

The Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine

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Circulation: 32158 writers, each of them creating a 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 (about 250 of you signed up in January), 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 let you update your address on my system.

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.

* Sometimes a horrible idea is actually a terrific idea. Want an example? Check out this month's organizing column, "Eat Dessert First!"

* Want to know the secret to killer dialogue? Check out this month's craft column, "Dialogue is War."

* I've been experimenting lately with what sounds like a great idea to create links for your book to the sales pages of every online retailer you can imagine. But is there a fly in the ointment? Find out in my marketing column, "Clicking On Buy."

2) Organizing: Eat Dessert First!

There's an old saying that goes something like this:

"The world could end at any minute. Eat dessert first!"

As writers, we all have a lot on our plate. Most of us have a day job or a business. School. Family. Friends. Daily chores. Plus all sorts of Important Stuff That Must Be Done Immediately.

All too often, writing gets done last. Or not at all.

How smart is that?

Writing fiction is what we live for. It's what drives us. It's the one thing we control in a mad world.

I recently realized that all the other important stuff in my life was crowding out the thing I enjoy most.

And I decided I've had enough of that.

So I made a commitment to myself that writing happens first in my day.

First.

When I get out of bed in the morning, I go straight to my office and spend a set amount of time writing.

Right away.

No excuses. No delays. No rabbit trails.

I don't check email. I don't look at the headlines. I don't plan my day.

I write fiction until the alarm on my phone tells me that my writing time is up.

A lot of times when the alarm goes off I keep working for another 10 or 20 or 30 minutes.

For the first time in a long time, I'm having fun again.

Writing fiction is the dessert in your life.

Eat dessert first.

3) Creating: Dialogue is War

Nothing is worse than dialogue that's going smoothly.

I've said this before and I'll say it again many times:
Dialogue is war.

Fiction is about characters in conflict. That means that in most of your scenes, for most of the scene, your characters need to be in conflict.

It can be high-level or low-level conflict, depending on your taste. But the conflict needs to be there. This does not mean that the characters need to be opposing each other directly, butting heads. That can happen in a high-tension scene.

But the more common way to show conflict is to have your characters working at cross purposes.

Which means they'll be talking at cross purposes. Ignoring each other's comments. Pursuing their own agendas.

An example will make this clear.

Here are the first four lines of dialogue for two scenes. Both of them feature two geeky guys who share a cubicle in an office:

"Morning, Aberforth! How are you today?"

"Great, Dragomir! Everything's perfect. How are you?"

"Marvelous. The project's on schedule and Bossbert is pleased with our progress."

"Well, let's get to work then and make sure things keep rolling along according to plan."

* * *

"Morning, Aberforth! How are you today?"

"Don't ask."

"Whoa, did you get any sleep last night? You look--"

"Any idea where I can get a gun that can't be traced?"

* * *

Which of these two scenes would you want to keep reading?

Good, I knew you'd say that. The vote's unanimous.

Let's look at Version 1 and figure out what's wrong with it.

In Line 1, Dragomir asks Aberforth how he is. This is a vanilla opening, but it won't sink the scene.

In Line 2, Aberforth answers the question. Straight ahead. No evasion. On the nose.

That's how people behave when all is well. Already, we have zero conflict, which means the scene is going nowhere.

In Line 2, Aberforth continues on with a question of his own, and Dragomir responds to it in Line 3. Again, right on the nose. This is boring as dirt.

In Line 4, Aberforth runs on with more of the same happy-happy-happy stuff. The scene is now officially in the toilet and circling the drain. The only thing you can do with this scene is to flush it.

Now let's look at Version 2 and understand what makes it work.

In Line 1, just as before, Dragomir asks Aberforth how he is.

In Line 2, Aberforth refuses to answer. In fact, he tells Dragomir straight out that the subject is off limits.

That's conflict. Anytime one character doesn't respond in the way the other expects him to, it's conflict. Lying, evasion, changing the subject -- all of those are conflict.

