

The Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine

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Circulation: 31683 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 500 of you signed up in June), 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 my system.

If you missed a back issue, remember that all previous issues are archived on my web site at:
<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/ezone>

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.

* When you try to plan your day, you quickly discover that life happens. Most days don't work out as planned. But there's a way to beat the unpredictability of life and make a schedule you can meet. Learn how in my organizing article, "Taming Unpredictability."

* Are you using white space effectively in your fiction? Do you know what it means to use white space effectively? If not, then read my craft article, "White Space Magic."

* The biggest buzzword in books these days is the word "discoverability." It's a fine buzzword, but is there any substance to it? Any at all? Find out my thoughts in my marketing column, "Long Game Discoverability."

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

2) Organizing: Taming Unpredictability

If you've ever tried to make a daily plan and stick to it, you've learned an annoying fact about plans:

Life happens.

Life happens in all sorts of unpredictable ways:

* You need one extra fact for the scene you're writing, so you go browsing the web and discover that it's way more complicated than you thought. You spend the afternoon rethinking your plot.

* You get an emergency email from your editor that you MUST deal with right away, and you burn three hours of your day putting out a fire that you didn't even know existed when you made your daily plan.

* Your computer's hard drive starts making horrible noises, and it turns out to need a trip to the geek shop. Even with a rush order to fix it, you lose two days.

These kinds of things happen all the time to writers. You probably had at least a couple of days with unexpected roadblocks last week. You'll probably have at least a couple of them this week. And every week for the rest of your life. That's just how things are.

How are you supposed to stick to a daily plan when things like these happen?

My opinion is that you can't.

Stuff is always going to happen. Unpredictable stuff.

Here's what I've been doing lately to keep my head in the game when the game keeps going awry:

I still make a daily plan of things I'd like to get done, but I write this daily plan second.

What I do first is to write a WEEKLY plan. On Monday, my first task is to write down a list of the things I think I can get done during the week.

If I get them all done by the end of the day on Friday, then the week is a success.

It's OK if bad stuff happens two days out of the week. Matter of fact, even three bad days isn't a tragedy. Three bad days is normal.

I've found that I can almost always count on having at least one or two Xtremely productive days each week.

I just can't ever know in advance which days they'll be.

When you have a day where everything goes right, you whip through your list at light speed.

I'm having a super-productive day today, as a matter of fact. Tomorrow might be horrible, but today is going great.

In one excellent day, you can get half your week's work done.

If you get only one terrific day per week, you'll probably get most of the things done on your weekly list.

If you get lucky and have TWO great days in a week, you can almost guarantee that you'll knock everything off your weekly list.

Try this experiment:

* For the rest of this week, make a daily list. Count

the number of days you actually finish everything on that list.

* Next week on Monday morning make a list of the core things you'd like to get done for the week -- the minimal set of achievements that would make the week a success. Continue making a daily list each day and continue counting the number of days that you get that list all done.

You might not have a single "successful" day (in which you get your entire daily list done).

However, you will probably have at least one and possibly as many as two highly productive days in which you make huge progress on your weekly list.

At the end of next week, look to see if the week as a whole was "successful" (because you got everything done on your weekly list).

You might be surprised. You might find that every day is "unsuccessful" and yet the week as a whole is a "success."

What's going on here? How can five bad days add up to one good week?

The answer is that we tend to overestimate what we can do in a day but we often underestimate what we can do in a week.

Stuff happens most days. It's a rare day when something doesn't go wrong. But those rare days can make up for all the rest. Most weeks can be good ones.

Try it and see.

3) Creating: White Space Magic

One of the most common mistakes I see when I critique manuscripts is that the paragraphs are too long.

When I see a dense page of text that has only three or four paragraphs, I suspect the pace is going to be slow and the writing is going to be boring.

When I see a page with a lot of white space, I suspect the pace is going to be fast and the writing is going to have a lot of conflict.

Part of this is just a psychological illusion.

When a reader is reading a scene with a lot of white space, her eye zips rapidly down the page. Before she knows it, she's flipping the page, and then the next, and the next.

