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The Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine

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Publisher: Randy Ingermanson ("the Snowflake guy")  
Motto: "A Vision for Excellence"  
Date: December 1, 2009  
Issue: Volume 5, Number 12  
Home Pages: <http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com>  
<http://www.Ingermanson.com>  
Circulation: 18518 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 (about 600 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 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.

\* Recently I paid a \$10 fine for being late to work -- and I was happy to do it. Want to know why? Read all about one of my secrets for being massively productive in "Holding Yourself Accountable."

\* Great fiction raises questions in the reader's mind -- but then delays answering them. There's an art to making your reader desperately want to know more. Want to pick award-winning novelist John Olson's brain on the fine art of building suspense? Read my interview with John in "Writing in the Shadows."

\* The greatest thing going in marketing is word of mouth. But how do you get it rolling? Find out one way to do it in "How to Run a Book Rush."

Are you reading my blog? Join the fun here:  
<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/blog>

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## 2) Organizing: Holding Yourself Accountable

People toss around the word "accountability" a lot these days. I have no idea what they mean by the word, so let me define what I mean by it. Accountability means three things:

\* Accountability means setting a goal that is clear, objective, worthwhile, achievable, and difficult.

\* Accountability means that you have to answer to somebody (your accountability partner or "board of directors").

\* Accountability means that you pay a penalty if you don't hit your goal. The penalty should be something that will pinch without killing you. It should be enough to motivate you to get it done.

In the June issue of this e-zine, I talked about using accountability to hit a deadline. But sometimes a deadline is not what you need. Sometimes, just showing up is all you need.

As an example, I got concerned some time ago that I wasn't starting work early enough in the morning. I'm a night owl, so it's easy for me stay up late, but it's hard to get up early. I was starting my day later and later, and it just felt wrong.

I decided to change that and I talked to my buddy John Olson, who sits on my personal Board of Directors.

John suggested that I choose a penalty that I'd pay if I wasn't at my desk working by a set time. I got to choose what time that would be. I got to choose the penalty.

The rules were simple. When I sat down to work for the day, I had to send John an e-mail saying, "I'm at work." The time-stamp on the e-mail would tell John if I was on time. If I missed, then it was my responsibility to send John the penalty via PayPal.

I picked a starting time that was early but not impossible, and I set the penalty at \$10.

The next morning, I was at work 20 minutes early. Because there was no way I was going to embarrass myself by sending John ten bucks. NO WAY.

The next morning I was 15 minutes early. The next day I was 10 minutes early. Pretty soon, I had it down to an exact science. I could slide into my chair, flip open my laptop, and type out an e-mail with seconds to spare.

I was thrilled. This was working great. John was pleased too. He didn't want my money. He wanted to see me working productively and hitting my goal.

Then one night, I stayed up super late working on a project which absolutely, positively had to get done that night. No excuses. I got it done. I staggered off to bed. I crashed hard.

Next morning, I was five minutes late getting to my desk for work.

I was sorely tempted to beg John for a reprieve. After all, I was only five minutes late, and I had a stinking good reason for it.

But I didn't beg off. If I had, John would have laughed in my face and just said no. (I hope he would, anyway. That's his job, even though I know he'd hate to do it.) So I didn't beg. I just paid up.

I was glad to pay up.

Why glad? Because when you've put a system like this in place, you start out very intent on not paying the penalty. As time goes by, you learn to squeeze the system. You figure out exactly how close you can come

without missing.

After a while, you get complacent about the whole thing. When you miss, it's all too easy to try to weasel out. The day you do that, the system fails you. More precisely, you fail the system.

So it's good to miss once in a while. It's good to pay your penalty. It's good to remind yourself that there are no excuses and that the system really does have teeth.

I rather like this scheme of having an on-going penalty for failing to get a routine task done. It's not quite so scary as the penalty for missing a big deadline, which is the plan I described in June.

It's an old saying that ninety percent of the game is just showing up. There's a lot of wisdom in that saying. Many of the big things we do in life are best done one little chunk at a time, day after day after boring day.

One of those big things is writing a novel.

