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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 600 of you signed up in March), 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.

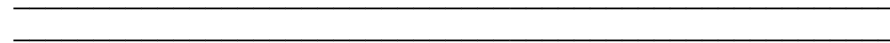
* A few years ago, I made a conscious decision to start using my time, money, and energy better. I've made steady improvements in every one of those. One of the things I've learned is that there is one method that outruns every time-management trick in the book -- in the long run. Read all about it in, "The Simple Power of Just Showing Up."

* Every story needs conflict. A good novelist has all kinds of conflict in his toolbox. But there's a special kind of conflict in which one side can't win and the other side can't lose. Want to know how it works? Read my article, "Games People Don't Play."

* If there's one word that my published novelist friends hate most, it's the "B-word". And what is this deplorable word that makes grown writers go soft in the knees? Read my article, "The B-Word."

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: The Simple Power of Just Showing Up

The first writing conference I ever went to was incredibly exciting. I'd never seen so many writers together in one place.

One of the people I most wanted to meet was an editor who had recently launched a multi-million-selling novelist. I managed to squeeze into one of his classes.

Naturally, somebody asked this editor what the secret was for the enormous success of the novel he'd just launched.

The editor thought about that for a long while.

I suspected that he had a really powerful secret that he didn't want to share.

Finally, he shook his head and said, "Ninety percent of this business is just showing up."

We all stared at him like he was crazy. Or holding out on us. That was his big secret? Just showing up? What was that supposed to mean?

He shrugged. "Listen, I know you're all wondering what we did to make this book such a massive success. Truth is, we don't know. We weren't expecting much. It just took off. We've done hundreds of other books. Most of them, we thought would do better than this one. But this time it all worked."

That was over twenty years ago, and it's stuck with me. Just showing up can do amazing things for your life.

Day after day after lousy stinking day, just showing up.

Just showing up is how you get that elephant eaten, one forkful at a time.

There are all kinds of time management methods out there that are supposed to help you get things done. Help you get all the things done that you have to do. Or most of them anyway. The details. The ruffraff. The little things that gnaw your soul.

Just showing up is different. It's not about the small stuff.

Just showing up will help you get one big thing done. The one big thing that feeds your soul.

The one thing that you want to do more than anything else in the world. The one thing that's so big you don't think it'll ever get done. The one thing that you could easily talk yourself out of starting because you can't see the ending.

Just showing up is powerful.

Maybe I'm preaching to myself about this one. Just showing up is hard for me. I'd rather ride a rocket than a turtle. I'd rather hit a home run than tap out a bunt. I'd rather do it now, now, now.

Just showing up means that it might not happen this week or this month or this decade. It might never happen at all.

Just showing up means that it'll happen (if it happens) on the day you least expect it.

It's April, and one quarter of the year is gone. Have you been showing up every day so far this year? If not . . . can you start? Today?

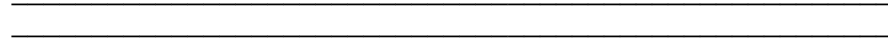
Sometimes the biggest magic is the thing that doesn't look a bit like magic.

I have a feeling that just showing up is one of those kinds of magic.

I'll make a deal with you. Let's just show up every day for the rest of this month. If that works out, then great.

And if it doesn't work out this month, maybe it'll work out next month. Or the next. Or the next.

That's what just showing up means.



3) Creating: Games People Don't Play

Fiction is about characters in conflict. In this column, I've talked about many different kinds of conflict over the years, but there's one kind that I don't recall ever discussing.

It's the conflict that comes when one character changes the rules of the game. Changes them so radically that it's suddenly a completely different game.

To understand this kind of conflict, let's look at an extreme example. Imagine that you challenge your buddy to a match at the tennis courts. Whoever loses has to buy the pizza for dinner.

You show up at the courts with your tennis racket and all your other gear.

Your buddy shows up with a chessboard, sets it up on the sidelines, and sits down behind the white pieces. He hasn't got a racket. He's not dressed for tennis. He isn't even on the court.

You wait for him to get his act together, but he's paying no attention to you, so finally you serve an ace to an empty court.

Your buddy moves his king's pawn forward.

You serve another ace.

