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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 (more than 500 of you signed up in March), 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.

\* You can do amazing things when you set yourself a challenge. Or you can fall flat on your face. Do you know how to define a great challenge that will get the best out of you? Find out in my organizing column, "The Incredible Power of a Challenge."

\* Nothing teaches you more about good fiction writing than analyzing a great novel. *THE HUNGER GAMES* is a great novel. Want to learn some lessons from it that you can apply to your own novel, right now? Read my craft column, "The Magic in The Hunger Games."

\* When Mark Coker (CEO of Smashwords) talks, I listen. Mark recently released a new free e-book on what makes an e-book successful. I'm reading his book right now and loving it. Want in on some of his secrets? Check out my review of his book in my marketing column, "24 Secrets of Ebook Publishing Success."

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

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## 2) Organizing: The Incredible Power of a Challenge

Can you do 100 pushups in less than 2 minutes?

Can you read 1000 words per minute?

Can you write a novel in 30 days?

Most people can't do any of these things. But quite a few people have found that they can do one or more of them -- once they've set a challenge for themselves.

You can do amazing things when you challenge yourself, and when you make a plan to meet that challenge.

On May 25, 1961, John Kennedy announced an ambitious challenge for the US -- to put a man on the moon before the end of the decade.

Kennedy had strong reasons for setting this challenge. As he said in a speech at Rice University, "The exploration of space will go ahead, whether we join in it or not, and it is one of the great adventures of all

time, and no nation which expects to be the leader of other nations can expect to stay behind in the race for space."

He also knew that it would be hard and expensive. Accepting this challenge meant that other good things would go undone.

So why do it? Part of the answer was that taking on difficult challenges makes you strong. In Kennedy's words, "We choose to go to the moon. We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win, and the others, too."

What makes a good challenge? A challenge should be all of the following:

- \* Objective
- \* Worthwhile
- \* Difficult
- \* Possible

Kennedy could have chosen many ways to challenge the US to explore space and to advance technology. Most of those ways would have been difficult to measure or verify.

Putting a man on the moon is objective. You either put footprints in lunar dust or you don't. You can see the results. You can prove you did it. Your vision is clear and focused.

In issuing the challenge, Kennedy made the case that space exploration was worth doing. It would be an adventure. It would establish US leadership. It would advance technology. And it must be done by a nation intent on using space for peaceful purposes, rather than for filling it with weapons of mass destruction.

But Kennedy made it clear that the challenge would be extremely difficult. The US could do it only with a maximum effort. Half measures would be worse than none at all.

However, Kennedy was confident that it could be done. Humans could walk on the moon -- if only they chose to go.

As it turned out, Kennedy was right on all counts. The space program has resulted in massive technological advances. It was hard. But the US did it in the time frame allotted.

A great challenge led to great results.

A bad challenge generally leads nowhere.

If a challenge is subjective, then it's a bad challenge, because you'll never really know if you got there, so you aren't as driven to try.

If a challenge is not worthwhile, then it's a bad challenge, because when the going gets tough, you've got no reason to stay tough and keep going.

If a challenge is not difficult, then it's a bad challenge because it sets the bar too low. Yeah, sure you can challenge yourself to run a 20-minute mile. For most people, that's no challenge at all. A challenge ought to stretch you, to change you, to make you a better person.

If a challenge is impossible, then it's a bad challenge because it's pointless. You can't jump over the moon with muscle power. Trying hard may make you a better jumper, but you won't try nearly as hard as you would if you set the goal to be possible.

In my own experience, I've often found that I could do a lot more when I set myself a challenge. Something objective, worthwhile, difficult, and possible. It's easy to go easy. But going easy usually means not going very far or very fast.

If you're writing a novel and you seem to be spinning your wheels, it may be because you haven't set the task as a challenge. Challenging yourself is fun. It focuses your efforts. It drives out distractions.

What's your current challenge?

Is it objectively verifiable?

Is it worth doing?

Is it difficult enough?

Is it possible?

A typical challenge for a novelist might be this. "I will have the first draft of my complete novel of at least \_\_\_\_\_ words written by this date \_\_\_\_\_."

