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The Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine

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Circulation: 21915 writers, each of them creating a  
Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius.

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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 (nearly 600 of you signed up in July), 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 moving forward as fast as you should in your writing career or is something holding you back? If you're going great guns, then skip this article. Otherwise, discover one of the most common roadblocks writers face in my article, "What's Holding You Back?"

\* Interesting characters are resilient characters. Want to know the secret to making your characters better able to bounce back? Read my column on craft for this month, "The Resilient Character."

\* Last month, I ran one of the most controversial columns in the history of this e-zine on "The Future of Publishing." It's an electronic future, and in that e-future, there's one tool that I believe is absolutely indispensable for every novelist. Can you guess what it is? Find out in my article, "One Tool Every Writer Must Have."

Are you reading my blog? I've recently started an immensely popular "Ask A Question For My Blog" feature to my web site. Every day, I answer one question from my loyal blog readers. Are you missing out? Join the fun here:

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

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## 2) Organizing: What's Holding You Back?

I recently discovered something about myself that surprised me. Something that makes me take a lot longer to get things done than I should. Something that sometimes keeps me from finishing tasks. Something that occasionally even keeps me from trying in the first place.

I'm a pessimist.

This came as quite a surprise. After all, I'm not nearly as pessimistic as "Joe," a guy I used to work with. Every time I suggested a new idea to "Joe," the first thing he'd say was, "Now be careful! There's a lot of things you haven't thought about yet." Then he'd shoot the idea down with rocket-powered grenades.

After a while, I learned not to run ideas past "Joe"

because apparently, all my ideas were bad.

I haven't seen "Joe" in years, and I'm pretty sure I'm not as pessimistic as he is. But somewhere along the way, I definitely went over to the Dark Side. I became more like him than I ever imagined possible.

That's the bad news. The good news is that pessimism is not forever. You can quit being a pessimist and start being an optimist.

But should you? Aren't those pesky pessimists more in touch with reality than those annoying optimists?

Yes and no.

Yes, pessimists generally do have a better grasp of the hard realities of the situation. "Life sucks" and all that. You can prove in the lab that pessimists are better at recognizing reality.

But no, no, no, because in very real ways, you make your own reality. We all know about self-fulfilling prophecies. Those work both ways. Optimists are happier, healthier, and get more done. Because they expect to. Pessimists are less happy, less healthy, and get less done. Because they expect to. Again, you can measure that difference in the lab.

If you're a pessimist and you want to know what's holding you back in life, just go look in a mirror.

It's you. But you already knew that, and you were already down on yourself, and now you're mad at me for blaming you, but realistically, you secretly believe it's your own darned fault, so you're really just mad at me for telling you what you already knew.

Sorry about that. I feel your pain. Remember, I'm a pessimist too, and I'm probably a bigger one than you are.

I'm a pessimist, but I'm going to change. Which is actually an optimistic thing to say, and it means the cure is already working.

What is pessimism? And what is optimism? And how do you know which you are?

I'm not the expert on this. Martin Seligman is the expert, and he has been for a long time. Recently, somebody recommended Seligman's book to me. The title is LEARNED OPTIMISM.

I grabbed a copy off Amazon and began reading. Seligman hooked me right away with his account of how he and a number of other researchers broke the stranglehold on psychology that had been held for decades by the behaviorists.

Behaviorists taught that people were created by their environment. To change a person, you had to condition him to a new behavior. A person couldn't change himself merely by thinking differently, because thinking didn't matter. Only conditioning mattered.

What Seligman and others showed was that the behaviorists were wrong. The way you think matters. Thinking optimistically, you could change things for the better. Thinking pessimistically, you could change things for the worse -- or at best just wallow in the "life sucks" mud.

There's a test you can take in LEARNED OPTIMISM that helps you figure out your particular style of thinking. There are three particular aspects to measure:

- \* Permanence -- if things are good (or bad), do you expect them to stay like that for a long time?
- \* Pervasiveness -- if one thing is good (or bad), do you expect everything else to be like that?
- \* Personalization -- if things are good (or bad), who gets the credit (or blame) -- you or somebody else?

Optimists think that good things will continue on but that bad things will go away soon. Likewise, they think that good things are pervasive whereas bad things are merely aberrations from the norm. When good things happen, optimists are willing to take a fair share of the credit; when bad things happen, they're willing to let others take a fair share of the blame.

Pessimists are the opposite on all of these.

I took the test and discovered that I'm somewhat pessimistic in two of these aspects and strongly pessimistic in the other.

That's not good. But (having now read the book) it's not permanent. I can change if I want to. Furthermore, that pessimism is in my head, it's not a pervasive feature of the universe. Most importantly, my pessimism isn't entirely my fault, because I can see now who taught it to me.

