

FOCUS

THE BRITISH SCIENCE FICTION ASSOCIATION'S MAGAZINE FOR WRITERS



WINTER 2013/14

No. 61

04 Everything You Wanted To Know About Self- Publishing And Small Presses But No One Would Tell You

Ian Sales goes into extensive detail about his own experiences with self-publishing and setting up Whippleshield Press, an independent small press.

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The cover is a medley of social media icons, signs and symbols squeezed through a rinser and strangled by a twisted sense of irony to offset the magazine's title, FOCUS. Or something.

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FOCUS

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Contributions, ideas and correspondence are always welcome at the contact address below, but please get in touch first if you intend to submit a lengthy article.

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IAN SALES SAYS...

My name is Ian Sales and I self-published.

Not so long ago, that admission was enough to ensure you would never be taken seriously as a writer. Though there have been occasional literary classics that were initially self-published — TE Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Roddy Doyle's *The Commitments*, for example — most self-published books were rightly considered too poor to have been published via traditional means. But as the publishing industry has changed, as technology has opened up the channels of distribution of fiction, so self-publishing has become just one more route into print for an author. True, there are an enormous number of self-published ebooks, and most are indeed of poor quality — derivative, badly-edited, poorly-written and with little care or attention given to presentation or promotion. But there have also been several self-publishing success stories, especially in genre fiction — Hugh Howey, Amanda Hocking, Michael Sullivan, Andy Weir... These are all authors whose self-published books sold sufficiently well that they were subsequently picked up by major genre imprints.

Self-publishing is not for everyone. Writing a novel of publishable quality — which not every self-published novel actually is — is only half the battle. Books do not become best-sellers by themselves. Simply making the book available on Amazon or Smashwords does not mean readers will immediately begin buying it. The most effective selling tool on the planet is word-of-mouth, but that rarely happens by itself. Promotion is needed to kickstart it. Social media is an excellent tool for promoting a book and its author, but it can also be abused. It's an arena full of unwritten rules, where opinions are often presented as fact,

where customs that apply in one venue don't apply in another, where misinterpretation and misunderstanding are endemic.

This issue of FOCUS has been designed as a guide to the vagaries and pitfalls of publication and promotion. I may be an award-winning self-published author, but my ambition is still to be published by a major imprint. I chose to self-publish a specific set of works for a particular reason — as will be explained later in this issue. I had to learn how to take publishing a book seriously in order for readers to take my book seriously. It paid off. Scattered throughout the main article are also short "case studies" by self-published writers, editors of small presses, and others who use the internet as their chief sales channel, outlining their own experiences. Donna Scott provides an article on promotion and creating a marketable identity, and on designing an online presence and getting it known. Del Lakin-Smith explains the tools for building a brand online. Jonathan McCalmont covers the uses and abuses of online reviewing and social media, and the mistakes to avoid. And there's the story of Whippleshield Books, the small press I set up in early 2012.

Although FOCUS is a writing magazine, we hope this look at the business side of the writing game will prove useful and informative. Everyone, they say, has a book in them. While for many it should probably stay there, if you are going to make the effort to write that book then it makes sense to maximise its chances of being published and being read.

Ian

About our Guest Editor

Ian Sales was only three when Neil Armstrong landed on the Moon, but he didn't see it on television because he grew up in the Middle East. He lived in Qatar, Oman, Dubai and Abu Dhabi, before returning to the UK for schooling, spending only the holidays abroad. After graduating from university, he returned to Abu Dhabi to work — first for the Higher Colleges of Technology, and then for a national oil company. He came back to the UK in 2002 and settled in Yorkshire, where he now works as a database administrator for an ISP.

Everything You
Wanted To
Know About
Self-Publishing
And Small
Presses But
No One Would
Tell You

RYAN SALES

Whippleshield Press is a small press specialising in literary hard science fiction and/or space fiction. To date, it has published the first three books of Ian Sales's Apollo Quartet — *Adrift on the Sea of Rains* (2012), *The Eye With Which The Universe Beholds Itself* (2013) and *Then Will The Great Ocean Wash Deep Above* (2013). *Adrift on the Sea of Rains* won the 2012 BSFA Award for Best Short Fiction, and was a finalist for the 2012 Sidewise Award for Best Short-Form Alternate History. The fourth and final novella, *All That Outer Space Allows*, will be published in 2014. Whippleshield Books is currently looking for submissions for *Aphrodite Terra*, the first in a series of mini-anthologies, each of which will focus on a celestial body in the Solar System. It is also looking to publish novellas by other writers which meet its guidelines. You can find out more at whippleshieldbooks.wordpress.com and shop.whippleshieldbooks.com.

There, that's the obligatory promotional bit out of the way. When I was asked to guest-edit this issue of FOCUS on social media, it seemed that the best way to do so would be to structure the issue around my experiences of publishing and promoting my own work. Whippleshield Books is my small press, and I originally set it up to publish the Apollo Quartet. But if you want your books to be taken seriously, you have to take the entire process of publishing them seriously. So I made Whippleshield Books an open-submissions small press, albeit with a very specific taste in genre fiction; and I published my books in hardback and paperback, as well as ebook.

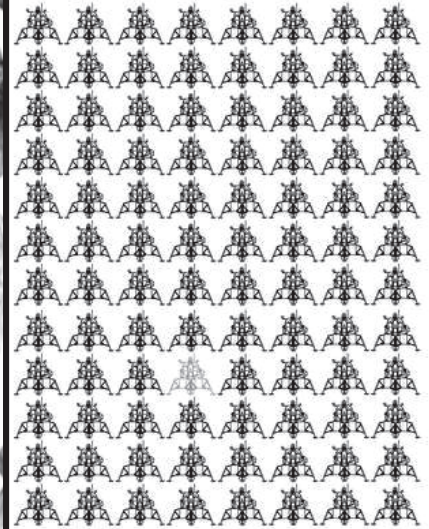
I thought I knew how to do it — after all, I'd edited a fanzine and co-edited a small press fiction magazine back in the early 1990s. But, of course, a lot has changed since then. We now have the internet (yes, technically we've had it since 1969; and I've been using it since 1985; but the World Wide Web didn't really kick off until 1996). I knew a number of people who ran small presses, and I could always ask them for advice. I'd even just edited — and done the layout myself — a hard sf anthology, *Rocket Science*, for a small press.

I went into publishing with eyes open... but it has still managed to catch me by surprise on occasion. I had to learn how to use the "tools" of the trade, how to show people I was serious about what I was doing, how to convince others of the quality of my product, and how to put up with the disappointment when my novellas didn't become the runaway best-sellers I felt they deserved to be...

The history

It's late 2011. I had written a 20,000-word novella which featured a two-page abbreviation key, twelve pages of glossary and two pages of bibliography. I knew full well no magazine would touch it. Abbreviations! Glossary! To me, the whole point of *Adrift on the Sea of Rains* was that I'd done something different. I saw that as a strength, but it also made the novella an almost-impossible sell. I approached a couple of small presses but they had over a year's worth of titles backlogged. And I wanted my novella out quickly. At Olympus 2012, the Eastercon that year at the Edwardian Raddison in Heathrow,

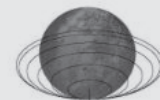
ADRIFT ON THE SEA OF RAINS
IAN SALES



APOLLO QUARTET 1

THE EYE
WITH WHICH
THE UNIVERSE
BEHOLDS
ITSELF

IAN SALES



APOLLO QUARTET 2

APOLLO QUARTET 3
IAN SALES



THEN WILL
THE GREAT OCEAN
WASH DEEP ABOVE

aria: left luggage

geoff nelder

The End of Science Fiction? No! Please let it have a different title." That was the introduction to my temporary appointment of administrator of small press BeWrite Books a few years ago.

"Read the novel, and you'll see why the title stays." I argued that most science fiction aficionados would recoil at the title, thinking it was another diatribe by the anti-SF literati. Indeed, the novel was more a detective thriller, but based on the premise of the imminent folding in of the universe. While humanity freaked at their termination, the police officer was determined that a murderer shouldn't get away with his crime. Sam Smith did a good job in that page-turner, but with that title it didn't sell as many copies as the story warranted. Titles are important. The title of my *ARIA: Left Luggage* has been dubbed "strange" and in hindsight too obscure to find easily on Amazon. Go for the juxtaposition of perceived opposites such as in Alyson Bird's *Bull Running for Girls*.

Small presses rarely see their books on the shelves in chain bookshops, not because of print-on-demand nature of the process whereby books are only printed when ordered, but because of the low bookseller discount often set by the publishers, which makes it insufficiently profitable. Watch out if you want author signings, for example, in Waterstones. I've questioned small presses on this and they argue their discount means larger royalties per book for their authors. I suspect a higher turnover with lower percent royalties works better...

An attractive publisher website helps as long as finding books readers want is as easy as picking delivery pizzas.

Sales are driven by loyalty and this is often generated via forums. I cut my moderator's teeth on a small press community forum. Lively, heated, angry, calm and passionate book lovers all, it was a marvellous vehicle for book promotion. Baen's Bar comes to mind as the active forum for Baen Books. Most small presses have forums but most are sparsely populated. Even the Yahoo group forum for Double Dragon Publishing is tiny compared to their hundreds of titles, but that's because the owner only allows its authors to be members. Yes, we are all readers but most writers are too busy to read, so publishers' forums really should be open to all readers if they want the forum to generate sales.

Does twitter help small presses? Yes, but ensure your authors don't just tweet their book links. "Engage" is the magic word on Twitter and all social media. It's time-consuming to respond, retweet and banter, but it helps create brand and, eventually, sales. Remember, the life of a tweet is only ten seconds, especially for high-rolling tweeters.

Publisher and book pages on Facebook create interest, and information is easily reached on releases for the many facebookers out there. Try facebook.com/abaddonbooks for example. Throw in cartoons and snarky images and readers will share your page with a tap of their fingers.

To maximise your social media presence in addition to the above, consider Pinterest, Bebo, Google+, LinkedIn, LibraryThing, Shelfari, MySpace, Tumblr, StumbleUpon, YouTube, blogs and Goodreads...

With all this, how do we find time to write stories?

Geoff's current novels include the *ARIA* trilogy, which has infectious amnesia as its unique premise. His social media links are: twitter.com/geoffnelder, facebook.com/AriaTrilogy, geoffnelder.com, and geoffnelder.wordpress.com for his blog.

I would be launching *Rocket Science*, an anthology of hard science fiction I had edited for Mutation Press. I wanted to launch *Adrift on the Sea of Rains* on the back of *Rocket Science*. But I only had three months in which to do it.

I didn't really have much choice. It was self-publish or nothing. But I resolved to make a *proper* job of it, to produce my novella in limited hardback, paperback and ebook formats. I asked a friend to undertake editorial duties, I designed a cover — inspired, bizarrely, by a piece of set dressing I saw in Michelangelo Antonioni's film *Red Desert* — and I sought quotes from a number of printing companies.

For the back cover of my book, I thought having a few quotes from other science fiction writers might encourage people to buy it. I think the first person I emailed a copy of the story to was Adam Roberts. He thought it was good and was happy to provide a puff. I made use of other contacts, and sent copies to Eric Brown, Keith Brooke, Gary Gibson, Kim Lakin-Smith, Michael Cobley, Jack Deighton, Andy Remic, Jared Shurin and Cliff Burns — all people I knew and, in some cases, had known for a couple of decades. They happily gave me quotes for the back cover. All this, of course, was quite ego-boosting — I'd not even published the book and I already had ten testimonials from well-known names in British science fiction...

In April 2012, I turned up to the Eastercon with a couple of boxes of my novella to sell in the dealers' room.

My expectations were actually quite low. I knew I could blag friends and acquaintances — and perhaps even the odd stranger — into buying a copy, especially if they'd had a beer or two. I'd had 100 paperback and 75 hardback copies printed, but I very much suspected I'd still have those boxes cluttering up my landing a couple of years later. Over the weekend, I managed to sell twenty-two paperbacks and twenty hardbacks. It wasn't enough to cover my costs, of course; but then I expected Whippleshead Books to be a money-sink for much of its operating life.

