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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 (more than 500 of you signed up in August), 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.

- * Getting things done, hour by hour, is a tactical matter. Telling yourself "just do it" doesn't actually work. What works is using a method to help you do it. What to know my favorite method for getting it done? Read this month's organizational column, "The Pomodoro Technique." It's even cooler than it sounds.
- * The ending of your novel is a powerful selling tool. It's the reason your readers will go out and talk about your book. But there's a little-known secret to making your ending fly. I'll tell all in this month's craft article, "Selling Your Ending."
- * In July, I began a series of marketing columns on the secrets of John Locke, the best-selling novelist who sold more than a million e-books in only five months. This month, I analyze two techniques Locke claims are the reasons for his amazing success, in my marketing column, "Final Secrets of John Locke's Success."

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: The Pomodoro Technique

Certain tasks in the writing life involve spending massive amounts of time on an extended task.

Writing the first draft of your novel is one of those tasks. You can't possibly get it done in one sitting. It will probably take you weeks or months to write your first draft.

How do you do that efficiently?

I've recently started using the Pomodoro technique for tasks like this, and it works well for me.

You can use a search engine to find out all about the Pomodoro technique, and if you're interested, I recommend that you do. But I'll summarize the basics here.

- a) Set a timer for 25 minutes and work on your task for the entire time, allowing no interruptions. If the phone rings, ignore it. If an e-mail comes in, ignore it. If the house burns down around you, interrupt your work. But assuming no major catastrophes, work until the timer goes off and then stop immediately. Make a check mark on a piece of paper. You've just completed one "pomodoro."
- b) Set the timer for five minutes and use this time to do something unrelated to your work. You can check your voice mail or your e-mail. You can take a quick walk or get a drink or go to the bathroom. You can listen to music or chat with a friend. When the timer goes off, prepare to get back to work.
- c) Repeat steps (a) and (b) until you've completed 4
 "pomodoros." Now you can take a longer break of about
 15 minutes.

That's essentially the whole deal. Repeat these steps until you're done for the day. At that point, you may want to track how many "pomodoros" you completed during the day. Or you may not care.

There are some obvious questions to ask about this method.

First question: Why is it called the "Pomodoro technique"? The answer is that the inventor of the method, Francesco Cirillo, used a tomato shaped kitchen timer when he developed the method. "Pomodoro" is Italian for "tomato."

Second question: What's magic about 25 minutes of work plus 5 minutes of fooling around? The answer is that there is nothing magic about it. The magic is simply to work with focus for a set period of time, and then to allow your brain a little refresh time. 25 minutes plus 5 minutes works fine. So would a different schedule.

Third question: Is there software you can use to manage the timer and keep track of your "pomodoros?" The answer is yes. You can find numerous programs for just about any computer, as well as apps for just about any smart phone. A quick search on Google will find you what you need.

Fourth question: Is there an official web site to learn more about the Pomodoro Technique? The answer is yes. Here it is:

http://www.pomodorotechnique.com/

Is the Pomodoro technique for you? Maybe; maybe not.

If it sounds like something you'd be interested in, then the odds are good that it could help you stay

focused on your work. In that case, try it and see.

But if it sounds like just another strait jacket, then it probably would be -- for you. In that case, just say no.

Different people are different. Methods that work for one person don't necessarily work for another.

I'm finding the Pomodoro technique very useful in large tasks where I'm working alone, such as writing a first draft or editing my work. It's not so useful when I need to work with other people on their schedule.

3) Creating: Selling Your Ending

Your challenge as a fiction writer is to give your reader the ending she wants in a way she doesn't expect. Your reader may "know" how it has to end, but you don't want her to see how it could possibly work.

The danger is that you'll find some too-tricky ending that makes the reader say, "Huh? That would never actually happen."

That's a serious problem, and plenty of novels have unbelievable endings that leave the reader saying, "No, sorry, I don't buy it."

What's the solution?

You, the writer, need to "sell the ending" to your story in advance by weaving in information through the middle of the story that makes your incredible ending credible. Not merely credible; inevitable.

But you must camoflage that information when you give it. At the end of your story, you don't want your reader to say, "That was obvious! I saw that coming a mile away!"

You want your reader saying, "That should have been obvious. I had all the information I needed -- but I still didn't see it coming!"

