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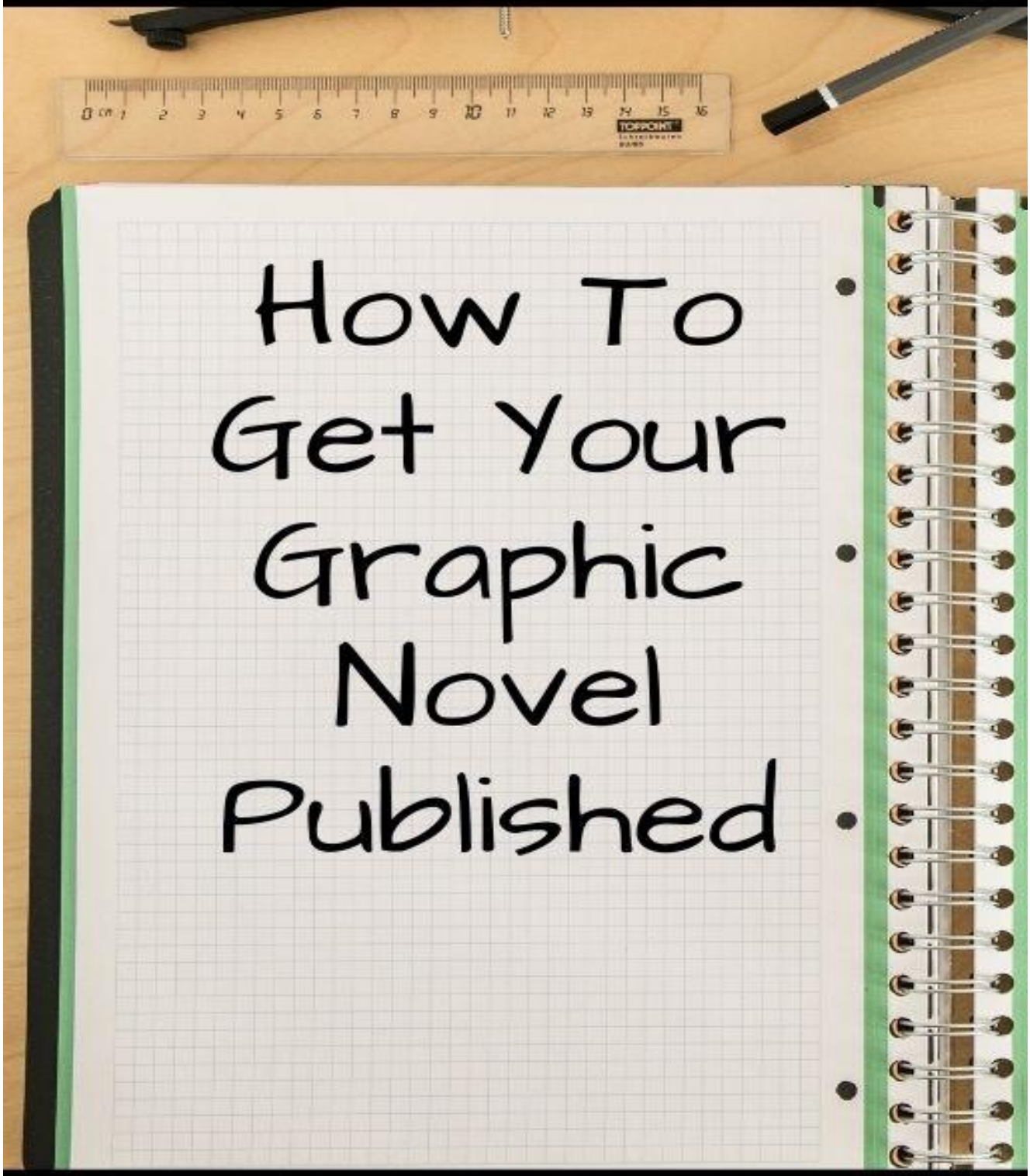

How To Get Your Graphic Novel Published

MARK JONES

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Introduction

What do you want?
Fame, money, success, power, or satisfaction?

I've thought long and hard about that question during my career. I think that fame usually brings a lot of money, and certainly, success can bring both money and power. However, what about satisfaction?

I think if it is used in the right way, satisfaction brings all of the aforementioned and a colossal amount of money. If you look at the success stories of people such as Steve Jobs, Bill Gates and their ilk – they were never really in it for the money.

Those chosen few, the great creative talents of our time, all seem to be motivated by satisfaction. They want to be successful, and they certainly want a lot of money, but what defines them is their passion for what they do. Apply passion to any career, and you can expect success of some kind to come along.

How can you become successful at being a published author, particularly in a field where the money is often not that great?

You need to have a colossal amount of love for comics and graphic novels, but even that is not enough. You will need to devote yourself to the study of writing, grammar, and even marketing.

In the age of the Kindle and the tablet computer, the writer is now a one-man-band. He may write, possibly also illustrate, and even do his marketing. In the twenty-first century, writers are becoming the ultimate entrepreneurs.

In competitive times, one needs an advantage. What is it that you can do that no one else seems to have considered? Sure, you can write and perhaps designing a book cover is no big deal for you. What topic should you add to your list in your quest to break into comics and graphic novel publishing?

How about knowing what the publishers think about their writers? Not just the successful writers, but the newcomers knocking on the door and trying to sell their first script? In an ideal world, you would be able to know the culture and way of thinking in a

publishing house.

Look in a dictionary, and you'll find culture and way of thinking are described as one single word: mindset.

This book provides insight, for writers, as to the mindset of a publishing organisation. Within this book, I will enable the reader to understand the way that editors, artists, desktop publishers, and marketing people think.

As a published writer and editor, I want to share my experiences with you in the best way that I can. I also want to show you an area of publishing that does not seem to have been covered in other books.

I am often asked why publishing houses seem to be harder to break into than banks. Many writers will also ask me a variety of questions, the most popular of which seems to be: why will they not even read my material?

What some writers should be asking is what goes on inside the publishing house? What are office politics? What happens to an editor once he agrees to try and publish my material? How can I ensure my work is published on time and resembles the material I originally submitted?

To become truly successful in publishing, understanding the culture and the way that a publishing house operates is of prime importance. If you are constantly sending your writing out, but not even receiving a reply then what I have to offer will be of great help.

For those simply wanting to know more about graphic novel publishing, this book also intends to provide a short, but firm, grasp of the basics.

If this book succeeds: writers will understand the mindset of publishers, and will be forewarned of potential problems and how to avoid them.

Each chapter of the book examines a process of graphic novel production, there are also personal accounts of what can make some processes difficult to complete. I will not stick to a rigid format for every process, but list issues that prevent most writers from having successful careers.

