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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 February), welcome to my e-zine!

You should be on this list only if you signed up for it on my web site. If you no longer wish to hear from me, don't be shy -- there's a link at the bottom of this e-mail that will put you out of your misery.

If you need to change your e-mail address, there's a different link at the bottom to help you do that.

If you missed a back issue, remember that all previous issues are archived on my web site at:
<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/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.

* As a novelist, a big part of your life lives on your hard drive. If you lose your data, you lose years of your life. Don't let this happen. It's incredibly easy to save your data. Read how in "Protecting Your Data."

* One of the things you must get right in your novel is your story architecture. You don't have a choice on this. If your story architecture doesn't work, you almost certainly won't sell your novel to a publisher. This month, I interview the guy I think is the best in the world on this subject, Larry Brooks. Don't miss my article, "Story Engineering."

* This year, everybody is talking about e-books and their impact on the publishing industry. One of my friends, former Writer's Digest fiction columnist James Scott Bell, recently self-published a novella and three short stories as an e-book. Want to know how he did it -- and why? Read the interview I did with him, "An Industry Pro Goes E."

Are you reading my blog? Check out the massively popular "Ask A Question For My Blog" feature on my web site. Every day, I answer one question in detail from my loyal blog readers. Are you missing out? Join the fun here:

<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/blog>

2) Organizing: Protecting Your Data

There are a lot of ways to have your novel rejected. An agent can tell you he doesn't think he can sell your work. An editor can tell you that your book's no good. The market can fail to recognize your genius.

Getting those kinds of rejection is just part of the great publishing game. Every writer has to face them, and face them down. They're scars of honor that all writers wear with a perverse kind of pride.

But there's one kind of rejection that no writer will ever take any pride in -- accidental loss of your novel.

There are any number of ways this can happen:

* You turn on your computer one day and hear a nasty,

scraping noise. Your hard drive has just crashed.

* You're at Starbucks working on your laptop. You go to the bathroom for a quick bio-break, and when you come back, your laptop has walked out the door with a new friend.

* You turn into your driveway and see that your house is fully engulfed in flames. By the time the firefighters put out the fire, your computer is a melted mess of metal.

If the only copy of your novel was on your computer, then your work is gone. Fate has rejected that novel and now you'll never ever sell it.

That's harsh. That's cruel. That doesn't need to happen.

If you've got any important data on your computer, you need to protect it. The simple rule is to have at least two current copies of everything you write, in addition to your original.

One copy should be on a backup hard drive on your desk. The other copy should be out there on the web somewhere, securely stored far from your home.

Why have two copies?

Because you can't be too careful with your important data.

You want one copy on your desk on an external hard drive to protect you if your computer's internal hard drive dies or if your computer gets stolen. In either case, you can restore your data very quickly from the copy on your desk.

You want one copy out on the web because your house could burn down or be destroyed by an earthquake, tornado, hurricane, flood, or ogre. In this case, restoring your data will take a bit more time, but disasters are rare events, so it's not that big of a deal.

Backing up your computer is not hard. If your data isn't safe, you can make it safe quickly and at little cost.

To backup your computer to an external hard drive, you'll first need to buy one if you don't have one. These are cheap and getting cheaper all the time. Today, you can buy a hard drive that holds a terabyte of data for under \$100. A terabyte holds roughly a million novel-length manuscripts. That should be plenty, no?

Now connect the external hard drive to your computer and back up your data using the software of your

choice. On a Mac, you can use "Time Machine," which comes free with every Mac. On Windows, you can use the system backup utility. Or you can buy an inexpensive backup program if you prefer.

It should take about two minutes to set up backups and less than an hour for your computer to save all your data to the external hard drive. After that, the software will periodically save any changes you've made to your work. This should happen without you even noticing.

To backup your computer to the web, you need to choose an online backup service provider. There are plenty of these -- Mozy, Carbonite, and CrashPlan are three of the more popular ones.

I use CrashPlan, for the simple reason that MacWorld gave it the highest ranking in a recent review of seven different service providers.

A good backup service should encrypt your data, store it in a secure location on the web, and make it easy for you to get your data back if and when you need it. For a typical home user, backup service shouldn't cost more than a few dollars per month.

Sign up for the service of your choice. Log in and select which data you want to back up over the internet. Then let the service do its magic.

Be aware that it can take days or weeks to back up ALL the data on your computer over the internet. That's because even high-speed internet service isn't all that fast compared to the boatloads of data on a typical computer.

Backing up your computer over the internet is like siphoning out your swimming pool with a garden hose. It works just fine, but it takes a good long time. Once you start it going, it should continue on by itself until it's done.