Your buddy moves his queen out to the fifth rank.

You ace him again.

He moves his king-side bishop out.

You miss on your next serve, but you aren't worried, because he still isn't on the court. One more serve,

and you'll have him nailed for this game.

He moves his queen down to the seventh rank, takes your king's bishop pawn, shouts, "Checkmate!" and leaps out of his chair, doing a victory dance.

What just happened there? You were winning, weren't you? But he thinks he's winning, because you've been playing different games.

This is an extremely weird kind of conflict. A meta-conflict. A conflict over what the nature of the conflict is supposed to be.

You might think this can never happen in real life. But in fact, it happens all the time. Here's an example that's a little less extreme:

Bossbert walks into Wally's cubicle. "Wally, have you got the report done for the Gooberheimer project?"

Wally blows his nose loudly and tosses the Kleenex at Bossbert. "Wow, I've got the worst cold you ever heard of."

Bossbert leaps back from the germy tissue. "I asked you a yes or no question. That means I need a yes or no answer. Are you planning to give me one or not?"

Wally coughs into his hand, then wipes it on his pants. "I should probably go home, if I didn't have so much work to do."

Bossbert's hands are curling into fists. "Would you like me to fire you?"

Wally puts his hand to his forehead. "I think I've got a fever. Maybe it's the flu."

What's going on here? Why is Bossbert getting madder and madder?

What's going on is that Bossbert is playing one game and Wally is playing another. Bossbert needs information, so he's asking simple yes-or-no questions.

Wally has no intention of giving an answer because he hasn't done his work. Instead of playing Bossbert's game (which he would lose), he plays a different game -- "feel sorry for me because I'm sick."

Only an unfeeling brute would fire a worker who has the flu. Bossbert can't win at Wally's game, and Wally refuses to play Bossbert's game. So Bossbert loses.

You can introduce conflict like this in any category. In GONE WITH THE WIND, Scarlett meets Rhett Butler in

the library and learns that he's been listening to her throw herself unsuccessfully at Ashley Wilkes.

Scarlett is upset and tries to insult Rhett by calling him an eavesdropper.

Rhett takes this as a compliment and happily informs her that he's an experienced eavesdropper.

Scarlett gets more angry and tells Rhett he's no gentleman.

Rhett is unperturbed and agrees with her. He tells her she's no lady, and that's what he likes about her.

Now Scarlett is furious. She tells Rhett that he isn't fit to wipe Ashley's boots.

Rhett thinks this hysterically funny, since Scarlett has just told Ashley she would hate him all her life.

Scarlett and Rhett are playing different games. Scarlett is playing the insult game, because she believes that words have the power to hurt. Rhett is playing the game of court jester. He accepts every insult with a grin. Scarlett can't win, because Rhett isn't playing her game. Rhett wins simply by refusing to play.

This works even in the most direct of all conflicts -- hand to hand combat. Every street fighter knows that the easiest fight to win is the one that's over before your opponent has even begun.

In Lee Child's novel, ECHO BURNING, our hero Jack Reacher is lured into a bar by a couple of toughs who are being paid to beat him up. They've even called an ambulance in advance to make sure he won't die if they get too rough.

They make the mistake of telling Reacher what they plan to do -- how they beat up another guy once before, how they cut him up so bad, he almost bled out. They're trying to scare him, to weaken his resistance. This is an intimidation game, part of the larger game of provoking a street fight. It would work on most people.

Reacher knows this game and he's not worried. It's been a long time since he lost a fight in a two-on-one battle. So he lets them know he thinks they're full of beans. Matter of fact, he tells them that he'll be happy to fight them right now if they'll step outside with him. He heads toward the exit and they follow.

Reacher now has them playing the game he wants them to play, the game of "We'll start an unfair fight out in the parking lot 30 seconds from now."

But that isn't Reacher's game. His game starts 25 seconds before theirs, the instant he reaches the rack of pool cues. He grabs one, spins around and lays into Billy first, then into Josh, while they're still thinking about what they'll be doing half a minute in the future.

They're unconscious before their game is even due to begin.

Why? Because Reacher refused to play their game. Because he chose to break up the timing of their game.

