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Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius.

"Fiction Writing = Organizing + Creating + Marketing"

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- 1) Welcome to the Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine!

Those of you who have joined in the past month (more than 500 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 help you bring my database up to date.

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.

* One of the best books I've read this year has one of the worst titles. Want to know what I learned from it about managing my life better? Check out my organizing column, "The Book With the Horrible Title."

* Have you been sucked into the story world of Downton Abbey yet? Are you wondering just what it is about this series that makes it so addictive? I can tell you why. Read my article on craft, "Why Downton Abbey Rocks."

* One way to get where you want to go is to work backwards from your ultimate goal. If your ultimate goal is to get published, do you know how to work backwards from that goal? I'll show you how in my marketing column, "Beginning With The End in Mind."

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

2) Organizing: The Book With the Horrible Title

Recently, a friend of mine recommended a book. He said it was a great book, but the title just didn't appeal to me. In fact, I hated the title. I thought it was horrible.

I almost didn't buy it. I almost didn't read it. I almost missed out on a really excellent book.

All because the title was horrible (at least it seemed horrible for me).

If you don't mind, I'll tell you what the book's about first and why I think you might love it. Then I'll tell you the title. For the moment, I'll simply call it "The Book With The Horrible Title."

If you're a writer, then your life is impossibly busy. You might imagine that you just need to manage your time better and you'll be fine.

Maybe so, but there are zillions of books out there on time management and if time management alone could solve the problem of too much busyness, then it should be solved by now.

Maybe time management isn't the answer. At least not the whole answer.

The Book With The Horrible Title argues that your most precious resource is your energy, not your time.

Manage your energy well and your life will be well.
Manage your energy poorly and your life will be hell.

Here are the main principles you'll find in chapter one of The Book With The Horrible Title:

- * You have four separate sources of energy -- physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual.

- * Managing each source of energy means avoiding either overuse or underuse -- there's a sweet spot which is neither too much nor too little.

- * To build your "strength" in each form of energy, you have to train yourself like an athlete, first pushing yourself intensely and then giving yourself time to recover.

- * The key to managing your energy is to develop rituals.

These principles ring true for me, although let me mention a few caveats, because the above principles contain some red flag words.

First caveat: "Energy" is a well-defined word for physical activity. It's not clear whether it's so well defined for our emotional or mental lives, but it's plausible.

Second caveat: I tend to be wary of anyone who talks about "spiritual energy" because it frankly sounds weird to me. When the authors of The Book With The Horrible Title talk about spiritual energy, they're talking about building your character.

And what is "character?" They define it this way: "The courage and conviction to live by our values, even when doing so requires personal sacrifice and hardship."

OK, that's not weird. I'm good with that.

Third caveat: The word "ritual" is a loaded word, and it might sound like this is going to be another one of those weird woo-woo books.

The authors use the word "ritual" as a synonym for the phrase "a highly specific routine for managing energy."

As an example, when a pro tennis player takes time

between each point to bounce the ball twice, visualize the next serve, step to the line, bounce the ball twice again, and then serve, that's a ritual. He's catching his breath and focusing his mind, managing his energy wisely.

The value of a ritual is that it's a habit -- so you don't spend a lot of conscious effort on deciding how and when to do things you must do. Since you do them the same way every time, they're effortless and you can spend your energy on what matters.

This idea of using "rituals" makes good sense to me. A ritual is a habit that improves your performance. There's nothing weird about that.

One of the key points of *The Book With The Horrible Title* is that most people tend to live their lives out of balance in at least one of the four key areas -- physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual.

"Out of balance" means that we either underwork ourselves or overwork ourselves. It's out of balance to be a couch potato. It's also out of balance to exercise so much that you break down.

Some people are out of balance in all four areas, which is why they feel overwhelmed and exhausted all the time.

I think the book is spot on here. Most writers I know tend to underwork on physical exercise. They tend to overwork on the mental stuff. Fiction writers tend to be pretty good about managing their emotional lives (although I know plenty who underdo it or overdo it). And the novelists I know tend to be all over the map when it comes to spiritual exercise.