Later that month, I published an ebook version of *Adrift on the Sea of Rains* on Amazon. Then a couple of reviews of it appeared online — not just positive reviews, but glowing reviews. It seemed that *people who didn't know me* liked my novella and thought it was actually quite good. Well, I knew it was good, of course; but it was also literary — my elevator pitch was "Cormac McCarthy on the Moon" — and there are a lot of science fiction readers who don't like literary in their genre. Then there was the glossary. And the abbreviations. And the "insane level of detail", as one reader put it.

I had spent quite a bit of social capital on launching *Adrift on the Sea of Rains*, and it looked like it was paying off. Having a good product, so to speak, certainly helped — not just the contents, but also the demonstrable effort I'd put into presenting it: the limited edition hardback, the paperback,

glossary

agent: a person who acts as a representative for an author and

mediates between them and the publisher. Most agents have strong working relationships with editors at imprints and small presses and can ensure their clients' submissions are not treated like manuscripts on the *slush pile*. Agents also undertake some editorial duties, particularly when working on a client's manuscript to ensure it is fit for submission to an editor. Agents are not a requirement for publication — although some imprints will only consider agented submissions — but they certainly improve an author's chances of publication.

imprint: the publisher's name as given on the spine, rear cover, colophon and title page of a book. Once independent publishers, most imprints are now through mergers and acquisitions owned by one of a handful of multinational publishing conglomerates. For example, the Orion Publishing Group, itself owned by Hachette Livre, owns Allen & Unwin, Millennium, Orion, Gollancz and Weidenfeld & Nicolson, among other imprints.

independent publisher: not all publishers are imprints or part of multinational conglomerates. Some are small or medium-sized enterprises, privately-owned, with no ties to any larger corporation. Since they cannot match the major *imprints* for depth of distribution, or the advances they can offer authors, they tend to focus on the quality of the books they publish.

print-on-demand (POD): a printing technology which allows for print-runs as low as single copies. POD titles are generally only printed when ordered. Because of this they are more expensive than traditional lithographic printing and economies of scale are much less marked. Many self-published authors use POD.

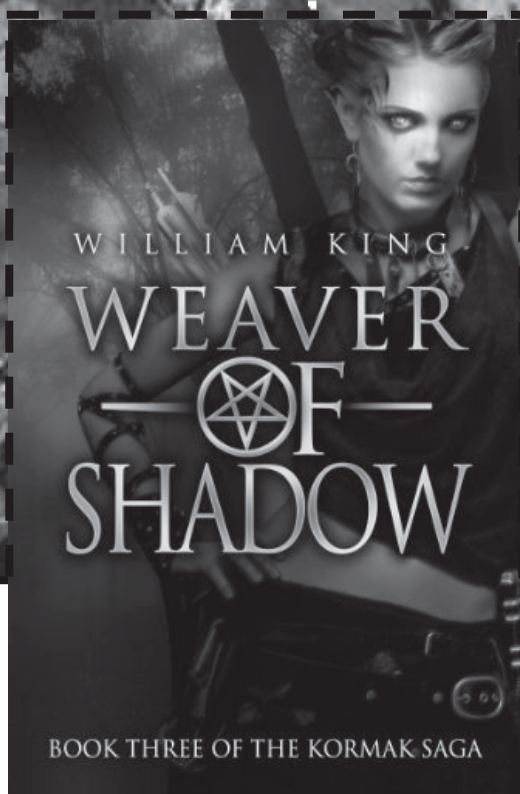
self-published: the author's work has been published by themselves, and not by a *vanity press*, *small press* or *imprint*. Self-published works can either be hardcopy books, printed using *POD*, or ebook only, using platforms such as Smashwords or Amazon's KDP. The author of a self-published book is responsible for all the costs associated with publishing the book, but they also earn all the revenue the book generates (less whatever percentage is taken by the distribution channel).

slush pile: those manuscripts at a publisher or magazine which were unsolicited, i.e., the authors were not invited to submit by the editor, nor are the authors represented by an agent.

small press: a publisher with annual sales below a certain level, or who published fewer than ten titles a year. Also known as an *independent publisher* or *indie press*, though these latter two terms are often used to describe any publishing house which is not an *imprint* of one of the multinational publishing conglomerates. Small presses may offer either a royalty or a fixed fee for publication of a work. The author does not pay for printing, marketing or distribution.

vanity press: not to be confused with a *small press*. A vanity press bills the author for all editorial and printing costs. Some vanity presses offer publishing packages, in which the author presents the manuscript and pays for all associated costs involved with editing, printing, marketing and distributing the finished book. Vanity presses violate *Yog's Law*.

Yog's Law: "money should flow toward the author". Formulated by US author James D Macdonald, the law has proven a useful tool in explaining to budding authors how the process of publication should work.



case study

weaver of shadow

william king

Write the best book you can.
Get it properly edited.
Get a cover that looks professional and lets the reader know what genre your book is in.

Write a decent blurb.

Upload.

Repeat.

Test everything for yourself. The internet is full of information about self-publishing. Almost all of it is sincerely meant and was probably accurate when written, but things change so fast and vary so much between genre and writer and strategy that what worked for someone else two years ago may not work for you. It's easy to make changes to covers, blurbs and prices. If you want to experiment you can. The internet is also full of people arguing about what works or doesn't. You don't have to be one of them. You can do what you want and analyse your own results. The publishing police won't come and arrest you for doing so.

Remember you are working in software now, not hardware. Until a few years ago publishing was like producing hardware in the computer industry. An artefact was created. It was shipped. It sat on the shelf. It was bought or it was not. After a certain period, it was discounted, returned, destroyed. Modern indie publishing is more like producing software. You can make changes, updates and upgrades. It has no shelf life. It sits on a server until someone buys it. Don't like your cover? Change it. Someone writes and points out a typo. Write them a polite email thanking them, correct the typo, and mention them in your acknowledgements if they agree.

Relax. You have time. Your book is not going to go out of print unless you want it to. It can find its audience over a period of years or decades if need be. If you are suddenly embarrassed by the childishness of your writing, pull it. Otherwise leave it to make its own way.

Write what you love. The economics of the industry have changed. Niche marketing is very, very possible. A 70% royalty and low overheads change everything. What is uneconomic for a conventional publisher may provide you with a living. Case in point, a couple of years ago, fed up with fat book fantasy, I set out to write a series of short (40,000 to 60,000-word) old school sword and sorcery novels about a barbarian monster hunter called Kormak. No conventional publisher would touch such a thing as it made no economic sense for them. I wrote the novels because I wanted to read something like them. Those books now earn enough to pay my bills.

Keep your expectations reasonable. The media is full of tales of self-publishing millionaires. As always, such people are outliers. Don't expect to make millions with the manuscript you just pulled from your bottom drawer. The odds are against it.

Keep writing. Keep publishing. If you don't play, you can't win.

Good luck.

William King is the best-selling author of several series for Black Library. His 2012 novel Blood of Aenarion was short-listed for the David Gemmell Legend award. His short fiction has appeared in Year's Best SF and Best of Interzone. His self-published Kormak and Terrarch series have sold over 40000 copies in the past two years.

gary gibson

Brain in a Jar Books came about as the result of an extended period of procrastination while I was working on a book. Writing books is hard, but publishing someone else's — particularly in e-format only — feels a lot easier. In 2009, I put a book by Fergus Bannon out on Kindle, and it got a few hundred sales and some excellent reviews. It then hit me at the start of 2012 that I knew a lot of people with previously professionally published work languishing on their hard drives for no good reason. Within 24 hours I had contacted pretty much all of them, and within two months most of the titles were up. There were, by then, news reports of previously unpublished authors making a fortune on Amazon; surely, I thought, stuff that had already sold and sometimes even been nominated for major awards could also do well? In truth, I had no real expectations. It was pioneer territory; all you could do was strike out and see what happened.

I've since come to the conclusion that Brain in a Jar worked very well — if unexpectedly — as publicity for me. My name appeared in association with the label in major genre press magazines, in interviews with other writers, and even as part of a major display on Scottish science fiction writers in the National Library of Scotland.

As for actual sales... Well, a few titles sold steadily, if not wildly impressively, for the first year or so, after which they slowed from a trickle to nothing. I'm tempted to blame the appalling quality of most self-published books (that weren't previously professionally published) for putting potential readers off, but I feel the answer, whatever it may be, lies elsewhere. Even at their best, some of the books sold only well enough to possibly buy the author a

McDonalds Happy Meal every other week. Others books, despite featuring stories short-listed for major genre awards, sold less copies than I can count on the fingers of one hand.

So what have I learned? That far from being dinosaurs, professional publishers remain absolutely necessary, and that quality of writing isn't enough to gain traction alone — or at least, not enough to put food in a writer's mouth. For that, you really do need an honest-to-God publicity department, and the willingness to keep producing work for years until your name and output hopefully gains traction with the reading public. A good book is like a tree in the forest — it might as well not exist, if nobody knows about it.

But at least the work is out there, and at least some people found it. Good work deserves to be available, whether people find it or not, and in that respect I'm satisfied. The experiment cost me nothing but the time and effort I gladly gave, but it's unlikely there will be any further BIAJ publications.

brain in a jar books

Brain in a Jar Books publications:

Judgement, by Fergus Bannon;

The Unusual Genitals Party, also by Fergus

Bannon; Cowboy Saints, by Phil Raines;

The Cyber Puppets, by Angus McAllister;

Iron Mosaic, by Mike Cobley;

With Time Comes Concord, by Duncan Lunan;

and Escape from Hell! by Hal Duncan.



The thing that often gets overlooked when launching a social media campaign to advertise your publication is “how are you going to measure impact?”

Okay, in one sense, it's easy: how many copies have you sold? But, funnily enough, that's not the most important thing. Because no matter how many copies you've sold, you'll want to sell more. So how can you tell just how successful all your promotion has been?

Promotion is the process that leads the customer through to the point where they click the “buy” button. You need to be able to monitor the customer's journey along that path. The penultimate destination in the case of Aethernet Magazine is our website: www.aethernetmag.com.

We set up our website while we were setting up the magazine. Dominic Harman provided a strong visual image and we based the magazine and website on this to ensure a consistent style. I use Wordpress for the website, it's easy to add sharing buttons to Facebook and Twitter, it's also easy to set up your site so that every post is automatically shared on those sites. After that we use Google Analytics to measure website traffic - it allows us to see where our referrals come from: principally Twitter and Facebook.

Barbara Ballantyne, editor and publicist for Aethernet, tried using paid Facebook adverts to publicise the magazine in the wake of the success of Chris Beckett, one of our contributors, at the Arthur C Clarke Awards. It was Google Analytics which let us measure their impact, and led us to the conclusion that, as far as we were concerned, paid adverts weren't worth it.

What has worked? Word of mouth. I think this, ultimately, is what all small presses rely upon. We simply don't have the advertising budget for anything else. What we do have (we hope) is some great stories, and a group of readers who very kindly take the time and effort to share the news that we exist. At the end of the day it's up to us to help provide them with opportunities to do so...

Tony Ballantyne's latest novel is *Dream London* (Solaris 2013). He is currently completing 'Cosmopolitan Predators!' for Aethernet Magazine.

setting up a small press, getting ISBNs, etc. But all that would have counted for nothing if people hadn't bought the book, read it and reviewed it. It took the spending of social capital to get that started.

Then I learned my novella had been short-listed for the BSFA Award. A number of people had told me they were going to nominate it, but it still came as a surprise. I certainly did not, however, expect to win the award. That came as a real shock. so much so, I hadn't even bothered to prepare an acceptance speech.

Later that year, I was informed *Adrift on the Sea of Rains* had been shortlisted for the Sidewise Award for Best Short-Form Alternate History. While I know a number of BSFA members who might have nominated it for the BSFA Award, I know only one member of the Sidewise Award jury, and I wasn't aware he had read it. So that was a very pleasant surprise. Sadly, I didn't win.