The issues mentioned also shed some light on the internal problems that publishers have. Even if you are a fantastic writer, the office politics within a publishing house may mean your work is never printed. The overall framework of this book is to provide not only an understanding of graphic novel publishing but also a guide to the minefield of the writer and publisher relationship. I've included many examples from my own life in publishing. Please note that I have not named any publishers or colleagues directly, and once you have read the book, I am sure you will understand the reasons for that.

In the following chapters, the tone of this book will be informal. I feel that potential writers need a friendlier and less bureaucratic tone than that which they often receive from publishers. I do not intend this book to be taken as a scathing or bitter memoir. That is not the intention of this volume. Some of the stories and details may seem turbulent, but that is what goes with the territory. I find working in the publishing industry to have been the most satisfying working hours of my life.

For those of you who succeed in placing your work, you will enter a profession that not only stimulates your interests but rewards them. As a disclaimer, the business of publishing is often unpleasant. You will be working with, and against, some fairly ruthless characters. I have listed the many different types of editors who exist behind the rosy facade of the publishing house editorial department.

The overview of this business, I offer, may surprise you. You will see that the complete publishing process is sometimes difficult, often political, but very satisfying.

I hope you enjoy this book, and that you learn a great deal from it. Probably, the most important thing you can learn is the complex etiquette between writers and publishers.

Please note that this volume is in British English, but my next work might just be in American English. I shed light on the reasons for that within this book. If you are a British writer, then I will show you why it may be worth your while to invest in an American English dictionary. That not only refers to being published in America but in many other countries across the world.

And One More Thing...

As an extra, a sort of special bonus feature, I am also going to offer you a glimpse into the world of graphic novel production in Asia. I've been there and spent some time working

within a culture that is vastly different from that of Western graphic novel publishers.

My reason for including my experience within Asia is that in looking to the future of graphic novel production, I think you will see the emergence and continuing growth of new companies throughout Asia. For those of you in the West looking to gain experience in the field of comic and graphic novel publishing, Asia could be a very welcoming host.

Before we examine each piece of your journey as a published writer, let's define the format we are dealing with.

What Is A Graphic Novel?

A graphic novel is a comic that contains one complete story. Many graphic novels are indeed sequels to existing works, and they contain the same characters and locations. However, the story should be new and complete. A graphic novel is not a weekly continuation of the same ongoing story, which you might find at a comic shop. In a graphic novel, the story should always be resolved.

How Are Graphic Novels Made?

Each publishing company will have its own set of processes, but the list below contains the basics which most companies must follow.

Pre-Production

1. The writer has an idea they feel could be developed into a graphic novel.

2. To save time, the writer should then examine the current marketplace to see which publishing house might give their idea a warm welcome.

3. Having identified a suitable publishing house, the writer should carefully read the company's submission procedures. Usually, the initial process is to send the publisher a two-page synopsis explaining the storyline from beginning to end. The synopsis process is often misunderstood by the novice writer (I offer tips and suggestions in a later chapter). Accompanying the synopsis should be an introductory letter highlighting any work the writer has previously published, and an outline (usually a paragraph) summarising the writer's idea for the graphic novel.

4. If the publisher is impressed by the writer's introduction, and synopsis (the publisher may ask for the synopsis to be redrafted several times) the writer will be asked to send what is known as a page by page breakdown. This is where the writer must describe what happens on each page of the graphic novel. Most publishers pay nothing for the page by page breakdown. Despite no monetary benefits, the writer should apply himself well to this process. A good page by page breakdown will save the writer, and editor, a lot of work in the long run. If the writer wants to save themselves even more time, they should ask the publisher if they have guide sheets for their categories of fiction (history, mythology, classics etc.), and a style guide that can be studied. A writer who carefully follows the publishing house's style guide, should not be surprised if their editor falls in love with them. Such love comes with a token of great affection: more work.

5. Once the writer and editor are happy with the final page breakdown, a contract for the script will be offered to the writer. The writer should read through this document carefully, it will cover issues such as payment, what is expected of the writer, and if the rights to the work will revert to the writer, should the book go out of print.

Production

6. The writer will then work closely with their appointed editor, and will hopefully produce a script that is deemed good enough to be passed to the art department for illustration.

7. Once the assigned artist receives the script and any reference images (pictures of locations and characters), they will consider what visual style will suit the story. Ideally, there should be a meeting between the artist and editor before the illustration begins. Hopefully, both parties will be happy with the chosen style.

8. The artist will then sketch *thumbnails* (so-called as some artists produce sketches no bigger than a thumbnail) of all the pages. Suppose the book is ninety-seven pages, then ninety-seven pages will be created in miniature so that the artist can get a rough idea of how the book will look.

9. From here, the artist will produce *roughs*, full-size drawings of every page. For the artist, there are now two ways they will progress. They will either erase all the rough lines of the drawings until a detailed page is realised, or the artist will redraw the

final page from scratch, achieving the quality finish they are seeking.

10. The completed artwork will then be scanned, page by page, into a computer. Most colouring is now done digitally in modern graphic novel production using the appropriate software.

11. Once the colouring is complete, a letterer will begin to place dialogue balloons and captions. The dialogue balloon, or bubble, is the spoken text of the characters, and normally points towards their mouths. Captions are small square boxes, whose text gives information such as a location and date or serves as the internal narration of a character. Lettering is still done by hand but, to save time, most publishers would rather have letterers complete the work digitally. This means the letterer can cut and paste text, directly from the writer's script, into the dialogue balloons they have created.

Post-Production

12. Now lettered, the graphic novel should end up in the hands of the desktop publishing staff. They will combine all ninety-seven pages of the story, together with a front and back cover, inner pages, a title for the spine of the book, and smaller, but no less important, details such as barcodes.

13. Now a printing company (internal or external) will send a sample mock copy of the graphic novel to the editorial department. The book will be checked for printer's errors (image blur, colouring, and line issues) and the last-minute check on grammar and spelling should be undertaken. If possible, it is highly recommended to include a good copy editor at this stage. When everyone is happy, the printers will complete a first print run. Dependent on the needs of the publisher, this can be anywhere from two thousand copies upwards.

14. If the marketing team have successfully advertised the graphic novel's launch date with posters, social networking and perhaps a good party, then the general public will know the book's release date and will be eagerly awaiting it.

15. Once the books have been delivered to the distributors, they will then deliver them to the high street and online book stores.

Is it so simple?

Not always...

The Problem Of Compromise

A hot country in Asia, 2009.

I am sitting in a private office. It is a small corner that sits within a large room that is occupied by no more than twenty people. The private office is referred to as “private” as it is composed of two temporary walls bolted together.

There is nothing private about the private office.

What we, the editor-in-chief, artist and I, are talking about can be heard very clearly by everyone on the first floor of the building. At this moment there is also a power cut, and the strong humidity is beginning to seep into the building.

The heat is not bothering me, but the feeling of forced compromise is. The artist, once again, repeats the same phrase he has used throughout our discussion: “I am not making changes.”

