
The Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine

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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 200 of you have joined since the last issue), 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 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/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 only have a limited amount of space in your house or office. If your space is controlling you, do you want to know how to take back control? Read my article "Controlling Your Space."

Last month, I introduced the idea of "tactical writing." This month, I want to take that a bit further. Do you know the foundation on which all tactical writing is built? Check out my article "Tactical Writing -- POV."

If you spend a lot of time creating a web site or blog, you naturally want people to come to it. You want "traffic." Measuring something is the first step to improving it. Want to know my favorite fast tool for measuring my traffic? See my article "Web Sites and Blogging, Part 9."

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

2) Organizing: Controlling Your Space

Writing is a business. Professional writers act like it's a business. Acting like it's a business is how they got to be professional writers in the first place.

If you want to write fiction, you need to have a place to write. It doesn't have to be a very big place, but it works best if it's dedicated to writing.

The problem is that when you first start writing, there is no place in your home marked, "For Writing Only." If you're going to get that place to write, you need to carve it out from the space you have.

Most likely, that space is already taken by something "important," so you are going to need to be ruthless. There is probably a lot more space in your home than you realize. But how do you reclaim it?

This month we'll talk about that. In fact, we'll go above and beyond your need for writing space, because it's very likely that writing is not the only thing in

your life begging for a little elbow room.

The fundamental problem we want to solve, therefore, is this: How do you control your space?

If you want to embarrass an American family, volunteer to help them move into their new apartment or house. I guarantee when you arrive at their old place, you'll find them neck deep in boxes, bags, and clutter.

I guarantee they'll all be muttering, "I can't believe we have so much JUNK."

I guarantee they'll all look embarrassed about it.

The funny thing is that if you ask the husband who all the junk belongs to, you'll find that most of it belongs to his wife and kids. Whereas if you ask the wife, you'll hear that it's mostly treasures that her husband and kids won't part with. The kids will tell you that it's all Mom's and Dad's stuff.

Everybody's right. Everybody's to blame.

The vast majority of American families have too much stuff that is useless, ugly, broken, or all of the above. This may also be true of other countries, but I don't live there. I live in America, land of the free, land of the brave, land of the unspeakably cluttered garage.

Whenever I help friends move, I'm astounded by the useless treasures I see. Freezers that don't work. Weight machines without any weights. Antique saw collections.

All cool stuff, to be sure. But none of these are nearly as cool as my complete set of theoretical physics calculations that I did in grad school. Or my collection of matchbox cars that I had as a kid. Or the top hutch of the computer table that we could attach to the bottom half if we had time.

Recently, a friend of ours gave my daughter a book on clutter, IT'S ALL TOO MUCH, by an organizing expert named Peter Walsh.

It got me thinking about stuff again. I'm rather proud that I lightened my load a couple of years ago when we moved across the country. I got rid of quite a bit of junk. I got my office organized. Mostly.

Tragically, the rest of my family is a different story. I'm pretty sure all the junk in the house belongs to my wife and kids. (Although they tell a slightly different story.)

Anyway, I thought it would be worth reading Peter Walsh's book, if only to help the rest of my family get their act together.

But a funny thing happened on the way to getting their act together. As I read the book, I realized that I've still got a wee bit of work to do, myself. OK, a lot of work to do. Not as much as my family, of course.

What I like about Peter Walsh's book is that it's about only one thing -- reclaiming your space. And it's quite inspiring, if it's possible to get inspired about throwing away thousands of pounds of treasure that you never use, never look at, and never think about.

For example, your garage is probably stuffed to the gills with all sorts of valuable stuff that you absolutely can't bear to get rid of because you like it, want it, paid too much money for it, or feel emotionally attached to the person who gave it to you.

Yet if your garage burned down, would you miss any of that stuff?

I wouldn't. Everything I really NEED is in the house. Everything I really LIKE is in the house. Everything I really WANT is in the house.

Everything in the garage is junk, other than the car. Fact is, we have to park the minivan outside because it won't fit in the garage. The oversized garage.

That's a little weird, considering that the minivan is actually useful to us. The minivan cost a lot more than any of those treasures. But the treasures sit in the garage and the minivan sits in the rain. Smart.

And come to think of it, half the stuff in the house is junk too. Last weekend, my family and I did what Peter Walsh calls a "kick start cleaning." It's not a real cleaning. It's just a quick and easy start to skim off the top layer of junk. It buys you a little breathing room.

And we cheated, because we just did our closets. I don't have a lot of clothes, but I was pretty sure I had a shirt or two I could get rid of.

I wound up filling a box -- one of those three cubic foot boxes that we still have after our last move (and why do we still have 100 empty boxes?) My wife filled another box. The kids filled another three. We took five boxes to Goodwill. Not a bad kick start.

Like I said, we cheated on the kick start because we only worked on the closets. But the fact is that we cheated on our cheating, because we only got rid of clothes. There are still some boxes of excellent stuff in the closet. And a bookcase. Yes, really. A bookcase in the closet. With some of my most important stuff in it.

In my defense, it's the smallest bookcase in the house.

We have ten others, one of which fills an entire wall of my office.