If you don't have a challenge, then there's no better time than now to create one for yourself. Once you take on a challenge, you won't be bored.

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### 3) Creating: The Magic of The Hunger Games

I believe that every novelist should be reading the current bestsellers.

You should definitely be reading the bestsellers in your own category.

You should also be reading the massive breakout bestsellers that are selling millions of copies per year, even if they aren't in your category.

Every novelist should read THE DA VINCI CODE. Every novelist should read THE SHACK. Every novelist should read the Harry Potter series and TWILIGHT and THE LOVELY BONES and THE GIRL WITH THE DRAGON TATTOO.

These should be no-brainers. If you want to write for the modern reader, then you need to have a feel for what the modern reader actually reads. Yes, even if you think popular fiction is crap. Even if you write literary fiction. Even if all your favorite authors died in the 19th century.

Every novelist should read THE HUNGER GAMES. I've taught on the craft of THE HUNGER GAMES at a couple of recent conferences and was shocked to see that many of my students hadn't read it.

Seeing the movie isn't enough. Any novel has interior monologue and interior emotion that the movie won't capture. Any novel has a voice that generally will get muzzled or lost in the movie. Any novel has scenes that will be dropped when adapted to a screenplay.

Once you've read any of these novels, you may find it useful to analyze them -- to figure out what makes them tick.

THE HUNGER GAMES is a great book to analyze because it's extremely well written (not all mega-bestsellers are). I can almost guarantee that if you analyze THE HUNGER GAMES, you'll immediately see ways to improve your writing.

I generally use my well-known Snowflake method to analyze a book. Many writers (but not all) find the Snowflake helpful in designing their story before they write the first draft.

But anybody should find the Snowflake useful when analyzing a story that has already been written. Why? Because most of the steps of the Snowflake correspond to time-tested methods of analysis that writers have been using for hundreds of years (in some cases for thousands of years).

The ten steps of the Snowflake are summarized here:  
<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/art/snowflake.php>

The first step in the Snowflake is to summarize the storyline in one sentence. This is sometimes called your "elevator pitch." The one-sentence summary of your novel will serve you well as a selling tool forever.

Here is my one-sentence summary of THE HUNGER GAMES:

"A 16-year-old girl volunteers to take her sister's place in an arena where twenty-four teens will battle each other to the death."

That's 25 words, which I consider the upper limit for a one-sentence summary. I prefer to see a one-sentence summary in the range of 10 to 15 words.

The goal is to tell the main idea of the novel in as few words as possible. Shorter is always better, if it captures the story.

The shortest one-sentence summary I've ever seen is the summary for my friend Tosca Lee's forthcoming novel ISCARIOT. Here it is: "Judas".

That's one word and it tells you everything you need to know about Tosca's book.

The purpose of a one-sentence summary is to tell people whether they're interested or not. That's all.

Notice that I didn't say that the purpose of the one-sentence summary is to sell your book. That would be crazy. Most people are not in the target audience for your book. If they're not in your target audience, they probably won't like it, and there's no reason you should want them to buy it.

You want a one-sentence summary that immediately gives the hearer enough information to know whether they're in your target audience or not.

If you like suspense fiction, then the one-sentence summary I gave above for THE HUNGER GAMES immediately tells you that you're going to love this story. If you don't like suspense fiction and the thought of teens killing teens makes you sick to your stomach, then you'll probably hate the story.

A one-sentence summary should hit emotive hot buttons. Notice the hot buttons I hit in the summary above:

\* "A 16-year-old girl" -- All adults can remember being 16. It's generally a crazy mixture of really great things and incredibly horrible things. This is automatically a hot button.

\* "volunteers to take her sister's place" --  
Self-sacrifice is always a hot button for readers. Most of us are only altruistic when it doesn't cost us much. But we would like to be altruistic on a heroic scale.

\* "arena" -- This has been a hot button ever since the Romans put the first two gladiators together.

\* "battle each other to the death" -- Single combat to the death is wired into our emotive genes. The idea was already old when David faced Goliath three thousand years ago. You may wish we were more civilized than that, but we aren't.