I calmly, and respectfully, point out that he has made thirty-nine changes to a script that is an adaptation of a historical novel. As the artist on the project, he has taken a few too many liberties. The result is that the ninety-seven illustrated pages, for the graphic novel, do not match the script that I have spent many months working on.

As an example, on one page we see the main character in a church, planning out their battle strategy. Instead, what has been illustrated is the main character standing in a field. This is one of the smaller discrepancies between the script I have edited and the illustrated pages the artist has produced.

All artists should be given creative freedom, but consider that an entire book full of illustrations does not match the script, which was carved from a thousand-page book.

“I am not making changes,” repeats the artist, smiling at both myself and the editor-in-chief. There is another factor, outside of this argument, which makes me understand that

we are not going to make any progress in this discussion. This particular artist is beloved by the family which owns the company. For that reason, this artist will always win out.

When the artist is promoted to the status of art director, later in the year, all of my projects will incur similar delays.

The editor-in-chief closes the discussion by asking the artist to make some changes at least. Two months will pass by and no changes will have been implemented.

Later, and without my knowledge, our letterers will place the text from the script onto the unchanged artwork. One morning, I am summoned to a meeting between a company director and the aforementioned artist.

The discussion centres on the fact that the text does not match the artwork and the dialogue balloons cannot be read in the correct order. I advise the director that there is a problem with the artwork not matching the script, but also that there are no panel borders in some parts of the book, which is making it impossible to know which dialogue balloon to read first.

The director gives the artist a list of changes. Another two months pass by, and none of these changes has been made. The book languishes in the art department and disappears from my sight.

Following this outcome, I discuss the situation with the editor-in-chief. We consider our options and decide to approach the scriptwriter to undertake a rewrite. The writer refuses to amend the story unless he is paid again. He has every right to this request, but as we are a small publishing house we cannot justify the expense.

Eventually, I decided to rewrite the story to match the artwork to ensure the graphic novel makes it to the printers. The rewrite begins, and the story to several pages is altered to fit the artwork. I also rearrange dialogue balloons, and captions, so that they fit the page and can be read in the right order.

To my surprise, the book ends up reading okay, and there is now one process left to complete – art and colour checking. Normally, this is the responsibility of the art department, but as we are a new and small company, the editorial team must also check these art issues.

This is where another problem rears its ugly head. There are several mistakes in the colouring, to list all of them would result in a list the size of a telephone book. As an example, one character's eye is blue whilst the other is green. Hair colour is another problem, throughout the book a character's hair keeps changing from blonde to dark brown.

After checking the colours for three hours, I speak with the editor-in-chief. We both agree that listing all the problems with art and colouring will take several days, fixing the art problems could take many weeks, and then there is the question of whether our requested changes will even be carried out?

Eventually, the editor-in-chief decides to send the book to the printers, despite the art and colouring problems. We both feel the project has been delayed for long enough, and that we need more titles in circulation. Having a wide variety of titles is ongoing pressure for any new publishing company.

The incident I have just relayed to you is one of many I have faced before. Its insertion into this book is not to criticise or deride any particular artists, but to show how graphic novel processes may differ depending on the company you are working for. As you can see from the above example, compromise is essential.

As you may have gathered, in certain companies, the artist has far more power than the writer or editor.

The Long Road To Publication

If you are new to writing then you are, no doubt, positively itching to see your first book in print. Nothing would satisfy you more than to walk into a book store and see your graphic novel on the shelves.

In publishing, patience is a virtue. It may take a lot longer than you think to get your first book out, and the ensuing waiting game is enough to test the patience of a saint. Within some companies, the time from a prospecting writer handing in his synopsis to his book being available on the shelves is about two years, or more, in total.

The complete energy and time put into a few graphic novels are on a par with some Hollywood movies, and the sales odds are just as tough. Can you mention the twenty best

selling graphic novels that came out in the last five years? Probably not, there will have been twenty best sellers but many of them are quickly forgotten.

Graphic novel publishing, and comic book publishing for that matter, is a tough business. If you look at the history of the industry, then you will see that there have been some major casualties. Some companies will fall and rise again, but not many will do so. In taking on your work, a publisher is taking a financial gamble. For those of you that are new writers, you must understand that your presence will cause no end of nerves for the marketing department. The fact that no one has ever heard of you before will put them in unknown territory. They prefer to have the *big name author* whose name they can put front and centre.

It may seem unfair, and even lazy, of them to think that way. Yet, their concerns are for themselves. What if this book flops? Will I still have a job? Will I be able to support my family? Self-survival is in the mind of most publishing house staff.

Why should they waste thousands, if not millions, of dollars printing and advertising your book? That is where your self-belief is needed. You must believe in yourself because there may be only one person in the publishing house who believes in your work, and that will be the editor who decided to give you a chance.

Never make your editor into an enemy. The chances are that they will have sat in meetings where your work is torn apart by their colleagues. Your script will have been passed to an editor who never reads, and doesn't like, the kind of work you produce. I have sat in such meetings many times, and sometimes I have had to endure sitting there while my writing is savaged by a panel of editors.

Editors can be downright mean, if not evil when it comes to criticism. They will never fully express such scorn in rejection letters. If they did, I'm sure an army of lawyers would be queuing up to file lawsuits for *psychological damages*. What is said within the publishing house is often very nasty and below the belt. Your editor will sit there and explain how problems with your work can be fixed, and how your material is going to sell a great many copies. They will extol your virtues, patience, and talent. These meetings where your work is examined could take place several times. First with your synopsis as your editor gets hammered in round one, then round two begins with your page by page breakdown, and your editor will be hit in the chin more times than Rocky Balboa.

By the time they have your script, the editor will be hanging on by their fingernails with the other editors trying to stamp on their hands. There are quite a few reasons why the other editors will try to destroy all that you have worked for. The first reason may be that they genuinely hate the story, and make that known at the synopsis stage. They will allow your editor to have a shot at a page by page breakdown, but they will be reading that too, and if they still don't like it then your story is dead in the water.

If your editor has been tough enough to get you a contract, and you have delivered a script – then that is when they will need your support the most. When you are asked to perform rewrites, it may be because other editors have asked for them, not your editor. They are hanging on to their job by a thread, and they are counting on you to make changes that might make the other editors allow the script to reach the art department.

There can be other reasons why your story is given a hard time. Your editor could be the focus of office politics, and certain editors want your editor, and your script, out of the company. As a professional, your editor will never tell you this. So, the next time they ask you for rewrites, think of a slimy political editor who is trying to stab your editorial saviour in the back. Make sure you turn in a great rewrite and you'll turn the tables on all those who would do either your editor or your material, harm.