As far as I'm aware, *Adrift on the Sea of Rains* is the first self-published work to win a BSFA Award, although not the first to be a finalist for the Sidewise Award. There's no denying that publishing in the twenty-first century — and particularly the second decade of this century — is very different from that of the twentieth century. Self-publishing is now just one of many routes into print — but, and I can't stress this enough, you will only get out of it as much as you put in.

And even then, there are no guarantees.

The promotion

If only you could write a book and then someone else arranged for all the promotion, all the review copies, the press releases and ARCs. You're a writer, after all; you do the writing. Sadly, even with the major imprints these days, the author needs to be involved in the promotion. Books do not sell themselves, and the publisher can only do so much. For *Adrift on the Sea of Rains* and its sequels, I had to do *everything*.

Once I had the finished product, I had to arrange for people to review it — not just friends and acquaintances, but also review venues, both online and print. I sent copies to the editors of Vector, Interzone, SFsite.com, the newsletter of the British Interplanetary Society, Locus, thezone-sf.com, sfsignal.com, The Future Fire; I organised giveaways on both LibraryThing and Good Reads; I asked friends and acquaintances who'd expressed their liking for it to say so on Amazon or their blogs.

Not everyone who received a copy reviewed the book, not every review venue reviewed the book. Where I could, I coupled *Adrift on the Sea of Rains* to *Rocket Science*, because I thought the latter, an anthology, more likely to be reviewed. And that got me a joint review of the two books in Interzone. I also placed an advert in the magazine.

Whenever I attended a convention — and I went to quite a few in 2012 — I'd take a box of books to sell. TTA/Interzone usually have a table in the dealers' room at most UK cons — manned by Roy Gray — and they're happy to host small press titles alongside their own. So, for the price of a couple of

beers, I could put copies on the Interzone table and let Roy sell them for me. Of course, I'd help out; and occasionally, I'd go looking for specific people to sell copies to.

All this helped sell copies of the book. But it was still small change. It was doing okay on Kindle, but it was going to be a few centuries at the current rate before I'd be able to give up the day job.

And then *Adrift on the Sea of Rains* was named on the Guardian newspaper website as a self-published title worth reading. Kindle sales spiked. Damien G Walter picked it out as one of the "five best self-published genre books of 2012". Sales spiked again. And then settled down at a higher level than previously.

Of all the promotional tools and techniques available, it was one I had no control over which had the most effect — a mention in a national newspaper. Even a mention in a 2013 issue of SFX, even winning the BSFA Award, had no appreciable impact on sales. Since those Guardian mentions, *Adrift on the Sea of Rains* has continued to sell steadily at around a copy a day for about a year. Sales of the second book of the Apollo Quartet, *The Eye With Which The Universe Beholds Itself*, published in January 2013, have been robust, if not spectacular. I typically sell three copies of *Adrift on the Sea of Rains* for each copy of *The Eye With Which The Universe Beholds Itself*. Now that the third book, *Then Will The Great Ocean Wash Deep Above*, is out, perhaps sales will pick up a little. Dean Wesley Smith, who once ran Pulp House Publications, has said it takes around fifty ebook titles for critical mass to form without promotion. Obviously, that's a level of productivity few people can manage, so promotion is clearly necessary. If you have social capital, spend it; if you have contacts, use them. Be careful not to abuse them, however. After all, no one likes a spammer.

A quick note on titles. A bad title can kill a book, a good title can give it a bit of a boost. It's the first thing potential readers will take note of, so it needs to encapsulate their expectations. It needs to give them a clue to what the book is about. *Adrift on the Sea of Rains*, even if I say so myself, is quite a good title — it's slightly mysterious, and those who know that the Sea of Rains is on the Moon will have a clue as to the story. It's also a google-whack — i.e., if you search for the title, my novella is all that the search engine will return. When it came to the second novella of the Apollo Quartet, I'd actually written much of it without a title in mind. I decided to see if I could find a suitable quote — from a poem or a play, or something pithy said by some famous person of letters. A search online for anything associated with the god Apollo led me to 'Hymn to Apollo' by Percy Bysshe Shelley, written in 1820. I was on a bit of a Malcolm Lowry kick at the time, so the line "I am the eye with which the universe / Beholds itself, and knows it is divine;" not only seemed relevant to the plot of my novella but *The Eye With Which The Universe Beholds Itself* also felt a bit Lowry-esque and a bit literary. Unfortunately, it is also a pain to type every time I write about the book. I like long, literary titles, but promotion-wise they can be a rod for your own back.

So what possessed me to do the same for the third novella, *Then Will The Great Ocean Wash Deep Above*, I'll never know.

colin tate clarion publishing


Clarion Publishing, through its Monico imprint, aims to publish highly enjoyable speculative fiction. In order to do this, particularly as we are as of writing this just a month shy from our two-year anniversary, we needed to deliver exceptional production value while running an essentially bare-bones backend. We investigated many production options, and settled on a professional, high-quality print-on-demand printer for our paperbacks - which gave us access to major worldwide distribution systems. We invested in InDesign, Photoshop and Illustrator for the day-to-day layout and production and, thanks to the kindness of the small press community (and my own connections with illustrators from the music business), we have a coterie of great artists for our covers. Added to our editorial connections, we managed to create a point-to-point system for taking on titles and turning them into novels that both ourselves and the author can take pride in. Of particular pride is how we approach rights ownership. We took the basic author publisher contract, and cleaned it up to be less obfuscated and to expressly favour the author - because without them we'd have nothing.

In terms of promotion, social media is important to us, but it can be easily misunderstood and misused. And we try not to do that.

Social media is about brand awareness, not sales, so we don't really promote our works in such a way. We prefer to be involved in online conversations and to participate without an agenda. We would much rather that other people online promote our works through these and other channels - because even though we know our novels are good, there is nothing as effective as friends and unbiased people you follow telling you this rather than the publisher doing so. As a result we focus heavily on person-to-person communication for our novels, with strong results.

I don't know what our individual identity is in the world beyond our small tree fort. Our identity is, to us, tied to the quality of our authors and the great works they write. We'd much rather that the personal identity and brand of our authors (with their own careers and books with other houses) are increased by our online actions. We'll reap the benefits, and so will they.

Colin Tate was born in Scotland, and lived both in the Highlands and Northern Ireland, until opportunity led him to move to New York, and then Japan. Now living in London, he is MD of Nemawashi Ltd, a strategic consultancy that advises other companies on how to improve their online business. Clarion Publishing was set up because of his life-long love of Speculative Fiction, and his desire to support great authors in what they do. He also once had an accidental staring competition with Billy Bob Thornton. It was weird.



Infinity plus in its current incarnation as a small publishing imprint dates back to late 2010, but infinity plus as an entity predates current ideas of social media, indie publishing, etc. Back when the World Wide Web was only five years old, I learnt how to write HTML and started to mull over ideas for promoting authors through this new-fangled medium. The following year infinity plus was launched as an online showcase for genre authors, featuring work from me, Stephen Baxter, Eric Brown and Michael Cobley. My timing was fortuitous: just as writers were becoming aware of the web, but most still had little idea what to do with it or how, infinity plus appeared - all they had to do was contact me and I'd take care of the rest. The idea snowballed, and soon I had what was, effectively, a weekly magazine on my hands with a regular audience in the hundreds of thousands. There was no money involved, of course, other than what I spent on the site. These were the days before the web was heavily commercialised and we operated on the belief that if we put stuff up for free we might share each other's readers around and expand the readership of our work in its "real" medium: print.

Fast-forward ten years, and I had a site that hosted over two million words of fiction from a large proportion of the world's leading genre authors, a thousand book reviews, a hundred interviews and much more. And I was fucking exhausted. Over-stressed in my day job, over-stretched with infinity plus, struggling to keep my own writing going, I was running on flat batteries and something had to give. With a big final site update in August 2007, I called it a day.

But things like infinity plus can never really be put aside, can they? And I've always had a fascination for not only what we write but how we get that to our audience. When a buzz started to grow around the idea of ebooks I decided to dip a toe in the waters by putting together a set of collections of my own short fiction. It made sense to use the established infinity plus name to do this. And, as with the original incarnation of infinity plus, as soon as I mentioned it to a few friends the idea snowballed and I quickly added titles by Eric Brown, John Grant, Anna Tambour and others. And now, within the space of less than three years I have an imprint with almost one hundred titles available in ebook formats, and many now appearing as print-on-demand editions too.

For this new incarnation, the challenge wasn't so much about how we used new media to establish an identity, it was about how to use the already-established identity in a new form. Particularly in an age when anyone can set up as a publisher with just a few clicks of the mouse, the big challenge is how do we differentiate ourselves? Yes, there are lots of fine self-publishers out there, but most infinity plus authors have already gone through an incredibly difficult filtering process via conventional publishing: they've already proved that they're bloody good at what they do, so how do we establish that as part of the brand? An excellent network of contacts makes a huge difference, and we already had that: most people in the business knew the infinity plus name already, and we had an established mailing list we could use; moving into Facebook, Twitter, etc, was a natural progression. Our writers, too, had brand recognition, if you'll excuse that ugly phrase. But that's brands established largely through traditional means, with careers rooted in traditional publishing... Things are changing, and we need to make it clear to new readers that there's some added value in an imprint like infinity plus (or NewCon, or PS, for that matter). How to do that? Right now, I don't know - I'm constantly surprised by which titles do well and which don't - but I think I've proven that I, and infinity plus, will be around long enough to work it out.

keith brooke

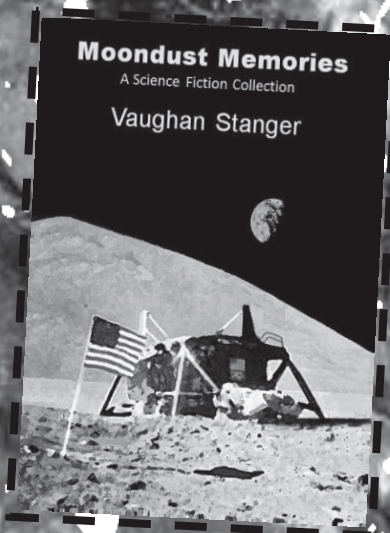
infinity plus

Keith Brooke's most recent novel *alt.human* (published in the US as *Harmony*) was shortlisted for the 2013 Philip K Dick Award. He is also the editor of *Strange Divisions and Alien Territories: the Sub-genres of Science Fiction* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), an academic exploration of SF from the perspectives of a dozen top authors in the field.

vaughan stanger

moondust memories

case study

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Like the majority of writers I slave away in the salt mines of SF publishing — I'm nobody's "next big thing" and rarely nominated for any kind of award — so the problem of how to secure my back-catalogue has intermittently nagged at my mind. In years gone by I might have waited, more in hope than expectation, for a micro-press to come knocking. Or perhaps, if I were bold enough, I'd approach one with a proposal. But nowadays the curatorial tools are in my hands. It isn't difficult to publish smart-looking ebook collections on Amazon KDP or Smashwords. If only selling them was so easy.

For most writers entering the self-publishing arena — or self-reprinting, as in my case — the unpalatable truth is that most of our books will only sell to that subset of our friends, family and colleagues who actually own a Kindle and enjoy reading SF. We can huff and puff on Facebook and Twitter all we like, but our sales will not rise exponentially as a result. Yes, there are tactics we can adopt that will boost sales a bit. In my case that included submitting an article about my writing to my ex-employer's pension plan magazine — the editor was delighted to receive it — or re-tweeting news items that I can link to one of my e-books. Yet still sales remain low: generally well below the fabled 400 copies that an average ebook allegedly sells. (Sadly, even if not bogus, that figure is assuredly a mean average rather than the more representative median.)

After that it's a matter of luck, which I've found comes in two variants: first, Amazon (or whoever) marketing one's books for you, as happened with a couple of mine; second, discovering that a book sells outside the SF community.

As an example, *The English Dead*, my SF story about recreating the 1924 Mount Everest expedition, sells to people who buy mountaineering books. Who'd have guessed? The trick then is to tweet with the right hashtags.