Select your most important data to back up first. That would probably be your financial information and your novel. These tend to be small files, so backing them up should take only a few minutes.

Your photos and music and the comical movies of your kitten will take a lot longer to back up. Select these to be backed up only after your important stuff is safe.

Once you've set up your backup systems, you really don't need to do anything else. Your backup software should be constantly updating your external hard drive on your desk. Your online backup service should be doing the same over the internet.

This doesn't take long, and once it's done, think what peace of mind you'll enjoy. You'll know that accident or theft of disaster won't prevent you from getting published.

Only those infuriating agents and editors can do that.

3) Creating: Story Engineering

Last summer I attended the Willamette Writers Conference. Not to teach. Just to learn. It was the first conference I've gone to in years where I didn't have any duties. I could actually go to workshops and listen.

I wandered into a class by Larry Brooks and sat down. Larry taught a mesmerizing hour on the subject of story architecture and I was hooked. Larry is a master of story architecture. I introduced myself after his class and we've been in touch via e-mail since then.

In the last few days, Larry has released his latest book, *STORY ENGINEERING*, published by Writer's Digest Books. He sent me an electronic copy a few months ago and I inhaled it in a few sittings.

Here's the endorsement I wrote for his book:

"Nobody on the planet teaches story structure better than Larry Brooks. Nobody."

Since Larry's book is new on the shelves, I asked him to do an interview on Story Engineering for this month's e-zine. Here's a short blurb about Larry:

Larry Brooks is the creator of [Storyfix.com](http://www.StoryFix.com), a resource for novelists and screenwriters, and a frequent instructor and lecturer on the writing conference circuit. He is the author of "Story Engineering: Mastering the Six Core Competencies of Successful Writing," just released from Writers Digest Books. He has published five critically-praised novels, including a USA Today bestseller and a Publishers Weekly "Best Books of 2004" entry. To learn more about Larry, visit: <http://www.StoryFix.com>.

In my opinion, *STORY ENGINEERING* is going to be the standard reference on story architecture from now on. If you'd like to check out the Amazon page for the book, click this handy link (which of course includes my pesky Amazon affiliate code):

On to the interview:

Randy: There are any number of books on fiction writing on the market. What's unique about yours and what drove you to write it?

Larry: Great question, one that I actually address in the Introduction of the book because it's also an important question. I think anybody that sets out to offer up some fresh thinking on a topic that's this broad and popular harbors an inherent insecurity, wondering if the world really needs another writing book. In this case, while I know there are many terrific books out there on "how-to" write a good story, I also think that the craft remains highly elusive for some folks. That, combined with the belief that we can never get enough fresh thinking on this topic, encouraged me to develop my storytelling model -- the six core competencies -- to a level of depth that would make it immediately useful to folks while offering something completely new. And, I have to be honest, people in my workshops have been asking me to write this book for the last 15 years, so that helps overcome those insecurities.

In short, it's unique because it's a fresh and completely original take on the "physics" of storytelling, which are anything but fresh and unique, they are universal. It's an eye-opener and game-changer for writers who are still seeking that "ah-hah!" moment in understanding what to write, where to put it, and why.

Randy: Your book is about the "Six Core Competencies" of the fiction writer. Tell us more! What are these six core competencies and what makes them "core?"

Larry: I like to say, and challenge, that there isn't anything in the writing game that doesn't reside within one of six realms of craft, which I call the six core competencies. Four of them are elements of story -- concept, character, theme and structure (plot sequence), and the other two are issues of execution: scene writing and writing voice.

That's all we have to work with. All are necessary, a weakness in any one, even if the others would humble Hemingway into quitting drinking, is a deal killer. And yet, it is the magic, artful combination of them, when executed at a professional level, that results in a story that will stand out. That's why this can never become -- or be viewed as -- formulaic writing, because no matter the genre or intentions, these six core competencies are as eternal as they are necessary. They empower the 'art' of storytelling without ever compromising it. This knowledge bridges the gap

between what is, for many, an elusive "art" and the accessible, learnable realm of "craft."

Randy: Let's talk about Concept for a bit. In my experience in teaching at conferences, this is one of the areas where beginning novelists almost always get it wrong. Do you have a set of steps for getting this right? How does a writer move from a bad concept to a good one?