The above paragraph is a model of how to change from pessimism to optimism. Both optimism and pessimism are driven by your beliefs, which are driven by what you tell yourself.

When you change your self-talk, you change your beliefs. When you change your beliefs, you change your behavior. When you change your behavior, you change your life. Chapters 12, 13, and 14 of LEARNED OPTIMISM teach you the techniques you need to change your self-talk.

Let's be clear on one thing. Optimism is not about the alleged "power of positive thinking," not about making those wretchedly gooey self-affirmations, and not about

telling lies to yourself.

Optimism is about looking for alternative plausible explanations that might lead to improving your life.

Pessimism is about looking for alternative plausible explanations that might lead to disimproving your life.

Which of those is likely to make you happier, healthier, and more productive? Bringing this home to the topic of fiction writing, which of those is likely to help you get your novel written, get it read by an agent, and get it published?

Research shows that optimism is an invaluable tool in dealing with criticism and rejection. If you've ever shut down for three days after a tough critique, or stopped sending out query letters for three months after getting a rejection from that perfect agent, then you can see the value of learning optimism.

Optimism will keep you going through the hard times as a writer. And you are going to have hard times. That will never change. What can change is how you respond to those hard times.

There is no way I can explain in 500 words exactly how it all works. The best I can do is to point you to Martin Seligman's book and tell you that I think it's gold. I expect this book is going to revolutionize my life in the next year. I hope it changes yours too.

Here's my Amazon affiliate link to **LEARNED OPTIMISM**:  
<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/blinks/optimism.php>

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### 3) Creating: The Resilient Character

In this month's column on organizing, I describe the differences between the optimist and the pessimist and explain why optimists get more done.

I have a strong suspicion that optimists make better characters. The reason is that optimism makes a person far more resilient, and resilience is something your character is going to need in order to survive the hell you're planning to put her through.

If you've got a character in your novel who doesn't seem to be going anywhere, or who can't bounce back from the setbacks you throw at her, chances are she needs a healthy dose of optimism.

Let's do a reality check on that and see if it makes sense.

One of the most compelling characters of 20th century fiction is Scarlett O'Hara, the irrepressible heroine of *GONE WITH THE WIND*, by Margaret Mitchell. Truth to tell, I've never liked Scarlett. She's rude and thoughtless and narcissistic.

But she's not dull. Why? The main reason is that you can knock her down, but the woman simply won't stay down.

One of the main hallmarks of the optimist is that they believe good things will go on and on whereas bad things will pass. Now remember one of Scarlett's favorite sayings whenever things go horribly wrong: "Tomorrow is another day." That philosophy (right or wrong) gives Scarlett incredible resilience.

Another indicator of optimism is an unwillingness to personalize failure. When things go wrong, there's always the possibility that it's the other guy's fault. When Scarlett overhears the other girls gossiping about her, it never occurs to her that they might be right. Instead, they're just jealous. Rightly or wrongly (in this case, wrongly), this attitude gives Scarlett a Teflon hide. Criticism simply doesn't stick to her. As a result, she can bounce back from scandals that would sink most people.

Why is this resilience of a character so important? Because in your novel, bad things are going to happen to your lead character. You're going to make them happen. You're going to thrash your character terribly. And she needs to be able to keep coming back, keep trying, keep looking for a way to find happiness.

Your character has a much stronger chance of doing that if she's an optimist. That's the way optimists behave.

Pessimists, on the other hand, wallow in their misery. Having a character feeling the pain is fine, up to a point. Having a character who thrives on it is another thing though. Unless you're extremely careful, a pessimistic character is a boring character.

Let's take another well-known example: Luke Skywalker in the original *STAR WARS* movie. When we meet Luke, he's a bit pessimistic. He's stuck on a planet he hates, doing a job he hates, denied the opportunity to fight the Empire he hates. And he's doing nothing about it. So far as he can see, he's going nowhere and he's never going to go anywhere.

Then Luke meets Obi-wan Kenobi. Kenobi is an optimist. Anybody who can face death with a cheery "I'll become more powerful than you can possibly imagine" is optimistic.

General Kenobi starts training Luke in the ways of the Force. If you think about it, the Force is about

getting things done. Making the impossible possible. A Jedi is an optimist.

After Kenobi is killed, Luke wallows a bit in misery. But not for long. Tie fighters come screaming after Luke and his comrades, and he rouses himself from his dejection to go fight. This is a powerful method of fighting discouragement -- distraction. Luke finds something to do, and afterward he feels better.