So, despite mostly low sales, has my attempt to establish a back-catalogue been worth the effort? Yes, unquestionably — because it's a big thrill to find out that someone you don't know not only bought your ebook but liked it enough to write a 5-star review. And in the end, people matter a lot more than sales, a point exemplified by my realisation that the greatest pleasure I've experienced during my e-publishing venture has been the opportunity to work with my close friend, Tony Hughes. Originally I planned to create ebook covers using stock art. Over a curry, Tony offered to paint one for my first, *Alternate Apollos*. I was amazed by the results. Since then, Tony has supplied the cover art for all of my ebooks (see www.vaughanstanger.com for examples). Most heart-warming of all, working on the covers has crystallised his plans for the future. When he (eventually) follows me into retirement, he intends to rent a studio and spend his time painting.

I cannot think of a better possible outcome for my e-publishing project.

Briefly an X-ray astronomer, latterly a project manager in the aerospace industry, now an obscure science fiction writer, Vaughan Stanger continues to shoot for the stars in his own, idiosyncratic way.

When we
set up
SF

sf gateway

Gateway, we had a very clear vision as to what it meant from a publishing/imprint point of view. We wanted it to be the perfect specialist bookshop, stocking not just the highlights from your favourite authors' careers, but every book they ever wrote. It would be filled with like-minded souls, happy to while away an afternoon discussing the finer points of Golden Age science fiction with you, and the people who run the shop would have an encyclopaedic knowledge of science fiction.

Achieving the first of those aims was relatively straightforward: acquire the rights to a metric ton of books. The third was accomplished via our partnership with the Encyclopedia of Science Fiction. The second? That's where the social media came in. What we wanted, right from the start was a sense of community. The three main avenues via which we pursued that goal were the creation of a forum, a Facebook page and, of course, Twitter.

Of these, Twitter has proven – rather predictably – to be the most popular medium. We use it in a variety of ways – we tweet a link to the Gateway blog whenever a new post goes live, we tweet a link to that week's promotional spots (Author of the Month, SF Masterwork of the Week, New Book of the Week and Readers' Choice), we send tweets marrying third-party articles/reviews about our books with the direct link to that book on the Gateway website and, as and when time allows, we engage in conversations.

We try very hard to establish a personality for SF Gateway – and in many ways, it's the same approach we take to Gollancz's social media – and to tread the fine line between being responsible to our authors by promoting their work and being responsible to our readers by not bombarding them with soulless plugs all the time. We are fans – at both SF Gateway and Gollancz – and as much as possible we try to interact as fans and think like fans. The identity we want to foster for SF Gateway is a friendly, engaged, hopefully knowledgeable imprint that cares about the books, the authors and the readers and wants to encourage the discovery – and rediscovery – of classic SF & Fantasy, and to discuss great books and interesting things with whatever community forms around that identity.

I guess the elevator pitch is that we love SF – especially classic SF – and we want to help others discover the joys of classic SF, too. With almost 2,500 titles published, we see it as our role to let people know about books they might not otherwise discover for themselves but to do so in a manner that it is helpful and collegiate rather than corporately touting our wares. That's our goal; whether or not we succeed is for others to say.

Darren Nash is Digital Publisher for Gollancz, Orion's SF & fantasy imprint, where he oversees the SF Gateway initiative – a programme conceived to make huge numbers of out-of-print classic science fiction available again as eBooks – and the SF and Fantasy Masterworks.

darren nash

The economics

Running a small press is a costly business. There's the printing costs of the books, the cost of the ISBNs, and the annual fee for the online ecommerce website. Obviously, I didn't pay myself as the writer of *Adrift on the Sea of Rains*, and since I designed the cover I didn't have to pay for that either. I asked a friend to do editing duties. All the same, I was £654.68 in the red before I'd even sold my first copy:-

hardback

set-up fee	£70.00
100 copies	£231.00
matt cover finish	£3.00

paperback

set-up fee	£70.00
100 copies	£159.00
matt cover finish	£3.00

10 ISBNs	£118.68
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This gave me a unit cost for each paperback of £2.32 and for each hardback of £3.04 – although I planned to sell only 75 hardbacks, which raised their unit cost to £4.05. I set the prices of the books at £3.99 for the paperback and £5.99 for the hardback, because I felt that was the market price. In hindsight, it proved too low.

	hardback	paperback
printing costs	£4.05	£2.32
ISBN	£0.12	£0.12
postage	£1.10	£1.10
TOTAL	£5.27	£3.54
PROFIT	£0.72	£0.45

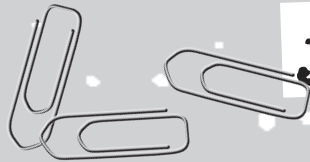
For sales by hand, e.g., at conventions, I generally charged £3.00 and £5.00, which increased my profit by 11p on each (as I didn't have to factor in postage; I always use recycled envelopes, so I don't count the cost of them).

However, I also priced the ebook edition at £2.99, and there were no costs associated with the production of that edition. Amazon offered either 35% or 70% royalty on every sale, i.e., £1.05 or £2.09 profit on every copy sold.

I had experimented with using Calibre to generate the ebook versions, but the output was poorly formatted. So I invested in a copy of Scrivener, and used that instead. I suppose, technically, it's a business expense, but since I also use it for writing novels, none of which I plan to publish through Whipplesfield Books, I chose not to count it as such.

When it came to getting *The Eye With Which The Universe Beholds Itself* printed, I used the same printing company, MPG Biddles. Their quote came in a little cheaper this time, even though the book was the same size – demy, 80 pages (because lithographic books have to have page counts divisible by 16).

hardback	
100 copies	£285.70
paperback	
100 copies	£202.00



Both were a little cheaper this time around. Even so, I'd learnt my lesson with the pricing of *Adrift on the Sea of Rains* — for an 80-page novella, £3.99 was too low for a paperback, and £5.99 was too low for a hardback. For *The Eye With Which The Universe Beholds Itself*, I increased both prices by £1. I kept the price of the ebook edition at £2.99, however.

The business



Writing a book is only one part of the process. I chose to write novellas of around 20,000 words, which I packaged as separate books. Once I had a final version with which I was happy - and had met with the approval of my beta readers - I handed it across to my editor, Jim Steel, for a good going-over. I also asked my cover artist, Kay Sales, to design the front cover.

For *Adrift on the Sea of Rains*, I was mostly feeling my way as I had no real idea of how to publish a book. For the second book, I had most of the process down:

1. Write book. Don't forget to keep potential readers updated with progress — through posts on personal or publisher blog (whiphleshieldbooks.wordpress.com).
2. Once book is finished, see what beta readers think of it.
3. Make changes based on their comments (if warranted).
4. Produce final copy in PDF format. Call this the e-Advance Reader Copy (ARC).
5. Contact people and offer e-ARC for review. If necessary, also produce e-ARC in epub and mobi formats.
6. Get quotes from printers, and then place order.
7. Make book available for pre-order in online shop. Blog and tweet that this is the case.
8. Take delivery of books from printer. Send out pre-ordered copies.
9. Blog and tweet as much as you can that the book is now published and available for purchase.

Most of the sales of the hard-copy editions of *Adrift on the Sea of Rains* took place at conventions. Early on, I signed up for Amazon Advantage, a streamlined ordering process by which Amazon orders and carries stock of your book. Unfortunately, they take a non-negotiable 60% discount... which means every paperback copy of *Adrift on the Sea of Rains* sold for me I made a loss on. Happily, the Kindle sales more than covered it.

Most purchases have been ebook, and of those the vast majority have been on Kindle. Approximately two-thirds of the copies of *Adrift on the Sea of Rains* I've sold have been on Kindle — and I actually went to a second printing of the paperback. Tempting though it is to publish solely on Kindle, the hardbacks and paperbacks were needed to signal that Whiphleshield Books is a

joyce chng **I**s social media the Best New Thing to have

happened in the past few years? With social media comes the influx of fiction, traditionally — and self-published — across all sorts of platforms. Suddenly we're hearing new voices, different voices, everywhere.

A bit about myself before I start: I am Singaporean Chinese and I straddle being published in independent small presses and dabbling in self-publishing. I have short stories and novels in nifty and great small presses, but I also post my fiction on platforms such as Smashwords, Amazon and new-fangled (accessible) places like Wattpad. Like any author now, I have my online presence with my blog and I interact quite often on Twitter. For reasons beyond me, I do not have a Facebook account. So, is social media the Best New Thing (or the last best hope) for writers like me?

Back in those early heady days of the 1990s, the internet was the Best New Thing for me. There was email. There were - suddenly - people whom I could meet without flying across oceans and continents. Like-minded people. I wrote fan fiction and fiction and had readers straightaway. To a girl growing up in Singapore and then studying in Australia, the internet opened doors to countries I thought I'd never had the chance to explore and to people I would not have met in the first place.

I often feel that social media is an extension, an outgrowth from the internet. Coupled with technological advances, social media dovetails into... everything. It is social, just as the internet is social, built on codes and social relationships. It is immediate. It is interactive. It is media that is social: relationships and interactions are integral to it.

But of course, there are people who mistake the "social" part of social media and turn their interactions into nothing less than a series of advertisements. I think many new and upcoming writers make this mistake. Audience/reader cultivation is one thing. But over-promotion is still rank narcissism and turns off the reader. Don't do that. Just don't.

I am not dismissing social media. Through social media (Twitter, blogging and Tumblr), I manage to find more readers beyond my own home country, Singapore - where I will admit that there is a smaller market and ever smaller readership for science fiction and fantasy. In terms of readership and audience, social media might be a good thing for less well-known authors and writers in a particular genre. However, given the ease with which people are now able to publish anything, voices on social media are being drowned out. Let's visualize a market place. Everyone, everybody, is shouting out a storm, hawking their wares. The popular writers have crowds of people standing around them. But some voices are softer and become lost in the general ruckus. I sometimes see social media like that: a noisy market.

What's in for social media and independent publishing? Well, for a hybrid writer like me, I think that it would probably evolve in time. Maybe, face-to-face interaction would come back into vogue. Audiences would not appear overnight, unless your writing is really brilliant (or you have a core of vocal supporters or an extensive network of "friends" or your fiction is priced \$0.99 (or is free)). Hats off to people who often claim that they have 5,000 downloads a month. Good on ya.

Joyce Chng tweets as @jolantru on Twitter, blackwolfchng on Tumblr and blogs at A Wolf's Tale: awolfstale.wordpress.com. She writes under the pseudonym J Damask for urban fantasy novels and Joyce Chng for short stories.

a wolf's tale blog

rb harkess

warrior stone: underland

How hard can it be?" I thought, procrastinating on the edge of the gulf. "You have a professionally-edited MS. You've been published by others. You are techno-savvy."

I dragged in a deep breath and took the step.

Still waiting for my foot to hit bottom.

So a little over dramatic, I admit, but not by much. And, in all honesty, Amazon have made it almost absurdly simple to publish an ebook. Possibly even too easy. But then, what they are hoping for is that you will get so far in, be overwhelmed by how cool everybody else's stuff looks next to yours, and pay them crazy money for their peripheral services. I don't want to sound mean, but if you go down the path of their free covers, you get exactly what you are paying for, and something that would turn most readers away as soon as they saw it.

But in all fairness, the ebook path is relatively simple; all you need is a professional standard manuscript and a graphic for cover art. You can be as tight-fisted as you like, or as extravagant. My blood comes from a long way north of the border so I got hold of something nice from Shutterstock and figured I could hack it into shape in Paint.NET. I'll get back to you on that when I get my blood pressure back under control.

"Ebook easy," says I, "Let's go for print too."

I took advice on this from a number of people and it really does depend on what you are wanting to do, what your business model is, and how you figure on distributing. The paths for an individual writer publishing their work, and someone who is a writer but who also wants to publish the work of others are *very* different. For the former, the most direct path is CreateSpace. Everybody has horror stories to tell, but whatever you do, you can pretty much bank on a huge chunk of your sales being through the Amazon channel. Unless you have a pressing need to do something different, it makes sense to start there even if you progress onto something different later.