Now it's true that when you sign a contract to write a novel, your publisher gives you a deadline. But the way you hit that deadline is by just showing up, every day, and typing your quota for the day.

Maybe your quota is 1000 words. Maybe it's 3000. The amount doesn't matter. What matters is that every day you eat your chunk of that elephant.

The problem with setting up this routine is that it's easy to miss a day here or there. And a day can ooze into a week way too easily.

If you don't want that to happen, then here's a plan for you to get that novel written, a chunk at a time:

- \* Decide what your chunk size is (either a word count or a set amount of time you'll work on it).
- \* Decide how often you'll do your chunk of work.
- \* Find an accountability partner and ask him or her to hold you accountable -- with no excuses allowed.
- \* Set a penalty for missing a chunk of work.
- \* Define how your accountability partner will know you did your work. This may mean e-mailing a document with words that can be counted. It may just mean sending a report of hours worked.
- \* Go to it and be honest! If you miss, then pay up, even if you have a good excuse. Especially if you have a good excuse. The road to hell is paved with good excuses. So pay up when you miss. That's your best

antidote for missing again next time.

I've only missed that one time. I promptly paid John my \$10 penalty. It's the best ten bucks I've spent in a long time.

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### 3) Creating: Writing in the Shadows

I met John Olson at a Christian writing conference in 1996. Both of us were unpublished novelists with a background in science.

I soon learned that John had a yen to write novels based on the vampire mythos and an uncommon ability to write spooky stuff. John soon learned that I like scary fiction.

That weekend, we forged a friendship that's lasted for over thirteen years. We've coauthored two books together. We've climbed corporate ladders and abandoned them. We've held each accountable as we pursued our dreams. I've learned boatloads about the art of writing fiction from John, and also a bunch about the art of living, and I hope I've paid him back by teaching him a thing or two also.

A bit more than a year ago, I sat in on a major track John taught at a writing conference on the subject, "Writing in the Shadows." I enjoyed his talk tremendously and kept thinking, "Darn! Why didn't I think of that?"

John's latest novel, *POWERS*, is just now hitting the bookshelves. I got my copy last week and am reading it now. It's a prime example of "writing in the shadows."

I've asked John for an interview so I could introduce you to his ideas. Here's the result:

RI: I really enjoyed your lecture series last year on "Writing in the Shadows." In a nutshell, what is "writing in the shadows" and why would an author want to do that?

JO: You've heard of reading between the lines, right? Well, writing in the shadows is writing between the lines. It's a set of techniques for creating mood and evoking an emotional response in such a way that readers aren't consciously aware of why they are responding the way they do. The words on your page all have shadows. Once you learn how to harness these shadows for your own purposes, you can use these

techniques to add creepiness to dark scenes, dread to action scenes, joy to celebration scenes or chemistry to relational scenes.

RI: Editor often tell us to "show, don't tell," but they rarely show us what they mean by that. What does "show, don't tell" mean to you?

JO: It's pretty easy. It means to... uh, show and er... not tell. Okay, maybe it isn't so easy to explain. Let me give you some examples. As a novelist I'm often tempted to write something telling such as:

Hailey was scared.

But if I do this, I don't give the reader a chance to experience that fear emotionally along with Hailey. Readers know intellectually Hailey is afraid, because I told them she was (and foolish readers that they are, they trust me), but they don't get to experience the fear along with her unless I actually show Hailey being afraid:

Hailey froze. The vampire's teeth were only inches away from her neck. She held her breath and tried to think, but her pulse throbbed like kettle drums in her ears. She had to make her stupid heart slow down. It was only encouraging him.

See? I never once told you Hailey was afraid, but you probably figured it out anyway. That's showing.

Okay... I know what you're thinking. I totally cheated. Of course Hailey's going to be scared with the sharp end of a vampire pointed at her neck. But what if your story doesn't have any conveniently located vampires? What if you need to show fear, and the reader doesn't even have a reason to be afraid yet?

That's where writing in the shadows comes in. It's possible to write a scene in such a way that your readers will pick up on the fear without knowing the reasons behind it.

