
The Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine

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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 (nearly 500 of you signed up in November), 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.

* Every writer needs a business plan. It's not hard to make one if you don't have one. Want to guess how fast you could put together a plan that would guide your efforts for the coming year? Read my article, "Your Business Plan."

* Many novels have an antagonist, commonly known as a "villain." Do you know your villain as well as you know your hero? If not, then you're leaving money on the table, because a strong hero requires a strong villain. I've recently had some new thoughts on villains after reading the book *THE SOCIOPATH NEXT DOOR*. Want to know some of the shocking things I learned about sociopaths? Check out "The Villain Next Door."

* Recently I had a one-hour Skype dialogue with industry pro Bob Mayer. The conversation was fast and furious and I captured it all to a text file. If you're remotely interested in what 2011 might bring to the publishing industry, read our dialogue, "New Directions in Publishing."

Are you reading my blog? Check out the massively popular "Ask A Question For My Blog" feature on my web site. Every day, I answer one question in detail from my loyal blog readers. Are you missing out? Join the fun here:

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

2) Organizing: Your Business Plan

If you're writing fiction with the hope of getting it published someday, then you're in business. If you're in business, then you need a business plan. If you have a business plan, then it needs to be updated annually.

I like to update my business plan every year at the tail end of December. Not much else is happening then. I've usually got time to think about what went well during the past year, what went badly, and what went undone.

It's not uncommon for a lot to go undone in a year. When you've got a lot of big plans for a year, you'll do well to get 20% of them done by the end of the year.

A successful year is one in which you got the most important 20% done.

I hope that's an encouragement to you. Your life can be successful if you only get the most important 20% of your projects done.

What goes into a business plan? I like to include the following major sections:

* Introduction. A one-page summary of where things stand, highlighting your long-term goals and your major achievements of the past year. If you're just starting your business, you won't have any achievements yet, but you can still summarize your major goals for your business (Example: "I want to publish a novel with a traditional royalty-paying publisher.") You can also summarize where you are on the road to reaching your goals.

* Business Details. Several pages that define those pesky details about money. If your business is earning money, how much did it earn in the last year and what were the main sources of revenue? What were the costs of doing business in the past year? What major projects do you intend to take on in the next year? What expenses will you incur and how will you pay for them?

* Detailed sections on each of the major activities of your business. If you've got only one major activity, that may be good -- it means you're focused -- but the hazard is that all your eggs are in one basket. If you've got several major activities, that means you're diversified, which is good, but the hazard is that you may be spreading yourself too thin. This is a good time to ask yourself the hard questions about whether you're too narrowly focused or spread too thin. Which of your activities generates the most revenue? Which creates the biggest costs? Which gives you the most personal satisfaction? The answers to these questions will give you ideas on what directions to take in the coming year, and on what to prune out of your life.

* Summary. Make a list of the main projects you want to work on in the coming year. These should be fully actionable projects -- by which I mean they should be things you can take action on AND things you can completely control. "Sending out queries to at least 20 agents" is actionable and you have complete control over whether you do it or not. "Signing with a major agent" is not fully actionable because you can't make an agent want to sign you on. "Polishing my manuscript" is fully actionable. "Selling my novel" is not.

My business plan for 2010 was fairly long -- eleven pages. Because it was a modification of the business plan for the previous year, it took me only one afternoon to write -- about three hours of actual effort.

I didn't accomplish even 20% of my goals for 2010. I did hit my #1 most important goal, and I got about halfway through my #2 most important goal. I didn't even make a start on two other goals that I considered very important at the beginning of the year.

In looking back, I can see two important reasons why I got less done than I'd planned. Neither of them was something I could have foreseen. I don't think I handled either of them as well as I could have. Sometimes, all you can do is muddle on.

I would judge the year moderately successful because I did get my #1 project done. (Achieving my #2 goal would have made the year a smashing success.)

What about you? Do you have a business plan for your writing business? How many hours would it take to write a five page document that spells out where you are now, where you want to go eventually, and your actionable projects for the coming year?