And that's where it all got complicated. While the CreateSpace process is not tangling with String Theory, it can still tie you into knots. There are lots of little *gotchas* all the way through, like getting to the point where you are about to order your review copy, and only then do they tell you that the size you have selected isn't going to be acceptable to the external supply chains in the colour paper you wanted. Hmm. Thanks for that.

Changing the colour changes the paperstock, which changes the thickness of the paper, which means you have to go back and edit the 12-layer graphic you spent a month putting together because the width of the spine changed. Or, if you wanted to keep the page colour, you have to go back and pick a new, more "standard" paper size, which means reformatting the text, which changes the number of pages, which means you *still* have to change the width of the spine as well as resizing the cover art.

Take a long, slow, breath. Hold, and release. Better?

Don't know. Ask me in a week, when the approval/proof copy turns up. Oh, did I mention that it can take a month to ship? Unless you pay four times the cost of the book on "expedited shipping", of course.

Worth it?

Oh, hell, yes.

RB Harkess grudgingly shares his writing time with his real-world job, where he does things with computers and bosses people about. His next book, *Warrior Stone: Underland*, is due to be published around Feb 2014 by Fox Spirit. He blogs at www.rbharkess.co.uk.

case studies

rb harkess



berit ellingsen

beneath the liquid skin

Because I write in a second language and submit work to publishers and presses outside of the country I live in, I use the internet and social media for just about every aspect of the business of writing.

When I started to submit my short stories to journals and presses, including independent presses and publishers, many of them were based in the UK or the US. It was therefore most convenient to submit the manuscripts as Word documents via email or other electronic means, such as Submittable.com, which many publishers use.

That's also how I submitted my collection of short stories, *Beneath the Liquid Skin*, to the publisher who took it (firthFORTH Books), and how 'Dancing on the Red Planet' found its editor in the science fiction anthology *Rocket Science*.

After the revisions of *Beneath the Liquid Skin* were finished (via email and Word files to the editor), the publisher and I agreed on which authors to ask to blurb the book and which journals and magazines to send to for review. Almost all the authors we asked to blurb - Jeff VanderMeer, Paul Jessup, Kathy Fish, Kristine Ong Muslim, and Tania Hershman — were writers who had commented on my stories in online journals or online communities previously.

The same was true for many of the writers that reviewed the book for various journals and magazines, such as Chris Galvin Nguyen, Peter Tieryas Liu, Simon Jacobs, Christopher Allen, Edward J Rathke, and Jimin Han. Several of the journals who reviewed the collection, such as *Metazen*, were magazines that had previously published

one of the stories in *Beneath the Liquid Skin*, or encountered them online.

My novel, *The Empty City*, also found its French publisher (Publie Monde) after writer and publisher François Bon read parts of the novel online. He contacted me for the rights to translate *The Empty City* and publish it in French. Some of the design work for the book was also done via email by a photographer and a designer who reside in different parts of France.

In addition, I have found a very friendly and supportive community of writers of all genres and styles in social media, who know the joys and struggles of writing, and readers who read and comment on the stories and sometimes even post pictures of my books in various settings.

Without that community of readers and writers, writing would have been a much less interesting, dynamic, and fun activity.

Berit Ellingsen is a Korean-Norwegian writer whose stories have appeared in *Unstuck*, *SmokeLong Quarterly*, *Birkensnake*, and other literary journals.

Her short story collection, *Beneath the Liquid Skin*, was published by firthFORTH Books in 2012. She was also nominated for the Pushcart Prize and the British Science Fiction Award that year. Berit's novel, *The Empty City*, was translated and published in French as *Une Ville Vide* (Publie Monde) in 2013.

Find out more at beritellingsen.com

proper small press. I didn't bother with any other ebook retail channels. I had both epub and mobi editions available in my online shop, but I didn't bother with Smashwords (their formatting engine badly mangles documents), Kobo or even iTunes. I've since learnt that none of those platforms will typically result in sales numbers anywhere approaching those on Kindle.

The future

As of the beginning of December 2013, Whippleshield Books has published three books of the Apollo Quartet and is currently accepting submissions for a mini-anthology titled *Aphrodite Terra*. Total sales of *Adrift on the Sea of Rains* are just shy of 900, around 385 for *The Eye With Which The Universe Beholds Itself* and nearly 30 for *Then Will The Great Ocean Wash Deep Above*, including a dozen pre-orders of the limited hardback edition. Even better, Whippleshield Books actually went into profit at the end of April 2013 and is currently over £900 in the black.

Unfortunately, MPG Biddles, the company I used to print up the first two books of the Apollo Quartet, went into administration in June 2013, so I have had to find alternatives.

For the paperback edition, I chose Amazon's CreateSpace. It's POD, but it's also distributed through the Amazon website. It's also cheap enough that I get a 30% royalty for each sale. I was worried the CreateSpace product would not match the quality of the printers I'd used for the previous two books, but the proof copy turned out to be well-made. Unfortunately, *Adrift on the Sea of Rains* and *The Eye With Which The Universe Beholds Itself* were both printed lithographically, which is they had an 80pp page-count. CreateSpace uses reprographic printing, so page-counts do not need

to be a factor of 16. Which means *Then Will The Great Ocean Wash Deep Above* has proven to have slightly too low a page-count for CreateSpace to print on its spine. It's annoying, but the ease of distribution makes up for it, I think.

The hardback proved much harder. I contacted Lightning Source but they told me I'd be better off using their IngramSpark POD platform. However, when I tried putting together a book on IngramSpark, I would have needed to price it at £10.99 in order make a royalty on it - because IngramSpark take a 55% discount on all distributed copies. Lulu proved no help either — my 80-page hardback would cost over £12 per copy. In the end, I went back to Lightning Source and told them IngramSpark was no good for me, so they accepted my order instead.

2014 will see the publication of the fourth book of the Apollo Quartet, *All That Outer Space Allows*, as well as the first in my series of mini-anthologies, *Aphrodite Terra*. And should someone send me something that meets the guidelines, I might well publish something else as well. *All That Outer Space Allows* will appear in the same editions as the other three books of the Apollo Quartet, but I won't bother with a hardback edition of *Aphrodite Terra*. For the latter, of course, I'll also have the added expense of the contents, something I've not had to account for when publishing my own work.

I would like to keep Whippleshield Books going. At some point, I hope I won't need to self-publish my own work, but I don't intend to fold up the press when I reach that point. I still think my small press has something to say, I still believe its identity means it offers something different to the genre community. And I think that should continue.

But it *has* been hard work getting there...



NEWS FROM ORBIT

TERRY JACKMAN, CO-ORDINATOR OF THE BSFA'S ONLINE WRITERS' WORKSHOPS, REPORTS

COVER ART WOULD YOU BUY A GREEN COVER?

Anyone who attended World Fantasycon, in Brighton, might have enjoyed the panel on cover art. Aside from the entertaining speakers, it was fascinating to hear some of the trials an illustrator can go through. My favourite was the artist who, having painted (yes, this was BC, in the sense of before computer graphics) a beautiful cover design, then presented it to the publisher who'd commissioned it. Only to hear the immortal words, 'Oh no, it's green. Green doesn't sell!'

Understandably annoyed — the publisher hadn't said anything about banning green — the artist asked, 'Why not?'

Answer: 'We did a green cover once. It flopped.'

Nothing at all to do with the pages inside then?

On a more serious note, the talk did make me think more about book covers I've been attracted to, and why, and about the split between a hardcopy cover and the thumbnail versions we're seeing increasingly on websites and Ebook purchases. So many of these images are complete failures when they are reduced in size, we can neither see the images nor even the titles. Hats off then to the artists who produce covers that work in both formats. I now appreciate you a lot more than I did before.

Right? So to all the Orbiters who regularly send out tough but honest responses — my thanks. You've earned them.

SEX, OR NOT SEX, THAT IS THE QUESTION?

These days we have children's books, then YA, then New Adult, then Adult. Except for the first category [I think] all the rest contain some sexual elements, even if it's only that awkward, gawky, adolescent crush business?

A recent online discussion was whether modern authors feel a commercial *obligation* to write about sex. So what would YOU say? Is it that times have changed, that we're no longer in a Victorian, cover-the-piano-legs world? Do we simply write what those around us consider normal? Or do we write in scenes that are either pressed on us by PR and marketing gurus [or that we assume will be]?

How many of us go back and add sexy bits after we've written a story, that didn't happen in the original? And, I suppose more importantly, did they make the story better? We can all think of examples where it didn't, where a story — good or bad — drowns in its sex scenes. Apparently it's OK to trust that decision to the publisher. Or is it?

WHAT'S AN EDITOR DO?

At another meet in Brighton someone asked two eminent UK editors to sum up an editor's job.

One replied it was to make the book as good as it could be. No argument from me.

But I really liked the second answer: 'To stop the authors making a fool of themselves.' Now that I'll go for.

It was especially apt since recently I've been editing a novel script, while at the same time someone else has been digging away at my own writing. So I was, as it were, sitting both sides of the table. Guess what? I-the-writer was doing one of the same things I-the-editor was complaining about!

So for all of us about to make our New Year Resolutions, how about including, as I will,

'I will not keep starting perfectly good sentences with conjunctions!'

And speaking of New Year's resolutions...

Another of mine was to get a domain name set up, and then a blog started. At the time I'm writing this I am, dare I say it, 2/3 of

the way there. This is because I have a variant of the Harry Dresden disease? You know, where anything technological goes haywire if he goes near it, especially anything computer-ish? My version doesn't affect things that are already running [much] but invariably attacks any new addition. In my case the setup procedures of any new software. But, with the help of my friendly local expert, Gordon, and a bit of luck, we're getting there.

What does all this mean to you out there? Though my current email address is still active it will eventually shift over for the new one: terry@terryjackman.co.uk. Feel free to change over any time now.

And by the time this FOCUS reaches you I should be available in-blog, at terryjackman.co.uk under **terrytalk**, on (mainly) writerly topics. Links welcome, reviews possible on current or future work, all welcome to look in. And I promise faithfully NEVER to blog about what I had for breakfast, the weather, the funny thing my offspring did today...

A Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all, and may success be with you!

RECENT SALES AND SUCCESSES?

Sales and successes, to Dec 2013

— Articles —

Geoff Nelder: on writing specifics in the anthology *Story Behind the Book*, published by *Upcoming4.me* [along with Ian Whates]

— Short Stories —

Mark Iles: 'Sally Jane'
'Santa Claws is Coming'
'A connoisseur of the Bizarre'
'Nightshade, all with Solstice'

Geoff Nelder: 'Intimate Surface' published in *Jupiter* magazine

Frances Gow: 'The Warren Street Kid' in *Bewildering Stories*
'Nothing at Camden Town', in *Wifiles*.

Mike Wood: 'The Photographer', in *Lamplight Anthology*.
'The Biggest Pumpkin in the World', in *short-story.me*
'The Abolitionist', published in *Kzine*.

Patrick Mahon: 'Be Careful What You Wish For' in *Jupiter SF 42*

Sean Jones: 'Overview' in anthology *Andromeda's Offspring*, from *Fringeworks*.



How To Get Reviewed While Making The World A Better Place



by Jonathan McCalmont



Half a Story is Half a Truth

The Internet is full of articles advising freshly published authors on how to get their work reviewed. Though undoubtedly helpful to some, these articles are usually written either by authors or by self-proclaimed "social media experts" who tend to view reviewers as a passive resource existing only to be used, exploited and eventually discarded by ambitious writers in search of a fan-base. Aside from being crude and dehumanising, these articles are often ineffectual as they fail to recognise that reviewers are people with desires and agendas of their own.

This may be an article about how to get reviewed but it is also the other half of an oft-repeated story. Hopefully, by providing some insight into how reviewers choose books and how reviewing works as a cultural eco-system, I can help guide you through the many hoops involved in getting reviewed and also help nudge you towards a relationship with the field that benefits us all.