Your POV character doesn't even have to realize she's afraid. In fact it's often better if she doesn't. If she knew she should be afraid, she might not walk into that dark basement we need her to walk into. We see this technique used all the time in movies. Our clueless heroine walks into the dark basement and suddenly the background music changes. We know right away what's going to happen, and we start yelling at her, telling her to turn her flashlight on, but she doesn't seem to hear us. It can't be because the background music is too loud, because if she could hear the music, she'd know the vampire was hiding behind the artificial Christmas tree waiting to jump out at her and make us wet our pants.

Stupid heroines. If only our novels had soundtracks to go along with them, showing in the shadows would be so easy! But if you think about it, our novels do have background music. It's hidden in the shadows of the words. Sentences have flow and rhythm and cadence. Words have connotations that evoke mood and emotion and tone. Characters have autonomic responses that happen whether they're aware of them or not. We have all kinds of tools to work with. We can go beyond showing and show in the shadows like this:

The door closed behind her with a sigh. Hailey shivered as a chill brushed across her mind, leaving behind the aftertaste of decay and wet rat. She hurried toward the elevators, fighting the urge to break into a run. Hollow footsteps echoed loud and lonely in the empty marble hallway. Stepping into a waiting elevator, she punched the ninth floor button and leaned back against the wall. The door shut with a clank, sealing her in.

See? Words like "sigh" and "aftertaste of decay and wet rat" and "sealing her in" create an emotional subtext that shows the reader what to feel without telling them why we want them to feel it. That's showing in the shadows.

RI: You're a strong proponent of giving readers "partial information." What do you mean by that, and what have you got against giving readers the full scoop on things?

JO: Giving the full scoop ruins all the fun -- at least it does if we're talking about novels. Ice cream is a completely different subject. Imagine a murder mystery where the author tells us who the murderer is the second we're introduced to him. Or imagine a romance where the author tells us all about the couple's future life together as soon as the male lead is introduced. It kind of spoils the fun, doesn't it?

Well, that's what we do any time we give the reader too much information. We take away the mystery and anticipation. So if Dash Totallyripped McMoneybags throws up the second he sees our heroine, don't tell us why. Let it be a mystery we can look forward to solving. And if Sydney Hottiepants is in love with Dash, don't ruin the romance by telling us. Let us interpret what she's feeling by the way she agonizes over her decision of which flavor of lip gloss to wear.

Remember, when we meet people in real life, they don't come with fact sheets pinned to their shirts. We have to "figure them out" by interpreting their words and actions.

Let's face it. We humans are really good at interpreting things. It's one of the things we do best. By giving our readers too much information, we deny our readers the pleasure of interpreting and

figuring things out for themselves. Not only does it take away from the fun, but it feels shallow and contrived. Why? Because that's not how reality works.

We may think that giving ten pages of backstory on the history of Sydney's attraction to losers is going to make her seem more real, but it will actually have the opposite effect. In reality we never have access to all the information. We have to interpret the clues we're given and figure things out for ourselves. It's more fun that way -- even if we get everything wrong.

RI: Pace is a critical element in modern fiction which is rarely taught. Can you give us your top three tips on pace?

JO: Sure... Tip 1) Slow. Tip 2) Medium. Tip 3) Fast.

How's that for a fast-paced response? Of course I could have picked up the pace by writing "Slow, medium, & fast." Or I could have slowed it down by using a plethora of multisyllabic adjectives and obscure, seventeenth century, Latin-derived inhornisms -- which brings me to my fourth point.

Readers subconsciously assume that reading time is proportional to the timing of the events they're reading about. If a writer takes time to describe the wildflowers beside the trail, the readers will infer a leisurely pace. If the story gives a quick succession of vague impressions, the readers will assume a rapid pace -- like the POV character is moving too fast to process all the visual information streaming past her eyes.

That's why you should never describe the wildflowers while a vampire is chasing your heroine through the woods. That's also why words like quickly and rapidly should be avoided. Not only are they evil "telling" -ly adverbs, but they also work against what they're trying to convey. Inserting them into a sentence actually slows down the sentence (which slows down the action in the reader's mind even though it's supposed to make the reader think the action is speeding up). The word slowly, on the other hand, doesn't work against itself, and is much more acceptable even if it is also an evil "telling" -ly adverb.