Solving a problem comes in two stages. First you diagnose the problem. Then you figure out the solution.

The Book With The Horrible Title likewise has two parts.

In Part I, you learn how to think about managing your energy -- physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual -- and how to know if you're underworking or overworking.

In Part II, you learn how to train your "muscles" in each of these areas by creating rituals that first work you hard, then allow you recovery time.

I have to say that I'm impressed. *The Book With The Horrible Title* has great ideas. I'm rethinking how I do things right now, based on what I'm learning from the book.

But as I noted, The Book With The Horrible Title has a title that I don't much love. Are you dying to know what it is?

The actual title of The Book With The Horrible Title is THE POWER OF FULL ENGAGEMENT, by Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz.

I hope you see why I don't like the title. It doesn't tell me what the book's about. ("Full engagement" is an idea defined in the book, but I don't think it means much until AFTER you've read the book.)

I haven't finished reading The Book With The Horrible Title, but I'm well into Part II and what I've read so far has been terrific.

Except the title, of course. Nobody's perfect.

I highly recommend THE POWER OF FULL ENGAGEMENT. Read it. Analyze your own life. Put it into action. Let me know a year from now if it made a difference in your life.

I bet it will.

3) Creating: Why Downton Abbey Rocks

Downton Abbey is the outrageously popular TV series set in the home of an aristocratic British family during the years 1912 through 1920.

On the face of it, the show's popularity makes no sense. 1912? What was happening in 1912? Oh yeah, the Titanic, but what else?

Why is Downton Abbey getting such incredible reviews? Why has it won six Emmy Awards and a Golden Globe? Why has it become the best-selling DVD box set on Amazon?

In a word, it's story. Downton Abbey is packed full of story.

And what does "story" mean, precisely?

Story is characters in conflict. Characters with impossible dreams. Characters willing to do anything to reach their dreams.

Let's look at the characters of Downton Abbey and their impossible dreams.

Lady Mary Crawley is young and beautiful, the eldest daughter of the Earl of Grantham. As the story begins, her fiance has just died on the Titanic. Mary's problem is that she doesn't have a problem with that. She didn't much love the guy, even though she was engaged to him.

Why would any girl agree to marry a guy she didn't love? Simple. She was pushed into it. Mary is the oldest of three daughters, but there aren't any sons in the Crawley family.

Unfortunately, the estate and the title and most of the family money have been "entailed," meaning that they will be inherited by the nearest male relative, not by Mary.

This is massively unfair, but the family has hoped to make it less unfair by pushing Mary into marrying the heir. Mary has gone along with this, until now. Not happily, but she's gone along.

Now the heir is dead and Mary doesn't feel sad about him. The only thing she feels sad about is that she doesn't feel sad.

Something is deeply wrong with Mary. She knows what it is. She has no purpose in life. As the story begins, her main purpose is to find her purpose.

Mary wants to make her own decisions in life. And that's impossible. Women in her position don't make decisions. They have their decisions made for them.

With the loss of her unwanted fiance, something snaps in Mary. From now on, she isn't going to have decisions foisted upon her. She's going to make her own decisions.

If the only decisions Mary has power to make are bad ones, then by heavens, she'll make horrible, wretched, idiotic decisions. But she will choose her own way in life. She will. Starting now.

The news of the Titanic arrives on the same day that the new valet, John Bates, arrives to begin his duties. Bates is an old Army friend of Lord Grantham, and lately some shrapnel has shifted in his knee, giving him a serious limp. But nobody knows about his injury until he arrives to begin work.

Unfortunately, Downton Abbey has zillions of stairs and no elevators. How can Bates manage his duties when he can't carry things even on level ground? Will Lord Grantham have to get rid of his new valet?