Getting Noticed

If you view reviewers as a passive resource then chances are that you will wind up treating the real-world and online social spaces of genre culture as little more than advertising hoardings. You see this attitude all the time in writers who spam reviewers with unwanted electronic review copies but you also see it in writers who misuse both conventions and genre-related social media. You see it in the way they mass-follow people on Twitter and then only ever talk about their books. You see it in the people who go to conventions, sign up for programming and then spend the allotted time trying to drag discussion round to their own work. Please, please, please: do not be this person.

Genre culture is not free advertising space; it is a network of institutions and people overflowing with history and individuality. By reducing them to the state of potential customers you are not only denying yourself the chance to make life-long friendships, you are also missing an opportunity to get people interested in your novel before you've even finished writing it. By contributing to the culture rather than simply selling to it, you will be ensuring that your novel will be born into a world that is already well-disposed towards it and that is the first step towards being reviewed: get yourself out there.

Received wisdom tells us the best way to get noticed is to start writing short fiction, hone your skills, acquire a following and eventually graduate to writing full-length novels. Though undeniably fruitful in some cases, the short fiction market is now so large that it is almost impossible to filter; the overwhelming majority of published short fiction goes unread and un-discussed and while those stories may help you to hone your craft, they are also a waste of time if you're looking to build up a following. Happily, the point of using short fiction as a stepping-stone is to get your voice out there and there are many other ways in which to do this.

Reviewers are typically not short of reading options; aside from all the books they have bought as fans, active reviewers often wind up receiving more review copies than they can cope with. Indeed, the greatest challenge in getting reviewed is not getting a copy of your book into the hands of a reviewer, it is getting that reviewer to a place where they want to open your book and start reading. One way to solve this problem is to use convention appearances, podcasts, social media and even your own series of reviews not as a means of selling a product but of selling yourself and getting people interested in how you see the world. If you are a Marxist YA author then talk about Marxism and how you approach Young Adult fiction. If you are a feminist hard SF writer then talk about science and gender. If you are an expert in mythology who has turned their hand to writing Arthurian fantasy then get out there

**Jonathan
McCalmont**
recently left London
for East Sussex and
is never going back.
Aside from being a
regular columnist for
Interzone, he is also
a film critic and a
fan-writer who
keeps a blog at:
ruthlessculture.com

"THE INTERNET AND CONVENTION CIRCUIT RUN ARE ALWAYS IN DEMAND... GENRE CULTURE RUNS

and talk about mythology and fantasy. The internet and convention circuit run on opinion and fresh voices are always in demand... Make your voice heard and the people who like your voice will want to engage with it at novel length. This leads us to the single most important piece of advice in this entire article: *have something to say*. Because if you don't have anything to say then why should anyone bother paying attention to you?

Getting Reviewed

It's important not to assume a direct correlation between positive reviews and sales, or for that matter, an inverse correlation between negative reviews and lost sales. Reviews don't sell books... What they do is sell the impression that a particular book is worth talking about. Reviewing functions a bit like a snowball rolling downhill: first you get the whispers of anticipation, then you get the appreciative early reviews, then you get the bigger venues with wider readerships deciding that your book is worth covering, and every step of the way you are building buzz and drawing attention to your work. Sure, a glowing review in the Guardian or on Tor.com will shift a few copies but review editors are reviewers too and in order to make review editors push your work out to reviewers, you need to get their attention. This process is also worth remembering when it comes to negative reviews since negative reviews (particularly well-written ones) often help to build buzz by making it look as though your book generates strong reactions — and pyrotechnical hatchet jobs always make people eager to join the conversation by reviewing your book. A writer's true enemy is not negativity but indifference; getting reviewed is about overcoming the reviewer's natural indifference to the existence of yet another book. Unfortunately, not all books are created equal.

Genre culture runs largely on social capital. While authors invariably get paid for their work, reviewers and con-runners usually do what they do because they are part of a community that acknowledges and rewards them for their contributions. However, some rewards are more tangible than others — many reviewers may work tirelessly out of devotion to the community and an unspoken desire for Hugo nominations and invitations to join juries, some (particularly the so-called "industry track" book bloggers) have invested significant amounts of time and effort in pursuing the rewards offered by the publishing business. What this means in practice is that publishers distribute review copies, insider gossip and party invitations to bloggers who, in return, allow their agenda to be shaped by the publishers. However, although this means books from genre imprints have a significant head start when it comes to generating buzz and getting the snowball rolling, it is not and has never been a foregone conclusion which books garner the most attention. Certainly, a lot of reviewers value their relationships with publishers, but an even greater number of reviewers revel in the joys of discovering an under-appreciated work and bringing it to a much wider audience.

The institutions of genre culture are generations old and they have their own preferences and prejudices. The field is arranged in such a way that it is harder to break-through when you are anything other than a straight white Anglo-American male with the backing of a genre imprint, but the field is also diverse and eager to change. The best way to overcome the historical prejudices of the field is to find your voice and use it to say interesting things... This will get you noticed, getting noticed will get you reviewed, and getting reviewed will bring first word of mouth, then buzz and finally sales.



ON OPINION AND FRESH VOICES LARGELY ON SOCIAL CAPITAL."

Getting Discussed

In the race to get reviews and garner attention, many authors forget that reviewing is about reading a book and then expressing how one feels about it. In other words, reviewers are going to take something that you worked on for months, read it in a few days and then spend a couple of hours churning out a review. Think about that for a few seconds... Are you ready for that? Do you actually want your life's work to be digested? Writing is an incredibly personal thing and while many writers are able to step away from their work the second it gets published, others are more reticent to let go and this is where problems begin.

As a general rule of thumb, it is a good idea to respond to thoughtful reviews with a signal boost (i.e., re-tweeting on Twitter or linking on your blog or Facebook). Doing this not only expresses your gratitude to someone who took the time to read and write about your work, it also helps to build relationships with reviewers by a) letting them know that someone pays attention to their work and b) making your fans aware of their work. Needless to say, this rule of thumb does not apply to negative reviews. Do not attempt to argue with a negative review, do not draw your fans' attention to a negative review and do not try to take revenge against people who do not like your work.

Responding to reviews and criticism of your work is generally a PR disaster waiting to happen. The important things to remember is that, aside from being generally more popular and more respected, authors have a very different relationship with their fans than critics do with theirs. If you draw attention to a negative review, chances are that your fans will take this as an invitation to "avenge your honour" by making the reviewer's life a misery. This is not just using your higher social status to shut someone up, it's about as close as social media gets to having someone lynched. A recent dust-up between an author and a reviewer started with the author insulting the reviewer and ended with the reviewer receiving rape threats. You may well walk away from that type of shit-storm with your reputation more or less intact but chances are that the reviewer will wind up taking a long hard look at their life and asking whether this reviewing lark is actually worth the hassle. Silencing your critics may "feel" right and just, but genre culture is a community and everyone (fans and authors included) benefits from the people who spend hundreds of hours per year writing about books.

The logic underlying each of these areas is realising that, by choosing to write and promote inside a particular genre, you are choosing to join a conversation that existed long before you were born and will continue to exist long after your bones have crumbled to dust. Fans are not slaves, reviewers are not servants... We are all members of a community and we all benefit from treating our shared cultural spaces in the way we would like other people to treat them. Nobody wants to attend conventions filled with people talking solely about their own work, so why do it? Nobody wants a culture in which everyone is afraid to speak their mind, so why use your superior status and popularity to bully people who say things you don't like? Nobody wants genre-related social media to devolve into nothing but a succession of press releases and promotional book cover presentations, so why limit your output to adverts? Scholars refer to the tendency to use institutions for selfish and destructive ends as the "tragedy of the commons", which brings us to the thorny question of awards.





Getting Nominated

One of the best ways of generating buzz about your work is to be shortlisted for one of genre culture's many awards. Even if you don't wind up winning, your presence on a shortlist will encourage reviewers as most reviewers pride themselves on having informed opinions about shortlists. There are two basic kinds of awards; those awarded by juries and those awarded by popular vote.

It is tempting to see juried awards as another venue for buzz snowballing, but the reality is reviewers tend to be very aware of buzz, but juries often include authors, academics and other people who do not follow the field as closely as your average reviewer. Good buzz will make it more likely that you will get on a shortlist somewhere but some awards (like the Clarke and the Shirley Jackson) seem to go out of their way to draw from a deeper pool.

I will not lie to you about popular awards. The recent history of the Hugo Awards show that a writer with a devoted following can easily logroll themselves to nomination and victory. All you need to do is ask your fans to register for you and they will do exactly that. This is why award season tends to result in authors either actively campaigning for votes or leaving a list of eligible works on their blog and repeatedly gesturing towards it in an entirely unsubtle manner.

Aggressively campaigning for awards is a very effective manner of winning awards. However, this is another example of the tragedy of the commons as turning literary prizes into crude exercises in getting the vote drains them of credibility and damages the rich and vibrant culture that has congealed around them. A better way of encouraging people to vote is to make people aware of your eligible stuff and the works that you intend to vote for. Think of it as an alliance with other writers as your recommending them not only reminds people of your tastes and sensibilities, it also encourages other writers to recommend you in return.

That would be a culture that benefits everyone, a culture worth working towards.

BECOMING A BETTER WRITER...



No. 4 Violent Acts

Practice might not make your writing perfect but, like any skill, it can certainly help make your writing better. These short exercises are designed to try and help you think critically about what you do when you write. You should be able to complete each exercise in fifteen minutes or so. In this issue, we look at writing realistically about violence.

1. Violence is a staple of much genre fiction, but it is often written in quite a mechanical way — describing what one character does to another. Write about an act of violence *you've actually seen or been involved in* but try to focus on how you felt, not what was done.
2. Many characters in genre stories possess almost superhuman combat skills and resilience. Write a short scene about two ordinary people — people who don't know martial arts and who feel pain and don't like it — who are frightened by the situation in which they find themselves but still feel they have to fight.
3. Former world heavyweight boxing champion Muhammed Ali once described his emotions before getting into the ring: "I wouldn't call it fear. I'd call it scared to death." Describe the feelings of a person about to get into a fight.

TALES FROM TURKEY CITY

The Turkey City Lexicon is an attempt to create accurate, descriptive, critical terms for common problems found in science fiction as an aid to writing groups. Tales from Turkey City is an ongoing attempt by **Martin McGrath** to illustrate some of these errors in the form of flash fiction. You can find the Turkey City Online (Google is your friend) and previous entries in this series can be found at www.mmcgrath.co.uk

"BOGUS ALTERNATIVES"

List of actions a character could have taken, but didn't. Frequently includes all the reasons why. In this nervous mannerism, the author stops the action dead to work out complicated plot problems at the reader's expense. "If I'd gone along with the cops they would have found the gun in my purse. And anyway, I didn't want to spend the night in jail. I suppose I could have just run instead of stealing their car, but then ... " etc. Best dispensed with entirely.

Lara slumped against the wall, wincing as she stretched out her injured leg, and fumbled for a cigarette. She probed at the slash in her jeans, the denim was heavy with blood. The gash in her leg was deep and slick, warm blood pumped steadily through her fingers even as she tried to press the ragged edges of the wound together.

She sucked heavily on the cigarette, coughed and felt lightheaded, rolled her head back and gasped.

– Shit! This was bad.

She should have gone to work, another day on the phones calling strangers, trying to sell them things they didn't need and probably couldn't afford. Turn left and get the train, turn right and have an adventure. So she'd turned right and then the brunette at the coffee shop had smiled at her. And Lara had smiled back, meeting her level gaze.

Today was an *adventure*.

She shouldn't have gone with the girl, Phoebe, to her apartment. But Lara was angry with Jenna who had been bugging her about paying the bills and cleaning the flat and acting like an adult. Jenna and the job. The shitty job and Jenna. Lara was starting to hate her life. Phoebe's place had been small, dark and dominated by the unmade bed. The sex had been urgent and a little clumsy but satisfying enough that, afterwards, they had drifted comfortably in the warmth of the bed.