And I thought I had my act together. Gack!

Controlling your space comes down to one thing: You can safely get rid of anything that isn't either useful or beautiful. There really isn't any reason to keep anything else.

And the fact is that you'd be OK, even if you got rid of everything. If my house were burning down, I'd make sure my family and pets were safe. Then I'd grab my wallet and laptop on the way out the door. Nothing else in my house is important enough to keep me inside a burning building.

Truth to tell, I could even replace everything in my wallet except the cash, which is precious little. And everything on my laptop that I really need is backed up online.

So why do I need all that stuff? Why do you need all your stuff? Some of it is useful. Keep that. Some of it is beautiful. Keep that.

Everything else is both useless and ugly. Why keep that? Why let it fill up your space? Why let it get in your way? Why let it give you little jabs of anxiety every time you look at it?

Having too much stuff wastes your time, your energy, and your money. It wastes your time because you can't find the stuff you really need. It wastes your energy because you have to work around all the stuff you don't need. It wastes your money if you have to rent extra storage space or if you have to leave your valuable vehicles out in the weather or if you have to buy something you need because you can't find the one that's lost in all the clutter.

I could say a lot more, but why should I? Peter Walsh said it all so much better. If you want to check out his book, here's an easy Amazon link:
<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/blinks/walsh.php>

Get rid of anything that isn't useful or beautiful. Everything else is useless AND ugly.

Somewhere on the way to a totally clean house, you'll suddenly discover that there's a place for your writing. It's a place that you had all along. It's a place that was crowded before with useless and ugly stuff. It's a place you can use just for writing.

Claim it. Seize it. Use it.

When you own that place, you will have a little corner of writer's heaven.

3) Creating: Tactical Writing--POV

Last month, I talked about the supreme importance of tactical writing. You can foul up the strategic and logistical aspects of your writing and you will survive. But if your tactical writing doesn't work, then you are in deep, deep trouble.

For the next few months, I'd like to talk more about tactical writing.

Tactical writing is about writing great scenes. The scene is the fundamental unit of fiction. If you can write a great scene, over and over again, then you can write a pretty good novel, even if the scenes don't actually hang together all that well.

Why is that? Because a scene is experienced RIGHT NOW. The previous scene was experienced a while ago and is no longer fresh in the reader's mind. The following scene hasn't been read yet.

So when your reader is experiencing your novel, whatever scene she is reading is the absolute most important scene to her. If that scene is good, then your reader believes the novel is good. If that scene stinks, then your reader believes the novel is skank.

The first thing you need to get right when writing a scene is this: Who is the viewpoint character?

Let me define what we mean by that.

You must choose one character that the reader will identify with throughout the entire scene. That character is called the viewpoint character (or sometimes the point-of-view character, often abbreviated POV character).

During the course of the scene, a major part of your goal is to persuade your reader that she IS the POV character.

That is no small trick. Your reader might be a rich, female, teenage Caucasian, while your POV character might be a poor, male, century-old Wookie. How are you going to persuade the reader that she IS the POV character?

More importantly, WHY would you want to do that?

The answer is simple. You want to give your reader a special kind of experience while reading. I call this experience a "Powerful Emotional Experience," and I

have long been convinced that this is the main reason your reader reads.

To give your reader a Powerful Emotional Experience, you have to create an emotive context. That means getting inside one character to the exclusion of all others.

Why be exclusive? Why not let your reader share the experience with all the characters in the scene?

Because that's how people experience life. There are two kinds of people in the world -- you and everyone else. You experience yourself from inside your own skin, inside your eyes, inside your ears. You experience everyone else as outside your skin, outside your eyes, outside your ears.

Your reader knows this perfectly well. When you insert your reader into your Storyworld, there is only one way to do so which will feel natural: Inserting your reader inside the skin and eyes and ears of exactly one of the characters.

The POV character will normally be a person. Rarely, it will be an animal. More rarely a plant. Even more rarely, an inanimate object.

Beginning writers often want to make their POV character some omniscient god-like person who sees into all minds. That's a mistake, because your reader is not omniscient. (I am willing to bet money on this.) Making your POV character omniscient will feel unnatural.

So why do some beginning writers want to use an omniscient point of view? Usually, it's because they have read a good novel that used omniscient POV. They assume the novel was good because it used omniscient POV. In reality, the novel was good EVEN THOUGH it used omniscient POV.

Some writers will even argue, "Charles Dickens wrote in omniscient POV, so I can too."

When someone takes this line with me, I sometimes say, "When you can write fiction one tenth as well as Charlie, then you can use omniscient POV." Which is a little unkind, but it's probably nicer than sticking a fork in their eye.

On days when I'm feeling a bit more patient, I observe that great writers of the past made many stupid mistakes, such as beating their wives, pickling their livers in alcohol, getting killed in duels, and using omniscient POV.

All of these are frowned on today.

Great writers of the past were great writers in spite of the mistakes they made, not because of them. It is

widely agreed nowadays that the goal of the fiction writer is to make the reader identify with one particular character in each scene.

It's perfectly fine, of course, to make the reader identify with different characters in different scenes. Most modern novelists have several POV characters in each book, switching to a different one with each new scene.

