

The Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine

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Circulation: 31263 writers, each of them creating a 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

500 of you signed up in May), 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 let you update my system.

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 a normal issue, we'll talk about each of these in turn.

However, this isn't a normal issue. This month, my column on craft ran extra long, so I decided to make the craft column the entire issue. We won't talk about organizing or marketing this month.

Every character in your novel believes she is the main character in the story. That's not a problem, that's a virtue, if you do it right. Do you know how to weave together those separate character stories into something irresistible to an editor? Find out how I do it in my craft article, "Story Threads in The Hunger Games."

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

2) Creating: Story Threads in The Hunger Games

In this column for the last couple of months I've been analyzing THE HUNGER GAMES, by Suzanne Collins.

This month, I'd like to talk about the story threads in this novel.

Story threads are often called "subplots." When a novel ends up too short, a common solution is to "add another subplot" to bulk up the story.

In my view, the easiest way to "add a subplot" is to add another major character. Each major character is the lead character in the story of his or her life. I call each of these stories a "story thread."

The main story thread in your novel is usually the story thread of your lead character.

If you're writing a romance novel, then it's a little more complicated than that -- the main story thread of your novel is the story thread of the relationship of your two lead characters.

For any category other than romance, I find that it's best to assign one story thread per major character. This is not an unbreakable rule. It's just a very useful way of thinking.

Now to THE HUNGER GAMES. The novel has a number of major characters. Let's look at them and the story thread that goes along with each one.

The lead character is Katniss Everdeen, and her story thread is one of survival in a battle-to-the-death. This means that the lead story thread is a survival story.

The second character is Peeta Mellark. Peeta never intends to survive the Hunger Games. All he cares about is to ensure that the girl he loves survives. Peeta's story thread is essentially a romance thread, and Peeta expects it to have a tragic ending.

It's a little unclear who should be considered the third major character, so I'll make a command decision here and declare it to be Cato, a massive brute who's been trained all his life to be a tribute in the Hunger Games.

Cato's story is not about survival. He assumes going in that he's going to be the winner. But in the training before the Games, he's outscored -- by a girl half his size. This kicks a hole in his ego.

From that moment on, Cato's story thread is about vengeance. He'll kill Katniss because she's upstaged him, humiliated him in what should be his hour of glory.

Haymitch Abernathy is the mentor for both Katniss and Peeta. Haymitch won a Hunger Games 24 years ago, and it ruined his life. He's been drowning his guilt in whiskey ever since.

Katniss is a tough kid and she's got a decent chance to win -- if Haymitch can stay sober long enough to guide her through. His story thread is about redemption. Helping Katniss win may be the only thing Haymitch can ever feel proud about.

Cinna is the stylist for Katniss. While this doesn't sound like an important job, it's crucial. He has to help Katniss overcome her surly attitude.

Cinna is playing a much bigger game than Katniss. She wants only to survive. Cinna wants to destroy the evil government and bring freedom to his people. Cinna's story thread is about revolution. Quite a load for a stylist.

As told above, these story threads are just that -- independent threads. The art of fiction is to weave these together into a single unit. Let's see how this works out by using one of the most powerful tools I know -- the character synopsis.

Even if you're a fan of my Snowflake method, you may never have paid much attention to Step 5, writing the

character synopses. Character synopses, taken alone, don't seem to be much.

You only really see their power when you get them working together. When I write a proposal, I write a chain of character synopses. Each one takes the story a bit further and adds a new dimension.

If I were writing a proposal for THE HUNGER GAMES, I'd include the following chain of character synopses.

SPOILER ALERT! The following character synopses tell most of the story and include numerous major plot spoilers. If you're planning to read the book, don't finish this section until you've read the story.

Katniss

Katniss Everdeen is a 16-year-old girl in a dystopic future America. She scratches out a bare living by hunting illegally with her best friend Gale.

Katniss only loves one person in the world, her little sister Prim. When Prim's name is drawn for the Hunger Games, Katniss volunteers to take her place, which she knows will be a death sentence.

Katniss is particularly unhappy that the other tribute from her district is Peeta Mellark, a boy she hardly knows, except that he saved her life a few years ago when she was starving and desperate.

During the last interview before the Hunger Games begin, Peeta reveals on national TV that he has a terrible crush on Katniss, and therefore he can't win even if he survives. Katniss is furious, thinking this is a scam to make her look weak.

When the Games begin, Katniss grabs a few supplies and heads for the hills to evade the Career tributes. Late that night, she discovers that Peeta has joined forces with the Careers, and has promised to deliver her to them.

Katniss is now completely convinced that Peeta is doing his best to survive at her expense. Can she outfox the Careers -- and punish Peeta?

Peeta

Peeta Mellark has been desperately in love with Katniss Everdeen since the first day of school when he was five years old. His nightmare begins when Katniss volunteers to replace her sister Prim in the Hunger Games.

Miraculously, Peeta's name is drawn for the Games also. He knows he can't survive because he has no killer instinct, but he vows to keep Katniss alive at any cost -- even if he must lie, cheat, and kill.