Which 20% of the things that you want to do in the coming year are the most critical to your ultimate success as a writer? Are there one or two items on your list that would make the coming year a success -- even if you achieved only those?

3) Creating: The Villain Next Door

One of the most common types of characters in a novel is the villain -- a person directly opposing the protagonist.

Writing villains is hard. The reason is that you, the author, are likely to dislike your villain. You probably find it hard to relate to your villain. You don't understand what makes him tick. Therefore, it's all too tempting to make him a two-dimensional character whose sole purpose is to be bad.

The problem with that is that villains don't believe they're bad. Villains generally believe they're the good guys. Villains believe that the story is their story.

I've been reading a book lately titled THE SOCIOPATH NEXT DOOR, by Martha Stout, Ph.D., and I think it's valuable to any novelist who wants to write a real, live, breathing, three-dimensional villain.

We'll define a sociopath, as Dr. Stout does, this way: A sociopath is a person who lacks a conscience. A

sociopath feels free to do anything without any sense of shame, guilt, or remorse.

You might imagine that people like that are pretty rare. One in a million, maybe. Or one in ten thousand. According to Dr. Stout, those estimates are way low. According to her, about 4 in every 100 people is a sociopath.

That's pretty shocking. Scary even. It doesn't mean that 4% of all people are psychopathic murderers. Those are pretty rare. It means that 4% of all people match the standard psychiatric definition of "antisocial personality disorder."

The sociopath category is pretty broad. A rare few sociopaths become serial killers. Most of them do their best to fit in with a world of people they can't relate to at all -- people hobbled with consciences.

There are plenty of places to fit in.

An extremely intelligent sociopath can do well in business or politics or the military, where ruthless domination of others might actually be rewarded. (Obviously not every businessman or politician or military professional is a sociopath.)

Less gifted sociopaths may find a niche in some job where they exercise authority over a few others and enjoy making life miserable for them.

Sociopaths with average talents are often full-time moochers, living off somebody else by arousing pity.

Plenty of sociopaths gravitate to crime. Surprisingly, the majority of criminals are NOT sociopaths. Studies show that only about 20% of prison inmates are sociopaths. But that 20% account for more than half of the most serious crimes.

If you decide that the villain in your novel should be a sociopath, what features should your character have?

To get the fully detailed answer, I recommend that you read THE SOCIOPATH NEXT DOOR or some similar book. Please note that reading one book on sociopaths will not make either you or me an expert, but these are the high points that I picked up from the book:

* Sociopaths know the difference between right and wrong. There is nothing flawed in their understanding of basic morality. However, when they do wrong, they don't FEEL any sense of shame or guilt. Therefore, they can justify anything they do by blaming the victim or the economy or society or circumstances or Satan or the weather or whatever.

* Sociopaths often are extremely charming. They study

normal humans and learn which buttons to push in order to get the responses they want. So the stereotype of the charming villain is based on reality. This skill is critical for sociopaths climbing the corporate ladder or making a career in politics or wangling into a romantic relationship.

* Sociopaths are extremely good at detecting potential victims. Whether they're looking for somebody to marry, somebody to mug, or somebody to mooch, they quickly home in on the one who'll give the biggest payoff.

* Sociopaths don't love anybody. They may say all the right words, but they never really mean them.

* Sociopaths crave pity. This may seem astonishing, but one of the most reliable indicators that somebody is a sociopath is their relentless attempts to arouse pity in the people they're victimizing. A typical sociopath can turn on the "crocodile tears" on command.

* Sociopaths are easily bored. So are children and young teens, of course, but normal people grow out of their boredom as they mature. Sociopaths don't. Because of that, they crave excitement, which causes them to take crazy risks which endanger themselves and other people. Those risks can lead to spectacular successes in business, politics, and war. They can also lead to spectacular failures.

* Sociopaths don't want to get better. They rarely try to get treatment unless forced to, because they think they're just fine the way they are -- it's the rest of the human race that's screwed up.