Larry: Many folks confuse concept with theme. Confuse it with premise. Confuse it with an "idea." One needs to rise above the rhetoric of these words to understand the differences. An idea is to write a story about Jesus, for example. A theme is to show how, in the author's view, the traditional church has it wrong. A concept -- the starting point of real story development -- would be a proposition: "what if Jesus didn't die on the cross, and evidence to that effect has been hidden and covered up, sometimes at the cost of lives, by the Church for the last 2000 years?" Which is way more compelling than the original "idea." From there, a premise evolves that describes a hero, a love interest, an antagonist and an unfolding journey for them all, including the reader. The result here would be, say, a book called "The Davinci Code," which ended up being the best selling modern novel, ever. Confusion ensues when we -- including writing teachers -- casually confuse these terms.

My favorite tool for concepting is the old "what if?" exercise, using the highest level of "what if?" to develop a descending ladder of ensuing "what ifs?" that take the story in an optimal direction with originality and compelling drive. When a killer "what if?" begets a cascading natural flow of other what ifs, you end up not only with a way to expose the best possible creative choices for the story, but the assurance that you have examined all possible narrative options and have chosen the optimal one. Too many writers, especially "pantsers," just write along and make the first and natural narrative choice without considering the options. The result is usually a rewrite, or a rejection.

Randy: You're probably best known for your work on Story Structure. Outliners and Snowflakers tend to love Story Structure and Seat-of-the-Pantsers tend to fear it. Why is Story Structure so critical to every novelist, and what do you do if you're a Pantser?

Larry: Because it is non-negotiable. Every good story ends up with it, so it makes no sense to fear that which you must discover one way or another. Pantsers are hoping to discover it as they write a draft. Planners begin with it. While I favor the latter, both can work. But neither can work unless the final draft demonstrates the "physics" of story structure. You

can't reinvent that, you must invent your story, no matter how original in nature, in light of those storytelling physics. Structure is to story what wings, a tail and an engine, all in context to aerodynamic theory, are to the designing of an airplane. Miss any of these and what you have is a crash and burn scenario.

Once you know what these physics are -- the specific sequence, mission and elements of story structure -- you begin to see it in every story you encounter. Even in successful stories written by authors who swear against planning or even the existence of structural principles. It's like somebody turning on the lights for the first time. This recognition is the turning point of a writing career, because everything that happens from that point forward is from an enlightened perspective, rather than a random, hoping-to-stumble-on it, imitation-driven perspective. It empowers pantsers as well as planners... though once experienced, pantsers quickly being using story planning in their process.

Randy: One of your concepts on Story Structure that was new to me was your idea of "pinch points." What is a pinch point and why does a story need one?

Larry: It's from the movies, and it works great in novels. The driving source of tension in a story is the presence, the pressure, of an antagonistic force. We meet or sense that force early, we experience it at Plot Point One, and then it's up to the author as to how we experience or see this antagonist. But we must see it and feel it again, and more than once. Pinch points are, very simply, when the antagonist comes to center stage, in context to what it/they want to achieve and how it opposes and threatens the hero and her/his quest. In a story about cancer, the cancer would rear its ugly head at the pinch points in a way that reminds us what's at stake, what's at risk and what the hero must conquer. The optimal locations are the 3/8th and 5/8ths points in the story, at a minimum, but more can be better, too. Because those moments often occur frequently, we can easily miss them as pinch points. But that doesn't change the power of them when they are inserted in the right place, even if they are in nearly every scene otherwise.

Randy: Talk to us about "voice." Editors and agents often say they're looking for writers with a great voice. What is voice and how do you develop one if you don't think you have one?

Larry: Voice is literally how you write. What you write in a narrative, stylistic sense. Your sentences. Your paragraphs. Your word and phrasing choices. Your wit, your irony, your poetry. Or your purple prose. A professional writer announces that skill

within the first sentence. Thing is, you don't have to be a poet to deliver a great voice. This is the least daunting of the six core competencies, and yet, non-negotiable: you must write professionally, rather than stylistically (the latter being the bane of many rejected manuscripts). You simply need to write compellingly. To be entertaining. Have a light touch, wield subtlety, have great timing. And most of all, never be over the top or too heavy-handed. John Grisham is a great example -- he's not going down in history as the best writer of sentences ever, but he is clear and clean, his narrative is an efficient and pleasant -- and occasionally powerful -- vehicle for his stories. Writers need to be clear: a solid voice is the ante-in, it'll never be what you gets you published. It's all about your story. It's like athleticism in pro sports -- you'll get cut on the day if you don't have it. But from there, because everybody in camp has it, your success depends on higher, more elusive skills, moves, sensibilities and instincts. In writing, "talent" isn't about sentences, it's about storytelling.

Voice is like scent in the air -- sometimes it's pleasant, sometimes not. But that's always a judgment call. Clear fresh air is always best, and safest. Sometimes brisk, sometimes lightly scented. But never something from a paper mill. You think that you're clever and witty, but the editor might find you glib and pretentious. It's always a risk to take your voice too far.