Pacing is tricky. There are hundreds of ways to inadvertently slow down a fast-paced scene. One of the worst culprits is what I call "order out of" which is when the author presents information to the reader in the wrong order. Take, for example, the following sentence:

A gloved hand burst through the wall and clawed at Dash's face.

On the surface this looks like a perfectly good



sentence, but if you look at what's going on in the reader's mind, you'll see why it slows the action down. When readers read the words "a gloved hand," they picture the gloved hand in their mind. Then, when they read further and read that the hand bursts through the wall and claws at Dash's beautiful face, they get confused and have to readjust the pictures in their minds.

Their first impression of the gloved hand was on the wrong side of the wall. They could see it in their minds, so they automatically put it in Dash's view, because he's the POV character through whose eyes they are viewing the action. But when it bursts through the wall and claws our hero on the face, they have to back up and readjust the picture so that the hand is on the other side of the wall. These kinds of readjustments break the flow of the narrative and slow the pace down -- usually at times when we're trying to speed the pace up.

RI: One of the things you and I have always agreed on is that fiction is about giving the reader a "powerful emotional experience." What are the main emotional drivers that propel a story forward?

JO: Besides the inherent pleasure we all get from reading beautiful, well-written prose, I think there are five main drivers that make our readers want to keep turning the pages. I could tell you what they are, but that would spoil all the fun. Instead, I'll give you a hint. They're so central to fiction that they're written on the shelves of most book stores. That's right. They're the genre labels. See if you can figure it out. What emotional driver is central to each of these groups of genres?

- \* Mystery
- \* Romance
- \* Action/Adventure
- \* Thrillers, Suspense and Horror
- \* Historicals, Science Fiction and Fantasy

RI: Any question I should have asked and didn't?

JO: I never know how to answer this question. I suppose it's because I always think through all the questions I know the answers to and then reject those questions, because they're too easy. And I avoid all the questions I don't know the answers to because, well... I don't want to look stupid. Which means I always end up looking stupid -- whether I'm stupid or not.

Stupid question.

Okay, here's a question you should have asked me:

Q: Who is the best author and writing instructor

you've ever cowritten a book with?

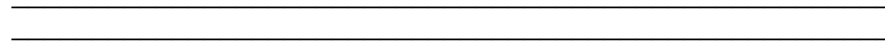
A: The answer can also be found on book store shelves. (Hint: Search for the word "DUMMIES" written in big bold letters.)

RI: Thanks for the plug, John, but it may be a wee bit superfluous. I already mentioned my new book, WRITING FICTION FOR DUMMIES, about 5000 times last month, and I'm going to mention it further down the page in this issue. But it never hurts to have you mention it too.

Thanks for your thoughts on Writing in the Shadows!

PS: John Olson has a new audio course, "Writing in the Shadows," which will go on sale on my Web site soon. Before that, though, we'll give you a chance to get it free -- if you buy John's latest book POWERS, which happens to highlight all of John's ideas for writing in those pesky shadows.

Why would we give away a two-and-a-half-hour-plus audio course to you just for buying a book? For the answer to that, see the marketing article just below, "How to Run a Book Rush."



#### 4) Marketing: How to Run a Book Rush

So your book's just come out and you'd like to stimulate sales. Matter of fact, you'd like stimulate a LOT of sales right out of the gate. You'd like to get that pesky word of mouth thing going.

How do you do that?

One possible answer is to run a "book rush."

What's a "book rush" and why the devil would you want to run one?

Let's answer those questions in reverse order. Why would you want to run a book rush? Because its purpose is to foster word of mouth. Not CREATE word of mouth. FOSTER it.

Most marketing people will tell you that the most powerful force in the marketing universe is word of mouth. But you really can't make that happen, because people either like your book or they don't. They'll either talk or they won't talk.

About all you can do is provide them the opportunity to

do so. You do that by encouraging a lot of people to read your book in a short period of time.

Here's my theory on word of mouth marketing. My theory may be wrong, but it seems like a good theory to me. I believe that word of mouth depends on the SQUARE of the number of people reading your book.