Realise that if your editor is fired, then you and your material will be fired too. The other editors who kicked your editor out will not want to support your material. They will have told the boss that your editor was crazy to support your story. They will have explained that you are a terrible writer and nothing but an amateur hack. Once your editor is gone, do you think they will try to push your next script on to the boss? Highly doubtful, and they will have succeeded in shutting the door in your face forever.

As simply as I can put it, that is one of the major factors for work being so delayed and publishing times being put back in graphic novel production. It is a political minefield, and the worst part is that you are not inside the publishing house seeing it happen, but you will feel it when your book is delayed again, and again.

The next area where your book can be delayed is within the art department. Your editor has succeeded in getting your script down there, but the art director doesn't want to play ball. They only have so many artists and they cannot commit anyone to your work for quite some time. A great editor will go down there and fight it out to get an artist, and a good one, to start illustrating your masterpiece. Think about the effect this is having on

your poor editor: sleepless nights, grey hair, and a feeling of great frustration as all they are trying to do are publish a great book.

Now for the last area that can cause delay: artwork that does not match the script. This is more likely to happen in companies where artists have more power. So, try to be patient if this arises. You may be asked to rewrite a few pages or make changes to fit the artwork, try to be professional, but if you are asked to do it then please tell them that you will need some kind of payment to compensate you. If the artist has ignored your script, then that problem should be addressed by the publisher.

Do try to be open-minded about the situation. Some artists do come up with better ways to express what you had in mind, visually, and it is always worth looking at what they have come up with. If you feel you can incorporate the changes, explain that but ensure that you are paid for it. The problem is emanating from the publisher, so they must either ask the artist to redraw the work, or offer you the chance to make some changes to the script.

If your work is changed considerably, then take steps to prevent this from happening again. Ask the publisher if they can ensure that you are contacted before the artist carries out alternative illustrations. Never threaten legal action or get angry, if the publishing house is not competent enough to produce books without such major problems, then you should seek out a more professional publisher.

Do Not Tell Them What They Should Be Doing; Sell Them What They Are Doing

I can remember one publishing firm that allowed would-be authors into the building to pitch their stories. The biggest problem was that many scribes would use up the time telling the publishing house what they should be publishing. Even though they were seldom published or had one book on the market, the writer would sit there and tell grim-faced bosses that they knew what the next big thing was. The next speech was about how the publishing house was clueless, and that they should be printing different material.

How do some people’s egos get to be so big? Well, to be fair, I have to agree that a lot of literary output by the big guns in publishing just hasn’t been that great recently. There have been huge launch parties for books that are quickly forgotten, and which only seem to reappear in the discount book stores. Today’s twenty-dollar hardback, which promises to be under every Christmas tree, is soon on the shelves for less than four dollars in Spring,

in the kind of shops that big publishers sometimes like to pretend don't exist.

I think the very low discount book stores are where the action is. With the advent of e-readers, how much we want to pay for a book is now subject to great debate. Some of the lock keepers in publishing want to kill the ebook by selling it for more than a paper book. If you want my feelings on that, I think the idea will be redundant sooner rather than later.

Why did they not see ebooks coming? It seems to be a similar situation to the MP3 issues that some record companies and retailers struggled to understand. They fought MP3 and lost, eventually caving in and giving the retail side of the business to a small handful of legitimate websites. I have no idea why some publishers are either trying to pretend ebooks don't exist or trying to sabotage them. They would do well to look at the outcome of the war on the MP3 format and learn from it.

But for now, let's move on with what the publishing houses want to sell. The scribe may be right with their speech as to what is selling in the market, but that oral instruction would better serve them if it was left at home. For better or worse, it is pointless to try and tell publishers what they should be selling. Unless you want to start your own publishing house, and you have the money to do it, stick to selling your script and leave the old guard to defend their forts themselves.

The basics of meeting a publisher are that you should only be there if you are positive that what you are selling matches the kind of material that they like to print. It is a waste of time to take your fantasy novel to a publisher that specialises in books on the subject of fishing. It will also show that you have done no research and simply tore a list of publishers out of the phone book without even reading it properly.

Make sure you research the company in detail and check out who controls which section. Who is the best person to speak to regarding the publishing of comic books that contain factual material?

Do they have a commissioning editor for original fiction who is looking for new material? Be certain of who you need to speak to.

If you are lucky enough to be let into the fort, what should you say and not say? Well, it may sound obvious, but keep your tone positive. Do not tell them how you are struggling to sell your material or how you have a sandwich in the fridge and nothing more. If you

are asked about any failures in publishing or any other business ventures you were part of, turn the negative into the positive. Explain to them that your software publishing house was a great experiment and that you learned a lot about what went wrong with it. For some reason, failure is seen as a sign of weakness, but there are agents and publishing houses who may give you a second chance based on your willingness to act as a team player.

If they have already read your script, and start to suggest alterations, don't start screaming and telling them that you will not change any of your scripts. Make a mental note of their suggestions, and nod your head and smile to show that you are listening to them. Please don't interrupt them mid-flow and try not to mention monies or contracts at this early stage in your relationship. If you have been invited in to see them, or you were canny enough to turn up on their doorstep, then I take my hat off to you, as you are halfway to your first big contract.

Meeting the publishers in person is so much more personal than a phone call, letter, email or fax. Also bear in mind that many publishing agents will take people on or give them a shot if they appear calm, reasonable, and willing to take instruction as to how their material can be improved. However, I am not telling you to be a poodle and say yes to their every request.

If there are changes that are so radical you are not sure what to say, then tell them that you would like a few days to think through their suggestions and you will draft a response in writing. This will impress them all the more, and even if you say no at a later date, then you will have given the agent or publisher an indication that you were at least willing to listen to what they had to say.

When you appear at their offices, work against their stereotype of the author as lazy and unkempt. Wear a smart shirt and a nice pair of trousers, and ladies please put on your nice outfit and act as if you were going to a job interview, which is really what the meeting between you and the publishing house or agent is likely to be.

If you have decided to call at the publishing house in person without any warning, then this may be your best strategy. Meetings that have been booked over the phone can be easily cancelled, and if you turn up at their offices unannounced and look like a lawyer, then you may be taken seriously enough to be given some kind of meet and greet with an editor. The best time to call at a publishing house is about ten o'clock in the morning. The editing team will have had their first cup of coffee, had a chat and will be ready to turn

their attention to finding the next bestseller.

If you call first thing at nine o'clock in the morning, you are likely to be met by a bleary-eyed, uninterested wreck (that's me on a Monday morning) who will meet with you, but really won't be listening. I would also suggest you avoid the late afternoon period as that is when offices are particularly busy, especially if we have deadlines to meet with local printers.

Okay, so you made it into the publishing house that makes fantastic graphic novels. The only problem you find is that they are not interested in your story. If during the meeting, they happen to mention that they think you are a good writer – then this is where your in-depth research may pay off.