* Sociopaths sometimes "do the right thing" -- if it gains them something. That may be public approval or it may be a heightened self-image. But their reason for doing the right thing is always based on what they THINK, not on what they FEEL. Doing wrong doesn't make a sociopath feel bad and doing right doesn't make him feel good.

* For a sociopath, life is about winning. Other people are there to be controlled or to provide points in the game. Relationships with those pesky people have no value, unless the relationship contributes to winning.

In writing a character -- any character -- you must find a way to get inside that character's skin. You must think as they think and feel as they feel.

That doesn't mean that you have to become a sociopath in order to write a convincing villain. It means you need to be able to IMAGINE being a sociopath.

And that's not so hard. Novelists typically have extremely high empathic skills. A novelist is required to imagine that he or she is a person of a different

gender, age, ethnic group, social stratum. Many novelists need to imagine that they live in a different time or a different place.

If you can imagine all that, then you can imagine that you have no conscience and don't want one. When you do that, you'll understand your villain in a whole new way.

4) Marketing: New Directions in Publishing

I spent an hour recently Skyping with best-selling author Bob Mayer on the general subject of "new directions in publishing."

If you don't know who Bob is, here's a quick description:

NY Times bestselling author Bob Mayer has over 40 books published. He has over three million books in print and is in demand as a team-building, life-change, and leadership speaker and consultant. Bob graduated from West Point and served in the military as a Special Forces A-Team leader and a teacher at the JFK Special Warfare Center & School. His latest books are *Warrior Writer: From Writer to Published Author* and *Chasing The Ghost*. He teaches novel writing and improving the author via his Warrior-Writer program. He is the Co-Creator of Who Dares Wins Publishing. He lives on an island off Seattle and teaches at the University of Washington. For more information see:
<http://www.bobmayer.org> or
<http://www.WhoDaresWinsPublishing.com>

Our conversation was wide-ranging and vigorous. I cut and pasted the transcript into a text editor and then spent some time disentangling things because in many cases we were both typing at once. I hope you'll find our discussion stimulating.

Both Bob and I see a bright future for authors willing to take control of their own futures. Here's what we said:

Randy: Our subject for today is "New Directions in Publishing." This is wide open, of course. Nobody has any clue what's going on. Except the few people who do, and nobody knows who they are.

Bob: Reality is going in a new direction -- I'm not sure publishers are. My take is it's pretty much

business as usual in NY. But the retail end is changing, which means they have to change or die.

Randy: It looks like the wheels are coming off of the publishing industry. What's the current status of the business, as you see it?

Bob: Confusion and fear. Traditional publishers want to hold on to the hardcover and mass market paperback. They say that eBook sales are 10%. If true, that's a 300% increase from the beginning of this year. I think they're 'joking the stats' because every author I talk to says their eBook sales as reported on royalty statements are 40-60% of total sales. The immediate effect is that publishers are dumping their midlist and going with the 10% of their authors who make 90% of the profit.

Randy: Which means that a lot of midlist authors are suddenly finding things a tough go. And they don't have any idea what to do next.

Bob: To an extent. If the author is established, they have more opportunities than ever before.

Randy: What I see are two groups of midlisters: Those who say, "Oh no, the sky is falling!" and . . .

Bob: And those who see opportunity! The Big 6 held a stranglehold on distribution. That's no longer true.

Randy: Talk to me more about the Big 6. What's been their market share in past years? And how is that changing?

Bob: The Big 6 Publishers control 95% of print publishing. Starting in 1995, the print business began contracting. The decline of the book chains is the biggest problem for traditional publishers. Borders will soon be gone. I believe Barnes and Noble won't be far behind. This means the selling of print books will fall more and more to places like Target and Walmart (besides the growing digital market). To me this means midlist authors are in an even worse bind than ever as far as print, because those places are only going to rack Brand Name authors. We're going to miss Barnes and Noble's huge shelf spaces. On the bright side, the eBook market is wide open. There are only 300 indie bookstores left and they're dying off too. 10 years ago there were 4,000. 7 out of 10 books printed by the Big 6 lose money. 10% of their titles generate 90% of their revenue. Those two facts indicate a reality: the focus for the Big 6 is going to be more and more on the Brand authors and less on midlist. The problem is: where are the next generation of Brand Name Authors going to come from?