Bates is one of the show's most likable characters. He never complains. Never feels sorry for himself. Never

tells anyone about the failings of the other servants. He's honest and kind and decent. All he wants is to have a job, and that is apparently the one thing he's going to be denied.

Bates has a rival. The head footman, Thomas, is young, strong, and handsome, and he wants the job of valet.

Thomas has a massive chip on his shoulder because he's "different" -- which is his term for the fact that he's gay. In 1912, that's a serious problem.

Thomas will do whatever it takes to get the job of valet, and if he has to lie and cheat to get Bates removed, no problem. But whether he gets the job or not, Thomas will never be happy. Because he's "different."

Mary's mother is Cora, originally from an American family, now a middle-aged English aristocrat. Cora desperately wants to get her three daughters married off well to nice men. Now that the heir is dead, it's time to reopen the question of that wretched entail. Why can't it be broken?

Cora repeatedly asks her husband to get the family lawyer to break the entail. And he repeatedly refuses, claiming that it can't be done. Cora strikes up an alliance with her mother-in-law, Violet, who also thinks that the best course is to break the entail.

Violet is an acid-tongued old woman who gets most of the funniest lines of dialogue in the series. Violet wants the same thing Cora wants -- to get the daughters married off, and most especially to see Mary keep the family fortune. But neither Violet nor Cora can persuade Lord Grantham to try to break the entail.

Why won't Lord Grantham at least try? He certainly loves his daughter Mary, and wants to see her married well and prosperous. But breaking the entail would probably not succeed, he's convinced. Mary might get the money, but never the estate.

Lord Grantham has poured his entire life into maintaining the estate. He married Cora for her money because it would enable him to keep the estate. Now how can he separate the estate from the money? The estate would die, and he can't tolerate that.

For Lord Grantham, the solution is simple. Let Mary marry the new heir. That would be young Matthew Crawley, a third cousin once removed. He's a handsome guy, although (gack) he's a lawyer. But even lawyers can often be trained.

Lord Grantham's plan is to train young Matthew to be the new Earl. And to convince Mary to marry him. Why won't Mary do what she's told? It's the obviously right thing. Lord Grantham loves Mary, but she can be so infuriating sometimes.

Matthew's certainly a nice guy, handsome, kind, honest. If Mary didn't feel forced to marry him, she'd probably be interested. But Mary's a stubborn cuss, and she won't be pushed.

So Matthew has no chance, even before she meets him. Matthew has no chance, even though he falls in love with her on sight. Matthew would do anything to convince her to marry him. But nothing is enough. He can't have her, plain and simple.

There's enough so far to make a movie, but not a TV series. There has to be more, much more. And there is. Practically every other character has something they desperately want -- and can't have.

Edith, the homely second daughter of Lord and Lady Grantham, would love to have a husband. But every time she sets her cap for a man, her beautiful older sister Mary steps in and flirts with him. Edith has no chance for a man and she hates Mary. She'd do anything to ruin Mary's life. Anything.

Sybil, the youngest daughter, is interested in politics and women's rights. But what chance does she have to do anything that matters? She's been educated by a governess, which means she's learned nothing. She can't do anything, because it's not ALLOWED, and that drives her crazy.

Anna, the head housemaid, is a thirty-something woman, not quite pretty, not quite plain. She's sweet and kind and she's naturally attracted to the new valet, Mr. Bates. But Bates has some dark secrets in his past, things he can't talk about.

Anna knows instinctively that Bates is protecting somebody. But Mr. Bates won't talk about it, and until he does, Anna's love is going unrequited.

Gwen, another housemaid, isn't happy with her life in service. She's been taking a course in typing and shorthand and would love to get a job as a secretary.

But nobody will hire a housemaid with no experience. Gwen has no chance to pursue her dreams. Unless Sybil gives her a hand, and even then, the odds are long.

Cora's maid, Sarah O'Brien, is a bitter woman who secretly despises her employers but adopts a fawning attitude when they're around. She's in league with Thomas to make life miserable for Mr. Bates, and incidentally Anna. For no good reason. It's not clear what drives O'Brien, but her goal is clear -- to make everyone else miserable. She's extremely good at that.