I was once in charge of original fiction in a graphic novel publishing house. Writing original stories is a very difficult thing to do. I realise this as I was once a struggling author looking to sell my children's story. My start in the business came about as an editor. Once I was inside the publishing house, I managed to publish my original fiction and convert classic books into graphic novels.

So, look at the other categories of comics or graphic novels that the publisher has. If you turn up at their door and they say that your story is not for them, ask if they need more writers for their biography or classics line. The chances are that they will, and if you look the part and you seem like someone who is fun and would be good to work with, then you will get your foot (well and truly) in the door.

Another good way to sell yourself is to practice a short pitch. What will you be selling? You'll be selling yourself. If you are the shy and retiring type, then it doesn't mean that will stop you from getting some work from a publishing house. It only means that you will need to prepare for the interview a little harder than other people. Nothing will give you more confidence than having some great one-liners that make the person interviewing you sit up and look you over once again, and change their mind about sending you home empty-handed.

Think about your meeting as if it were one of those *elevator pitches* you've heard so much about. Have a set description of yourself and your skills that is no longer than five minutes. Explain to the publishing house how your background, discipline, and outlook make your writing style unique.

It may help to take a small portfolio of any work you have had published, and even if you haven't published anything, take some of your poems or short stories in a smart wallet. It may even be worth having a graphic designer, or even you, create some smart layouts for the stories. Perhaps some watermark images, or text that wraps around a symbol? I will leave it to your good taste as to what you want to show them.

When planning your short presentation, think first about your strengths and weaknesses. Are you a good speaker, a good planner, or a good writer? By knowing this, you can tailor your pitch to concentrate on your spoken descriptions of your work, or you might rather show them the neatly designed samples you've brought.

Be well prepared before setting foot in the publishing house. You should begin your preparation by asking what your intended audience wants or needs? Do they want to know what the story is about, or are they more interested in the fact that it will sell in today's market?

Once you consider the audience's needs, you can answer their questions before they can think of any. As an example, don't wait until they ask you the length of your graphic novel. During the presentation, tell them the length of your story and justify it with information about the world you have created for the story or the fact that it contains many factual details.

With that in mind, think about the questions that your audience may ask you. Try to have ready-made answers that are short, effective, and answer their questions with *yes* or *no* first. By answering yes or no, your audience will not feel that you are reluctant to answer, and will feel that you are listening to their concerns. The audience will not be left with the impression that you were waffling, and insulting their intelligence by not answering their questions.

Example

Question: *Do you know an illustrator that would suit your graphic novel?*

Your answer: *Yes, and I have already spoken with him and his rate would be X number of dollars per hour.*

When answering questions, try to have some answers that are catchy and known as

headline grabbers. Every answer you give should provide another reason for the agent or publishing house to buy your manuscript.

Example

Question: *The character in your story, how are they different from other superheroes?*

Answer: *They are different in that they are only interested in publicity. My superhero doesn't care about the people they are supposed to be saving.*

Throughout your presentation, maintain a relaxed and confident posture. Try not to fold your arms as this is seen as being defensive, and your audience may feel you are trying to hide something. Also, refrain from touching your face or head – this gives the impression that you are worried and nervous.

When giving your pitch or having a chat with the agent or publisher, don't rush to sell your story. Please don't suddenly change the topic from the editor's holiday to your book, it will seem forced and make the editor uncomfortable or feel not that important. A good editor will want to build a relationship with you, they need a writer they will feel comfortable working with. If this is something you find difficult, plan out some transitions in your conversation. If the editor has been telling you a story about how they spent Christmas, then that is the time to tell them about a great Christmas story you wrote.

Save the best part of your story until last. That way, you will reignite your audience's attention, and leave them on a high note. This is far better than leaving the more boring part of the presentation until the end, which may cause the audience to leave feeling a little subdued or bored.

When making a pitch, you must remind the audience of what you have told them. Try to think of your presentation as a story. It should have a beginning, a middle, and an end. The idea is that the audience will not forget the story you have told them.

1. Beginning of the presentation: *tell the audience 'what' you are going to tell them about your story.*

2. Middle of the presentation: *tell them about your story.*

3. End of the presentation: *tell them what you told them about your story.*

Why Grammar Is Important

I like to travel, and I often use my trips to research the global market for comics. In May of 2011, I was lucky enough to be introduced to two owners of a very large publishing company in Asia. They were very nice guys, and I wanted to pick their brains about the current market. Their company has fallen on hard times in recent years, and the vast majority of their output is geared towards the online market. I still can't quite make my mind up about reading comics and graphic novels on a laptop or desktop computer.
The biggest problem with reading from a computer screen is that my eyes become tired and irritated in a short space of time. Still, the owners of this particular company were adamant that they could shore up the company with online comics.

When you see the artwork in their books, some of it is beautiful. When they began their company, in the nineteen-eighties, they aimed to become the equivalent of Marvel and DC. They focused their books on newly created superheroes and complemented their stories with cutting edge artwork.

Much of their success could be attributed to the fact that no other Asian publisher was doing the same. They were also offering their comics at heavily discounted rates, and their products flew off the shelves as a result and made them very successful.

Thirty years on, the company they have founded is not as profitable and there are now more competitors in their market than ever before.

Whilst I was in their offices, they pitched their latest idea to me. There was another topic that came up in our conversation that day that caused quite a debate. That topic was the subject of grammar, and whether it is important to the sales of their books or not.

Their company has never been interested in producing books or comics that are carefully checked for their grammar content. If you happen to pick up one of their comics, you will see spelling mistakes and bad punctuation. Those of you who are into the technical side of grammar will be aghast at the number of run-on sentences, split infinitives, and agreement in sentences that is wrong.

The partners in the business, after their successes in the nineteen-eighties, are convinced

their customers couldn't care less about grammar mistakes.

With the amount of competition opening up in the British, American, and worldwide market – every little advantage available to a publishing business must be exploited to the full.

In my opinion, one of these advantages is good editing and clear grammar. If you were to sit and think about your favourite books, you might want to reread one and look at the grammar. The better the grammar, the easier the book is to read, and the more pleasurable your reading experience will be.

As we are now in the days of the e-reader, and there are a lot more self-published authors, the amount of grammar mistakes in their books is at an all-time high. No real-time has been set aside for checking sentences, spelling, and readability. As a reader and not just an editor, nothing upsets my reading experience more than finding a bad mistake that interrupts the story in a way the writer never intended.

In a science fiction story, you should feel that you are on an inhospitable planet or a haunted space station. When a missed spelling mistake such as *Spece Stetion* jumps out at you, then the story thread has been broken and you will be left disappointed and wishing your time had been spent with another author.

If ebook readers continue to flourish, and more first-time authors aim to sell in the e-reader market, then I think a big factor in a large volume of sales will be down to good grammar.

Spelling mistakes and jumbled sentences are not just the habits of self-publishers, more and more large publishing houses seem to be making more mistakes than ever. I own an e-reader, and as a result, I read a lot more than I used to. The books I like to buy are a combination of the big sellers in the paperback sections, and authors who have decided to publish their material independently.