Less is more, unless more is called for. That's the art of it. It's hard to teach, hard to evolve, and invaluable once you do.

Randy: Thanks for joining us today, Larry!

Now, once again, if you want to check out Larry's book on Amazon, here's a handy link:
<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/blinks/brooks/story.php>

Also, check out Larry's web site and blog here:
<http://www.StoryFix.com>

4) Marketing: An Industry Pro Goes E

The e-book revolution is roaring in even faster than predicted by e-enthusiasts. A few facts will make clear what I mean:

A-list novelist David Morrell recently self-published his novel THE NAKED EDGE on Amazon, in Kindle and audio formats only.

A-list marketing guru Seth Godin is due today, March 1, 2011, to self-publish his next book, POKE THE BOX, simultaneously in hardcover and e-format.

In January of this year, self-published e-novelist Amanda Hocking sold a reputed 450,000 copies of her books on Amazon. She is 26 years old. Less than a year ago, she posted her first novel on Amazon. Now, she's a superstar.

In view of these, I wasn't surprised when one of my writing buddies, Jim Bell, recently self-published a new e-book, COVER YOUR BACK. The book contains a novella and three short stories. If the words "film noir" and "femme fatale" ring your bells, then COVER YOUR BACK might well be a book you'd enjoy.

Jim has not abandoned the world of traditional publishing. His venture into e-books simply allows him to do things that he couldn't have done with a paper-and-ink publisher that thinks a year is a short period of time.

I asked Jim to tell me about his venture in an interview for this e-zine. Here's a blurb about him and his writing:

JAMES SCOTT BELL is a bestselling thriller author and served as the fiction columnist for Writer's Digest magazine. He has written three popular craft books for Writers Digest Books: Plot & Structure, Revision & Self-Editing and The Art of War for Writers. Jim has taught writing at Pepperdine University and numerous writers conferences. On June 4th and 5th he is teaching a seminar in Los Angeles for novelists and screenwriters. Information can be found at <http://www.jamesscottbell.com>

On to the interview. Let's see what motivated Jim to take the e-plunge.

Randy: You recently self-published your first e-book, after more than a decade of publishing paper books with a number of traditional royalty-paying publishers. What prompted you to take the plunge into the e-book market?

Jim: Because there is absolutely no downside to it, and plenty of upside. The e-market is exploding and I had several stories and a novella that didn't have a home. E-book publishing allows me to bring new material to my readers, and introduce me to others. I've always

admired the old pulp writers of the mid 20th century, who had to write a lot for a penny a word, but created some of the best suspense ever. That's what I always wanted to be able to do, and now can via e-publishing.

The nice thing is that the royalty for these works is great and I get paid every month.

Randy: Let's talk a bit about the process. You decided to write a novella and three short stories. You wrote them in Microsoft Word just as you normally do. Then what happened? How did you take the book from a Word document to its final published form on Amazon and the other online retailers?

Jim: I hired a person to do the conversion for me. There are many people out there who will do this, and the cost is relatively low. You should be able to find someone for between \$50 - \$100. It may be a bit more if the document needs more work. I toyed with the idea of doing it myself, but was advised by others to let a professional handle it. So I provided the Word document and the person I hired converted into a format for Kindle, for Nook, and for Smashwords, should I expand to that.

Randy: Many fiction contracts have "non-compete" clauses in them. Tell us about those and what they mean for the already-published author who wants to venture into the electronic self-publishing world but doesn't want to alienate his publisher.

Jim: Well, publishers are investing money in writers and trying to build them. So a standard publishing contract has a clause that says the writer cannot sell a book that might compete with the one they're publishing. Usually there's language about potential "harm" to the sales of the contracted book. That could mean that a self-published e-book, at a low price point, could be viewed as competition with the published e-book, which might have a higher price point.

On the other hand, a low priced, self-published e-book can be seen as a marketing tool for the other books. This should all be discussed with the publisher, and a written understanding hammered out.

Randy: Any predictions on the near-term future of publishing? As we speak, Borders is circling the drain and Barnes & Noble is battling to reinvent itself, while dozens of previously unknown writers are earning thousands of dollars per month. Where do you see the world of publishing going in 2011? What are your plans to deal with the massive change?

Jim: I do think the traditional publishing model is

undergoing great stress now. There are fewer distributions points, less revenue coming in as consumers turn to lower priced e-books. The old guard will have to be experimenting with new ways of doing things, but that's hard for a big, established business to do.