Randy: Right. And my view is that they're going to come out of the ranks of e-book authors who have an entrepreneurial spirit.

Bob: Right. And the Big 6 will try to scoop up the successful ones. Except their royalty rates for eBooks have to increase. It's a Catch-22. If someone is succeeding on their own, why give up 70% royalty for 25% of 70%?

Randy: Exactly. An author would be crazy to do that. I have a theory that authors will e-publish themselves at 70% royalties and then hold onto the e-rights when they sign contracts for p-books with publishers.

Bob: Publishers won't go for that. I'm fighting Random House right now for e-rights on some books.

Randy: Publishers will hate the idea. So there's going to be a period of war before things settle out. But the authors actually hold more power than they imagine.

Bob: The overhead for the Big 6 operating out of the Big Apple is way too high. Heck, even Who Dares Wins Publishing, which we started up this year and operates out of my office in WA and Jennifer Talty's office in NY, has overhead. We could never operate brick and mortar out of a NY office. So that's something that's going to have to be addressed. I see further major contractions occurring in NY and more out-sourcing of jobs to people digitally. The acquiring editors will still be in NY with the agents, but a lot of the other parts are going to be out-sourced. We control content. Readers buy content. Everyone else needs to either help connect the two or they'll fail.

Randy: Right, and with e-books, we can control our distribution to an extent. Do you think publishers are going to lower prices on retail copies of e-books?

Bob: They have to. They can't right now because their overhead is too high. So they're in a crunch.

Randy: Which is why they're going to continue shedding people. An author can self-pub on Amazon and do fine at a \$2.99 price point. Can a major publisher survive at that price point?

Bob: Actually, what Wylie tried to do, may be the future. Random House blacklisting him, told me how scared publishers are. Agents are going to start wondering why they need publishers too. Since they are essentially the quality control for the Big 6.

Randy: That raises another issue -- the future of agents. Some people think that agents are becoming superfluous. But I'm not so sure.

Bob: I think they could become more important if they change. I see agents sort of merging with smart publishers.

Randy: Agents have been reading the publishers' slush

pile for years. What else will they do in the future?

Bob: They'll become publishers. Screen the slush, pick the books they think can make it, then outsource all the editing, uploading, covers, etc.

[Interruption! We inserted one comment each later during the editing of this dialogue:

Randy: This could be a conflict of interest for an agent, so it would need to be done in a way that protects the author's interests. Any thoughts on this?

Bob: That's the tipping point. Andrew Wylie tried to do it this year: publish his authors backlist on his own, and the traditional publishers piled on him with threats of cutting him out. There will come a time when an agent will have to make the decision to become a publisher rather than an agent. When they do, they won't be able to sell to traditional publishers any more. So they won't be able to wear both hats. What I believe will actually happen is a smart publisher will merge some agents into their business, giving them the financial backing to work, with the real money on the back end. One topic we didn't discuss is the profit sharing concept. The days of the big advance are dwindling because so few books actually make a profit under the current model. What the future holds is where authors, agents and publishers all share in the profits on the back end. The question then arises, how does an author make a living while writing without any advance? Every answer raises new questions, as they always do.

End of the inserted discussion on potential conflicts of interest.]

Randy: An agent is intrinsically a much lighter and more nimble business than a publisher. So they can do that. And authors can be nimble too. But it could make traditional publishers obsolete. The big corporations with big buildings.

Bob: Yes. We've changed our business model at Who Dares Wins six times in just this past year. A large corporation can't do that. Agents can.

Randy: Tell me more about Who Dares Wins.

Bob: We started it to get my backlist out in eBook and POD. Once we went through our learning curve, we realized we could expand and have slowly been doing that. Taking on other writers.

Randy: How does your acquisition process work?