It's a fine line you have to walk.

As an example, let's analyze the ending of the movie THE KARATE KID (the 2010 version).

Spoiler alert: There is just no way to analyze the ending of a movie without telling how it ends, so if you haven't seen the movie and if you ever intend to

see it, you should stop reading right now and go watch it before you read any more.

Here's the story setup:

Our hero, 12-year-old Dre Parker, moves from Detroit to Beijing because his mother is offered a job there.

Right away, Dre hates the place. He doesn't speak Chinese. The entire environment feels weird to him, but everybody else thinks he's the weirdo. And he's being bullied at school by a pack of half a dozen young toughs who study kung fu with a brutal teacher who believes in "no mercy."

After being bullied once too often, Dre retaliates by throwing a bucket of water on the lead bully. The whole gang then chases him down and begins beating him up.

In steps Mr. Han, the maintenance man in Dre's apartment building. Mr. Han (played by Jackie Chan) turns out to be surprisingly good at kung fu and he handily fends off the bullies.

After the fight, Mr. Han takes Dre to his office and does some hocus pocus stuff with blue flames and little glass jars and whatnot. The viewer is as surprised as Dre when the hocus pocus works and the pain goes away.

But since there's nothing much at stake in this scene, the viewer buys it. This is China. Cool stuff can happen here. Dre's new friend has healing power.

Mr. Han persuades the teacher of the bullies to order them to stop bothering Dre, but there's a price. Dre must enter the coming kung fu tournament and fight the bullies there, in public.

This sets the story question for the movie: Will Dre beat the bullies at their own game, or won't he?

The category of this movie is action-adventure, and the viewer knows that most of the time, the hero of this kind of movie is going to win in the end. The odds are usually long, but that only makes the ending more satisfying.

In THE KARATE KID, the odds are extremely long. Dre has never studied kung fu, and Mr. Han has never taught it. There are six bullies, and all of them are bigger than Dre.

Worst of all, Mr. Han starts the training by teaching Dre to be respectful and obedient, rather than teaching him something useful, such as actually fighting. Dre chafes. The tension rises.

Eventually, Mr. Han's training gets some traction. Dre learns respect and starts to learn to fight, but he has a very long way to go, and much of the training is

mental. He must learn to focus. He must learn to control his temper. He must learn to believe in himself.

Mr. Han takes Dre to a monastery in the mountains to teach him some lessons about life. Dre sees a lot of strange things, and one of the strangest is the sight of woman standing on one leg before a cobra, hypnotizing it with her swaying motions and with her eyes.

Dre returns from the mountain with a new vision for what a kung fu artist can be, and now his training really ramps up.

But new complications arise. There's a girl he likes, and of course things go awry. Mr. Han has an emotional breakdown on the anniversary of the death of his wife and son and Dre must help him bounce back.

The intensity of Dre's training rises and rises. He overcomes obstacles. Shatters barriers. Too soon, the kung fu tournament arrives.

Dre is clearly ready to fight. It's not obvious that he's ready to win, but he's become a credible little fighter. He's definitely not going to embarrass himself, and that's the main thing. Mr. Han believes that if he can come out of this tournament no longer fearing the bullies, then that's a win.

In his first match, Dre is up against a bigger and stronger kid. He has a rough start but he shows some mental toughness. The crowd is surprised when Dre wins it.

The crowd doesn't know it's a movie, but we viewers do. We know it's an action-adventure movie and that Dre will win at least his first few matches. But we want to see him earn them.

He does. Dre comes out more aggressive in his second match and he wins that one too.

Meanwhile, the bullies are slicing and dicing through their opponents. They're good. They're strong. They're fast. And they show no mercy at all.

Suddenly, Dre's in the quarterfinals, and ... he wins! Two more fights, and he could win the championship! But the two toughest bullies also make it into the semifinals. Dre's going to have to fight at least one of them, and he's scared. These kids are brutes, both of them.

Just before Dre's semifinal match, we see his opponent being given instructions by his teacher to cheat. The kid is supposed to take Dre out, inside or outside the rules. He wants to beat Dre fairly, but his teacher doesn't want Dre beaten; he wants him broken. The kid goes in and fights dirty. So dirty that the referee disqualifies him.