So if you double the number of people reading your book at a given time, then you quadruple the amount of word of mouth going on. If you get ten times the number of people reading your book at the same time, then your word of mouth marketing increases by 100 times.

The reason is that word of mouth happens when two people who are reading your book start talking about it, and that catches the attention of their friends who hear them talking.

That's just my little theory, and it might be wrong. But if it's right, then it makes sense to do all you can to foster that first rush of readers. If they like your book, then word of mouth will take off. If they don't, then it won't.

So the above explanation tells you WHY you might want to encourage a lot of readers to buy and read your book early on.

But HOW do you do that?

The answer I'll suggest here is to run a "book rush" -- a short launch period when you give lots of people some excellent incentives to buy your book RIGHT NOW.

You can't give just anybody those incentives, though. You need to give them to people who:

- \* Might reasonably want your incentives
- \* Might reasonably want your book

Here then is the simple plan for running a book rush:

- \* Choose a period of time (the Launch Period) when you'll run the book rush. This can be one day or several days.
- \* Create some cool incentives that might appeal to people who you think will be interested in your book. These incentives need to be electronic products that you can deliver free, anywhere in the world, using the internet.
- \* Let people know that the book rush is coming.
- \* Notify them (via e-mail or your blog or FaceBook or Twitter or all of the above) when your Launch Period begins. The notification should send them to your Web site, where you can have a special page devoted to your book rush.

\* Your Web page should tell about your book, tell what the incentives are, and include a link to Amazon so they can buy the book. The Web page should also have a form people can fill in after buying the book so they can get to the secret location where they can download the incentives.

That's really all there is to it, other than the geeky tech details, but I don't teach geeky tech details here. Either you need to be geeky and technical, or you need to find someone in your life to take care of that for you.

It's a simple idea, and I've seen it used several times over the past couple of years. I've bought a couple of books that were promoted in a book rush.

If you'd like to see some examples of how a book rush works in practice, I'll show you those too. During the course of the next week or so, I'll be doing a book rush for a novel and for a nonfiction book:

\* The novel will be John Olson's book POWERS. The incentives will include a free copy of an audio lecture that John recently recorded on "Writing in the Shadows" plus a 24-page full-color PDF file of the POWERS comic book. I'll throw in a 50% discount coupon on all electronic products in my store.

\* The nonfiction book will be my book WRITING FICTION FOR DUMMIES. The incentives will include an audio lecture on "Strategic Self-Editing" along with several other useful goodies from a number of my friends with books on writing fiction. Again, I'll throw in a 50% discount on all electronic products in my store.

You'll receive a short e-mail to let you know when these book rushes begin. We'll do John's book rush over a four-day span this week, then we'll do mine over a three-day span next week.

Watch your in-box.

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

My new book, WRITING FICTION FOR DUMMIES, began shipping recently and should be in bookstores now. I will be running a book rush for this book soon. (See the marketing article above for more info on what a "book rush" is.) Bottom line: I plan to give you some special goodies if you buy the book during the Launch Period. Stay tuned . . .

I recently released 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 next year is already beginning to fill in.

In March, 2010, I will be doing a small group mentoring workshop at the Mount Hermon Christian Writers Conference. More info:  
<http://mounthermon.org/adult/professionals/writers-conference>

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.

Margie will be teaching Master Classes at the following locations in the next few months:

- \* January, 2009: Portland, Oregon
- \* February, 2009: Silicon Valley
- \* April, 2010: St. Louis

See Margie's web site for details.

Margie will also be teaching several online courses next year:

- \* January: Defeat Self-Defeating Behaviors
- \* March: Empowering Characters' Emotions
- \* May: Deep Editing: The EDITS System, Rhetorical Devices, and More

\* June: Writing Body Language and Dialogue Cues Like a Psychologist.

If you want to buy these courses in electronic form, you can get them at Margie's site NOW:  
<http://www.MargieLawson.com>

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#### 7) Steal This E-zine!

This E-zine is free, and I personally guarantee it's worth at least 5491 times what you paid for it. I invite you to "steal" it, but only if you do it nicely . . .

Distasteful legal babble: This E-zine is copyright Randall Ingermanson, 2009.

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

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

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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 18,000 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  
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