Bob: Right now, it's mainly authors who have rights to their backlist. Most authors think they can do it

themselves, but it's not as easy as it appears.

Randy: No kidding. There is a learning curve on the formatting of an e-book. And most e-books need cover art because they can't use their old covers from the original book.

Bob: And we also have done a book that needed to be out right away on social media for writers. A traditional publisher would have taken a year to get it out, which would have made it obsolete. Cover art requires an expensive program and expertise. Has to pop in thumbnail.

Randy: Meaning that a 100 x 150 pixel cover is a whole different game from a 600 x 900 pixel cover.

Bob: Yes. Simple is better. Contrast is important.

Randy: But on the plus side, the cover will appear in RGB format, not CMYK. Which means that certain colors that simply can't be done on a paper cover will work on electronic media.

Bob: We just did a blog on cover art and some things we learned. We're still learning. Also there are six different eBook formats right now, so that's a lot of work.

Randy: Do you automate the process of putting out all the formats? SmashWords uses their "meat grinder" technology to produce them all from one Word file.

Bob: Right now, the other half of my company, Jen Talty, does all that. We dropped Smashwords because you lose some control over pricing and that then becomes an issue with Amazon's webcrawler.

Randy: Can you elaborate on that? What control do you lose?

Bob: When Smashwords puts a book to all its sources, those sources can reprice it. Amazon will then lower your price on Kindle to the lowest price it finds.

Randy: Amazon has the market clout to do that.

Bob: Yes. So we lost our 70% royalty on some books that got priced below the \$2.99 threshold.

Randy: Gack! Not good. The 70% Amazon royalty is huge for authors. That makes the game reasonable.

Bob: We pulled them and are now reloading on Smashwords but restricting where the books can go. The CEO of Smashwords actually came to my blog to explain what they were doing, so it's getting worked out. What no one talks about is 100% royalty.

Randy: Meaning?

Bob: We've formatted all our books for the various devices. When someone buys an eBook directly from our web site, we don't have a middle man.

Randy: Right, but you still have credit card charges, which amount to about 14% of the price on a \$2.99 book. Roughly.

Bob: We use Paypal right now, and I think their % is under 5%.

Randy: It is, but they also charge a \$.30 base fee, which is about 10% on a \$2.99 book. Both PayPal and credit card charges work out about the same, when all is said and done. I love PayPal, by the way. But on small ticket sales, there's a hefty fee as a percentage of the sale.

Bob: Yes. Still, a 90% royalty is very nice.

Randy: Yes, it's much better than 8% from a major publisher. Which gets paid 9 months after the purchase. With a percentage held back for fear of returns.

Bob: Yes. I earn more in one month from a book we publish than six months from my traditional royalties.

Randy: I'm not surprised. Speaking of returns, do you think the industry is going to change the return policy in the future? I'm astonished that it's still in place.

Bob: Yes. Because Print On Demand is the future. Once the price point on the Espresso Machine gets low enough, they'll be no more shipping of books to bookstores. They'll be printed right there. We use POD to supplement our eBook sales. We find that for non-fiction, readers often want the physical book.

Randy: I agree. For fiction, I always get the e-book now. But for nonfiction reference books, I still like paper. You don't think brick and mortar bookstores will die, do you?

Bob: Sadly, I think brick and mortars will die. They already are. Unless they specialize. Do what Starbucks is doing. The trend is to go local. Local authors, local books. Hold more events. Use the Espresso Machine as an income source by letting people print their own books right there.

Randy: But local has the disadvantage that it doesn't scale. An author can only be in one place at a time. Whereas the web never sleeps.

Bob: True. And with social media an author has a much greater reach than ever before. I think it's an exciting time to be an author.

Randy: It's a GREAT time to be an author. You've got a

book out on social media correct? By one of your authors?

Bob: We Are Not Alone: The Writer's Guide to Social Media by Kristen Lamb. What's key about her book is she focuses on content BEFORE worrying about getting on social media. Most authors are using social media poorly without a plan. For example, authors using their book cover or their pet as an avatar is wrong. Unless they're only going to write one book or sell their pet.

Randy: A lot of authors try to just promote themselves, rather than promoting ideas. Content is still king.

Bob: Right. I'm reading Steven Pressfield's The War of Art right now. He has some great ideas.

Randy: I love that title.

Bob: Content is King. But I've had to accept promotion is Queen.

Randy: Promotion is a whole lot easier when there's content to back it up.

Bob: Most writers hate promoting. Author is INFJ on Myers-Briggs. Exact opposite, ESTP is promoter.

Randy: Right, I'm an INTP myself. So maybe I'm a half and half.

Bob: Yes. Always have to have great content.

Randy: One thing established authors have is name recognition. Like David Morrell, one of my favorite thriller writers.

Bob: Yes. Being a Brand. Morrell just bypassed traditional publishing.

Randy: Right, and I bet he'll do extremely well.

Bob: He will. Along with his backlist.

Randy: That's one thing people don't talk about much with e-books, but it's huge -- backlist. When you discover a new author and he has a big backlist, you can get it all. Instantly.

Bob: I've got 18 titles from my backlist up and it's great to watch the money roll in.

Randy: I just started reading Lee Child's Jack Reacher series. I started with Book 15.

Bob: His first book, Killing Floor, is classic.

Randy: Then I went back to Book 1 and started buying the whole series. That's a whole lot easier to do with e-books than with p-books.

Bob: Yes -- people who read eBooks buy more books. That's a glimmer of hope if publishers will embrace it. But they haven't yet.

Randy: E-books are always in stock and they're available at 3 AM on a Saturday night in Ulan Bator.

Bob: And they tend to be impulse buys.

Randy: Part of the publishers' problem is that contracts written more than 10 years ago don't really cover e-books.

Bob: That's what I'm battling Random House over. I stupidly signed away 2 books to them last year, but declined to do any further.

Randy: Books published in the last few years will never go out of print now, because of e-books. Unless you put clauses in the contract to redefine what out of print means.

Bob: There are clauses being built in on that. RH says less than 300 sold in two reporting periods, which is pretty low.

Randy: My agent friends tell me that publishers are rewriting the contracts.

Bob: Yes. The 25% eBook royalty isn't going to work much longer.

Randy: I think it has to go up to 50%, which is still low compared to 70% or 90%, but most authors would be willing to take that to avoid the work. But 25% seems unfair to most authors.

Bob: Yes. We offer 40% right now, but I'm accepting we probably have to go to 50%. Still, it's currently higher than pretty much everywhere else.

Randy: This is a time of chaos for publishing.

Bob: Yes. And the key is to stay on top of all the latest information and try to sift through it all.

Randy: Right, things change every month.

Bob: Reading blogs, things like your newsletter, PW, going to conferences. It's all key. Twitter is a good information source. I hit probably five or six links from people who have good information every day to stay updated.

Randy: One thing that's changing is the required lengths of books.

Bob: Yes. We're focusing soon on shorts. 10-15 thousand words at \$2.99. And, on the other end, it

doesn't cost any more to do a 170,000 words book.

Randy: The nice thing is that you could write a 10k book in a week.

Bob: Or pull it together from a bunch of blog posts.

Randy: Whereas most authors would be stressed to do a 100k book in a month.

Bob: Yes. I'm getting some experts to put together shorts on their particular fields.

Randy: And as you say, books that were formerly too long (more than 150k or so) can be done economically. It only adds a few cents to the Amazon cost to the author to do a really long book. I think they charge the author about 5 cents in delivery fees for a normal sized book.

Bob: Yes. The other interesting thing is going to be enhanced ebooks. We're not sure how that's going to work, but we're playing with it.

Randy: Meaning "director's cut" editions? Something I've been thinking about a lot.

Bob: Adding in links to photos, maps, etc. And, like Baldacci did, extra content.

Randy: Most of the e-book readers won't support video.

Bob: No. And it could be distracting if done badly.

Randy: The iPad could handle it, I think, but not the current Kindle.

