics you cover in your new e-book, THE 11 SECRETS OF GETTING PUBLISHED. This book is now available for \$2.99 at all the usual online retail outlets.

Here's a link to Mary's book on Amazon:

<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/blinks/demuth/11secrets.php>

Visit Mary on the web here:

<http://www.marydemuth.com>

<http://www.facebook.com/authormarydemuth>

<http://www.twitter.com/marydemuth>

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.

However, (hanging head in shame), despite my plans to cut back, I've just added another event to this year's schedule in November. Dang! Simplifying my life is more complicated than I thought.

I will be teaching at these conferences in 2011:

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, St. Louis)
4 hours teaching a lecture series on the Snowflake method
<http://www.acfw.com/conference/>

Novel Writing Boot Camp, (November, Chicago)
2 intense days with 4 drill sergeants and 40 tough recruits
<http://www.christianwritersguild.com/novel-writing-boot-camp/>

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.UmstattedMedia.com>

7) Steal This E-zine!

This E-zine is free, and I personally guarantee it's worth at least 1000 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

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 26,000 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>
