
The Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine

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

Those of you who have joined in the past month (nearly 300 of you are new since my last issue), welcome to my e-zine! You can find all the previous issues on my web site at:
<http://www.advancedfictionwriting.com/html/afwezine.html>

Drat, drat, and drat! I had intended to get this issue out yesterday--the first Tuesday of the month. Alas, I was busy yesterday working furiously on a Tiger Marketing Project, which I was hoping to show off in this issue. Well, it won't happen. My project is not quite ready for prime time. I expect that it will be ready soon, and then I'll drop you a short Special Edition to show off my handiwork.

Because of that, there will be no Tiger Marketing column in this issue. (As you all recall, Tiger Marketing is a method of marketing that lets your customers find YOU, rather than you having to shotgun the world with irritating ads for products it doesn't care about.) I'll do a Show-And-Tell of my little project as soon as it is safe to show.

In this issue, I'll tell you something important you should know about keeping your email address from being harvested by people who want to sell you obnoxious products.

I'll also give a (rare) product endorsement for a time-management tool I've started using.

Finally, I'd like to talk about the Big Picture in story structure. Last summer, we talked extensively about the Little Picture. Now it's time to zoom out a bit. I'll talk first about the theory and then show how it works in practice for two movies: Pirates of the Caribbean; and Pride and Prejudice.

2) Email safety

A friend asked me recently how to deal with all those annoying unwanted ads that come to your email in-box by the hundreds. There's a four-letter word for this that rhymes with "ham". Unfortunately, if I use that term here, this email will be labelled as being, um, "ham" by your "ham-filter" and you won't get this email. But I think you know what I mean by "ham".

Anyway, my answer to my friend was that you should do all in your power NOT to get on the "ham" email lists to begin with. There are wicked orc-like beings who write programs that crawl around the web looking for links that look like this:
"mailto:joeschmoe@somecompany.com".

In a web browser, this shows up as a link. If you click on it, your email program pops up with the email address "joeschmoe@somecompany.com" already filled in. This is a very convenient way for webmasters to let visitors on your web site send you an email.

It's also a very stupid way.

The reason it's stupid is because of those pesky web crawlers. When they see that "mailto" prefix, they grab the email address "joeschmoe@somecompany.com" and send it back to the bad guys, who collect tons of these email addresses. They stick them in databases and sell them to those obnoxious "ham" people. And then poor Joe Schmoe starts getting unwanted email to help him refinance his hovel, or to watch Paris Hilton doing naughty tricks, or to increase the size of various body parts.

There is an easy way to avoid all this mess which I will tell you here. I didn't invent this idea. Competent webmasters should know this trick. If they don't, then they should be spanked. Severely.

The solution is just a wee bit techie, so if you're not techie, give this to your webmaster. The idea is to replace the "mailto" link with a slightly different link that does the same thing, but in a way that the web crawlers aren't designed to look for. So they pass you by, and your name doesn't end up on the "ham" lists.

First, let's look at the WRONG WAY to do it. A typical "mailto" link would look like this:

```
<a href="mailto:joeschmoe@somecompany.com">Email me</a>
```

What appears in a web browser is "Email me" underlined as a link.

The right way to do this is to follow a two-step process.

1) Modify the above line to call a JavaScript function that calls the email program in an obscure way. So replace the above line with this:

```
<a href="#" onclick="contactMe()">Email me</a>
```

2) Add a couple of lines of JavaScript in the header of the web page HTML file. They should look like this:

```
<script language="javascript" type="text/javascript">function  
makeAddress(name, domain, extension){return "mai" + "lto:" +  
name + "@" + domain + "." + extension}</script>  
<script language="javascript" type="text/javascript">function  
contactMe(){document.location=makeAddress("joeschmoe", "somecompany", "com");}  
</script>
```

Each of the lines above that starts out "<script" is a single line that should not be broken up with any carriage returns.

It should be clear that you need to change the various parts such as "joeschmoe", "somecompany", and "com" to the appropriate parts of your own email address.

That's all! If you do this, those crawlers won't find your email address. And you won't be getting force-fed "ham" every day.

If all of the above is obscure to you, your webmaster should understand it easily.