White space makes your reader feel like she's flying.

As I said, this is a psychological trick, and by itself it doesn't mean very much. Pace is about more than reading pages rapidly.

Pace is about the amount of conflict coming at the reader on each page.

Fiction thrives on conflict.

Don't confuse conflict with mere physical action. Conflict is about trading punches, but most often those punches are verbal or psychological, not physical.

Conflict is a lawyer cross-examining a lying witness.

Conflict is a woman trying to get her man to tell her what he's really feeling.

Conflict is a baseball player stepping up to the plate with the tying run on third and facing the league's toughest pitcher in the final inning of the World

Series.

Conflict is about back-and-forth.

You get the least conflict per page when you use a lot of description, narrative summary, and exposition. All of these tend to use long paragraphs that focus on a single thing.

You get the most conflict per page when you have a lot of action and dialogue and when you alternate rapidly between characters. Doing that will naturally give you a lot of short, punchy paragraphs.

The more paragraphs you have, the more white space on the page.

This isn't complicated, so I'm not going to belabor it. White space is magic, not because it CAUSES good writing but because it's an EFFECT of good writing.

If you've got a scene that your critiquers are telling you is slow and boring, take a look at how much white space you've got. You probably need more.

Look for every paragraph longer than five lines. Can you break it up?

It probably has some description or long explanation or something else that you're certain your reader can't live without.

Kill it. Get rid of it. Be a brute.

Here is where you protest that you can't do that -- your reader will hate you forever for cutting out that long horrible explanation about the history of mildew.

Fine, if it's that important, then cut it down to three lines.

But you know in your lying little heart that it's not that important.

It may be that the paragraph has no description or explanation at all. In fact, you may believe it's packed with action. The tiger and the vampire are locked in a wrestling match to the death.

But if that paragraph is longer than five lines, you're probably using narrative summary. You're telling your reader about the fight, rather than showing the fight.

If a fight is worth having in your story, it's worth showing, punch by punch, snarl by snarl, bite by bite.

Break up that long paragraph into a sequence of actions and reactions. One paragraph for the vampire, one for the tiger, back and forth, until you have a victor.

When you do that, you'll naturally produce a lot of white space.

Your eyes will tell you when you've done enough.

It's possible to go too far, of course.

You don't want to have an entire novel of one-line paragraphs. White space is wonderful, but there can be too much of a good thing.

I've seen two writers who used too much white space. Oddly enough, both of them are best-selling authors. I've never seen a bad writer use too much white space.

If too much white space is your problem, there's an easy fix for it. Just add in some interior monologue, some sensory description, and even an occasional bit of exposition to fatten up a few paragraphs.

White space is magic. White space is power. You know the drill. Great power, great responsibility.

Use it well.

4) Marketing: Long Game Discoverability

The buzzword that authors and publishers are using these days is "discoverability."

Is this sensible, or is this just the latest quackery? I'll give you my opinion, but first some context.

An enormous number of books get published every single day of the year. How is any one book supposed to stand out in the crowd when the crowd gets bigger and noisier every year?

That is the problem of "discoverability."

In the old days (say two or three years ago), publishers and authors had a few standard tools for getting a book discovered.

Publishers sent their books to the major reviewers. They paid hefty money to buy placement on the front table at Barnes & Noble and Borders and other booksellers. They paid publicists to get their authors on radio or TV.

Authors held book signings at bookstores. They put up web sites and blogs. They went on speaking tours. They hit the social media networks.

The purpose behind all of these methods was to get word-of-mouth going. Quickly.

The problem is that the old ways aren't working as well as they used to. There are far more books than there used to be.

Truth be told, the old ways never worked very well in the first place. For every success, there were plenty

more failures, with no rhyme, no reason to explain the difference between success and failure.

Notice that most of the methods I mentioned above are actions with short-term effects.

The review magazines have an influence for the month they're printed. After that, not so much. Placement on the front table works for as many as days as you keep paying for that front table real estate. After that, not at all. A radio or TV interview is on today, gone tonight.