What I have found in recent months, is that the best selling self-published titles on the ebook circuit have far better grammar than the titles launched by professional publishing houses.

I am not going to name the book, but a recent event has prompted a slew of biographies and articles on a popular celebrity figure. One such biography has received a gigantic

marketing campaign, with radio and television adverts, and the author selling his book on one chat show after another.

Having purchased the book for my e-reader, at an extortionate rate I might add, I was disgusted to see mistakes that even a newbie to publishing would not make. To begin with, the formatting of the book is terrible. At the beginning of each chapter, the first word on the page has been split, by accident, into two lines. The mistake looks worse than amateurish, and you really would think that the publishing house could afford to pay someone to read a copy on an e-reader to check for such an error. I also think major publishers consider the ebook as an afterthought as if it is something not worth spending time on.

Then there is the number of spelling mistakes, and it is a large number at that. The sentences are often muddled, and there are strings of dependent clauses, but no independent clauses joining them in the paragraph.

The whole book feels rushed, and the structure of the book is bad. The price of the book is more than its printed counterpart, and that is an incredible thing when the book is delivered digitally without postage charges or packing materials.

How can a professional publisher launch such a shoddy product onto the market? Well, it is sadly happening due to several factors:

1. Insane deadlines are created. For the publisher, the book must be on the market for Christmas, the holidays, or even to capitalise on a movie release that summer that covers the same material.

2. Editing standards have declined due to insane deadlines. The editor also has a lot less power and is often a lot less skilled. I can never understand why editors are often the most poorly paid people in publishing. Their marketing colleagues are often paid double the salary amount they receive.

3. No one wants to be an editor anymore. This is sadly true, and it means that the calibre of the candidates has dropped to an all-time low. The days of the editor being a fussy grammarian who would examine every sentence in detail are sadly declining. There are still some of us who love our work and want to ensure a positive reading experience for the reader, but we are few.

4. Many publishers are also beginning to believe that grammar is not that important. Perhaps this is down to the perception of their customers. With the increasing number of celebrity biographies, particularly Z-list celebs who seem to be famous for reality television shows, it seems publishers think their best customers are a group of illiterates who will buy a twenty-dollar hardback just so they can look at the pictures. Maybe they have a point. Perhaps books with pictures of celebrities caught looking their worst, wearing sneakers and shorts while paying the pizza delivery guy, are more important to publishers than a prize-winning novel.

It could be that I am a silly idealist and that the publishing houses are right. Who cares about the importance of the apostrophe, or the benefits of a well-composed paragraph?

Well... I am going to stick to my guns about the importance of good grammar, and here is my reason:

I think that e-readers such as the Kindle will continue to gain ground in the area of publishing. Even though many publishers are terrified of the self-published writer, I think this is an important turning point in the arena of the best seller. I think the most successful self-published writers will be those that pay careful attention to their use of grammar.

Now, I'm ashamed to admit that I am editing this book myself. I hope that doesn't offend you too much, and that the decision is not because I have a massive ego. To be honest, I am always looking to test myself as a writer and editor. If you find a spelling mistake, please do contact me. I would love to know if a reader is better than me at spotting mistakes. I also understand that no one's use of grammar is perfect. Considering the increasing price of many books, I am sure we can agree that several spelling mistakes in a book are unacceptable.

One thing I should mention is the area of grammar within education. My father was sent to a grammar school as a child. I was sent to a modern-day high school. I cannot tell you how much I envy my father's days at grammar school. His writing is clear, concise, and his use of grammar is very good.

Some small advice, if you want to start improving your grammar then you should buy a good dictionary and thesaurus. Use both books as much as you can, and if in doubt about the meaning of a word – turn to the dictionary. To make my point, I have read a lot of work where some people have made mistakes when it comes to putting a word in

the singular.

Example

He picked up the dice and threw that single little cube at the villain.

If it is a pair of dice, then in the singular it should be ***die***. The sentence should read: “He picked up the die and threw that single little cube at the villain”. I’ve seen that kind of mistake daily, and that is one of the words that people forget exists in the singular as well as the plural.

It’s okay to use a spelling checker, but remember that you should always read your work through at least twice. Do not be ashamed to ask others to check your work also.

Perhaps you are like me, in that you wish you had received a better education in English grammar. Not to worry, there are many ways you can improve your current standard. I am not going to give out a huge list of books to read. You will not find that anywhere in this book. My reasons are that every writer has their journey, and what works for me may not work for you.

What I will do is recommend a video course I thought was excellent. There is a set of DVDs called *The Complete English Grammar Series* which is presented by Karl Weber. For people looking to tidy up their grammar, this course will be perfect for you. The videos are well presented, and start simple before becoming more advanced. Unlike a lot of English grammar books, this series of videos are easy to follow and not overly technical.

As well as buying those DVDs, I am going to suggest something a little more radical. I would suggest you consider teaching English abroad. First of all, you would be in a job where you are teaching English grammar daily and must learn it to keep your job. That’s quite a powerful motivator. You’ll also have the chance to enter into a different culture, perhaps India, China, or maybe even Japan. Nothing has a better effect on writers than immersing themselves in the culture of another country. I’ll leave the ball in your court on that one, but please do consider it if you feel your grammar skills are lacking.

What Is A Synopsis?

Many new and aspiring writers often assume that a synopsis is a two or three-page

document. That much is true, but what about the content? The majority of synopses that I receive are not badly written, it's just that they are not what we have asked for.

Are you confused? Well, you're in good company if you are. What the synopsis should be is your story, condensed into two pages, from start to finish. It shouldn't contain background information on you or even your past experiences, and I would suggest that you avoid comparing your story to existing movies, books, or graphic novels.

A long time ago, I received more than one synopsis from an established writer. He had produced one series of comics for a now-defunct comic company. He would begin all his synopses by stating that his story was "Batman meets Star Wars", or "Indiana Jones meets Barbie". The problem was that his stories were just that, they were his re-imagining of an existing story or franchise retold in his own words. I'm sure you're smart enough to realise that ripping off such huge franchises is career suicide for nearly all publishers. The last thing a small start-up company wants is to be dragged into the courts by a big corporation and sued for every penny they have.

From the quality of his writing, I was amazed that this young fellow ever got published. More to the point, his naivety in terms of his willingness to break copyright was even more surprising. Therefore I would suggest you do not say such things as "It's Riddick from the Pitch Black movie meets a Lara Croft adventure story."

Most editors, especially myself, will immediately be on their guard if you mention an existing movie franchise. From their point of view, if you are a movie buff and not a writer, then they are about to get a rewritten version of Star Wars for the umpteenth time that month. You may think I'm joking with you, but some publishers will get letters trying to sell them a story where a young space pilot eventually destroys a space station that looks like a small moon. The writer might even go so far as to say they are calling the space station, "The Kill Star".