In most scenes of your novel, your characters are all going to be playing the same game. It might be tennis. It might be office politics. It might be verbal jousting. It might be a fist fight.

It's not WRONG to let your people all play by the same rules. That's the way most of life is played. You can have a nice conflict where everybody plays fair.

It's just a whole lot more interesting when one of the characters decides to play a different game -- a game the other characters aren't expecting, aren't prepared for, and can't win.

If you want to try taking one of your scenes up a notch, see if you can find a way to get one of your players to change the game. He can either change the rules, change the turf, change the timing, change the definition of winning.

Whatever this rogue character does to change the rules, it needs to massively tilt the game to his advantage.

Try it and see what happens.

What have you got to lose?

4) Marketing: The B-Word

Recently, I did an interview on the blog of Larry Brooks at <http://www.StoryFix.com>. One of the questions he asked was this one:

If you had an elevator ride with an aspiring writer who recognized you, what would you tell him is either the biggest and costliest mistake newer writers make ... or the best thing they can do for their skill-set and career ... or both?

That really got my neurons firing. Here's the answer I

gave:

New writers often fail to understand the importance of branding. When you attach your name to a novel and publish it, that's an implicit contract you're making with your reader: "I promise to produce more fiction like this in the future."

If you violate that contract, then your reader feels cheated. Even if your next book is fantastic, it's not what the reader was expecting.

This has nothing to do with being "typecast" as an author. It has everything to do with setting expectations and then meeting those expectations.

Let's say you go to a Chinese restaurant and order their "Buddha's Delight Vegi Plate." The meal is amazing. You tell all your friends about it. You come back a month later with your buddy and . . . that plate is no longer on the menu. In fact, all the Chinese food items are gone. Instead, you've got a choice between an incredibly tempting "Eggplant Parmesan" or an equally inviting "Chile Relleno."

Those are great dishes, both of them. But you came to the restaurant to have Chinese food! And that's exactly what you didn't get. No matter how good the actual menu is, the restaurant violated its implicit contract with you. And you're mad as heck. Rightly so. You won't go back to that place and you'll tell all your friends to give it a skip.

Consistency matters. Quality and consistency.

When we talk about an author's brand, we mean the set of expectations the reader has when they see your name on the cover.

If you don't want to meet those expectations, that's fine. Do the right thing and use a different pen name for that new, cool category you want to write.

Treat your readers the way you want to be treated. They'll reward you for it.

That's a pretty long answer. Many authors hate the "B-word" -- branding -- because they don't want to be "typecast."

That's understandable. That's common, in fact.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle tried to kill off Sherlock Holmes because he felt that his "literary energies should not be directed too much into one channel."

Eventually, public clamor forced him to bring Sherlock back for many more adventures.

Conan Doyle worried that the time he spent writing the Holmes mysteries "may perhaps have stood a little in the way of the recognition of my more serious literary work."

Can anyone remember what that more serious literary work actually was? Sherlock Holmes has trained several generations of young people to think logically. What could be more serious than that?

But what if you really can't be bottled up in one single brand? Then what do you do? Are you doomed?

Not at all. If you're running a successful Chinese restaurant and you desperately want to start cooking Italian food, the solution is simple: Open an Italian restaurant under a different name and sell some pasta. Ditto if you want to open a Mexican restaurant.

The one thing you don't want to do is call them all the same thing. "Lotus Garden" would be a fine name for a Chinese restaurant. Not so much for Italian or Mexican.

A brand is a fairly squishy thing, but I like to think of it as a combination of three things:

- * Your name.
- * The associations people think of when they hear your name.
- * The advance decision your fans make that "I want that author's next book, whatever it is" COMBINED with the advance decision your non-fans make that "I have read that author's work and I won't buy it again because it's just not for me."

If people don't know your name, then you have a weak brand.

If people know your name, but they really don't have any strong associations with it, then you have a weak brand.

If people know your name and if when they see your name on the cover of a book, they INSTANTLY know what that book is going to be about AND they know whether they want that book or not, then you have a strong brand.

So if you want to split your brand, the simple solution is to write under one or more pen names. You can make a big secret out of this or you can be totally open. Either way, nobody will really care.

