
The Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine

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"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 250 of you have joined since the last issue), 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 email that will put you out of your misery.

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:

Want your next novel to be a bestseller? Of course you do. Who doesn't? But that's a little easier said than done, right? In this issue, I'll lay out a roadmap for your next novel. I can't guarantee your results, of course. Making a roadmap is easier than following it, but this is the big picture plan of attack. How well it will sell depends on how well you execute the plan. But the first requirement is to know the plan.

In a recent series of posts on my blog, my readers posed questions for Renni Browne, author of SELF-EDITING FOR FICTION WRITERS. Virtually all published novelists that I know own a copy of Renni's book. Renni was kind enough to answer questions, which I then posted to my blog. In this issue, I'll give some highlights of what we learned from Renni.

I'm currently running a series on my blog with Jeff Gerke, who is launching a small press dedicated to marketing the unmarketable. How is Jeff going to beat the odds? Find out ... in this issue.

If you want to see what we're talking about NOW on my blog, join us Monday through Friday at:
<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/blog>

2) Organizing: A Roadmap For Your Next Book

If you want to drive from Los Angeles to New York, you need a roadmap. That isn't necessarily an actual piece of paper with roads drawn on it. It might be just a series of steps to follow, like these:

- * Get on I10 and drive east from LA
- * Switch to I15 and drive to Salt Lake City
- * Take I80 east to Chicago
- * etc. (It gets complicated after that)

Now, each of those steps may take a short time or a long time to execute. You'll be on I10 for maybe an hour. I15 will take you a full day. I80 might take a couple of days. Along the way, there'll be smaller tasks you have to execute, such as stopping for gas, food, motels, etc.

The important thing here is that the main steps are in order. You'll go nuts trying to get onto I80 straight from I10, because they don't connect. Try any trick you want. You can even (groan) ask directions. It won't help. If you want to get from I10 to I80, you need to take that pesky intermediate step of I15. You can't skip steps.

Of course, there are other ways to get there. You could

take I70 through Denver and Kansas City and Columbus and on east. Or you could take the southern route on I40. What won't work so well is taking I5 up to Seattle. That's a little pointless, even if you drive it really fast, because Seattle is further from New York than LA is.

The roadmap to getting published isn't quite like driving across the country. It's a lot fuzzier, and you have more options. So it's not surprising that I often see writers doing things that are the equivalent of trying to get onto I80 from I10, or going to New York by way of Seattle.

I won't claim that there is only one way to get there. But there are more probable and less probable paths to success. What I'll sketch out here is a more probable roadmap for getting published and marketing it successfully.

I'm going to do things backward, though. Rather than show how you get from here to there, I'll start with "there" and work back one step at a time through the career of a typical novelist to the very beginning. You can stop reading the list when you get to the point where you are.

Here is the backwards roadmap. Take it with the appropriate grains of salt: It's not the only way to get there; it's the big picture and leaves out many details; it's only an approximation to reality.

- * Do radio and TV interviews for book
- * Launch book and e-mail your database of fans
- * Edit galleys for book
- * Work with publicist on campaign for book
- * Revise novel after receiving editor's comments
- * Begin building your marketing platform
- * Send "polished draft" to your editor
- * Revise your novel
- * Receive phone call from editor buying your book
- * Your agent submits book to publishers
- * Get an agent
- * Meet agents at writing conference or by mail/email
- * Write a stellar proposal
- * Polish first three chapters
- * Finish first draft of novel
- * Start writing first draft of novel
- * Design your novel before writing it
- * Get brilliant idea for a novel that "can't miss"
- * Finish "Junior year" of learning the craft
- * Finish "Sophomore year" of learning the craft
- * Finish "Freshman year" of learning the craft
- * Decide that you want to be a novelist

I want to make it clear that this process normally takes years. You simply can't decide today that you're going to be a novelist and tomorrow get an agent and the next day have a book launch party. It doesn't happen that way.

Likewise, if you decide today that you want to write a novel, and then spend six months learning how to use some handy-dandy screenwriting software, you've just taken a trip to Seattle. Writing a screenplay is a fine goal in life, but it's not writing a novel. Writing a screenplay won't make you a novelist. Writing a novel will make you a novelist. If you want to go to Seattle, go to Seattle. It's a beautiful city. Just don't kid yourself that it's on the way to New York.