Peeta's strategy hits a huge obstacle when he must admit his crush on national TV. Now Katniss knows he loves her, and she's furious at him for making her look "weak."

Peeta must rethink. He decides to join forces with the Career Tributes by telling them he can deliver Katniss, the girl who mysteriously scored highest in the training.

Peeta's resolve is put to the test when he and the Careers discover a girl alone in the woods and attack her. Leaving her for dead, the Careers get impatient when she takes too long to die and send Peeta back to finish her off. Can he violate his own values and kill a helpless girl?

The next day, Peeta and the Careers corner Katniss in a tree at dusk. They guard the tree overnight, but at dawn, Katniss attacks them and drives them off, killing two and wounding everyone else.

When they finally regroup, Peeta must at last double-cross the Careers to defend Katniss, but in doing so, he's wounded so badly that he can't hope to survive. Katniss is alive, but so is the most powerful

of the Careers, a brute named Cato. What more can Peeta do for the girl he loves?

Cato

Cato comes from a district where it's common to train children as killing machines so as to achieve wealth and honor in the Hunger Games. Cato is powerfully built and superbly trained. He volunteers for the games, expecting to win.

He is shocked and humiliated when he is outscored by Katniss Everdeen in the final week of training just before the Games begin. Katniss must die!

When Peeta Mellark offers to deliver Katniss, Cato agrees to take him in as an ally with the other Career tributes. But Cato is suspicious of Peeta, who seems soft, and keeps an eye on him.

When Cato and the other Careers drive Katniss up a tree at dusk, Cato is elated. They've got her! But at dawn, Katniss fights back with a nest of deadly tracker jacker wasps which can cause death or insanity.

Cato survives the tracker jack stings. When he recovers and tracks down Katniss, Peeta turns traitor and fights him off. Cato attacks savagely and wounds him, but Katniss has escaped -- with a bow and a dozen arrows.

Within days, Katniss has attacked the base camp of the Careers, destroying their supplies. Cato goes into a blind fury. The little witch is an excellent archer and might actually win! She can't do that. The Hunger Games belong to Cato, and he will win at any cost.

When the Gamemakers announce that new supplies will be dropped at dawn, Cato lays his plans to trap Katniss. Can he destroy her -- before she kills him?

Haymitch

Haymitch Abernathy is the one person in District 12 who has won a Hunger Games. The Games seared his mind for life, driving him to drink to numb the horror. Every year, he must coach two losers from his district, and he hates it. He despises the Games and would do anything to destroy the Capital that imposes them.

When Katniss and Peeta are drawn as tributes, Haymitch sees nothing new. Two more losers who will die like sheep. Why should he waste effort trying to coach them? But they show some fight early, some spunk, and Haymitch decides he must try.

Peeta can't win, but Katniss might. And Peeta is just stupid enough to sacrifice himself to help Katniss. There's a chance. Haymitch begins pulling strings.

As the Games begin, Haymitch works tirelessly behind the scenes to line up sponsors who will pay for gifts to be dropped in on Katniss. He also knows that Katniss thinks like he does, so he can send her messages by the timing of his gifts.

The problem is that the idiot girl can't see that Peeta really loves her. But at least she's smart enough to see the connection between a show of affection and the gifts Haymitch is lining up.

Can Katniss win? Maybe. As the Games continue, Haymitch pulls out all the stops to help her. But there's a new hazard. What if she wins? What if she wins in a way that causes a political firestorm? The idiot girl might win the battle and lose the war. Please, please, please don't let her do anything stupid!

Cinna

Cinna is a young man raised in the Capital who secretly despises the Hunger Games and the brutal government that sponsors them. He would do anything to destroy the government, but how?

Cinna is a brilliant stylist, and when his skills are required for the Hunger Games, he volunteers to work for the girl tribute from the lowly District 12.

Katniss is a great kid, and Cinna throws all his skill into helping her create a memorable image before the Games begin. He helps her overcome her stage fright by telling her to answer the TV interviewer while imagining she's merely talking to Cinna.

Against all hope, Katniss endures in the games. Endures, wins, saves Peeta, and in the process puts herself in enormous danger.

Now Cinna faces his most difficult task -- helping Katniss walk the political minefield she's created by showing up the Gamemakers. Can Cinna rescue Katniss from the unspeakable hazards she barely understands?

The conventional way to write a proposal is to write one long synopsis (2 pages, single-spaced, roughly 1000 words) that tells the whole story in one great glop.

Writers hate that. Synopses are the most-hated writing task novelists ever tackle.

Guess what? Editors hate synopses too. I can't remember ever hearing an editor say they like synopses. Synopses are boring. Synopses focus on plot. They usually bring in a confusing array of characters, with no explanation of who they are deep inside.

But the character synopses I showed you above are different. Each one focuses on a single character. Each one tells you what makes that character tick. Each one tells you part of the story of that one character.

Here's the key thing. The character synopses I showed you are chained together. The first focuses on the beginning of the story. The next focuses on events a little further on in the story. They chain like that, revealing more events in the story. The final one focuses on the ending.