And that's when things had started to go wrong.

Lara woke, heavy-headed and confused, not sure how long she'd slept.

Phoebe was dead. The dozen or more stab wounds in her back and the thick slop of blood on the sheets had been the giveaway. She was already cool to the touch. Lara should have called the police, but the broad-bladed kitchen knife in her hand and the gore that covered her

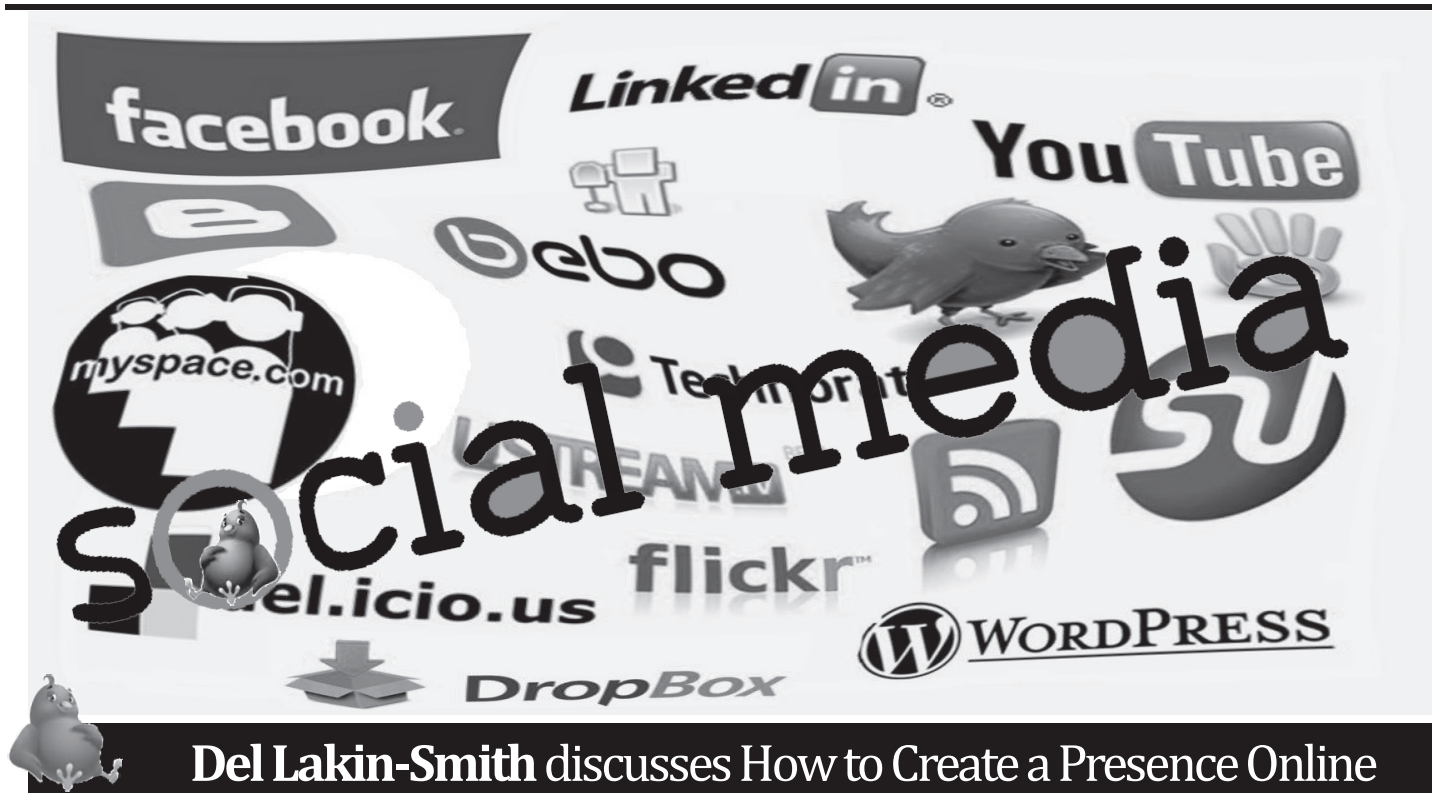
arms made her pause. She'd dealt with the police before, nothing serious – some drug busts, she'd got into a few fights – but she didn't trust them and knew they wouldn't believe her. She wasn't going back to jail for something she hadn't done. But it was the thought of disappointment and betrayal on Jenna's face, trying to explain why she'd been in another girl's room, that had really made up her mind.

She could have just washed off the blood and got out, but her DNA and fingerprints would be on record. She had to destroy any evidence, so she'd poured a bottle of vodka around the room and struck a match. She hadn't expected the fire to get out of control and hadn't expected the whole building to go up like that. Maybe then she should have just gone home, but she'd needed a drink after watching the fire and the ambulances taking all those bodies away into the deepening night, and the bar had just been there.

The man had sat at a table across from the booth she picked. He didn't speak, but she'd known right away – known by the way he'd smiled at her, at the way he'd met her gaze – that he'd killed Phoebe. Still, when he stood up and walked to the door, still smiling, she could have stayed where she was, had another drink then gone home to Jenna. Instead she'd followed him, trying to tell herself that it was for Phoebe, knowing that it was because he knew what she'd done and that he was a threat. In her pocket her hand had rested on the handle of the knife, the knife she'd meant to offer to the river on the way home, and when the man had turned and laughed at the sight of her, she'd drawn it out and slashed at him. And someone had screamed, and she hadn't stopped or tried to explain, she'd run. And there'd been police. And shouting. And a shot.

And now she was here.

FIN.



Del Lakin-Smith discusses How to Create a Presence Online

Del Lakin-Smith is an Enterprise Solutions Architect by day, helping companies make the most out of their enterprise collaboration systems. During the twilight hours he runs **SpaceWitch**, an online marketplace for independent publishers focusing on genre fiction. He has also spent time running websites for the BSFA, BFS, the Arthur C. Clarke Award and many authors. You can occasionally find him on Twitter **@dellakinsmith** or more likely in the bar at a convention.

social media

Speaking as a non-writer, I can't tell you how to write or what to write. But as an enterprise architect I can give you some insights into what works online, and what does not and why.

We all know we need a web presence, right? What does that mean? In its simplest term it means when someone types your name into Google they find you. But that also goes for your work. Searching for your latest novel, short story or knitting project should enable your fans or customers to find what they want and be able to buy/engage/interact with it or you.

It can end there. Or it can go so much further. To me, this boils down to two simple questions. What do I want to achieve and am I any good at this?

Here are some thoughts to get you on that journey:

Do you keep a **diary**?

What level of tech skills do you have?

Do you have a techy friend who owes you a favour or two?

Are you a very private person, and, if so, can you find a comfortable way to have a web presence?

Do you have a solid **network** of friends and family who can help promote your site online?

Do you go to writer events?

The reason for these questions is twofold. There is always going to be some nasty techy stuff you will have to learn to get a blog or website up and running, and you will also have to be able to keep it up to date with current and engaging content.

But do you even need a **website**? This is the key question that will drive the rest of your "web presence".

With my background, I can spin up a new self hosted wordpress blog in about ten minutes. Themed and plugins activated. Pushing data out to the search engines and reaping the rewards. That is the easy part (for me at any rate).

A blog by its nature is all about constantly changing content. News, thoughts, activities, events, etc. Can you keep this up? Do you have enough going on in your head to keep writing posts and delivering content to your potential fanbase?

There is nothing worst than an empty or outdated blog. You might as well create an animated gif of a tumbleweed and have that as your entire website!

There is a phrase that goes "content is king". This is a major oversimplification, but speaks a level of truth. If you can keep outputting content for your website, pop over to <http://wordpress.com/> and get your blog up and running.

But if you can't, if you don't work that way, or don't have the time or inclination, what are the options?

We can use this old thing called a "static website". A static website is designed to represent you at a fixed point in time. A few pages linked together that details you, your work and any other pertinent information. Ironically, you can actually use WordPress to do this too. You simply remove all the bloggy bits and create pages and a navigation structure. The reason I recommend this approach is that it is future-proof. If at any point you want to start blogging, then you simply turn the bloggy bits back on.

Now, there are also some cool alternatives to a single destination website. Allow me to introduce **microblogging** and social networking. As we know, the World Wide Web is a series of interlinking pages using something called hypertext markup language (HTML). Using the same principles of interconnectedness, we can utilise other web services to create our web **presence**. How we choose which system(s) to use comes down to personal preference. You can mix and match or have a 'nuke from orbit' approach and post to everywhere at once (See **hootsuite** as an example of how to do this).

Some examples of microblogging and **social networks** are:

Tumblr — great for posting images, videos, snippets, music, etc. No need to spend hours formulating great words — just post some pictures of cats and funny **youtube** videos

Twitter — what can you say in 140 characters? Very fast stream of pearls of wisdom (or links to cat videos)

FaceBook — "The Social Network": tell the world all about yourself, but watch those privacy settings

Google+ — a desert in the oasis of social networking... or a great place for tech journalists and photographers

LinkedIn — All very worky, but, hey, writing is a job right?

social media



Posting simultaneously to all networks can reach a larger audience. But my advice is to create content for each network. Your LinkedIn audience might not care about the latest meme, and your Facebook friends may not want to see a constant stream of 140 characters **hashtagging** something on twitter. Keep the content fresh, fit for purpose and engaging.

I mentioned a mix and match approach earlier, but where this gets super powerful is by combining all of your **content** from around the web into one place. 'Your brand' is defined by **who you are** in all of the public places. To go back to WordPress, there are countless plugins available that will enable you to aggregate all of your social streams into one place — a great method of ensuring your fans keep coming back to your place where you have control of the experience.

The end game here is to get your fans to buy your books. So I created

SpaceWitch to enable writers and publishers to sell their books to a targeted audience. Focusing on the independent genre presses in the UK, we give control back to the publishers, enable authors to build additional content within the site, and we support all formats, physical and electronic books.

The key is that content and sales become glued together. No need to jump to another ecommerce site once your fan has read a blog post by you. They can reward you instantly by purchasing your book and supporting your writing career.

So, to sum up. You are **your brand** — be who you are and do it to the best of your ability. Share well and share wisely.

FIN.

**Donna Scott is
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social media



It's alright for that Harry Potter fella, isn't it? Actor Daniel Radcliffe recently told *Sky News* that he just doesn't do social media. "If you go on Twitter and tell everybody what you're doing moment to moment and then claim you want a private life, no one is going to take that request seriously," he said. But then, we've all known who he was since he was 11. He's never really had to push his "brand" or put a show reel together on his YouTube channel. Sure, he helps to publicize the films he's in with interviews and such, but he doesn't really have to remind people who he is and what he does. He doesn't *have* to tweet a thing.