3) Managing Your Time

Frankly, I'm a lazy cuss and I hate to waste time doing boring and routine stuff. I'm also a bit forgetful, so I need to make a To Do List, or I forget to do things.

The problem is that making To Do Lists is boring and routine. I never get everything done on my daily list, so I wind up writing "Neuter the Cat" at the top of my list for six weeks in a row. This is a waste of time and ink. Not to mention that Muffin then goes through puberty and starts creating Baby Muffins all over the

neighborhood.

Not too long ago, I decided there MUST be a better way to manage my To Do List. The thing had over 120 lines! I kid you not. It was unmanageable. And Muffin had grown a goatee and was sweet-talking my daughters. Something had to be done.

So I went looking on the web to see if there was software out there to help me manage my To Do List From Hell. I read through a list of about 30 different products at VersionTracker.com. I downloaded 6 that looked interesting. I fired them all up. 3 of them looked VERY good. I played with all 3.

1 of them stood out, a program called "Life Balance." It has a 30-day free trial period. After that, you have to pay \$65 to get a permanent license. I tried it and the product works wonderfully, so I ponied up the 65 bucks. It's worth it to me.

You may find it useful too. If you're a writer, you NEVER have enough time. Life Balance is available for Mac, Windows, and Palm operating systems.

Check it out:
<http://www.llamagraphics.com/>

I wish these guys would pay me a referral fee for telling you about their product, but those cheapskates don't pay me a dime. It doesn't matter. I love this software--one of the few programs I can say that about. I hope they earn some money for it, because it saves me time and helps me remember when to go do something fun or keep up with my family or friends. That's why it's called "Life Balance"--because it helps you keep your life balanced.

Muffin hates it.

4) Plotting Structure: the Big Picture

Plotting is easy for some people and hard for other people. My writer friends tell me that I'm a good plotter. I find that ironic because plotting was one of the last things I learned how to do. I still don't think it comes natural to me, but I've at least learned a few analytic tools to apply to a story idea. These tools help me figure out "what my plot really is." They also tell me when something's missing.

The tool I'd like to talk about here is what I call the "Three Disaster Structure." I don't think that's the standard term for it. I'm not even sure the idea is standard. But I like it because it helps me get my novels in shape at the bird's-eye level.

You've probably heard of the "Three Act Structure." Some guy named Plato thought this up, and the idea has stuck for a while. I learned the Three Act Structure from my friend James Scott Bell, who co-writes the Fiction Column for Writer's Digest.

The Three Act Structure divides the time-line of your story into three unequal parts, the Beginning, the Middle, and the End. When I say they're unequal parts, I mean it. The Middle is twice as long as either the Beginning or End.

So if your novel were a football game of four quarters, then the Beginning would be the first quarter. The Middle would be the combined second and third quarters. And the Ending would be the fourth quarter.

All that is standard terminology. So how does the Three Disaster Structure fit into this?

Simple. The Three Disaster Structure says that you have three MAJOR disasters in your story and they are equally spaced. So Disaster 1 comes at the end of the first quarter. Disaster 2 comes right at half-time. Disaster 3 comes at the end of the third quarter.

Mathematically, the Three Disaster Structure is the "dual" of the Three Act Structure. The Acts are composed of big BLOCKS of time. The Disasters are three POINTS of time that mark transitions between the big blocks.

So Disaster 1 comes at the end of the Beginning, and forces your characters to make a decision that transitions them into the Middle.

Disaster 2 comes at the midpoint of the Middle. It's there to keep you from getting a "sagging middle," which is a term editors use when the story starts dragging somewhere in the second act.

Disaster 3 comes at the end of the Middle, and forces your characters to make a decision that transitions them into the End.

Simple, no? In the next two sections, I'll apply this analysis to a couple of movies my family and I watched over the holidays.

5) Plot Structure of Pirates of the Caribbean

On New Year's Eve, my family and I stayed up till midnight and watched Pirates of the Caribbean. The heroine of this movie is Elizabeth Swann, played by Keira Knightley.

This is one of our favorite movies. It was supposed to be an action-adventure romance movie for kids, with Orlando Bloom playing the heart-throb character Will Turner. Thanks to the inspired steal-the-show acting of Johnny Depp as the loony pirate captain Jack Sparrow, the movie is all that PLUS being a rather over-the-top comedy. So there's something for everybody, unless you like monster trucks. There are no monster trucks.