A great one-sentence summary is focused. Notice what I left out of my one-sentence summary. Not a word about the romantic subplot. Not a word on politics. Not a word on the dystopic future. All of those are great elements, but they're not central.

The central story is combat to the death in an arena. Less is more when you're writing a one-sentence summary of your novel. You achieve perfection in a one-sentence summary when there is nothing more to remove.

One final point about your one-sentence summary. It should focus on what happens early in your story.

It will often focus on the so-called "inciting incident" -- the incident early in the story that kicks your characters out of their ordinary world. That's what I've done here.

It may sometimes focus on a disaster that happens as much as one quarter of the way into the story. Rarely will you need to tell anything beyond that in a one-sentence summary. You don't want to tell too much.

Your purpose in writing a one-sentence summary is to create a "story question" in the mind of the hearer. A "story question" is always of the form "Will she or won't she \_\_\_\_\_?"

In *THE HUNGER GAMES*, the story question is "Will she or won't she survive the arena?"

Your story question depends crucially on what category you're writing.

In a mystery, the story question is generally, "Will he or won't he find the murderer?"

In a romance novel, the story question is almost always, "Will she or won't she marry That Guy?"

One thing your one-sentence summary should NEVER do is to give away the ending. The one-sentence summary is a selling tool. It ignites curiosity. It never satisfies that curiosity.

The whole point of a one-sentence summary is to get one of the following two responses:

\* "Sorry, not interested." (This will be the most common response. Sorry, but most people just won't care one peanut for your novel.)

\* "Wow! That sounds cool! Tell me more!" (This is the response you should expect from your target audience, and from nobody else.)

There is a third response you may get from your one-sentence summary:

\* "Hmumum, sounds pretty good." (If you are hearing this, then you either don't have a story or you haven't yet figured out what it is. "Pretty good" is a death sentence for your story. You want people to love it or hate it. If your one-sentence summary is "pretty good" then kill it or fix it, but don't keep it.)

We've now got a one-sentence summary of THE HUNGER GAMES. Have you written a one-sentence summary of your own novel? Does it do the job? Can you make it better? Should you kill it and create a new one?

Next month, we'll look at the large-scale structure of THE HUNGER GAMES -- the so-called "three-act structure."

Your homework: If you haven't read THE HUNGER GAMES, read it before next month and then summarize it in a paragraph of no more than five sentences.

This is harder than it sounds. A lot harder. Unless you're a professional novelist, you'll find it almost impossible to write a one-paragraph summary that does the story justice.

My challenge to you: Try anyway. It'll be good for you. Hard work makes you strong.

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#### 4) Marketing: 24 Secrets of Ebook Publishing Success

I'm currently reading a free e-book by Mark Coker, the CEO of Smashwords. I heard Mark speak last year at the Novelists, Inc. conference, and I was tremendously impressed with him.



Smashwords is an e-book distributor that helps you publish your work and distribute it to most of the major online retailers (all except Amazon).

Mark's new e-book is free. You can get it at [Smashwords.com](http://www.smashwords.com). The title is THE SECRETS TO EBOOK PUBLISHING SUCCESS. You can get it here: <http://www.smashwords.com/books/view/145431>

Here are my thoughts on a few of Mark's secrets:

Secret 1: "Write a great book."

This is the conventional wisdom among publishing professionals, and I agree. One of the linchpins of my own strategy has always been that marketing is easy if you have great craft. So spend your energy developing your craft.

This is why my own teaching focuses so heavily on craft. You might get some short term success by brilliantly marketing a second-rate book. But you'll be forever marked as a "great marketer, lousy writer." Who wants that?

Mark thinks that about 80% of the success of a book is due to its quality. I don't know whether this is true or how one would prove this. It seems plausible, but I'm not married to a number.

The main point is that great marketing starts with a great product. If you want to make your marketing easier, improve your craft.

Secret #5: "Write another great book."

Mark's point here is that every book you write is a marketing platform for every other book you write.

What? Not Facebook? Not Twitter? Not your blog?

Well, no. A post on Facebook or Twitter has a lifetime of about 3 hours and then it's gone. After that, it has no more effect on the world and can't do a blessed thing to help market any of your books.

Whereas a book you wrote ten years ago may very well be the road by which a new reader discovers you today. If you've written another 20 books in those ten years, then that old book now serves as a sample of all 20 of your other books.

And furthermore, each of those 20 serves as marketing for the ten-year-old book. And for each other.

All your books are marketing for all your other books.

There is a simple math rule to describe roughly how effectively your books market each other.

Having 2 books published is about 4 times as good as having only 1 book.

Having 3 books published is about 9 times as good.

Having 10 books published is about 100 times as good.

Every book is helping market every other book. (As long as you have followed Secret #1 and written a great book. Bad books don't help each other.)

Yes, it's true that you can get short-term results from Facebook or Twitter. Nobody seems to know how much, but you can get something.

Yes, it's also true that you can get results from your blog. A blog post is forever, and so a blog can give you long-term results.

But e-books are forever too. They never go out of print unless you get embarrassed by them and pull them from the online retailers. The advantage of an e-book is that it's the best indicator of what your other books are like. If a reader likes one of your books, she'll probably like all of them.

So write your best e-book and then write another, and another, and another.

Secret 11: "Give (some of) your books away for free."

I have long been a fan of giving away some things for free. And not your worst stuff, either. I believe in giving away some of your very best stuff. Give away some of your gold.

Just as an example, one of the very best ideas I've ever had was the ten steps for designing a novel that I named the "Snowflake method." I posted an article on the Snowflake on my web site about nine years ago. It has since been viewed over 2.5 million times and it has made me famous. I constantly hear from people who say that the Snowflake has revolutionized their writing. It's not for everybody, but it's gold for many people.

Giving stuff away free works. Mark Coker does this a lot. You can convert your books to e-books on Smashwords at no cost. You can post them for sale there at no up-front cost. (Smashwords will sell them for you and keep a small percentage as a consignment fee. This is a great deal for you and it gives Smashwords an incentive to give you great service.)

Mark's e-book is free. Why? It helps authors and it gets the word out about Smashwords. Any writer will benefit from his e-book, and many of them will choose

to work with Smashwords, which will then eventually earn him a tidy profit.

I don't think you should give everything away for free. You need to eat and pay your bills. But giving away some of your very best stuff can make good sense.

Mark estimates that free books on Smashwords are downloaded 50 to 100 times more than paid books. This works wonderfully if you have a number of other titles, because the free book acts as marketing for all the others. (Remember Secret #6.)

Secret #17: "Platform building starts yesterday."

Your platform is whatever you have in place that allows you to reach readers. This may be a speaking business, a web site, a blog, a Facebook page or profile, a Twitter presence, an e-mail list, or whatever.

If you don't have a platform today, then you can't use it for marketing your books. But you can use your books to help build your platform. Then tomorrow, your platform may be of some value in promoting your books.

Mark has a simple formula for building a strong platform: Be useful to other people.

By no great coincidence, this is essentially the same as my own formula for building a platform: Say things that are valuable to other people.

You don't actually have to say much about your products when you follow this formula. If you are useful to other people, if you say things they value, then they'll tell other people about you and your platform will grow.

A small fraction of those you reach with your platform will buy your products. It's silly to worry about those who don't buy your stuff. Focus on doing things that make the world a better place and you'll be rewarded financially. Maybe a little; maybe a lot.

I've talked about 4 of Mark's secrets. There are a couple of dozen more. Here are some of the most interesting:

- \* "Practice metadata magic"
- \* "Understand the algorithm"
- \* "How retailers select titles for feature promotion"
- \* "Architect for virality"
- \* "Practice the never-ending book launch"
- \* "Maximize distribution"
- \* "Think beyond price"

I highly recommend THE SECRETS OF EBOOK PUBLISHING SUCCESS. There is gold in this e-book. And you can't

beat the price. Free.

The world would be a better place if all authors took the advice Mark gives in this book. Authors would do better. Readers would have an easier time finding the books they want.

Here's the direct link to Mark's e-book again:  
<http://www.smashwords.com/books/view/145431>

Have fun!

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

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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. 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.

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

This E-zine is free, and I personally guarantee it's worth at least 101 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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#### 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 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 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.

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

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