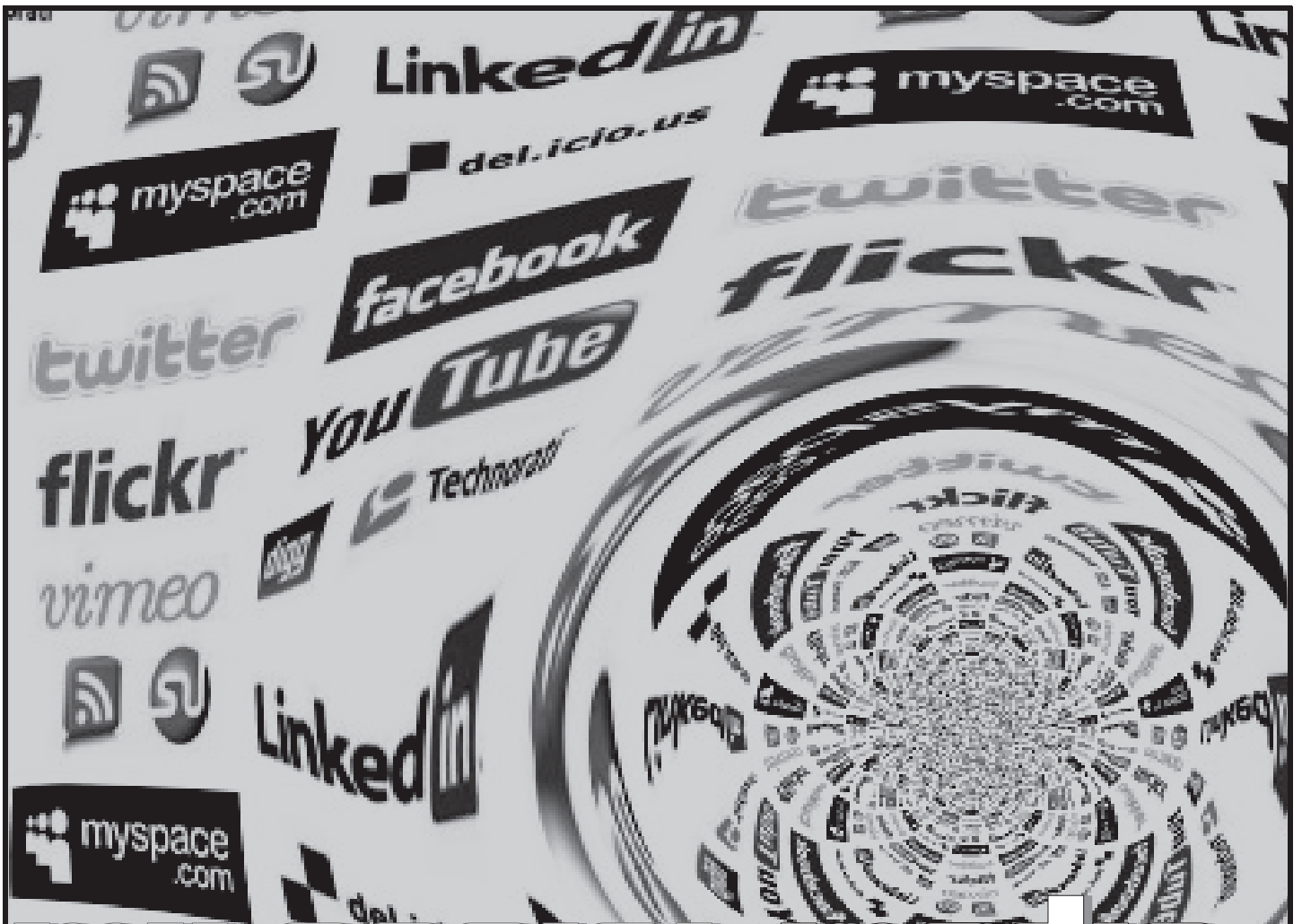
However, for us mere muggles, things are not quite the same. Many people of my acquaintance who make an income from their creativity have been strongly urged to engage with social media by their fellows, agents and publishers. But oh the perils and pitfalls! Rattle your chains of guilt if you've ever enjoyed the chorus of derision that used to occur when someone made their own Facebook fan page. My peers once even came up with the number of 'friends' to have before that sort of thing was deemed seemly — 2000. However, we've softened up lately. Now we just sneer at people who have, say, 1999 Facebook friends. A bit needy, aren't they?

I am on the internet a lot. By which I don't mean I spend all day debating on Twitter about who should be checking their privilege; I have a day job that I like and my evenings are a bit full. But I have a website *and* a blog, as well as all the requisite social media memberships. As a writer/editor/poet/stand-up/fan/foodie I try to let people know about what I do and hope it pays one day. However, I realised I was probably revealing a bit too much personal stuff when some people I didn't know turned up to my birthday party. A bit unnerving... but on the plus side I discovered I actually had fans...and they brought cake, double bonus!

How do you manage how others see you online? Can you create an appealing identity using social media without compromising your personal privacy? It's a veritable quagmire.

Musical comedian Helen Arney feels the pressure of having to have an online presence: "I feel like it's an unavoidable part of what I do as a self-employed writer and performer. If I didn't have a decent online presence — a website, a YouTube channel, a Bandcamp page, a Twitter feed — it would be harder for people to find out about what I do and get in touch about work, or for possible audiences to find out where I'm playing next so they can come to my gigs and buy my music! But it's more than that... I'm also someone who spends a lot of time at home working on my own. Twitter is a lifeline of human interaction. And constant distraction. Almost like a real human, then... Or a cat. That you can switch off sometimes."

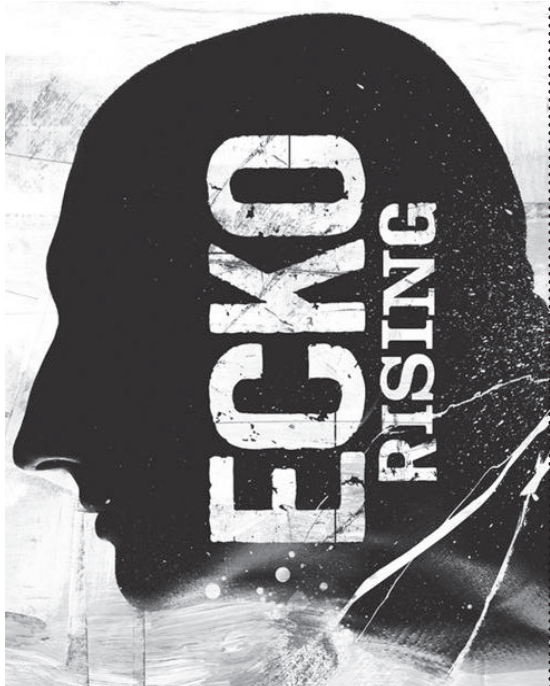
Danie Ware, author of the *Ecko* series, feels that her participation in social media is definitely "a choice": "On its simplest level, I'm a single parent and social media helps me stay in touch with my friends, with their families and interests, and with what's going on in the world around me. Since the publication of my *Ecko* novels, it's also given me the opportunity to stay in contact with the genre/industry as a whole, to learn about the craft of writing, and to talk about the books I've written and read.



my social media

CRISIS and other STORIES

BY DONNA SCOTT



Danie Ware can be found on Twitter as @Danacea and on danieware.com.

Ecko Rising and Ecko Burning are published by Titan Books.

"If I have a 'duty', it's because I set up, and now run, the social media identity for a certain well-known retail Brand — I'm sure I don't need to say which one. I discovered recently that the Brand in question is one of the top 200,000 Twitter streams worldwide, which was a startling and rather good surprise."

Clearly, the social aspect of social media is one that appeals to us as writers, giving us a chance for a break from the solitary nature of what we do. Helen points out the duality of such social interaction: "I used to spend/waste a lot of time on Facebook, at that time when you would accept friend requests from anyone and everyone because it was just *so* exciting! Which leaves me with a lot of friends/"friends" (delete as applicable) online."

Conversely, online strangers have become firm friends for Danie: "In the first days of Twitter, I made friends all across the globe — there were only a few of us then, and we had a very strong social bond. In six-plus years, that bond has been with many of us, site to site, experience to experience; it's grown with us and has stayed strong. It's slightly surreal, because most of these people I've never met and never will, and yet the friendships are years-old and completely genuine [...] As an author, social media can be equally distraction and tool — it simply depends how you use it (and how disciplined you are). As a single mum, it can sometimes be a lifeline — if you don't know something, and you ask for help, your friends will be there for you [...] Many of the people in my Twitter stream knew *Ecko* when I (very!) tentatively starting writing again, and put the first few chapters on Googlepages, back in 2008. I was scared out of my tiny mind — and it was down to the support and friendship of the people that read it that I found the courage to write more."

Helen agrees that social media can be a great resource: "Without Twitter I wouldn't be involved in a whole bunch of interesting side-projects like Ada Lovelace Day Live, Arts Emergency, Science Grrl... It's great for finding just the right audience for a niche show, getting a few different perspectives on a train of thought, and finding a decent coffee shop in central Manchester. But it's only part of the puzzle... if Twitter and Facebook were the only contact I had with friends, colleagues and employers I very much doubt I would get anything substantial off the ground. It's brilliant in the moment, but once it falls off your timeline, it's usually forgotten [...] The best thing has probably been a video that Happy Toast made for one of my songs. It came about because someone suggested we might work together on Twitter, and that little tiny idea turned into an epic project. We've never actually met in real life, so this amazing video is entirely thanks to Twitter. And Happy Toast's amazing animation work, of course."

**"I'M A MUM AND A GAMER AND A CYCLIST AND M
CENTRE OF MY OWN VENN DIAGRAM THAT LOOPS**

It all sounds brilliant. But then the internet also has an ugly side. "Among the worst things I encounter— stupidity and bad manners," says Danie. "If you wouldn't write on a piece of A4 and pin it to the staffroom notice board, don't put it on Twitter. It's common sense, but every so often I see things that make me cringe."

It seems the best way of dealing with blunt remarks, trolling and 'someone being wrong on the internet' is to rise above it if you can, count to ten and ignore the click-bait. The murky underworld of comments sections under articles — where angels fear to tread — is summed up by the phrase "below the line": it's *beneath* you; don't go there. Just remember who you're representing here, as Danie explains: "As a Brand identity, my attention has to be on the Brand I'm promoting — which means a very tight focus. Quite apart from the 'manners' question, I have to focus on our own stock, events and promotions. I've had to take a blanket decision not to RT people's Kickstarters or local events, for example, simply because I get a dozen requests a week and can't possibly answer them all — and this can be very awkward at times. This doesn't mean that the company Brand doesn't talk to people, though — I find that personal responses and a sense of humour are imperative!"

There are some writers out there whose online identity comes with a side order of snark and who are happy to build a following of rubberneckers for their latest attack. There might be some insightful literary discourse buried in their condescension, but I personally don't want to give them a single click-stat. I'm much happier networking and socializing online with people who I think are nice, like Helen and Danie. When it comes to branding, Helen is perhaps the most focused of all of us: "I'm a musical comedian, interested in science, maths and bad puns so if people are curious about how that eclectic combination of things works together, they're probably interested in most of the other things I like and want to share online." Danie says, "I'm a Mum and a gamer and a cyclist and many other things, so I sit in the centre of my own Venn diagram that loops in many different interests."

I would argue that you don't necessarily have to brand yourself as any particular creative type, but if you're a bit of a polymath it may be better to play to your main strengths first and foremost. Be nice, think twice before responding to something you don't like, and instead work on filling the internet with more interesting things — your witty insights; your clever content. Be the brand you wouldn't mind buying yourself.

FIN.

**ANY OTHER THINGS, SO I SIT IN THE
S IN MANY DIFFERENT INTERESTS."**

Social media

Helen Arney tweets as @helenarney — check out Helenarney.com for dates of her upcoming performances with Festival of the Spoken Nerd and Full Frontal Nerdity. In 2014, she will also be presenting on BBC's Coast.



photo c/o Alex Brenner (alexbrenner.co.uk)



photo c/o Idil Sukan / Draw HQ



photo c/o Steve Ullathorne (steveullathorne.com)

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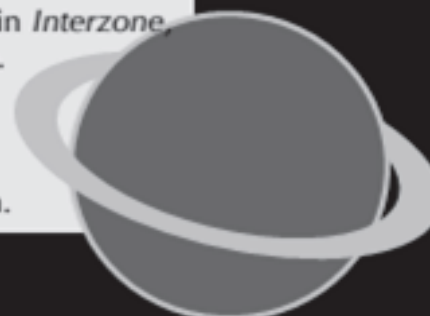
The James White Award is an annual science fiction short story competition, established in 2000 in memory of Irish writer and fan James White. It is open to any non-professional author. Stories entered into the competition must be original and previously unpublished. The award is sponsored by Interzone and supported by the British Science Fiction Association.

This year's judges are novelists Sophia McDougall, Emma Newman and Adam Roberts.

The winning story will receive £200 plus publication in *Interzone*, the UK's leading science fiction magazine. Entry is free.

Entries are now being accepted. The closing date for this year's competition is 31 January 2014.

For more information visit www.jameswhiteaward.com.



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