There is a LOT of action in this movie. A lot of twists and turns in the plot. You can almost get lost trying to follow them all. However, the core storyline is fairly easy to work out using the Three Disaster Structure. Here is my analysis, where I interleave the three Disasters between the various Acts of the Three Act Structure.

Beginning: Elizabeth Swann is the daughter of the governor of Port Royal and she's just been asked for her hand in marriage by a man she doesn't love, a commodore of the British fleet. She prefers Will Turner, a poor blacksmith with no social standing. When pirate captain Jack Sparrow arrives in town, he tries to escape hanging by using Elizabeth as a human shield, but winds up in jail awaiting the gallows. Elizabeth secretly owns a cursed gold medallion that belonged to Will Turner. This medallion draws Captain Sparrow's former shipmates to attack Port Royal.

Disaster 1: Elizabeth and her medallion are captured by the pirates, but she demands the right of "parley"--a meeting with the pirate Captain Barbosa.

First Part of Middle: Captain Barbosa takes both the medallion AND Elizabeth to an uncharted island where he plans to break the curse that has left him and his men in an Undead state for the last ten years. They are doomed to never die but never really live either. They believe that Elizabeth's blood will break their curse. Will Turner is in love with Elizabeth and will do anything to save her. He and Jack Sparrow steal a Royal British Navy boat and hire a crew and pursue the pirates. Jack knows that the pirates mean to kill Elizabeth.

Disaster 2: Jack Sparrow and Will Turner rescue Elizabeth, but Jack is left behind to face the vengeance of the pirates when Will and Elizabeth escape.

Second Part of Middle: The pirates want to kill Jack, but he persuades them to pursue Will and Elizabeth and their vagabond crew. In a sea battle, the pirates destroy the stolen British ship and capture the crew. The pirates maroon Jack and Elizabeth on an island and take Will Turner back to the island, having discovered that it is his death that will undo their curse. Jack and Elizabeth are rescued by the commodore, who is still waiting for Elizabeth to answer his proposal of

marriage. The commodore intends to return home and hang Jack, leaving Will Turner to suffer his fate with the pirates.

Disaster 3: Elizabeth persuades the commodore to go rescue Will Turner--but she has to promise to marry the commodore.

Ending: Just before the pirates murder Will Turner, Jack Sparrow persuades them to go fight the British FIRST (better to fight a battle while you are still Undead than after you have become a mortal again). Most of the pirates enter into a fierce battle with the British. Jack and Will are left in the charge of the pirate Captain Barbosa. They break the curse, kill or capture the pirates, and return to Port Royal where Jack Sparrow is to be hanged and Elizabeth is to marry the commodore. Things don't turn out quite that way, and everybody ends up happy except the commodore.

Note that the Disasters above are all POINTS in time, and each of them forces a transition to the next big BLOCK of time.

6) Plot Structure of Pride and Prejudice

My family and I FINALLY found time to see Pride and Prejudice on New Year's Day. We'd been wanting to for weeks, but life kept getting in the way.

We loved it. The movie version is a LOT shorter than the 5-hour BBC version which came out several years ago. I have to say they're both excellent.

The heroine of this movie is Elizabeth Bennett, played by Keira Knightley. (I know what you're thinking. The answer is NO! I do not have some weird thing for Keira Knightley. It's pure coincidence that we watched two of her movies on consecutive days. Keira IS cute, I'll grant her that, but not NEARLY as cute as my wife. Honest.)

Pride and Prejudice is not a particularly plot-oriented movie. No sword-fighting, no car chases, not even an exploding helicopter. Just lots of clever dialogue by that Jane Austen woman. This is a character-oriented movie. A chick flick.

But there IS a discernible plot, and it's easy to map out the main features of it by using the Three Disaster Structure, which I show here interleaved with the Three Act Structure:

Beginning: Elizabeth Bennett lives in the country with her parents and four sisters in late 18th century England. The girls are all unmarried. Their father is a

gentleman but not very wealthy. Their flighty, quackative mother is desperately trying to marry them off to rich young men. Elizabeth's sister Jane meets up with Mr. Bingley, a nice, likeable, rich guy from London who has come to live in the country. Bingley's best friend is a dour guy named Mr. Darcy who is even richer but not nearly so likeable. Things are going swimmingly for Jane and Mr. Bingley for awhile, and then . . .