A booksigning works for the three hours you're in the store. After that, the bookstore people might remember you, maybe. When you give a talk, you can move a lot of copies at the back of the room today. As soon as you leave the venue, you don't move any copies. A tweet has an effect for a few hours and then it's gone.

Short-term marketing made sense in the old days. Back then, a book had a shelf life of a few weeks. If it hadn't been discovered by then, the bookstore sent it back to the publisher for full credit and the book disappeared.

Publishers and authors had to play a short game because that was the only game in town.

They hoped that somehow, playing the short game hard enough would generate word of mouth.

Sometimes it did, and when it did, great things happened. But the short game has always been hit-or-miss. In the old days, if it didn't hit, the game was over.

E-books have changed all that, because e-books are forever. There is no three-week ticking clock for e-books. Once an e-book goes on sale, it has an infinite length of time to be discovered.

That means that it now makes sense to put more effort

into "long game discoverability."

If you spend all your marketing in short-term efforts, you are going to get all your returns as short-term results. But the instant you turn off the electricity, the marketing machine stops.

I suspect that there will be more winners in the future because there will be more choices. Because there is more time for each book to find its audience. Because more of the actual money goes to authors and less goes to those pesky "middlemen."

If that's true, then publishing is becoming a long game, and much more of your marketing effort should go into things that last. Things that make you discoverable next week, next month, next year, next decade.

You can only be doing so many things each day. If everything you do is for short-term results, then you can never get off the marketing treadmill.

Here are a few of the thousands of things that might make you more discoverable for the long haul. These are not guaranteed to work. A lot depends on how well you execute. But these are things that last:

* Web site articles or blog articles with content good enough to attract traffic from search engines.

Imagine spending an hour to write an article on a topic related to your book. Imagine posting it on your web site. Imagine that it brings in 100 page views every day. (This is not a huge number.) Imagine having a blurb about your book on that page.

In a year, that blurb would be seen by over 36,000 people. In a decade, 365,000 pairs of eyeballs would see it.

That's not nearly as sexy as spending an hour on a TV show. But which do you think is more effective at

selling your book, long-term?

* Guest blogs with an "about the author" blurb that links back to your web site.

I saw a question this morning on an e-mail loop for authors asking whether blog tours work. I have my doubts about the short-term effectiveness of a blog tour.

But I know for certain that a link from a blog to your web site lasts pretty much forever. Incoming links really help your site get noticed by the search engines. Incoming links last a long, long time.

If this is part of your marketing strategy, then do your guest posts on blogs that actually get traffic, because a link from a high-traffic blog is worth more to you.

I suppose doing a guest blog isn't as exciting as speaking to 100 people in a room and selling 25 copies of your book. But guess which one lasts longer?

* Your author page on Goodreads.

Goodreads is a social network for readers. That's the whole point of the site -- to help readers discover books and authors.

Any author can have a profile page on Goodreads. It lists all your books, with links to major retailers. It includes blurbs for each one. It lets readers click a button to become your fan.

There is a lot to like about Goodreads. You can post excerpts of your books. You can get various widgets to embed in your blog or web site. You can link in your blog so that new blog entries show up in Goodreads.

Facebook and Twitter get all the hype right now. But neither of these social networks are exclusively about books. Goodreads is.

If you've got limited time to spend on social media, then Goodreads seems like the smart place to spend it.

* The "Also Bought" list on the online retailers.

On every book page on Amazon, there's a section labeled "Customers Who Bought This Item Also Bought". There are similar sections on B&N and Smashwords. This is the online equivalent of browsing in a bookstore.

The "Also Bought" list means that each of your books is an advertisement for your other books.

If you have a sizable backlist of books, then your books can cross-promote each other very nicely.

This means that it's entirely possible that your best marketing strategy might be to just write more books. I don't know any way to prove this, but it's possible.

In my opinion, the days of exclusively using short-game marketing are over. If you want to see a quick bump in sales, then yes, use some of the short-term marketing methods.

But a long game now makes sense. Think about marketing tasks you can do today that will still be working for you ten years from now.