Now, what should be in a synopsis? Below is an example of what a synopsis should not be:

Synopsis A

Space Pilot Bill

Okay, so here's my children's story! - Bill Butler is an ageing space pilot with one more smuggling run to go. Bill likes to drink and often falls asleep at the wheel when he's had one beer too many (I'd never do that). Now, Bill's life... well it's a TRAIN WRECK! It's just, like, a total mess. Bill is confused about what he wants from life, and he's thinking of visiting a life coach when... BANG! His space cruiser crashes into an intergalactic warlord's space truck.

Now, Bill... he's all apologetic and stuff and he and the Warlord, they exchange details and Bill promises to pay for the damage he's caused. So far, so good.

But, unbeknown to Bill is the fact that the Warlord doesn't want Bill to pay for the damage, the Warlord wants Bill to smuggle some goods for him instead.

After speaking with the Warlord again (this time on his cell phone) Bill agrees to smuggle something the Warlord needs bringing in for him.

What it is that Bill is smuggling, we just don't know.

Following on from that, is a lot of action, a little romance, and an unforgettably deep reading experience.

Thanks for reading my Synopsis. I'm not quite sure where the story is going to take us, but I just know that with my god-given talent and your vast resources, we can outsell that Harry Potter stuff, like a million times over.

I've got lots of other stories that you can read of mine! You and me, we could be really stupidly RICH!

I first got my love of comic books when I was six years old, when my uncle died in a tragic juice blender accident. The next week, at my uncle's funeral, my Mother knew she'd be bored, so she took a comic book to the funeral to read. After she finished reading it, she passed it to me and the rest is history.

Now, let me tell you about my next story. It's about this guy who works in a supermarket, and he's transformed when he drinks some rotten milk from the supermarket. He gets himself lots of powers and he finds that he can read the minds of really bad people – you know, super villens and all.

Okay, so, please make all cheques out to Ricky La Dill, and I'd like three thousand dollars for the first story, and four thousand dollars for the second story, if it's all right with you guys.

Regards,

Ricky

Okay, so it's a synopsis letter that I made up, but I've seen worse than that, believe me. Where did our friend, Ricky La Dill, go wrong? Please check out the list below:

1. It is not well written, but Ricky's synopsis started okay in the first paragraph. He mentioned who his lead character was and gave us some information about their personality.

2. His biggest mistake was trying to inject some poor humour, the line where he wrote "I'd never do that." It may seem like a cool thing to do, and you are just trying to get the editor to laugh. The unfortunate thing is that the editor is not laughing at a joke that is to be included in the story. Also, Ricky has brought the editor *out* of the story with his joke. One minute, the editor is imagining our drunken space hero, but then the next he's worrying that Ricky probably has been charged for drinking and driving. The editor may have some concerns about putting Ricky on the Oprah Winfrey show to sell his children's book.

3. Ricky has capitalised whole words such as "TRAIN WRECK" and "BANG". Please avoid using all capitals in letters to editors and agents. It looks amateurish and unprofessional. Capitalising words in comic dialogue balloons may be okay, but when dealing with professionals, you should act as a professional yourself. The appearance and structure of your synopsis are just as important as the story you are trying to sell.

4. The quality of writing throughout Ricky's synopsis is very bad. You can also see that Ricky's spelling is terrible, and he has not taken the time to check his writing for mistakes. I have met many writers who seem to think that good grammar and spelling are just not that important. They argue that readers don't care about such things. I've always said that is total nonsense, and I am sticking to my guns on that issue. Whether you write a script, synopsis, or even an email to a publisher, agent,

or editor – please take the time to revise your writing. Check what you have written for spelling mistakes, general grammar issues, and whether your letter makes sense. I often receive emails from friends, family, and professional writers. If they send me a letter in the post or send me a story, their grammar and spelling are usually excellent. However, when it comes to emails, people just don't seem to think it matters that what they have sent contains errors, spelling mistakes, or even if it reads like nonsense.

Please think about the fact that your correspondence with a company will not only affect the sale of your story but could also determine your working relationship with the publishing house. If you send them badly written work or even emails, ask yourself this question: what impression am I giving them? It is more than likely they will think you are illiterate, incompetent, and perhaps even ignorant of how their business works.

5. There is the section in the synopsis, where Ricky tells us: "Following on from that, is a lot of action, a little romance, and an unforgettably deep reading experience." Your synopsis should tell the story from beginning to end. You should mention all the plot twists, all the major events, and how the story ends. Ricky has not told us what happens at the end of the story, and we are left with the impression that he has only written half of it.

6. Another problem in many synopses is where the writer begins to tell us about himself and his life experiences. If you really must include such details, they should go in a separate letter or email. The synopsis is about your story from start to finish, not about your life from start to finish, or a list of life's low moments that you have had to overcome. If the editor has never met you before, and you start telling him how your uncle died, it will make him feel very uncomfortable and wonder why you are heaping your troubles on a guy who sells comic books for a living.

   Keep any personal details short and to the point. I often find the best tactic is to quickly tell the publishing house why you have decided to bless them with your story, and it also tells them that you may have taken the time to find a publishing house where your kind of story would be welcome. Make your praise short and sweet: "I regularly read your horror comics, and enjoy the frequent plot twists in their stories. That is part of the reason why I think you would find my story of interest."

7. Do not try to sell more than one story in a single synopsis. Work hard on sending one great synopsis at a time, and the chances are that even if she will not publish the first synopsis you send to her, an editor may like your style of storytelling and ask if you have another story in the pipeline. The editor is more likely to reread a well-written synopsis, or even change her mind about it.

   I once received a synopsis that I thought was well written, and very professional. I felt the story was interesting but perhaps a little clichéd. I wrote to the writer and asked if he had another story I could look at. Before he could send me his second synopsis, I asked a colleague to tell me what they thought of his first story. They said they loved it, and I decided to take a chance and publish it. I then also published his second story, and he now has an excellent relationship with the publishing house and has written several books for them. If I am in doubt, I always ask a colleague for a second opinion. So, please make sure your work is presentable enough for them to show someone else.

8. Ricky's final mistake is to start discussing money, and asking for cheques before any agreement has been made as to whether the editor is even interested in his story. Try not to make any references to payment until the editor brings up the subject. It looks rude, desperate, and as if you are assuming that they want your story. If you are offered a contract, then you will get the publishing house's standard contract and agreed rates. The best advice I can give you is to perhaps ask them for further monies for books that you need for research. Also, keep receipts for ink cartridges, pens, pencils, and whatever else you buy. Many, if not most, will be tax-deductible.