I find character synopses far more interesting to read, and far more fun to write, than a real plot-based synopsis.

The bad news is that you can't write a proposal without a synopsis. I've never met a publisher who would take a proposal that lacked a synopsis.

The good news is that you can put anything extra you want into a proposal. If you insert the character synopses before the plot synopsis, you give yourself a huge advantage.

Character synopses, taken together, do the same job as the plot synopsis, and they do it better. Each one is personal -- focusing on a single character. Most editors prefer character-oriented fiction. So character synopses grab the editor's interest and get her invested in the characters.

Then when your editor hits the real synopsis, she can skim it quickly because she already knows the story. She can check off her list that, yes, she's read the darn synopsis.

My rule of thumb in writing character synopses is to write half a page to a page about each major character. Explain what drives the character. Then tell a bit of the story as if that character were the lead character.

There's one final virtue of writing character synopses.

Empathy.

You, the author, naturally favor the hero of your story. You naturally dislike the villain. You naturally consider the sidekick less important.

When you write a character synopsis, you have to get inside that character's skin. You have to treat him like he's the hero. You have to empathize with him. Even if he's really the villain.

That can only make your story deeper. You can't have a cardboard character, once you've built up a deep well of empathy for him. You can't.

Are you ready to try your own character synopses?

Make a list of the five most important characters in your story.

Write a page on each one, telling his side of the story. Imagine that the novel is all about him.

That's it. It works. It's magic.

Try it and see. It might just make you a better writer.

3) What's New At AdvancedFictionWriting.com

My coauthor, John Olson, and I recently launched the new e-book edition of our novel THE FIFTH MAN. The launch went Xtremely well, and we're now hard at work editing our next e-books.

Mine will be a new edition of my novel DOUBLE VISION. John is working on a new edition of his novel ADRENALINE.

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, "Marketing 101":
<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>

4) 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 Umstattd'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.

5) Jim Bell's Weekend Seminars

My good friend Jim Bell is doing a series of weekend seminars this summer in Austin, Nashville, and Cincinnati.

You may recognize him as the author of the best-selling book PLOT & STRUCTURE, one of the very best books on how to write fiction. Or you may remember that Jim is the former fiction columnist for Writer's Digest.

I have known Jim for many years and I have a high level of trust in his ability to deliver the goods.

Jim is the guy who first taught me Three-Act Structure years ago, and he's a terrific speaker and teacher. I've learned a lot from him.

Jim asked if he could buy an ad in my e-zine for his seminars. I don't accept paid ads, but Jim is a great guy who contributes a lot to the writing community.

So I offered to give Jim a free mention here on one condition:

I asked Jim to give readers of my e-zine a discount.

He agreed to give you all a \$30 discount. The normal price of one of these 2-day seminars is \$399. You can get it for \$369 with the discount code ADVEZ.

What do you get for that \$369? Here's the writeup Jim sent me:

Two power packed days to take your fiction writing to the next level . . . and beyond. For both traditional

and self-published writers. Lunch is included both days.

Among the things you'll learn:

- * The Most Important Thing Every Successful Novel Must Do . . . and How to Do It
- * Mastering the Seven Critical Success Factors of Fiction
- * The Emotion Quotient for Grabbing Readers and Not Letting them Go
- * Plotting With Perfect Structure, Every Time -- Never Write a Weak Story Again
- * Thematic Unity, What Most Writers Want But Can't Figure Out. We'll Figure.
- * Creating Characters That "Jump Off the Page"
- * How to Write Scenes With No Dull Parts
- * The 8 Essentials and 12 Tools of Great Dialogue
- * The Secrets of Making Readers Turn the Pages
- * Creating a Compelling Voice and Style

Plus: interactive exercises that will add depth and appeal to your current project.

You can get more info and sign up for one of these weekend seminars at the following web pages. (If you sign up, use the promo code ADVEZ to get the \$30 discount.)

Austin, June 16 & 17

<http://jsbaustin.eventbrite.com/>

Nashville, August 11 & 12

<http://jsbnashville.eventbrite.com/>

Cincinnati, September 15 & 16

<http://jsbcincinnati.eventbrite.com/>

Have fun!

6) Steal This E-zine!

This E-zine is free, and I personally guarantee it's worth at least 747 times the price. I invite you to "steal" it, but only if you do it nicely . . .

Distasteful legal babble: This E-zine is copyright Randall Ingermanson, 2012.

Extremely tasteful postscript: I encourage you to e-mail this E-zine to any fiction writer friends of yours who might benefit from it. I only ask that you e-mail the whole thing, not bits and pieces. Otherwise, you'll be getting desperate calls at midnight from your friends asking where they can get their own free subscription.

Of course you should not forward this e-mail to people who don't write fiction. They won't care about it.

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

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Award-winning novelist Randy Ingermanson, "the Snowflake Guy," publishes the free monthly Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine, with more than 31,000 readers. If you want to learn the craft and marketing of fiction, AND make your writing more valuable to editors, AND have FUN doing it, visit <http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com>.

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

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