Finally, let me note that this roadmap is pretty much the same, whether you're writing a bestseller or writing a run-of-the-mill novel. The difference in results depends very much on how well you execute the various steps along the way. Writers who do a great job in their Freshman year tend to become great Sophomores and later on fabulous Juniors. They tend to get the best ideas, write the best first drafts, create the best proposals, land the best agents, sign on for the best editors, and end up with the best marketed books. So wherever you are on the road, do your best work.

Here are a few questions for you:

- * Where are you on the roadmap?
- * Are you working on the next logical step, or are you trying to skip steps? If you're skipping steps, is it a reasonable skip or is it an impossible one?
- * Do you know how to take your next step? If not, do you know who might be able to help you figure out your next step?

Let me reiterate that the above roadmap is not cast in stone. The only rules in this game are to succeed. The roadmap is one that is typical of many of the authors I've watched as they moved from green Freshmen to polished, published authors. Use my roadmap like the "pirate's code" -- it's a guideline, nothing more.

3) Creating: Self-Editing Your Fiction

Not long ago, I asked my blog readers what they're most interested in learning about. They suggested many topics. I held an "election" to see which was most popular. One of the biggest needs turned out to be how to edit your own fiction.

In November, I asked Renni Browne if she'd be willing to answer a few questions on the topic. She's a co-author of the Xtremely well-known book SELF-EDITING FOR FICTION WRITERS, a book that's on the shelves of most published novelists. Here is a handy link to her

book:

<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/blinks/selfediting.php>

Renni is also the founder of The Editorial Department, a company that does freelance editing for novelists and nonfiction writers. You can check out their web site here:

<http://www.EditorialDepartment.com>

I thought it might be interesting to replay some of the questions posed by my blog readers, along with Renni's replies. These originally appeared on my blog a few weeks ago, along with a lot more.

Pam asked: I've read a lot about cutting when editing. How do you know when you should add?

Renni answered: Lord, I think this is a gut feeling. Listen to your instincts when you read over a scene or chapter, an exchange of dialogue, whatever. Does it feel to you that something's missing/lacking? But let's go a little deeper. That may be exactly the way you want the reader to feel after reading the scene, which gets us to the question many writers fail to ask themselves: How do I want this scene to affect the reader? Many writers put all this great energy into working on a scene and no energy whatsoever into how the scene is going to work on the reader. If you want the reader to be, say, convinced that a wife is a lot smarter than her husband, reading over the scene in which we meet the couple with that in mind will let you know if you need to add anything to help the reader make such a deduction.

Randy added: When I'm editing, I add text under the following conditions:

* The scene does not have a Goal, a Conflict, and a Disaster (if it's a Scene) or it does not have a Reaction, Dilemma, and Decision (if it's a Sequel). To see a discussion of Scenes and Sequels, see my article on Writing the Perfect Scene.

<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/art/scene.php>

* Parts of the scene are unclear and can be clarified by adding text.

* The pacing is too fast to support the action and needs more text to slow it down.

* I can't tell who's talking.

* The scene is not delivering a Powerful Emotional Experience because I am giving short shrift to the emotive aspects.

* The scene lacks visual elements (or other sensory elements).

Christophe asked: How do you edit a chapter that has been rewritten ten times? A chapter that you can't get a clear view of anymore because you have all the ghosts of the previous versions haunting your brain. It's been rewritten so much you can't make out anymore if it's good or bad or somewhere in between.

Renni responded: I just had this situation with my article at www.editorialdepartment.com "What Editors (Really) Do," which is about the length of a chapter. It was important to me -- I've been editing manuscripts for forty-five years, and people don't know what that actually involves. There are different kinds of editing at different stages, and I wanted to make distinctions.

Now, I wouldn't dream of writing anything for publication anywhere without having it edited (my writing is my child, just like yours), so I always send my final draft to an editor at The Editorial Department. But in this case I kept writing the piece over, putting it aside, and writing/rewriting it again.

Came a day when I read it and felt the way you describe yourself so colorfully in your post. I e-mailed it with an SOS to one of our editors, who liked it very much but also pointed out a huge goof I'd made and didn't see because I'd bogged down in all that rewriting. All of which is a roundabout way of saying when you get to this state, unless you can put the chapter aside for a l-o-n-g period, professional feedback -- or, at least, experienced feedback you don't have to pay for -- is the only option that makes any sense. Problem chapters (or articles, or short stories) are problematical for a reason. You can't see it, you're too close to it, it's your child, you can't be 100% objective about it.