Meantime, there will be a veritable tsunami of original material self-published. Most of it will be bad. A writer still needs to sweat and strain and get better. The old model provided a filtering system. But for those who learn to write well, the self-publishing avenue has great potential.

I don't think anyone can predict what the landscape will look like in five years. I have been surprised at the rapid rise in e-readers (as was predicted by one Randall Ingermanson). As a writer I'm taking advantage of the opportunity. Others will do the same. And word of mouth will continue to help the best works get the attention they deserve.

Randy: You probably couldn't have traditionally published your novella WATCH YOUR BACK and you almost certainly couldn't have published your short stories in paper format. Tell us a bit about those stories and why you wrote them. Isn't it enough to be a successful novelist?

Jim: I love the short story and novella form. It used to be we had a thriving short story market in this country, lots of pulp and slick magazines. But that all dried up except for a couple of little magazines, through which it is impossible to make a living. And yes, short story collections are rarely published in print form.

So, here is a way for me to write short form suspense fiction and publish it. As I said, there's just no downside to that. I can provide entertainment for readers at a low cost, and everyone's happy.

Randy: I bought COVER YOUR BACK last week and read through it in a day. Great read! Lots of fun for those who like darkish fiction. What advice do you have for someone contemplating writing exclusively for the self-publishing market?

Jim: First, always be about getting better as a writer. That should never stop. I started in this business 20 years ago and have kept on studying the craft all that time.

Second, be sure to have your story vetted by several "beta" readers, and even consider paying a freelance editor to go over the manuscript. Readers do notice if the text is sloppy.

Third, hire a good cover designer. You have to make a good first impression with your book cover.

Finally, make some long term plans. What kind of writing will be your specialty, your "brand"? As you build readers, they are going to expect some continuity in your work. That's not to say you can't be flexible and try new things, but an audience is grown largely by coming to rely on the type of story you produce. Think of Stephen King and John Grisham. Even they did not deviate from their genres until they were well established in them.

Randy: Great advice, as always. Thanks for telling us about your adventures on Planet E, Jim!

If you're interested in checking out what devilish games Jim plays on his lead characters, have a look at the Amazon page for WATCH YOUR BACK. Priced at \$2.99, it's a darned good deal:
<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com/blinks/bell/back.php>

(Standard full disclosure: The above link contains my Amazon affiliate code.)

I hope to get my own first self-published e-book into cyberspace this month. The book will be one of my previously published novels, OXYGEN.

The premise: An explosion on the first mission to Mars leaves four astronauts with only enough oxygen for one of them to reach the Red Planet alive. NASA engineers feverishly plan a rescue mission, but it's hopeless unless somebody can figure out which of the four astronauts is the saboteur.

Watch this space for more info on OXYGEN.

5) What's New At AdvancedFictionWriting.com

My book, WRITING FICTION FOR DUMMIES, has been selling well since it began shipping more than a year ago and is one of the most popular fiction writing books on Amazon. 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 latest 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>

Currently, my co-author John Olson and I are preparing our back list of novels for publication as e-books.

John and I are also creating some powerful online tools to make it easy for us to market our work effectively and easily. In due time, we'll make those tools available to other authors. More info on that when the opportune moment arrives.

I normally teach at roughly 4 to 6 writing conferences per year, depending on my schedule. For 2011, I have decided to cut back on my teaching so I can focus on a major project I'm working on. My schedule for 2011 is now all filled in.

I will be teaching at these conferences in 2011:

Mount Hermon Christian Writers Conference, (April)
8 hours mentoring a group of no more than 10 novelists
<http://mounthermon.org/adult/professionals/writers-conference>

Oregon Christian Writers Conference, (August)
6 hours teaching a lecture series named "Fiction 101"
<http://www.oregonchristianwriters.com/summer-conference/>

American Christian Fiction Writers, (September)
4 hours teaching a lecture series on the Snowflake method
<http://www.acfw.com/conference/>

If you'd like me to teach at your conference in 2012 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.AuthorTechTips.com>

Thomas is especially skilled at helping authors create an inexpensive but 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.UmstattedMedia.com>

7) Steal This E-zine!

This E-zine is free, and I personally guarantee it's worth at least 460 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, 2011.

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:

<http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com>

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 2-paragraph blurb with it:

Award-winning novelist Randy Ingermanson, "the Snowflake Guy," publishes the Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine, with more than 24,000 readers, every month. If you want to learn the craft and marketing of fiction, AND make your writing more valuable to editors, AND have FUN doing it, visit <http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com>.

Download your free Special Report on Tiger Marketing and get a free 5-Day Course in How To Publish a Novel.

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