In Line 3, Dragomir carries the conflict forward. Instead of dropping the subject, as Aberforth asked, Dragomir gets even more personal by asking if Aberforth got any sleep. This is exactly the direction Aberforth doesn't want to go.

In Line 4, Aberforth again ignores the question. Instead, he interrupts with a question of his own that takes things in a new direction -- where can he get a gun?

Aberforth and Dragomir are talking at extreme cross purposes.

Notice that the stakes rise with each line of dialogue. In Line 1, we're in the ordinary world of Cubicle City. In Line 2, we've got a refusal to communicate. In Line 3, we see that Aberforth has a serious personal problem that might affect his job performance. In Line 4, he's become a desperate man.

The reader doesn't need to be told this. The reader infers it from the dialogue.

The scene's had a promising start, but the conflict can't end here.

It would be a horrible mistake for Aberforth to

willingly explain what sort of trouble he's in and for Dragomir to help him find a gun. There's not much conflict there.

Instead, Aberforth will refuse to explain his problem. Dragomir will try to squeeze some of the truth out of him, but Aberforth will lie and it'll be up to Dragomir to figure it out if he can.

Furthermore, Dragomir will try to dissuade him from doing anything stupid or illegal, but Aberforth won't be listening because he already knows there's only one solution to his problem.

Aberforth may get his gun, but Dragomir will do his best to prevent him.

At some point, Dragomir may join forces with his friend. But not right away. Not until we've introduced some other character to carry the conflict.

Until that happens, Dragomir needs to be fighting every move Aberforth makes. He'll do that either by opposing him directly or by working to drive him to another course.

Either way, that's conflict.

Conflict drives fiction.

Dialogue is war.

Don't let it stop until the end of the book.

When the war is over, your story is over.

4) Marketing: Clicking On Buy

Let's say you've got a web site that features your book.

You've got a killer cover. Sizzling sales copy. And a heart-stopping sample chapter.

But you also want to close the sale, and you aren't set up to sell copies of your book on your own site, so you want to send people to the major online retailers.

But which retailers?

Amazon? Sure, but not just Amazon US. Some of your buyers will want Amazon Canada. Or Amazon UK. Or Amazon France, Amazon Germany, Amazon France, Amazon Italy ...

If there's an e-book and paper edition of your book, then you need TWO links to each of these.

And you've got to link to Barnes & Noble. And the Apple iTunes store, which has dozens of different stores localized to various countries.

Don't forget Books-A-Million. Xlibris. Alibris. Kobo. Diesel. Smashwords.

And on and on. The list grows every day.

That sounds pretty hopeless.

It would take up way too much space on your web site to put in a link to each one of them, right?

Well, no. I came across a tool recently that can do it all with a single button on your site. Your visitors have to choose two things from dropdown menus:

- * Their preferred electronic device (or paper).
- * Their preferred store.

Then they click the "Buy Now" button and off they go to exactly the online retailer they want. No muss, no fuss, no wasted space.

Sounds cool, but it must be expensive, right?

Nope. It's actually free. You can find out all about it here: <http://www.EZBuyButton.com>

The reason it's free is that EZBuyButton attaches their affiliate code to the link to each online retailer. If the customer buys, then EZBuyButton gets paid a small affiliate fee by the retailer.

Most authors use the Amazon affiliate program, "Amazon Associates," to earn a little extra cash when they direct people to their book pages on Amazon.

EZBuyButton is just doing this on a grand scale with all the retailers and with all the books.

That's the main problem with EZBuyButton that I can see. If you use it, you can't attach your own affiliate code. EZBuyButton is already attaching theirs.

I've spent some time playing around with the tool to see how well it works.

For each book, you need to fill in its title, author, ISBN, and price.

You have six different options for the color of the buy button and you have five options for the style of the button (which defines how it behaves). It's easy to choose any combination and you can change it later if you like.