Randy adds: After I'd been getting published for a few years, I suddenly discovered that many of my friends were using freelance editors to improve their work. The reason for this is that publishers just don't have the resources anymore to edit manuscripts like they used to. Editors in publishing houses these days are vastly overworked. So a lot of writers hire editors before they submit their final draft to the publisher -- typically to help with big-picture issues such as plot and characters, and often to identify little-picture problem areas. I now have a literary assistant too, and I wouldn't think of writing a book without her help. It's just part of being a writer.

Lynda asked: It seems craft is like peeling the proverbial onion, always more to learn. How do I know when to quit revising?

Renni answered: Oh, dear. The answer to this one depends so much on your level of confidence. I can say

that many writers get to an Aha! By which I mean, a stage where they have a feeling -- however shaky, however fleeting -- "This is good, this is what I was trying for." If you get that feeling upon reading a heavily revised draft, stop messing with it. Also, professional feedback at this point can be invaluable.

Randy added: There are two kinds of writers who have this sort of feeling -- Freshmen and Seniors. It goes without saying that Freshmen who get this feeling are delusional. It's a sweet delusion, of course. I remember thinking my writing was brilliant, Pulitzer-ready, staggering-genius work when I was a Freshman. It turned out to be crap, and I've never had that feeling again, but it was nice while it lasted.

Now Seniors will get a similar feeling, but it's a bit more mature. It's the feeling you get when you've hit a thousand baseballs and you whack one especially well, and you know even before you see it fly over the fence that you've parked this one, baby. It's an intuition, and it comes from experience. Be aware that Seniors can also be delusional, but about half the time, they're not. Hence the need to get a second opinion.

I thank Renni Browne once again for being a guest on my blog.

4) Marketing: Launching Your Book

Marketing fiction is a tough game, no matter how you play it. Last month, we looked at a very traditional and powerful approach -- working with a publicist to garner reviews and media attention.

This month, we'll switch gears and look at a very untraditional approach. It's one that most publishers these days would like their authors to follow. But in many cases, neither the authors nor the publishers know exactly how.

Years ago, I met with my marketing director to plan the launch of my next novel.

My first question was: "What's the most important thing I as an author can do to help promote my book?"

I remember her answer verbatim because it was short and very clear: "Get your e-mail database as large as possible."

Which was an excellent answer. It is, I believe, the best answer she could have given me. The only trouble was that neither she nor I knew exactly how to do that.

I've learned a few things since then.

There are many ways that one can build an e-mail database. But please remember that your goal is NOT merely to get e-mail addresses. Any idiot can do that and there are plenty who do, which is why you get all those e-mails pitching you with unmentionable products that you don't want.

Your goal is get e-mail addresses of people who are genuinely interested in what you are writing and who are willing to receive e-mail from you whenever you write a new book.

That's a trick!

Most authors, frankly, don't do this well at all. They do two things poorly:

- * They add to their list any e-mail address they come across without getting permission to do so. Tragically, this is illegal, but it happens all the time. I receive many more newsletters from authors than I ever joined voluntarily.

- * They don't get enough e-mail addresses to make a difference. This is because they only have a few hundred friends, and once they've added those to the list, that's the end of their resources.

So let me give two rules for building your own e-mail list:

- * Never add someone unless they volunteer.

- * Give them an incentive to volunteer.

Not long ago, I spent some time talking with my friend Jeff Gerke, who is launching a small independent publishing company with an apparently impossible task. Jeff wants to publish fantasy, science fiction, and various other "speculative" novels and (here's the catch) he wants to market it to Christian readers.

On paper this should be easy. There are millions of Christians who read exactly this kind of fiction. But they don't go to Christian bookstores to buy it. So in practice, Christian publishers that have tried to publish novels like this have found that the books don't do well, and so they give up after a couple of tries.

Most of the Big Boys in Christian publishing have tried to do this sort of speculative fiction. A very few of these books have done spectacularly well. The rest have tanked. There hasn't been any middle ground. So the prevailing wisdom is that the market isn't ready for this kind of book.

Enter Jeff Gerke. Jeff has worked in the past for three

different Christian publishers as an editor and has even published some of the speculative novels he likes so much. Now he wants to create a small press to do ONLY that kind of book. That's what he likes to read, so that's what he wants to publish.

How's he going to market these books?

He's building an e-mail database, and he's doing it the honest way -- with incentives for people to sign up and incentives for people to tell their friends.

Incentives are great, if they're the right incentives. Readers of this e-zine received incentives that appeal to writers as an inducement to sign up. I didn't offer a discount on cat food. I offered useful information on getting published and on marketing fiction.