The housekeeper, Mrs. Hughes, is a quiet soul, but she secretly wonders what her life would have been like if she'd married the farmer who asked her many years ago.

But she'll never know, will she? Unless . . . she gets a second chance at love. Will she get that chance? Would she take it?

The second footman, William, is a young man fresh off the farm. He means well, but he's none too bright, and the highest ambition he can imagine is to rise to the position of first footman.

William has a thing for the kitchen maid, Daisy, and he'd be ever so happy if only she would notice him.

Daisy is a young girl from a miserable background. If her self esteem got any lower, it would be underground.

Daisy is in love with the footman Thomas, who rarely gives her the time of day. Thomas only ever pays attention to Daisy because he knows it hurts William.

Daisy is too naive to realize that Thomas is never going to love her because he's just not interested in women.

Mrs. Patmore, the cook, is slowly losing her eyesight. She's a kind soul, but she thinks she'll be sacked if anyone learns she can hardly see. Mrs. Patmore only wants to keep her job, and she's terrified, so she takes out her frustrations on Daisy.

The butler, Mr. Carson, runs the household and supervises all the other servants. It's a constant challenge. Mr. Bates can't carry. Thomas is a conniving SOB, but you can't pin anything on him. O'Brien is cruel and arrogant to the servants, but she's always sweetness and light around her employers, so there's no getting rid of her.

Mr. Carson feels that the honor of Downton Abbey rests on his shoulders. It's a heavy responsibility. Carson desperately wants to maintain tradition, but that's impossible. The world is changing and soon it's going to be unrecognizable.

Butlers should have no favorites, but Carson loves Mary like his own daughter and he'd do anything to see her happily married.

Mr. Carson has a secret from his past, and it would kill him if anyone knew. But the only person who knows his secret lives far away. For the moment.

There's more, of course. I've left out a few major characters and all the minor characters.

But I've covered enough to make it clear what drives Downton Abbey. Here is the secret that will drive your own fiction to success, if you let it:

Every character in Downton Abbey behaves as if he or she were the hero of the story. Each one desperately wants something. Something he can't have. Something she will do almost anything to get.

When you write your novel, it's tempting to bring in characters solely to serve the story of your protagonist. Characters who are there merely to play the role of Sidekick or Villain or Love Interest or Humorous Relief or whatever. Characters without their own hopes and dreams.

That is the road to second-rate fiction.

Give each character a dream. Preferably an impossible dream. Something your character will do anything to get.

When a person will do anything to get what they want, then anything can happen.

That's why Downton Abbey rocks. That's what will make your story rock too.

4) Marketing: Beginning With The End in Mind

In Stephen Covey's classic book, *THE 7 HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE*, he recommends that you "begin with the end in mind."

He's talking about living your life in a way that you'll be proud of it when you die. The "end" he has in mind here is death.

But beginning with the end in mind makes sense, no matter what path you're taking, and the path we writers

care about is the road to publication.

The "end" of that path is the happy day when an editor calls you to say, "We voted today and we've decided to offer you a contract on your book."

That's a good end to a long, long path. Getting published by a traditional, royalty-paying publisher is validation for your work. (You may also consider it validation for you, but it's really just validation for the novel you wrote.)

It's important to know the "end" you're trying to reach, because then it's not hard to work backward from that "end."

Let's do that now. Let's work backward several steps.

What comes before you get the contract?

That's easy. The last thing that happens before your editor calls to offer you a contract is that the publishing committee meets and your editor pitches your book to them and they vote on it.

What happens before the committee meets?

That's also easy. The editor reads your manuscript (and probably also your proposal) and decides that this is a manuscript she wants to champion.

What happens before your editor reads your manuscript and proposal?

There are two normal ways to get a manuscript in front of an editor. Either you or your agent send the editor the manuscript.

It doesn't matter who sends the manuscript. The only thing that matters is that the editor recognizes the name of the sender.