Disaster 1: Mr. Bingley abruptly leaves for London, jilting poor Jane for no good reason.

First Part of Middle: As a result of this disaster, first Jane and then Elizabeth travel to London. Jane is unable to make contact with Mr. Bingley, but Elizabeth unfortunately has too much contact with Mr. Darcy, whom she dislikes more and more all the time. She learns that he was the one who broke up Bingley and Jane.

Disaster 2: Mr. Darcy abruptly proposes to Elizabeth, confessing that he's madly in love with her, even though she's far below him socially. Elizabeth turns him down cold.

Second Part of Middle: Elizabeth returns home upset and has to deal with her weird mother and man-crazy younger sisters. Eventually, she goes out traveling with her uncle and aunt and chances to visit Mr. Darcy's estate while he's gone. She learns from his servants what a great and kind man Darcy is. Her visit is cut short when her younger sister back home elopes with a worthless soldier, Mr. Wickham. The family is narrowly rescued from a scandal when Wickham is paid off to marry the girl and go far away.

Disaster 3: Elizabeth learns that it was Mr. Darcy who paid off Wickham and saved her family from dishonor. She is now in debt to a man she thought she had alienated.

Ending: Mr. Bingley returns to the country and renews his pursuit of Jane. They soon get engaged. Elizabeth has slowly warmed to Darcy, after realizing that his iron exterior masks a heart of that pesky gold. When he asks her AGAIN to marry him, she agrees. The movie ends with the obligatory smooching scene.

Note once again that the Disasters above are all POINTS in time, and each of them forces a transition to the next big BLOCK of time.

7) What's New At AdvancedFictionWriting.com

I'm still unemployed and loving every minute of it. I know many of you are lying awake at night wondering how

poor 'lil Randy is going to keep from starving without a day job.

I'll manage. No Tiger Marketer is likely to ever go hungry. Matter of fact, it didn't take long for a very interesting Tiger Marketing opportunity to come up.

Here's how it happened. I was talking with a long-time friend of mine back in early November about how excited I was to be jobless. I told him a bit about Tiger Marketing, etc. and some of the projects I have planned.

He got interested and we started talking and before we knew it, we had a small and inexpensive business venture mapped out. He's got some very valuable intellectual property and he's been trying for about ten years to figure out how to market it. (Hey, he's a university professor, and they don't teach Tiger Marketing in grad school.) It sounded like a good product to me. Socially responsible, environmentally friendly, and easily findable on the web by a large untapped niche market. All the essentials to warm a Tiger Marketer's heart!

So we'll be launching this venture soon. I was hoping to get it rolling by the first of the year, but we got sidetracked by a bunch of those annoying holiday things. You know--family and friends and parties and presents and all sorts of irritating stuff like that. Oh, the horror!

The upshot is that I haven't done any actual writing this month, and some of my writing-related projects have been put on hold for a few weeks. I hope to get back to those shortly. But when the iron's hot, that's when you need to whack it. So I'm taking my best whack.

See ya next month with more stuff on the craft and marketing of your fiction!

8) Steal This E-zine!

This E-zine is free, and I personally guarantee it's worth 186,284 times what you paid for it. I invite you to "steal" it, but only if you do it nicely . . .

Distasteful legal babble: This E-zine is copyright Randall Ingermanson, 2006. Sorry about the disgusting legal-speak, but if I don't do it, somebody somewhere will probably do something snotty.

Extremely tasteful postscript: I encourage you to email this E-zine to any writer friends of yours who might benefit from it. I only ask that you email the whole thing, not bits and pieces. That way, they'll know where to go to get their own free subscription, if

they want one.

If you email it to a friend, remind them tactfully that when they sign up they should name YOU as the person who referred them. When my subscriber count reaches 5000, I'll hold a drawing for a brand-new iPod Nano. Your name will be entered once for each subscriber you referred. Subscribers who name themselves as referrers unfortunately don't get credit, so they might as well be honest and admit it was you!

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My new web site: <http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com>

Randy Ingermanson
Publisher, Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine
