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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 (about 500 of you signed up in December), 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/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.

* Are you planning to be a successful novelist? I don't mean dreaming, I mean planning. Do you know why it can make a huge difference in your career? Read my organizing column, "Strategizing Your Writing Career."

* When you're writing a novel, a major milestone is your first draft. If you never get a first draft written, you'll never be published. Different writers approach this differently. Do you know all your options? Have you found the one that works best for you? Check out my column, "Your Creative Paradigm."

* Once you sell a novel to a publisher, your editor immediately expects you to begin marketing your work. A web site. A blog. Facebook. Twitter. On and on. Do you know when to say yes and when to say no? Learn an essential yardstick for deciding how much marketing is enough in my article, "10, 100, and 1000 Dollar Work."

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

2) Organizing: Strategizing Your Writing Career

In my November column, I talked about the three essential skills you need if you want to succeed in the writing business -- Vision, Strategy, and Tactics.

In December, I discussed Vision and gave you some simple tips to help you define the Vision for your career and for each book.

This month, we tackle Strategy.

Let's be clear about two things:

- * Strategy is hard work.
- * Strategy pays off massively.

Strategy is hard work because it will never really end. If you're going to succeed in your writing career, you will need to be continually refining your Strategy.

Having a sound strategy doesn't guarantee you'll be successful, but it makes your success much more probable.

The reason Strategy is important is because in your writing career, you'll be asked to do far more things than you can possibly do. You will never, ever have time to do it all. A sound Strategy will tell you what to do yourself, what to hire somebody else to do, and what to let go.

My thinking on this has been shaped quite a bit by the book, *THE E-MYTH REVISITED*, by Michael E. Gerber. I highly recommend this book, which is not about writing, it's about running an effective business.

Writing is a business, so the principles apply, even though Mr. Gerber never mentions fiction writing in his book.

What is "the e-myth"? It's the starry-eyed notion that just because you're in business, you somehow magically become an entrepreneur.

Anybody can strap on ice skates, but that doesn't make them a hockey player. Anybody can start a business, but that doesn't make them an entrepreneur.

The minute you make the decision to write a novel with the hope of selling it someday, you're in business. But you'll only be an entrepreneur if you take action to do so. And most writers don't.

So what makes you an entrepreneur? For the full story, I recommend you read *THE E-MYTH REVISITED*. One essential task that entrepreneurs do is to plan their business from the very beginning as if it were already large and successful. Then they make a strategic plan to get to where they want to be.

The very first step on this road is actually the scariest. This is the step that causes most writers to dig in their heels and say no. Here's where most writers screw it up and never, ever get it right.

A crucial thing that every large and successful business has is an org chart -- a simple document that tells who does what, and who is accountable to whom.

I know exactly what you're thinking right now. Why the heck does a little one-person business need an org chart, when all you want to do is write fiction?

The answer is that you want to do more than write fiction. You want to make money.

If you don't want to make money, then I'll agree that you're not in business and you don't need an org chart.

But if you do intend to make money from your writing, then you're in business and you CAN'T do everything that you'll need to do to thrive. You will eventually need to hire somebody. At which point, your little business will be an organization.

You might as well get off to a good start. It takes all of about ten minutes and you can do it right now. In fact, I'll give you a prototype org chart below.

All you have to do is type your name in every slot in the chart, and you're done. Then for the rest of your career, you'll be looking for ways to hire out the roles in your business that you can't or won't or shouldn't do.

Every time you hire somebody to play a role in your business, you can delete your name from that slot in the org chart and type in that person's name. Now you instantly know what they do and to whom they report.

The larger your business gets, the fewer roles in the org chart will have your name in them. That's fine. That's great in fact. The fewer roles you play, the better you can play the one you really want to play -- the role of writer.

As you get more successful, you'll have people to do your admin work, your accounting, your marketing, your legal work, and a myriad of other things. You CAN'T do it all yourself and be successful. So you might as well get the structure of your business correct from the get-go.

Here is a prototype org chart for your business as a writer. It's like an outline. Each person reports to the person one level up.

- * Chief Executive Officer: You
 - * Administrative Assistant: You
 - * Chief Operations Officer: You
 - * Writer: You
 - * Editor: You
 - * Graphic Designer: You
 - * Literary Agent: You
 - * Customer Relations Manager: You
 - * Marketing Director: You
 - * Brand Manager: You
 - * Webmaster: You
 - * Blog Editor: You
 - * E-mail Newsletter Editor: You
 - * Social Network Manager: You
 - * Chief Financial Officer: You
 - * Accountant: You
 - * Manager of Accounts Payable/Receivable: You

You will probably always be the CEO of your business. You will definitely always be the Writer.

But you can hire somebody else for every other role in the chart. As you get successful, you'll need to hire people to do at least some of these roles. Here is the approximate order you might fill those roles:

* Probably your first "hire" will be to find a critique buddy to fill the role of Editor for free. Everybody needs a second opinion on their writing, and you typically pay back your critique buddy by playing the same role for her.

* Eventually, you'll find an agent to play the role of Literary Agent, since very few writers are competent to be their own agent. Agents work for a percentage of your income, so they don't get paid until you do. You don't need an agent until you're writing well enough to sell your work.

* Once you make your first sale, you may find it useful to hire an Accountant to do your accounting and file your taxes. Part time, of course. A few hours per year, but they'd probably be the most hellish hours of the year if you had to do them yourself.

* Before your first book comes out, you'll need a real webmaster to build you a web site. You'll pay an upfront cost and then there'll be ongoing expenses at a much lower rate.

* After you've written a few novels, you may find it useful to hire a freelance editor to help you shape your story ideas before you show them to your agent. You pay for this on a project basis -- it isn't a full time job.

* When the e-mail starts arriving in your in-box in the dozens per day, you'll very likely handle a Customer Relations Manager to answer the easy e-mail. This will probably never be more than a few hours per week, unless you become massively famous.

* If you get asked to do a lot of speaking, you might hire an Administrative Assistant to help you deal with the details, plan your trips, and handle the routine administrivia that most writers hate, hate, hate. Once again, this is strictly a part-time job.

* If your books start doing well, your publisher will expect you to up your game in marketing, social media, and blogging. Unless you really excel at these, you may hire out some or all of this work to a Brand Manager, a Social Network Manager, and a Graphic Designer. You may even hire a Marketing Director to keep all these people under control.

* If you do extremely well, you'll find that your blog and e-mail newsletter are just too much, and you may hire a Blog Editor and an E-mail Newsletter Editor.

* If you're making so much money (and spending so much) that the bookkeeping gets to be a hassle, you can hire a bookkeeper to cash your checks and pay your bills (your Manager of Accounts Payable/Receivable).

These won't happen all at once. But as your career grows, it's entirely possible that you could end up hiring somebody to play every role except CEO and Writer. Those are your jobs.

It's worth repeating that most of the people you hire will be working for you only part time. They'll be independent contractors whom you pay an hourly wage or a fixed fee or a percentage of earnings to do the crucial support tasks that will keep you on task.

Which is writing.

Your main job will always be to write. And you can't write if you're worn down with all the roles that a successful business requires.

One of the most important things you can do to make yourself successful is to simply begin acting RIGHT NOW as if you're going to be successful someday. As if you're going to need to hire all those people.

If you don't plan for it, then either it won't happen, or it'll happen in a weird, wild, willy-nilly way that makes it hard for you to manage.

Don't do that to yourself. Plan now for success. Because someday, you might be immensely successful. It's easier to set yourself on the right course now when you're small than to do a course correction later when you've built up a lot of momentum in the wrong direction.

Here's your homework assignment: Paste the above org chart into your word processor, restructure it as an outline, and type in the correct name for every role. Then print it out and hang it where you can see it every day.

That's your future. May it be wildly successful.

3) Creating: Your Creative Paradigm

Getting your first draft written is a major strategic goal in writing your novel. But how do you get there?

You need what I call a "creative paradigm" -- a method for doing your creative work. Creation tends to be messy and chaotic and hard. Your first draft is all about creation.

Once you've got your first draft written, you'll be

able to focus on editing, which is a whole other game. But you'll never have anything to edit until you've first created it, so in this article, let's worry only about the creative part.

When I was writing my book, *WRITING FICTION FOR DUMMIES*, my editor believed that there is one best creative paradigm to get that first draft done. She thought it was "obvious" that you should write an outline first, then write your novel sticking tightly to the outline.

If that were the only possible creative paradigm, a lot of great books would never have been written. Plenty of authors simply can't write a novel from an outline. Their brains aren't wired that way.

In my book, I identified four common creative paradigms for getting to that first draft. Here they are:

* "Seat of the pants." When you write by the seat of your pants, you don't know how the story is going to end. You typically don't even know what's going to happen on the next page. You just sit down and start typing.

Stephen King writes by the seat of his pants, and he's done all right with it. So has Jerry Jenkins, author of the *LEFT BEHIND* series of apocalyptic novels. This is a very common road to the first draft.

If you're a seat-of-the-pants writer (often called an SOTP), then don't try to change yourself. There's nothing wrong with you. There's nothing wrong with your method.

However, when your first draft is done, there'll be a lot wrong with your manuscript. It'll be a big brick of paper with a wandering story that had no planning, and so it's going to need major revisions. That's the biggest problem with writing by the seat of your pants.

Most SOTP writers love the revision process, so they aren't intimidated by the fact that they're going to have to do a lot of it. Once the first draft is done, for them the real fun begins.

Sometimes the SOTP creative paradigm is called "organic" writing. In my view, this label really doesn't make any sense. Seat-of-the-pants writing is no more natural than any other creative paradigm and it doesn't produce inherently better final products.

* "Edit as you go." This creative paradigm is similar to writing by the seat of your pants except that you don't go very far before you stop and edit what you just wrote. Maybe every page. Maybe every scene. But you edit it. And edit it again. And again. Until it's perfect. Only then do you move on.

This is a fairly slow way to write a first draft, because you may revise a single page 20 times before you move on. It may seem like your progress is frozen-slug slow. But when the draft is done, the book is done. It's as perfect as you're going to make it.

That's one of the nice things about the edit-as-you-go creative paradigm. You don't have a long extended phase of revisions to do after you finish the first draft. You just turn it in and move on to the next project.

Dean Koontz is a well-known edit-as-you-go writer, and his results speak for themselves. This method is fairly rare, but if it's your style, then it's your style and you probably can't imagine doing it any other way.

* "Outlining." Many writers simply can't face the idea of writing a first draft unless they know where they're going. All the way, in detail. So they first write an "outline."

This is NOT the multi-level outline that you learned in fifth grade, using bullet points labeled with Roman numerals, letters and numbers. Instead, a novel "outline" is a synopsis, a narrative summary of the story, told in present tense and focusing on the plot, but possibly including some discussions of character development.

Your outline may be a short synopsis of two pages, the typical length that you'd submit to an editor when trying to sell your book. It may be a twenty page synopsis with every scene sketched in. It may be a 150 page tome that functions as a very short first draft.

Robert Ludlum was famous for writing enormously long synopses for his spy novels. Many other writers over the years have found that they can't write a novel without an outline.

If you're an outliner, then outline and be proud of it. Don't let anyone tell you that you're somehow more rigid and less natural than an SOTP. Write your novel the way you want to write it. If outlining works for you, then use it.

* "The Snowflake method." If I'm famous for anything, it's for inventing this creative paradigm, which I named after the famous "snowflake fractal" from pure mathematics.

The main idea of the Snowflake is that you start small with one single story concept and then flesh it out in a succession of steps, each time adding more detail. You alternately work on the plot and the characters until you've got a strategic plan to guide you in writing your first draft.

In early 2003, I posted an article on my web site spelling out the Snowflake method. I had used the method to write my first published novel, and it just felt natural to me. (I used a very early version of the Snowflake to write my Ph.D. thesis in physics when I was at Berkeley back in 1986.)