But it's too late. Dre is hurt. Hurt bad. If his leg's not broken, it's too damaged to continue.

Dre is taken downstairs where the doctor gives him the bad news. This match is over for him. Upstairs, the announcer is telling the crowd that Dre has two minutes to appear on stage or else he loses by default.

This is what novelists call "the dark moment." It really looks like Dre is out of the match. He's fought well and honorably, but he'd be nuts to continue. His mother doesn't want him to fight. The girl he likes doesn't want him to fight. Mr. Han doesn't want him to fight. And his leg is hurting so bad he can't even stand.

The only problem, from the storyteller's point of view, is that Dre needs to win. In this category of movie, the hero needs to win. Second place is not good enough here. People don't watch action-adventure movies to see the hero finish second.

What's a movie maker to do?

With two minutes left, there simply isn't time to explain all about Chinese medicine and to convince the viewer that there are ways to make the pain go away using blue flames and little glass jars and whatnot.

If the ending is going to work, the director needs to sell that idea to the viewer much earlier in the story.

Fortunately, that's exactly what happened much earlier in the movie. The viewer has already bought into Mr. Han's curative powers using blue flames and little glass jars and whatnot.

That's the crucial point. The director sells this idea to the viewer early on, when the stakes are low.

Then at the end of the movie, the director can cash it in. All Dre has to do is to ask Mr. Han to do that thing with "the glass jars." We don't have to see him do it. We already know he can.

In no time, Dre is hobbling upstairs to fight.

His opponent in the final round is the worst of the bullies, the meanest and toughest of the pack. The one we've seen brutalizing his opponents throughout the tournament. Evil incarnate.

It's a tough, tough match. The first to score three points will win the match. The bully scores first, knocking Dre completely off the stage. Dre drags himself back up and the fight continues.

It's still a tough match, but Dre knocks his opponent down and scores a point. The score is now tied, and it's starting to look like he could actually win. He'll need some luck, but he could win if nothing more goes wrong.

Dre is looking better and better. He takes the bully down and smacks him again, hard. He's scored another point, and now he's ahead, 2 points to 1. One more and he'll win.

But nothing is easy, and the bully's coach gives him new instructions: "Break his leg. No mercy." The brute goes back, energized, gets Dre on the run, then takes a flying leap and smashes Dre in his damaged leg, scoring a point and tying the score.

Dre's on the mat in agony for an age, trying to stand. He's all alone now. Mr. Han can't come on stage and do more tricks with blue flames and little glass jars and whatnot. Dre needs some new bit of magic, but he seems to be fresh out of magic.

Dre finally hauls himself to his feet, but he's only got one functioning leg and the bully has two. Now what?

Now Dre goes into the pose of the cobra dancer he saw earlier in the movie. He's standing on one leg, bobbing and weaving, staring at the bully with hypnotic eyes.

The final showdown begins, and the bully is preparing his attack, but he's confused. He stares at Dre, befuddled. Finally he rushes in.

Dre spins around, does a one-legged backflip, and kicks the bully in the head, scoring the winning point.

It's an almost unbelievable ending, but it works.

Why? Because the director sold the viewer the key idea earlier in the movie -- the idea that a one-legged dancer can hypnotize a deadly foe with his swaying motions and his eyes.

When you reach the final confrontation of your story, if you've boxed in your hero tightly, the only way to win is by using a trick that's outlandish and extraordinary.

But by that point in the story, it's way too late to sell your audience on anything outlandish or extraordinary. Late in the game, your audience is on guard for such tricks.

That means you've got to sell your reader on your outlandish and extraordinary tricks early in your story.

And you've got to disguise those outlandish and extraordinary tricks by bringing them in at the

emotionally slow points of the story, when the stakes are low and when it's not even clear that you're selling anything.

If you sell your ending properly in the middle of your story, your reader will buy that ending when you cash in your tricks at the final confrontation.

It sounds easy.

It's not.

But that's the way it's done by the masters of story telling.

4) Marketing: Final Secrets of John Locke's Success

Two months ago in this column, I began an analysis of John Locke's lastest book on marketing fiction, HOW I SOLD 1 MILLION EBOOKS IN 5 MONTHS, which you can get on Amazon for \$4.99. I continued that analysis last month.