By the end of the movie, Luke has become much more proactive. He goes into a hopeless battle, daring to hope. Those hopes are rewarded, as hopes sometimes are. Luke is learning that optimism is more than just its own reward -- it can lead to other rewards.

By the third movie in the series, *THE RETURN OF THE JEDI*, Luke is confident and incredibly optimistic. He goes to rescue Han Solo, apparently unarmed. When Jabba the Hutt sentences him to death, Luke warns him to surrender or be killed. Luke's optimism pays off. He escapes with his life, rescues his friends, and destroys Jabba.

Luke is now fit to face the final battle -- with the evil Emperor. This is a battle he can't hope to win. He's not strong enough. But he's willing to go into it because he believes that he can turn Darth Vader to the good. Only an insanely optimistic person could believe that.

Luke's story is compelling because of his now unlimited optimism, which makes him willing to dare great things. It's impossible to achieve great things unless you dare them.

Unlike Scarlett, Luke didn't start out as an optimist. He became one by working at it -- by learning the ways of the Force. As I pointed out in the article on organizing, this is realistic. You can change your thinking. You can change your life.

Are Scarlett and Luke the rule or the exception? Let's look at a few other examples from modern fiction:

\* *THE GODFATHER*, by Mario Puzo, is dominated by Don Corleone, a man who came to America as an impoverished immigrant and rose to power by refusing ever to accept the status quo. Yes, things were bad in the early days, but Corleone refused to believe that the bad times were forever. A local thug threatened Corleone and his comrades and demanded protection money. Corleone promised to pay him promptly -- and then boldly murdered him, keeping his money and the payment that his friends would have paid the racketeer. Corleone believed that bad things need not continue forever. That's an optimist working.

\* *ENDER'S GAME*, by Orson Scott Card, features a young boy, Ender Wiggins, who is being trained to save the

human race from the next expected invasion of alien "Buggers." Ender faces constant brutality from the other child warriors, all older, larger, and stronger than he is. He could blame himself for being weak. Instead, he recognizes that he's smarter than the others and finds ways to turn their strengths against them. Ender never blames himself. Instead, he externalizes his problems. That's an optimist.

\* THE GIRL WITH THE DRAGON TATTOO, by Stieg Larson, has a powerfully compelling supporting character, Lisbeth Salander. After being brutally raped by the lawyer appointed to serve as her guardian, Lisbeth bounces back, refusing to accept the situation as permanent. Soon enough, the lawyer learns that it's an Xtremely bad idea to mess with the girl with the dragon tattoo. Lisbeth simply can't be beat, even if she's a mere 90 pounds of antisocial nothing. Her extraordinary resilience comes from a deep-seated optimism that she can beat anybody -- anybody.

\* THE HUNGER GAMES, by Suzanne Collins, stars Katniss Everdeen, a young girl in a dystopic future in which large parts of the former United States are held in thrall to a despotic central regime. As the story begins, Katniss believes that running away is no solution. It's horrible everywhere, she thinks, so there's no point. But as the series progresses, Katniss learns that she is powerful, that the scattered Districts are ripe for revolt, and that she can be a catalyst for change. Fans of this series are eagerly awaiting the third book in the series, which we hope will bring freedom to all the Districts. Despite the dystopia, Katniss is a beacon of hope -- she's becoming an optimist by changing the way she thinks.

What about your novel? Is your lead character optimistic and proactive? Or does she wallow in despair, doing nothing? Which behavior pattern is more likely to lead to change? Which makes your character more interesting?

How can you change your lead character to be more resilient? Can she learn to treat defeats as temporary, not permanent? Can she discover that bad luck in one part of life doesn't mean bad luck in all areas? Can she stop blaming herself and start looking for ways to fix things?

Those are crucial questions. The answers can make your characters far more resilient -- and far more interesting.

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Last month, I wrote a column on the future of publishing that generated a lot of response. My essential prediction is that in the next few years, writers will become more independent and entrepreneurial. They'll (in many cases) begin acting as their own publisher. They'll find that in the brave new e-world, authors can do very well.

But writers are going to need to learn to replace some of the services that publishers have long provided them. They can and should outsource the editing of their work. They can and should outsource the graphic design of the covers for their books.

One thing writers should NOT outsource is the marketing of their work. In the past, publishers did the marketing, usually in a hit-or-miss way that made a few authors rich but doomed the vast majority of authors to so-so sales.

It's just not safe to assume that your publisher will get who you are as a writer. If you don't have a publisher, it's not even possible to assume that.

Writers need to take charge of their own marketing.

In almost all cases, that means starting a blog. My own opinion is that the author blog should be the starting place for every author's marketing unless there's some compelling reason why a blog isn't possible.

