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How Not To Get Published

By Michael LaRocca

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HOW NOT TO GET PUBLISHED

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One morning, I decided to sleep late for a change. I stumbled out of bed at 10:00, not my usual 7:00, and fired up the computer. Little did I know what I'd find in my mailbox on this particular morning.

The first thing I saw was about a dozen people congratulating me for something. I opened an email at random, and it didn't say why I was being congratulated.

Meanwhile, my other mailbox opened in a different window. It informed me that 39 people had joined my newsletter mailing list since the previous night. A dozen more congratulations waited for me there. I opened one up, and again there was no reason.

Instead of continuing, I played a hunch. I logged onto my publisher's website, and there it was. VIGILANTE JUSTICE. While I was sleeping, my first novel was published. (There's a 16-hour time difference between my home in Hong Kong and my publisher's office.)

I checked out the VIGILANTE JUSTICE web page — my web page — and was astounded once more by the book cover. The music, which I'd never heard before, captured the mood of the book perfectly. For a long moment, I simply basked in the feeling. Published at last.

If someone had told me one year ago that I'd be publishing four books this year, I'd have called him an eejit.

The last time I was published, not counting VIGILANTE JUSTICE, was twelve years ago, and that doesn't count because I paid someone to do it. I'd long since given up on getting published again. In

How Not To Get Published

fact, I doubted I'd ever write again.

By now you may wonder how I made it from Point A to Point B. Or for that matter, why I stopped writing.

The second part is simple. I was chasing money, becoming a high-powered businessman and losing myself. The first part is a little more difficult to explain.

In December 1999, I flew to Hong Kong for a vacation. The first vacation in my life, really. I intended to stay for a month, but I never left. Instead, I married an Australian who teaches English over here. I quit my job in North Carolina by email, though I still maintain my former employer's website. I love the Internet.

I found myself unable to work in this country. So what was I to do with my time? I dusted off a childhood dream and resumed writing.

I had a slush pile full of old short stories, and I ran them through the on-line writing workshops. There are two parts to writing — story and structure. I wasn't changing my stories — they came from me and were what I wanted to write — but my style was pathetic. Style is also the part that can be learned. So I did.

Then came something that amazed me. New stories. Just mixing with the "writing culture" got my creative juices flowing again. After all those years. Better than ever, in fact.

Next, I published them. Between March and December 2000, I published twenty stories in twenty different e-zines. I only made \$6, but I was padding my resume. I believed that I had a short story anthology in me, and I'd decided to try e-publishing it. I felt I needed a "track record," so I got one.

I also had a novel in my slush pile, the one new thing I wrote in the nineties. A gripping imaginative story, badly told. But I'd finally learned about the craft, the structure, and the hard work that comes after that original flash of inspiration.

You see where I'm leading by now. I wrote two new novels, and signed contracts to publish all three novels plus the new short story collection in 2001.

It's a common sight among new writers, and really it's a bit sad. People who have the story — the part that can't be learned — but tell it badly. They rush in on the adrenaline high that all authors know so well, then get rejected and give up.

What defines a great story? That depends on which reader you ask. If you're writing a story that moves you, someone somewhere with similar tastes will like it. Some stories will be more popular than others, but every story will be considered great by someone. But if it's badly written, the reader will simply put the book down and read something else.

As a teenaged author, gathering up enough rejection slips to wallpaper the room, I didn't give up. I just

How Not To Get Published

got arrogant and decided "You don't understand me, ya eejit." That's no solution either. Nor is paying to be published.

Nope, if you want to get published, learn how to tell your story. Spelling, grammar, punctuation, pacing, dialogue... all that stuff that you may have slept through in high school will become second nature with enough practice.

I did quite well in high school English, by the way, but it's not like they taught pacing and dialogue and real story-telling there. To learn that, you've gotta read. But that's no problem for an author. If you don't enjoy reading, I don't think you can write something that others will enjoy reading.

Also, you must listen to the criticisms. Accept some and reject others, but always listen. I believe the Internet makes it much easier to get those criticisms.

I work as an editor now, and one of my authors told me that he sees movies inside his head. It shows in his writing! I don't write that way, unfortunately, but I still know how he feels. When "the Muse" pays me a visit, I've gotta write it down as fast as it comes to me. That's the one part that can't be packaged,

taught or mass-produced. That part comes from you, the author, and no one else can do it the way that you do.

Kurt Vonnegut, whose works I greatly admire, writes one sentence at a time, and makes each one perfect before he begins the next. But I don't write like that, nor do most of the authors I know. We just let it fly, then go back and fix it later.

But if you don't want to get published, don't go back and fix it. Pass that raw copy around to your friends and family and let them tell you how wonderful it is for fear of hurting your feelings. Then send it to the publishers and collect the rejection letters. That's what I did "in my younger days," and I wasn't published.

It took me twenty years to learn my lesson. It would genuinely make me feel good to hear that most writers aren't taking quite so long.

Oh, and when the day comes that you finally are published, it's best not to sleep until 11:00 PM Eastern Standard Time and hear about it in the wonderful but chaotic way that I did. (Not that you can know what day that'll be.) I barely had time to bask in the moment before I had to fire up the publicity machine and see how many copies I could sell.

I'm very proud of VIGILANTE JUSTICE, by the way, and not just because it's an EPPIE 2002 finalist in the Thriller category. I wrote what I like to read; something that says what I want to say, and my readers are genuinely enjoying it. That's why I write.

Michael is an American living in Hong Kong. He has been working as a full-time author for over two years and as an editor for over a year. He has 4 novels scheduled for publication. He's proud of the fact that he rarely writes in the same genre twice. One of his novels is an EPPIE 2002 in the Thriller

category. His website is at http://free_reads.tripod.com.

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**SMART TIPS THAT WILL GET YOU PUBLISHED
–TIME & TIME AGAIN!**

By Peter Sinclair

<http://www.motivationalmemo.com>

Here are some tips on how to not only correctly submit an article for publication but to also give you the best chance to be published...

TIP #1

Write the best possible article you can.

TIP #2

Give your article a dynamic title that will grab people's attention. It **MUST** stand out from the crowd.

TIP #3

Make it neat, make it short or at least fit the requirements of the publisher. The one below would accept 300 to 500 words.....I choose to stick to the lower denominator, making it easy for them to cut and paste. If your article is

How Not To Get Published

a long piece then edit it down to a size between 300 and 500 words. By doing this you will give yourself the greatest chance of being published and what is more important... being read.

TIP #4

Keep your work to 60–65 characters wide and use subheadings to capture people's attention.

TIP #5

Make sure you spellcheck your work before you send it out.

TIP #6

Include your website address or at least provide the opportunity for people to subscribe to your ezine.

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