What your readers care about is that when they see your name on the cover, they know right away whether they want the book or not. Life demands enormous numbers of decisions from us every day. A strong brand is one

fewer decision that your fans have to make.

If you write under multiple names, this will certainly mean that some of your fans are going to LOVE one of your names and HATE one of your others.

This is good. This means that you won't lose readers who don't happen to like everything you write. Your separate brands may lead to widely separate fan bases.

Have you defined your brand (or brands) yet? If not, you can get started right now. Bear in mind that branding is a life-long process, so you'll never really finish, but it's one of the most important things you can do in your writing career.

Here's how to start. For each category of fiction that you want to write, answer these questions:

- * What author name will I use for books in this category?
- * How many books do I intend to write in this category?
- * What three things do I want people to think INSTANTLY when they see this author name in large letters on the cover of a book?

I strongly recommend that you use a different author name for each category.

The number of books that you intend to write in a given category will determine how much work you want to put into promoting the brand for that category.

The associations that you want people to make with your author name will define the length of your books, the quality of your writing, the type of art on your covers, and the publishers you choose to work with.

Branding is a painful process. It forces you to examine yourself closely, and that can be scary.

You can always soothe the pain of that self-scrutiny by going out to eat at your favorite Chinese-Italian-Mexican restaurant.

5) What's New At AdvancedFictionWriting.com

My book, WRITING FICTION FOR DUMMIES, has been selling well since it began shipping more than a year ago and is one of the most popular fiction writing books on Amazon. You can find out all about WRITING FICTION FOR DUMMIES here:

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

If you've already bought the book and like it, I'd be delighted if you wrote an Amazon review. Thanks to those of you who already have! I appreciate you!

I've also been gratified at the response to my latest software product, "Snowflake Pro," which makes it fast, easy, and fun to work through the steps of my well-known Snowflake method for designing a novel. You can find out more about Snowflake Pro at:
<http://www.SnowflakeProSoftware.com>

Currently, my co-author John Olson and I are preparing our back list of novels for publication as e-books.

John and I are also creating some powerful online tools to make it easy for us to market our work effectively and easily. In due time, we'll make those tools available to other authors. More info on that when the opportune moment arrives.

I normally teach at roughly 4 to 6 writing conferences per year, depending on my schedule. For 2011, I have decided to cut back on my teaching so I can focus on a major project I'm working on. My schedule for 2011 is now all filled in.

I will be teaching at these conferences in 2011:

Mount Hermon Christian Writers Conference, (April)
8 hours mentoring a group of 5 novelists
<http://mounthermon.org/adult/professionals/writers-conference>

Oregon Christian Writers Conference, (August)
6 hours teaching a lecture series named "Fiction 101"
<http://www.oregonchristianwriters.com/summer-conference/>

American Christian Fiction Writers, (September)
4 hours teaching a lecture series on the Snowflake method
<http://www.acfw.com/conference/>

If you'd like me to teach at your conference in 2012 or beyond, email me to find out how outrageously expensive I am.

If you'd just like to hear me teach, I have a number of recordings and e-books that are outrageously cheap. Details here:
<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/info>

6) Randy Recommends . . .

I don't take paid ads for this e-zine. I do, however, recommend people I like.

I'm a huge fan of Margie Lawson's courses, both the ones she teaches in person and the ones she sells on her web site at
<http://www.MargieLawson.com>

Margie is a psychologist who applies what she knows about human psychology to writing fiction. I believe her material is brilliant. Check her out on her web site!

I've also become a fan of Thomas Umstatted's terrific uncommon-sense thoughts on internet marketing. You can read Thomas's blog at:
<http://www.AuthorTechTips.com>

Thomas is especially skilled at helping authors create an inexpensive but powerful web site using WordPress blogs. I am a huge fan of this approach, since it gives the most bang for the buck in an author site. Find out more about this at:
<http://www.UmstattedMedia.com>

7) Steal This E-zine!

This E-zine is free, and I personally guarantee it's worth at least 1000 times the price. I invite you to "steal" it, but only if you do it nicely . . .

Distasteful legal babble: This E-zine is copyright Randall Ingermanson, 2011.

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

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

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Award-winning novelist Randy Ingermanson, "the Snowflake Guy," publishes the Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine, with more than 25,000 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>.

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