The tedious part comes in choosing which online retailers you want links to. You have about 50 choices for e-book retailers (more than 30 of these are Apple iBookstores in various countries), and I count 18 choices for retailers of paper editions of books.

For each book, you have to click a checkbox for each retailer you want to include in the list of options for the book. Then you have to manually paste in the link to the sales page for that particular book on that particular retailer's web site.

That turns out to be a lot of work. At least some of it could be automated, since the links to all the Apple iBookstores are very similar -- they differ only in the two-letter country code. And Amazon provides a service to lookup the links to book pages automatically.

So it takes quite a lot of time to set up your button for a given book. When you're done, you just click a button and the EZBuyButton web site creates a bit of Javascript code which you can then embed on your web site or your blog.

They even include a WordPress plugin to make it easier to add an EZBuyButton on your WordPress blog.

I like the idea of EZBuyButton a lot. One button that can send your customer to exactly the right retailer with just a few clicks -- that's a great idea.

But I don't like the fact that I can't attach my own affiliate code to links to Amazon.

And I think the tool would be MUCH easier to use if the steps to setup the online retailer links were more automated.

So I haven't decided yet if I'll be using EZBuyButton on my own web sites.

But I thought you all would be interested in hearing about this tool. It's a step in the right direction.

5) What's New At AdvancedFictionWriting.com

I'm currently working on a new edition of my novel DOUBLE VISION, to be released in e-book format. I'm in

the final stages of revamping both of my web sites.
My head is about to explode.

My book, WRITING FICTION FOR DUMMIES, has been selling well since it began shipping three years ago. For the last couple of years, it's been the hottest selling fiction-writing book in the Kindle store.

You can find out all about WRITING FICTION FOR DUMMIES here:

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

If you've already bought the book and like it, I'd be delighted if you went to the Amazon page and clicked the Like button at the top:

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

I've also been gratified at the response to my flagship software product, "Snowflake Pro," which makes it fast, easy, and fun to work through the steps of my wildly popular Snowflake method for designing a novel. You can find out more about Snowflake Pro at:

<http://www.SnowflakeProSoftware.com>

I normally teach at four to six writing conferences per year. I am currently booked to teach at only two this year, which should give me a bit of breathing room.

Why don't I teach at more conferences? Because teaching is an incredibly demanding blood sport and it sucks a huge amount of energy out of my tiny brain. I prefer to put my absolute best into a few locations than to muddle through at many.

I will be teaching a mentoring group with no more than ten students this March at the Mount Hermon Christian Writers Conference in central California. Details here:
<http://mounthermon.org/event/122>

I will also be teaching a six-hour class on marketing for writers in August at the Oregon Christian Writers Conference in Portland. Details here:

<http://ocwsummerconference.com/>

If you'd like me to teach at your conference in 2014 or beyond, email me to find out how outrageously expensive I am.

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

Details here:

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

6) Randy Recommends . . .

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

I'm a huge fan of Margie Lawson's courses, both the ones she teaches in person and the ones she sells on her web site at

<http://www.MargieLawson.com>

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

I've also become a fan of Thomas Umstattd's terrific uncommon-sense thoughts on internet marketing. You can read Thomas's blog at:

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

Thomas and his team are especially skilled at helping authors create a 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.AuthorMedia.com>

I'm watching Thomas's latest venture with interest: The BestSeller Society. I don't know enough to have an opinion on it yet, but wanted to mention it because Thomas is a bright guy who usually has smart things to say. More info on it here:
<http://www.bestsellersociety.com>

Please be aware that in this section I ONLY recommend folks who have never asked me to do so. Tragically, this means that if you ask me to list you here, I will be forced to say no.

7) Steal This E-zine!

This E-zine is free, and I personally guarantee it's worth at least 625 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, 2013.

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

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

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

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Award-winning novelist Randy Ingermanson, "the Snowflake Guy," publishes the free monthly Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine, with more than 32,000 readers. 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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