As I noted in both previous columns, there are six main tasks you need to accomplish in creating and marketing your fiction. Locke doesn't list these anywhere in so many words, nor does he give you time estimates for how long they ought to take. Here are those tasks, with my estimates on time:

- * Define your General Target Audience (days of work)
- * Create your book (months of work)
- * Create your platform (weeks of work)
- * Launch your book (one day of work)
- * Grow your platform (ongoing effort for years)
- * Market your book (ongoing effort for months)

In the last two months, we've covered the first five of these tasks and we've discussed in general terms the final task, marketing your book.

This month, we'll look at two elements of book marketing which Locke does differently from just about everybody else.

Here they are, and if they seem simple to you, let me say that I thought they seemed a little too simple when I first read his book, but as I read his explanation of what he's doing, I decided that these are really quite clever.

- * He writes "Loyalty Transfer Blogs."
- * He taps into the "Viral Circle" on Twitter.

Let's look at each of these in turn.

Locke doesn't blog very often. As of today, he's blogged about 8 times since early November, 2010, when he changed his marketing strategy to use very few blog posts.

Few, but ripe.

Locke doesn't blog just to be blogging. He blogs to connect to his General Target Audience on an emotional level.

As I've discussed in the last couple of months here, you don't know your General Target Audience until you can name the emotional buttons that they want pushed when they read fiction.

The reason your General Target Audience reads fiction is precisely to get those emotional buttons pushed.

The reason John Locke blogs is to push the emotional buttons of his General Target Audience in a post of 500 to 800 words. Then, somewhere on the page of his blog, he showcases his books that push those same emotional buttons.

Locke calls this a "Loyalty Transfer Blog." The purpose of the blog post is to build loyalty in his General Target Audience (by pushing the right emotional buttons) and then transfer that loyalty to his books.

It seems to be working for Locke. It's hard to argue with the simple facts. Before he starting writing Loyalty Transfer Blogs, he was selling a few dozen books per month. Soon after he began writing them, he was selling hundreds per week, then hundreds per day, then hundreds per hour.

Make of that what you will. To me, that looks like success.

The only question is how you get people to read your blog in the first place. The answer to that is found in Locke's second idea . . .

The Viral Circle

Locke has a Twitter account, as many authors do. He builds a following, as many authors do. (He calls that his "Friendship Circle.")

But the Viral Circle is not about targeting his followers.

The Viral Circle is about targeting people in his General Target Audience who never heard of him before.

Locke's Viral Circle uses Twitter search to find people who are tweeting about the same topic as he blogged about in his Loyalty Transfer Blog.

Locke then sends a private message via Twitter to individual people tweeting on that topic and invites them to read his latest blog post on that same topic.

These are people who aren't following him, but they are people who might be interested in him because they're tweeting about a subject he's blogging on.

And that's it. That's the Viral Circle.

Can something so simple really work? That depends on how well you do it. Let's look at what Locke did to promote his books in early November of 2010. There were really only two steps:

First, Locke wrote a Loyalty Transfer Blog titled "Why I Love Joe Paterno and My Mom!" You can find it here: http://donovancreed.com/2010/11/

The blog post is a well-written, heartfelt post on Joe Paterno, the football coach at Penn State. In the post, Locke pushes all the emotive buttons that his novels push. But so far as I can see, he doesn't mention any of his novels. At least not in the post itself.

In the header of Locke's blog you'll find the cover art for all of his novels. (They form an eye-catching series of leggy women, which pretty well defines Locke's brand).

In the margins of his blog, you'll find blurbs and cover art thumbnails for all of his books, with links to Amazon.

Locke's second step was to do a search on Twitter for Penn State. He chose the top 100 results of this search and sent a private message to each of them with a link to his blog post.

Many of those folks checked out his blog. Many of them liked what they saw. Almost instantly, Locke's post went viral.

Locke didn't blog again for more than four months. Why should he? He had an evergreen blog post that was doing a good job for him. He spent his time writing more novels.

The question is whether Locke's methods will work for you. That's a good question. Every author is different. Every author brings different skills to the table. Every author has a different General Target Audience.

I believe that if you've got good craft and if you've got a well-defined General Target Audience, then you ought to be able to market your book effectively to that audience, using some or all of the methods we've discussed in this column during the last three months.