Jeff's incentives are geared toward his audience. I've been discussing all this with him on my blog lately. The name of his new publishing house is Marcher Lord Press, which we abbreviate as MLP. Here's what he said about his incentives:

Q: You and I brainstormed up some innovative ideas for launching your first few books at MLP. Tell us about those ideas and how you're coming along with them.

A: The two main marketing strategies we talked about were a massive giveaway prize drawing for launch day (which is October 1, 2008, God willing) and freebie goodies to be given to anyone who actually purchases one or more books on launch day.

The plans for both strategies are proceeding apace. But I'll tell ya, when I thought about forming a publishing company I never thought I'd be reading about how to score cheap international airfare. Ah, it's an adventure.

I know what I want to give for the grand prize but I haven't figured out the financing for it yet. The name of the company is Marcher Lord Press. Marcher lords were knights who held the borderland between England and Wales and England and Scotland. Marcher lords were used in other cultures, too. And in literature: our dear Theoden King, is Lord of the Mark (March). So what would be better for a grand prize than sending the winner and a guest to England to stay in the most famous marcher lord castle of all: Caerphilly Castle in Wales?

So if you have any free international airfare tickets sitting around, could I please have them? Oh please, oh please, oh please?

I've also gathered and am still gathering tons of other great prizes. I want to have as many as 100 things to give away. I've got signed copies of Christian novels, I've got an etching from William Shakespeare's

tombstone, I've got a leather-bound 50th anniversary edition of The Lord of the Rings, I've got cups and canvas bags and book markers. I've even got a numbered, signed, canvas print by famed space artist Frank Hettick. More goodies continue to roll in, too.

For the added value items to be given away with a purchase on launch day, I'm going electronic. If someone in Australia buys a book, I don't want to have to mail him my goodie individually (since the book itself will ship directly from the printer). So the goodies will be downloadable, I think.

The first is an original nonfiction book (20,000 words) on marcher lords and their castles by professional castle historian and author Lise Hull. The second will be an art book full of artwork by the many excellent Christian fantasy and SF illustrators I've come to know through <http://www.WhereTheMapEnds.com>.

Randy sez: Thanks to Jeff, for explaining all that. Those are certainly strong incentives for his target audience to sign up for his e-mail list. But there's more, and this is what makes it interesting.

If you sign up on Jeff's list, your name is entered once for the drawings of the various prizes. If you refer a friend, then your name is entered AGAIN in the drawings. If you refer 100 friends, your name is entered 100 times. The friends just have to name you as the person who referred them when they sign up.

That's an incentive for Jeff's people to tell friends who would be interested in Jeff's books. It's not an incentive for anything else. So it's a good incentive plan.

When Jeff's books launch in October, 2008, he'll notify people on his list that his new books are now out, and he'll give them all the info. They'll either buy or they won't, of course, but it's reasonable that many of them will. Then he'll hold the drawings and give away the prizes to the people on his list.

I know perfectly well that only a small minority of readers of this e-zine will be interested in Jeff's books. But I think most of you should be interested in his marketing methods, because they apply to any marketing niche you can imagine. And the larger your niche, the more valuable these methods will be.

For those who are interested in learning more about Jeff's publishing company, Marcher Lord Press, check it out here:

http://www.marcherlordpress.com/Sign-Up_Page.htm

One final comment: In Article #2 in this e-zine on your roadmap to success, one of the steps I suggested was "Begin building your marketing platform." Jeff's

incentive plan is one example of the sort of thing I was talking about.

There are many ways to build your platform, of course. Use the ones that fit you and your style best. And remember that the sooner you start building your platform, the taller it will be on the day you launch your book.

5) What's New At [AdvancedFictionWriting.com](http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com)

November has been a strange month. I took quite a bit of time off early in the month to work on a special project that had a short time fuse. I still can't reveal what it was all about, but it's finished. It didn't earn me anything, but it was worth doing, and it gave me some ideas for other projects I might work on in the future.

I'm also continuing to work on a proposal and sample chapters for my next novel. I've run the sample chapters past my freelance editor and am polishing the proposal. Writing a proposal is a lot of work!

I am also beginning to get articles posted on my Best Practices page on my web site:
<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/best>

6) Steal This E-zine!

This E-zine is free, and I personally guarantee it's worth at least 2831 times what you paid for it. I invite you to "steal" it, but only if you do it nicely . . .

Distasteful legal babble: This E-zine is copyright Randall Ingermanson, 2007.

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:
My fiction site: <http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com>

7) Reprint Rights

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Award-winning novelist Randy Ingermanson, "the Snowflake Guy," publishes the Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine, with more than 10,000 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