That works very well. The only hazard is that if your scenes are too short, your reader will start feeling jerked around.

What doesn't work is "head-hopping" -- putting your reader inside the head of first one character, then another, then another, all within the same scene. Then the reader doesn't know whom to identify with.

Yes, there are some writers these days who still practice head-hopping. They get away with it because they are good storytellers whose strengths outweigh their weaknesses. But their editors wish they would stop.

It's a simple tactic -- choosing one POV character for each scene. Simple, yet powerful. All the other tactics we'll discuss in coming months depend on this one.

Next month, we'll look at a nice tactic for designing your scene to give your reader a Powerful Emotional Experience.

4) Marketing: Web Sites and Blogging, Part 9

This is the ninth in a series of articles on using a web site and/or a blog to help promote your writing.

I have a Ph.D. in theoretical physics and spent a number of years doing applied physics research for a high-tech company in San Diego. Once I began getting my fiction published, I cut back on my work in science, but even now, I still spend a bit of my time working for a biotech research company in San Diego.

One of the things I've learned in my long career as a working geek is that if you can measure a process, then you have a good chance of improving it.

If you can't measure it, then you might be able to improve it, but you won't really know for sure. And you almost certainly won't know what caused the improvement.

Measurement is the key to improvement. Continuous

measurement is the key to continuous improvement.

What you don't want to do is spend ALL your time measuring stuff. That is not only too geeky for words, but it defeats the whole purpose. Knowledge is no good if you never have time to use it.

Recently, a guy I really trust mentioned a free tool he uses to measure his web site. I tried it and immediately loved it.

Here's the URL:

<http://www.Quantcast.com>

Quantcast is free; it's easy to use; it gives you good info quickly. I set it up a couple of weeks ago to measure my site, and within days it was giving me good accurate information on who visits my site. I spend about 2 minutes every day looking at the data.

As a matter of fact, you can see what I see. Go to the link above and enter the URL for my web site: AdvancedFictionWriting.com.

As of today, Quantcast is telling me the following about my site:

- * My site shows about 37,000 page views per month
- * I get just over 10,000 unique US visitors per month
- * I get more than 6,000 unique non-US visitors
- * 48% of my visitors are men, 52% are women
- * My site appeals strongly to the 18-34 age group
- * It appeals almost as strongly to the 12-17 crowd
- * Likewise for the 35-49 age group
- * My site visitors are better educated than average
- * Less than 1 percent of my visitors are "site addicts"
- * Another 19 percent are frequent visitors
- * About 81 percent are passers-by

There's a bit more info, but the above is typical. If I sold advertising space on my web site (which I don't), I could provide this sort of demographic information to prospective advertisers to help set my rates.

Quantcast doesn't give information on every site on the web. They do their best to estimate data for the sites they think are getting a fair bit of traffic. And they will give exact information on your site if you register with them and help them measure your site more accurately.

When you register, they give you a small tracking snippet to put into your pages. If you use templates, as I do, then it's easy to insert the tracking snippet into each template. Every page on your site will then be tracked. I don't actually track all pages on my site, so Quantcast only measures the ones I want measured.

You can use Quantcast to help you decide how well your

web site is doing. Are you reaching more people this month than last month? Are they the types of people you thought you were reaching? Are there any surprises?

The point of asking these kinds of questions is that your answers may suggest some lines of action. If your site draws all women and no men, why might that be and what do you want to do about it? If your site draws only the 12-17 age group, is that what you intended? If none of your visitors are college educated, what does that tell you? If nobody ever comes back to your site, does that matter to you, and what could you do about it?

Quantcast is a good first step in measuring your site's effectiveness.

You can get much more detailed information about your web site elsewhere, but typically you'll need to pay for it or work harder for it.

Next month, we'll look at some of those other options.

5) What's New At AdvancedFictionWriting.com

I'll be running one of my famous 24-hour specials on my web site in the next few days. Watch your e-mail in-box for a Special Note from me announcing it.

I recently posted my sixth monthly humor column in a new online magazine. The latest column is titled, "Why Aren't You Famous?" Here's the link:
http://www.ChristianFictionOnlineMagazine.com/biz_rooney.html

I teach at roughly 4 to 6 writing conferences per year, depending on my schedule.

I have finished all teaching for the year 2008. My calendar for 2009 is beginning to fill in.

I will be teaching internet marketing in a major track at the Florida Christian Writers conference in February. Details here:
<http://www.flwriters.org/>

I will be doing an 8-hour fiction mentoring workshop at the Mount Hermon Christian Writers Conference in April. Details here:
<http://www.mounthermon.org/writers/>

If you'd like me to teach at your conference, 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) Steal This E-zine!

This E-zine is free, and I personally guarantee it's worth at least 1536 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, 2008.

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. Otherwise, you'll be getting desperate calls at midnight from your friends asking where they can get their own free subscription.

At the moment, there is one place to subscribe: My fiction site: <http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com>

7) 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 2-paragraph blurb with it:

Award-winning novelist Randy Ingermanson, "the Snowflake Guy," publishes the Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine, with more than 13,500 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