I've been pleased that the Snowflake has taken off massively all around the world. The Snowflake article on my web site has been viewed over 2 million times. Clearly, it struck a nerve. But I'm the first to tell you that it's not the only way to write a novel. If it works for you, then use it. Otherwise, find another road to nirvana.

How do you decide what creative paradigm you should use to write your novel?

I suspect that in reading the descriptions of the four paradigms above, one of them seemed natural to you and the others seemed unnatural. In that case, try the one that sounds natural. It's a good bet that your brain is wired to use that method.

You may find that none of them seem natural. In that case, try each one for a month or so. See what works.

When your book is published, nobody is going to know or care which creative paradigm you used to write your first draft. They'll care about whether your story works.

Your story has the best chance of working if you write it using a creative paradigm that suits you.

If you want to know more about each of the four paradigms, then feel free to consult chapter 4 of my book, *WRITING FICTION FOR DUMMIES*, which has much more detail than I've had room for here.

4) Marketing: 10, 100, and 1000 Dollar Work

So you've got a book coming out and the marketing director at your publisher calls you up, very excited about your book.

You're excited too, until she tells you all the things she wants you to do to promote your book.

Put up a web site. Create a blog. Make a Facebook fan page and hang out there. Get active on Google Plus.

Starting tweeting. Build an e-mail list. Get on Goodreads. Print bookmarks. Speak at libraries. Do book-signings. Run a contest and give away a new Kindle.

And on and on.

About now, you're probably wondering when you're supposed to find the time to do all this stuff when you have a day job AND you're trying to write your next book.

The first thing to remember is that when a marketing director gives you a laundry list like this, she probably knows very well that it's really just a menu.

You don't go to a restaurant and order everything on the menu. You order a couple of dishes and leave the rest for next time.

By the same token, you're going to choose one or two things on your marketing director's menu to focus on. The rest, you're going to do badly or not at all.

She'll probably be very pleased if you execute even one of these really well.

She'll probably be very displeased if you make a half-hearted stab at every single suggestion and end up doing all of them badly.

How do you decide what to do and what to leave undone?

Many authors seem completely unable to answer this question. So they do whatever their instincts tell them, or they do what a friend told them to do, or they do nothing at all.

I learned a simple principle from my friend, marketing guru Perry Marshall. Perry likes to divide up all the work you COULD be doing into rough categories based on how much they earn you:

- * Ten dollars per hour work
- * Hundred dollars per hour work
- * Thousand dollars per hour work

These are broad categories. "Ten-dollar" work is anything that earns you between three and thirty dollars per hour.

Here's an important principle that will save you mountains of grief: If you have all the hundred-dollar work that you can handle, then don't do any ten-dollar work unless you absolutely have to (or unless you love it). Instead, hire somebody to do it for you.

Likewise, if you have plenty of ten-dollar work, then don't take on one-dollar tasks, unless you have to (or unless you REALLY love them).

Believe it or not, authors violate this principle ALL the time.

One big problem writers have is that they can't easily tell the difference between ten-dollar work and hundred-dollar work. How do you know what your work is earning you?

Let's start with the easy things, which are writing and speaking.

Suppose you know that you can write a novel in 500 hours and your last advance was \$5,000. These are typical numbers early in a writing career. Then writing a novel is worth about ten dollars per hour to you.

Later in your career, you might be earning \$50,000 per book, and now writing a novel is hundred-dollar work. Nice, if you can get it!

Likewise, it's not hard to compute your hourly rate for doing public speaking. Generally, you'll get paid an honorarium for this, and you can also sell books at the back of the room. It won't take very many speaking engagements to figure out what your actual pay rate is.

But what about all those other tasks you're supposed to do? How much does hanging out on Facebook earn you? What about Twittering? Or maintaining your blog?

It's hard to say for sure, but here you can harness your good common-sense instincts. (Most authors are cheapskates, so let's put that to work.) Suppose that somebody offered to do all your Twitter work for you. How much would you be willing to pay per hour for them to do that? A dollar an hour? Five? Ten?

I suspect that very few authors would be willing to pay a hundred dollars per hour for somebody to tweet for them. I doubt many authors would pay even ten dollars an hour. I'll bet most authors wouldn't pay more than a dollar an hour.