If your agent sends the manuscript, the editor accepts it because she knows your agent.

If you send the manuscript, the editor accepts it because she knows you.

If the editor doesn't know either of you, then she doesn't even look at your manuscript. She's too busy dealing with professionals to be bothered with amateurs.

And how in the world would the editor know you? What has to happen in order for the editor to know you?

That's extremely simple. The editor will only know you if you have met her. The usual way that happens is that you meet her at a writing conference and pitch her your story and she says, "Wow! Sounds interesting. Send me your manuscript and/or your proposal."

If meeting an editor at a writing conference sounds scary, you might think that it's better to just get an agent and let him do it. OK, fine. Let's say your agent send the editor the manuscript.

What happens before the agent sends the editor your manuscript?

Again, very easy. Your agent first has to offer to represent you and you have to accept that offer of representation.

Why does an agent offer to represent you? What has to happen first?

That's also easy. You send that agent a copy of your manuscript and/or proposal, and he recognizes your name on the cover, reads it, and decides that you are a talent worth spending time on.

Uh-oh. How would the agent recognize your name?

The agent will only recognize your name if he's met you. The usual way that happens is at a writing conference. You make an appointment and pitch your story to the agent, and he says, "Wow! Sounds interesting. Send me your manuscript and/or your proposal."

You may be wondering why you have to meet people in person. Can't you just mail in your manuscript? Or e-mail it? Are agents and editors too snooty to read their mail or their e-mail?

No, they're not snooty. They're busy. They're overwhelmed with the zillions of other writers sending in stuff by mail and e-mail. Your mail or e-mail is lost in the flood. Unless they know you.

A writing conference is your best chance to capture the undivided attention of an editor or agent -- for fifteen minutes. You make an appointment. You've got a quarter of an hour to show what you've got. No interruptions. Nobody else.

Sure that's scary. Sure that's hard. So was getting your driver's license. So was getting your first kiss.

Lots of things are scary and hard, and you do them because the rewards are worth the risk. Life is about doing the scary and hard things you need to do to get what you want.

If you want to meet an editor or agent and have a more-than-fair shot at making an impression, then a writing conference is an excellent place to do it. In my 20+ years as a writer, I haven't seen a better way to make that connection.

About once a year, I write a column in this e-zine about the enormous benefits of going to writing conferences. I believe in conferences.

I sold my first book (and my second, and my third) on my own, without an agent, as a direct result of the contacts I made at writing conferences. I met my first agent (and my second and my third) at conferences.

Most of my published novelist friends did the same.

No need to belabor this point. Either you're ready to go to a conference and make some connections, or you aren't.

If you are, then what are you waiting for? The year is early. Make it happen.

If you aren't, then now might be a good time for me to mention that writing conferences are a great way to learn more about the craft of writing fiction.

I joined my first critique group as a result of going to my first conference. I met my first writing buddy at another conference. I first heard the phrase "you're going to get published soon" from a novelist at a conference.

I don't usually make a sales pitch for my products in this column, but I will now, because it would be wrong not to mention it.

I've got an e-book available, the WRITER'S CONFERENCE SURVIVAL GUIDE, that tells you all about how to pick the right conference for you and how to get the most out of it.

You can find out all about the WRITER'S CONFERENCE SURVIVAL GUIDE here:
<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/links/wcsg.php>

If the "end" you have in mind is to get published with a traditional, royalty-paying publisher, then a writing conference is very likely to be one of the last steps you take before you reach that "end."

Nothing happens unless you take action. Go to it.

5) What's New At AdvancedFictionWriting.com

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 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:

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>

6) Randy Recommends . . .

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

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

<http://www.MargieLawson.com>

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

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

<http://www.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) Steal This E-zine!

This E-zine is free, and I personally guarantee it's worth at least 333333 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>

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Award-winning novelist Randy Ingermanson, "the Snowflake Guy," publishes the free monthly Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine, with more than 30,000 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
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