And relax.

Marketing isn't a lottery anymore. Now it's a matter of making smart long-term investments that will pay off forever.

5) What's New At AdvancedFictionWriting.com

My coauthor John Olson and I recently launched the new e-book edition of our novel THE FIFTH MAN. The book reached the #1 spot on the fiction bestseller list on Smashwords.com. We're now hard at work editing our next e-books.

Mine will be a new edition of my novel DOUBLE VISION. John is working on a new edition of his novel ADRENALINE.

My book, WRITING FICTION FOR DUMMIES, has been selling well since it began shipping more than two years ago. For the last year, 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 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 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 4 to 6 writing conferences per year. I am currently booked up for 2012 (unless you want to make me a truly amazing offer or you have some incredible blackmail info on me).

If you simply MUST hear me speak in 2012, you have already missed two conferences where I taught in February and March/April. I will be speaking only twice more this year, at these locations:

August 13-16, Oregon Christian Writers Conference, northern Oregon, "Marketing 101":
<http://oregonchristianwriters.org/category/summerconference/>

August 24-26, Romance Writers of New Zealand, Auckland
<http://www.romancewriters.co.nz/conference/>

I expect to also attend the ACFW conference in Dallas in September (where I will take a few 15-minute mentoring appointments) and the Novelists, Inc. conference in New York in October (where I will just be enjoying the workshops and hanging out with writers).

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.

If you'd like me to teach at your conference in 2013 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>

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) Jim Bell's Weekend Seminars

My good friend Jim Bell is doing a series of weekend seminars this summer in Austin, Nashville, and Cincinnati.

You may recognize him as the author of the best-selling book PLOT & STRUCTURE, one of the very best books on how to write fiction. Or you may remember that Jim is the former fiction columnist for Writer's Digest.

I have known Jim for many years and I have a high level of trust in his ability to deliver the goods.

Jim is the guy who first taught me Three-Act Structure years ago, and he's a terrific speaker and teacher.

I've learned a lot from him.

Jim asked if he could buy an ad in my e-zine for his seminars. I don't accept paid ads, but Jim is a great guy who contributes a lot to the writing community.

So I offered to give Jim a free mention here on one condition:

I asked Jim to give readers of my e-zine a discount.

He agreed to give you all a \$30 discount. The normal price of one of these 2-day seminars is \$399. You can get it for \$369 with the discount code ADVEZ.

What do you get for that \$369? Here's the writeup Jim sent me:

Two power packed days to take your fiction writing to the next level . . . and beyond. For both traditional and self-published writers. Lunch is included both days.

Among the things you'll learn:

- * The Most Important Thing Every Successful Novel Must Do . . . and How to Do It
- * Mastering the Seven Critical Success Factors of Fiction
- * The Emotion Quotient for Grabbing Readers and Not Letting them Go
- * Plotting With Perfect Structure, Every Time -- Never Write a Weak Story Again
- * Thematic Unity, What Most Writers Want But Can't Figure Out. We'll Figure.
- * Creating Characters That "Jump Off the Page"
- * How to Write Scenes With No Dull Parts
- * The 8 Essentials and 12 Tools of Great Dialogue

* The Secrets of Making Readers Turn the Pages

* Creating a Compelling Voice and Style

Plus: interactive exercises that will add depth and appeal to your current project.

You can get more info and sign up for one of these weekend seminars at the following web pages. (If you sign up, use the promo code ADVEZ to get the \$30 discount.)

Austin, June 16 & 17

Too late to sign up for this one! It's done.

Nashville, August 11 & 12

<http://jsbnashville.eventbrite.com/>

Cincinnati, September 15 & 16

<http://jsbcincinnati.eventbrite.com/>

Have fun!

8) Steal This E-zine!

This E-zine is free, and I personally guarantee it's worth at least 1331 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, 2012.

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>

9) 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 3-paragraph blurb with it:

This article is reprinted by permission of the author.

Award-winning novelist Randy Ingermanson, "the Snowflake Guy," publishes the free monthly Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine, with more than 31,000 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.

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