Whatever number you'd be willing to pay, that's probably a decent estimate of its actual value to you. If you've got the common sense of an anthill, you aren't going to overpay or underpay very much.

Suppose you decide that you couldn't possibly pay more than a dollar an hour to hire somebody to Twitter on your behalf. This means that Twittering is probably only earning you a dollar an hour.

Now here's the simple question: If you have an extra hour in your day, should you spend it Twittering or writing? If writing earns you even ten dollars an hour, then this is a no-brainer. For you, it makes more sense

to write than to tweet.

One caveat: If you like to hang out on Twitter and you'd do it for free, then there's no harm in doing so when you're not working. But call it what it is -- entertainment, not work.

You may be thinking, "But what about all the intangibles of marketing? Spending time on Twitter or Facebook keeps my name in the front of people's minds. It keeps me in the conversation. That's good."

That may be true. Those pesky intangible values may be very significant. But be honest with yourself. How much would you be willing to pay for them? That's the best indicator of their real value to you. If you think it would be worth paying somebody \$1000 per hour to gain those intangibles, then do it yourself. If you wouldn't pay ten cents per hour to do the job, then why in the world would you do it yourself?

You can apply this same kind of thinking to just about any marketing activity your marketing director throws at you. How much would you pay somebody per hour to do this task in your stead?

If that number is very much less than you'd earn from writing, then it probably makes much more sense to do the writing, not the marketing. If you can hire somebody to do the marketing for less than the rate you'd demand, then it probably makes sense to pay them to do it.

If the number is very much more than what you'd earn from your writing, then do the marketing.

You can use this principle to figure out how to say yes and how to say no on just about any required task that comes your way.

What about optional tasks? Does the same calculation apply?

Yes, but there's another decision to make for optional tasks -- the decision whether to just leave it undone. That's a simple decision.

If you can find somebody to do it for less than you're willing to pay, then hire them. Otherwise, don't worry about it because it's just not worth it to you.

There are a zillion ways to market your book. Your marketing director knows you can't do them all. Make her happy and do at least one of them really well. Make yourself happy and do only the ones that are worth it to you.

5) A Special Deal From Larry

My friend, Larry Brooks, just e-mailed me a few days ago to let me know that his latest e-book is now available, WARM HUGS FOR WRITERS.

It includes over 30 chapters, each containing a short essay on a nugget of wisdom about writing that Larry learned the hard way.

Larry's got a special deal going right now for his book. Just do these two things:

- * Buy WARM HUGS FOR WRITERS on Larry's web site or from Amazon.

- * Send Larry an email containing the electronic receipt, with the words "Randy Sent Me" in the subject line.

If you do those two things, Larry will send you a bonus e-book -- your choice of one of several of his other e-books on the craft of fiction or one of his e-book novels.

To find out all about WARM HUGS FOR WRITERS and see the list of bonus e-books Larry's offering and get his email address, check out this page:

<http://storyfix.com/warm-hugs-for-writers>

Larry always has good things to say about the craft of writing. He's one of my most respected teachers of fiction writing. And by the way, he's also a heck of a good novelist.

No, Larry didn't pay me to say any of that. I just like his stuff. A lot. You might too.

6) What's New At AdvancedFictionWriting.com

My book, WRITING FICTION FOR DUMMIES, has been selling well since it began shipping 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 well-known 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 come hear me speak in 2012, you can do so at one of these locations:

February 16-19, Writing for the Soul Conference,
Denver:
<http://www.christianwritersguild.com/conference/>

March 30-April 3, Mount Hermon Christian Writers
Conference, central California:
<http://mounthermon.org/adult/professionals/writers-conference>

August 13-16, Oregon Christian Writers Conference,
northern Oregon:
<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 and the Novelists, Inc. conference in New York in October, but have no plans to teach at either one of these.

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>

7) 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.AuthorMedia.com/blog>

Thomas is 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>

8) Steal This E-zine!

This E-zine is free, and I personally guarantee it's worth at least 7734 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 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 Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine, with more than 29,000 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.

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