Your campaign won't look like Locke's and it won't look like mine. It'll be uniquely yours.

You might be interested in how I'll be running the marketing campaign for my next e-book. I'll spell it out in general terms here.

The title of the novel is OXYGEN. I coauthored it years ago with my good friend John Olson, who holds a Ph.D. in biochemistry. Since I have a Ph.D. in physics, people often assume that John and I "must" write science fiction.

But such pesky assumptions are often wrong.

I like to read suspense novels -- Tom Clancy or John Grisham or Michael Crichton or Ken Follett. And there's a special place in my heart for action-adventure movies like DIE HARD and THE KARATE KID. If there's a good solid romance thread in the story, I like it even better. THE HUNGER GAMES is my ideal novel.

John's tastes are similar. He likes a bit more romance than I do, and also a bit more fantasy, but generally we read a lot of the same books. John got me to read PRIDE AND PREJUDICE and I actually liked it.

If somebody's in danger of getting killed or kissed, we're happy.

We typically write about geeky people like ourselves, either scientists or engineers or math-heads. We throw in a lot of suspense and add a romantic thread and sometimes a bit of mystery. I like to call our kind of writing "genius in jeopardy" fiction.

This will shock some people, but the terrible truth is that neither of us ever intended to commit an act of science fiction. There's nothing wrong with SF, but that's just not our main love.

OXYGEN was John's idea: An explosion on the first mission to Mars leaves four astronauts with only enough oxygen for one. Two of the four are secretly in love with each other, but they're both too geeky to admit it. Can our planet-crossed lovers find a way to beat the laws of physics? Or must one of them die to save the life of the other?

When John told me this idea, I loved it. Then he offered me the chance to coauthor it with him, because he knew we'd do a better job together than either of us

could alone.

I jumped at the chance. John and I worked relentlessly to develop the story and write a killer proposal. Finally, after a full year of work, we sent out the proposal. In less than seven weeks, we had an offer from the publisher we most wanted to work with.

The book sold well and won a bundle of awards and honors. But all good things must come to an end, and OXYGEN eventually went out of print. John and I got back the rights and we'll soon be releasing it again as an e-book.

Want to know the inside story of what we did to create our winning proposal? Want to see that proposal and cover letter, annotated with our current thinking on what we did right -- and what we did wrong? Want to see my line-by-line motivation-reaction analysis of the first scene, which John wrote? Want to see John's critique of the second scene, which I wrote?

We'll be including four appendices totaling about 20,000 words that show you exactly what we did to create and sell our proposal and that analyze those first two scenes in Xtreme detail.

Are we ridiculously stupid to include an extra 20,000 words that will interest ONLY the tiny percentage of people on the planet trying to write a novel?

Maybe, maybe not. One thing we've learned is that you often do well by helping people achieve their dreams. And we know that lots of people would like to write a novel . . . someday.

Those are exactly the kind of people we know how to help. Both John and I have taught fiction many times at writing conferences. I've written one of the hottest selling books on how to write fiction.

Our four appendices will include some of the most critically important things we needed to learn when we were just starting out writing.

We don't have an editor to force us to cut our word count, so we're free to go into more detail than we ever have before, with a lot of brand new material.

Our General Target Audience is the set of all people who like action novels with a strong female lead character.

But our Specific Target Audience for this book narrows down that General Target Audience to those people who also want to write a novel.

Is that Specific Target Audience too small? We don't know and in a certain sense we don't care. Small fires burn hot. We'll take our chances.

OXYGEN is due to release in about a week. The price is going to be ridiculously low -- much lower than any product I've ever released before.

Our launch plan is pretty simple. Both of us will notify our e-mail lists and I'll blog about it. I'll mention it on Facebook and John will probably tweet about it.

Eventually, I'll try a Loyalty Transfer Blog and I might even try to tap the Viral Circle.

But we're going to keep it simple. For us, simple is good. Simple is inexpensive, which means we can keep our prices dirt cheap. And simple just might be effective.

Stay tuned.

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 currenty the hottest fiction writing book in the Kindle store. 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:

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 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 144 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 e-mail 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.

Of course you should not forward this e-mail to people who don't write fiction. They won't care about it.

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 27,000 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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