Why? Because blogs are a powerful way to bring traffic to your web site. A blog on your web site gives your site "Google juice," which provides you with a steady stream of visitors who never heard of you before.

Think about that for a second. Isn't that the goal of marketing? To sell to people who never heard of you before?

A blog is a tremendous foundation for a writer's marketing.

There's a tool that will make your blog more effective.

If you blog, then you also need a blog reader. A blog reader is software that lets you choose which blogs you want to read whenever there's something new on them.

Using a blog reader is a whale of a lot easier than trying to remember which blogs you like so you can check them to see if there's a new entry. It's far easier than having a bunch of bookmarks so you can check the blogs you like.

A blog reader automates that step of checking all the good blogs. It only shows you the new stuff.

You need a blog reader for two reasons:

- \* You need to keep track of bloggers who are similar to you
- \* You need your own blog to be readily accessible to blog readers

Why should you care what other bloggers are doing?

That's easy. They're both your competition and they're part of your "supertribe." If you cooperate with them, you can all do better.

Why do you care if your blog is accessible to blog readers? Because many of your fans will use blog readers to read your blog. By using a blog reader to read your own blog, you can know for sure that your most loyal fans will be having a good user experience.

The bottom line: You need to be using a blog reader.

If you're using one now, you're done. Congratulate yourself and stop reading.

Still with us? That's not surprising. Most writers don't use blog readers. For you, that needs to change, and there's no time like now to make that change.

You need a blog reader and you need it now.

Which blog reader should you use? Technology changes fast, so any list I might recommend will be out of date soon. The best thing I can suggest is to do a search for the phrase "blog reader." You'll find plenty of good blog reader tools. Take a look at them. Choose one. Install it. Start using it every day for the next week. After that, you'll be hooked and you'll also be massively better able to keep up to date with your favorite blogs.

I use Google Reader, which is a web-based blog reader. You don't have to install anything. All you have to do is create a free account and start using it. You can find it here:

<http://www.google.com/reader>

Once you install your blog reader, you'll want to "subscribe" to a few blogs. How do you do that? That's easy:

When you find a blog you want to subscribe to, look for the orange "RSS" icon (usually in the margin of the blog) and click on it. You'll be guided through a couple of steps to subscribe to the blog for your particular blog reader.

For an example, take a look at my blog at <http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/blog> and you'll see the orange "RSS" icon at the top of the right margin. Right next to it are the words "Subscribe in a reader."

Which blogs should you subscribe to? That depends on what you like. Being a selfish guy, I'll recommend my own blog and a few others that I read regularly:

My Advanced Fiction Writing Blog:  
<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/blog>

Jane Friedman's "There Are No Rules" blog:  
<http://blog.writersdigest.com/norules>

Joe Konrath's "A Newbie's Guide to Publishing" blog:  
<http://jakonrath.blogspot.com>

Darren Rowse's "ProBlogger" blog:  
<http://www.problogger.net>

If you're not reading other people's blogs, then you're not going to be an effective blogger because you'll be making it up as you along, rather than following the best blogging practices.

If you don't become an effective blogger, then you're going to hamstring your marketing efforts for your fiction, right when you need more than ever to be an excellent and efficient marketer.

Get a blog reader. Subscribe to some excellent blogs. Learn what you like and what you don't like. Then when you're ready to blog, you'll know what you're doing. And you'll have a fighting chance to do well while the publishing world goes through the revolution that is beginning now.

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

My new book, *WRITING FICTION FOR DUMMIES*, has been selling well since it began shipping last November 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>

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

In September, I'll be taking mentoring appointments at the American Christian Fiction Writers conference.

Details here:

<http://www.acfw.com/conference>

In October, I'll be teaching an all-day series of lectures for an RWA group (RWA = Romance Writers of America) in Houston.

Also in October, I'll be teaching an all-day series of lectures for the Denver Romance Writers.

If you'd like me to teach at your conference, email me to find out how outrageously expensive I am.

If you'd just like to hear me teach, I have a number of recordings and e-books that are outrageously cheap.

Details here:

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

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## 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>

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7) Steal This E-zine!

This E-zine is free, and I personally guarantee it's worth at least 71566 times the price. I invite you to "steal" it, but only if you do it nicely . . .

Distasteful legal babble: This E-zine is copyright Randall Ingermanson, 2010.

Extremely tasteful postscript: I encourage you to email this E-zine to any writer friends of yours who might benefit from it. I only ask that you email the whole thing, not bits and pieces. Otherwise, you'll be getting desperate calls at midnight from your friends asking where they can get their own free subscription.

At the moment, there is one place to subscribe:  
<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com>

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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 21,000 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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Randy Ingermanson  
Publisher, Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine  
<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/ezine>

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