Bob: Readers read. That's why I'm not a fan of film trailers for books. Different medium.

Randy: The thing with video is that it requires really good production values or it looks hokey. I don't like them either. I looked at trailers for a while and found that I was unimpressed with every trailer I'd seen. And a 3 minute video feels like forever. I'd rather have text so I can skim.

Bob: Exactly. I used to have video of my presentations, but dropped it because the quality wasn't good enough. And, interestingly, people would rather listen to CDs or MP3 than watch something. That's another area where we get income: MP3 downloads of my workshops. We're on iTunes with that. We also sell MP3 direct. Just got an order as we've been talking for my Warrior Writer presentation.

Randy: Audio has high value to the customer. They can put it on an iPod and listen on the commute or in the gym. I've been selling MP3 direct on my site for a long time because it's a great deal for customers and

therefore a great deal for me.

Bob: Yes. It's one of those things that took a little while to perfect, but we've got it down now.

Randy: What are your thoughts on podcasting books in segments?

Bob: I don't know about podcasts. We've been discussing them, but it's a big investment in time. So it's on our "to look at" list.

Randy: It's something I'd love to try for promoting my novels.

Bob: One thing we thought of yesterday was a free eBook with excerpts from all our books. A sampler. So that will be done before the end of the month

Randy: That would be cool. People tend to be quick to download free, but not so quick to consume it.

Bob: Yes. But it only costs us the time to put it together. It's hard to tell what works and what doesn't as far as promotion.

Randy: One thing I think might be cool would be an "omnibus" version of a series -- get them all in one big e-book at a price that's much better than buying them one by one. It could work for a complete series. Not so much for a series in progress.

Bob: Good idea. I think we'll try that for my Atlantis series. Have six books in it. Pull them all together at a discount.

Randy: Joe Konrath mentioned this idea on his blog a few months ago and I've been itching to try it.

Bob: Actually, we could do it this weekend and get it up. I'll let you know how it goes. That's the great thing about eBooks -- you can do things fast.

Randy: Right, once you're past the learning curve. I think you'd need to price it so that it's still a good deal if people have bought one or two books. So it needs to be a deep discount. That's my hunch.

Bob: I'll update you on it. I can hear my partner in NY groaning as I've just made more work for her. But since the books are already individually formatted, it shouldn't take much time.

Randy: LOL, just what she needs -- more work.

Bob: Yeah. Our To Do list is never-ending.

Randy: I'd love to hear how it works out.

Bob: I'll email you and also blog about it at Write It

Forward

Randy: One last thing before we break -- how important is POD for an author going the e-book route?

Bob: I don't think it's that important, unless you have a following or are doing non-fiction. We put non-fiction on LSI right away. For fiction, we do a couple a month as they get traction in eBook to keep our overhead reasonable.

Randy: Makes sense to me. LSI is Lightning Source, right?

Bob: Yes. The good thing is you can also sell via LSI in the UK. And it's expanding to Australia next year.

Randy: When you say "overhead" you're referring to the cost of typesetting, correct?

Bob: Set up costs. Plus, formatting takes quite a while for the POD book. That was a steep learning curve. You only get two shots at upload or they charge extra.

Randy: Gack! What are the setup costs for Lightning Source?

Bob: \$75 initially and then another \$20 charge for something else. Not too bad. But when you're doing a lot of titles, it adds up.

Randy: Right. Plus the time to do it. And time is money.

Bob: Time is the key for that.

Randy: OK, we've covered a huge amount in the last hour. Anything to add?

Bob: Just reiterate that it's a great time to be a writer, but the most important thing is to have great content.

Randy: Agreed on that. Thanks for your time!

Bob: Thanks -- have a great weekend.

If you'd like to know more about Bob and his company, check him out on these sites:

<http://www.bobmayer.org>

<http://www.WhoDaresWinsPublishing.com>

5) What's New At AdvancedFictionWriting.com

My book, WRITING FICTION FOR DUMMIES, has been selling well since it began shipping 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, I'm still open to requests for 2012.

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>

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!

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