So, how should a synopsis look and be structured? I would recommend it fills two pages in Microsoft Word, and be typed using the *Times New Roman* typeface, and the size should be twelve point. As for the alignment, it tends to be up to the writer, but I would suggest either left-hand side formatting or block paragraphing. The paragraphs should be single-spaced, and if you are posting the synopsis, do not staple the two pieces of paper together and always try to use good quality printing paper.

Below is an example of how a synopsis should look and read:

Synopsis B

The Empire Corridor

Sally, Billy and Lucy are staying for the night with their grandmother. She has recently moved house.

Lucy asks her Grandmother where she got the silver necklace she wears around her neck. Her Grandmother takes off the necklace and hands it to Lucy, who notices that there is a small ring, with a picture of a ship, attached to the necklace.

Their Grandmother tells her that their Grandfather won the ring in a game of cards on his way to America and that it had given him the idea to become involved with haulage shipping when he got to America. She tells them he became very successful and very rich.

The Grandmother tells the children it is time for bed. They agree, but ask her to tell them a story. She begins to tell them about a train that crashed whilst on its journey from Buffalo to Albany, New York – which is where they are staying. Now a ghost train, it has been seen passing by the nearby train station in the early hours of the morning.

Excited by the ghost story their Grandmother has told them, the children sneak out of the house in the middle of the night. They decide they will see if the train does pass through the train station in the early hours of the morning.

On the way to the train station, the children sense they are being followed by someone. They notice a figure who wears a red cloak with a hood. The figure is following them. The children agree to try and find safety in a train that has just pulled up at the station.

The train is old fashioned and ornately decorated. They wander through some compartments (one will be a small casino – a hint that their grandfather is onboard somewhere) but before they can get off the train, all the doors close and the train begins to start moving.

One end of the train is dark and cold. It leads towards the driver's compartment, but there is a lock on the door preventing them from reaching whoever is driving the train. They can hear some kind of banging from behind the door. There is a strange symbol on the door lock.

The other end of the train is well lit, and someone has placed the children's favourite foods and toys throughout the compartments.

The children begin to search the train. They find letters, more strange symbols and luggage that is old but in perfect condition. The children also find out that they can read a strange language. They also find parts of a journal, relating to someone who, at one time, became trapped on the ghost train. The dates in the journal are very recent.

At the well-lit end of the train, there is a door which, once opened, reveals a dusty office. It seems to have been the base for a business. There are lots of clues regarding the haulage business. A document states that the owner of the business is now completing haulage via the train networks in America. One of the children notices a key that has the same symbol as the lock on the door at the other end of the train.

The children try to use the key to open the locked compartment at the other end of the train.

The door opens and in the locked compartment, they meet William Jones. Someone or something locked him into the compartment on purpose. It turns out that William is a ghost hunter who has tracked down and located the mysterious ghost train. He conducted lots of interviews, found the train station the train passes through and then filmed it at night using special equipment. We find out that he had been put onto the case through an anonymous client.

William tells the children all about the curse of the train. (The readers will see a ten-page flashback).

The train had been filled with celebrities and reporters who were friends of a wealthy businessman. We learn that the businessman had become interested in the idea of the spirit and human world being connected and that he felt all humanity would benefit if those two worlds could be somehow linked.

He had employed a supernatural magician. They had decided to undertake the experiment on a moving train to try and evade the authorities. When the experiment failed the two men began to argue. The ghost hunter tells them that contrary to popular belief, the train stopped letting off all of its passengers.

Only the magician and businessman remained aboard. They began to argue, the businessman hit the magician who ran to the driver's compartment and locked himself in. He set the train in motion but was unable to stop the train when it was accelerating

towards a car that had broken down on the train tracks. The train was destroyed, and both men were killed.

William suspects that the argument between the two men has left them, and the train, stuck in limbo between the real world and the spirit world.

As William finishes his story, the train breaks to a halt. William tells the children to wait in the compartment. He locks them in and speaks to someone we cannot see. He tells them that he has the children under lock and key.

The train is now back at the station where the children first boarded it. Standing on the tracks in front of the train is the hooded figure from the beginning of the story. The person pulls back their hood and we find out it is the children's Grandmother.

We learn that William was born into a family famous for being powerful supernatural magicians. His surname matches that of the supernatural magician who was killed when the train crashed all those years ago.

The Grandmother enters the train. She demands that the children be released. We learn that she had come to know the location of where the train was when William had interviewed her when he was trying to find the train. He had not known she had been on board the train all those years ago, but she had been forced to get off the train by her husband.

William tells her that the ghost of her dead husband must forgive the ghost of his dead grandfather.

She tells William that her dead husband (the businessman) had recently contacted her in a dream, and wanted to meet his grandchildren. He had also relayed to her that he was unwilling to forgive the supernatural magician.

The grandmother tells William she agrees that both of the ghosts should make peace with each other, but William should release the children regardless of that.

William's grandfather appears and tells him to do as she has asked. Once William releases the children, the ghost of the businessman appears. He sees the necklace that Lucy is wearing, and at the sight of his grandchildren, he tells the ghost of the magician

that their feud has gone on for too long and that he forgives him. The businessman says the train is now ready to reach its final destination, and the children and their grandmother should leave.

As they leave the train, the children wave goodbye and the train begins to move away from the station, but it is also disappearing into a mist at the same time. The Grandmother tells the children that both men can now move on to the spirit world, now that they are at peace with each other.

The story is not much better than Ricky La Dill's, but the writer has supplied the synopsis in a format that the publisher would approve. The characters are explained briefly but clearly, the idea of the story is well communicated and all the plot twists and the ending of the story are revealed.

The *Empire Corridor* synopsis is no Harry Potter, but the writer has understood what a synopsis should do. Even if you make mistakes in your plot or characters within a synopsis, the publishing house will be far more forgiving if you outline the story from beginning to end. They will want to work with you on improving it, but by being open and honest about the content you will improve your chances dramatically.

Another mistake to make is trying to turn the synopsis into a sales pitch. Yes, you are trying to pitch them a story, but avoid sales techniques and clichés such as "this story is so entertaining, it's magic!" I would suggest you leave that kind of approach and language to the marketing section.

American Or British English?

This is all down to who you are working for. As a British writer, if you want to receive a steady income then I would strongly suggest you brush up on your American English. There is such a wide range of comics and graphic novels in America, and they also come with a large audience. For the British writer, the payoff in being able to switch from British to American English really will broaden your career horizon.

If you want to take this route, my advice would be to simply switch the spell check to American English, but also to invest in a reputable American English dictionary. Read through your finished script or synopsis carefully, as programs such as Microsoft Word may think your spelling mistakes are actual genuine words.

For the British writers who are appalled at the idea of writing in American English, I would suggest you take the following into account:

1. The last recorded population figures for England were some sixty million people, and that figure will only have risen in recent years. With America, you are looking at a population of over three hundred million people, and therefore more comic and graphic novel readers.

2. Singapore recently began to consider the use of American English due to America's massive customer base and worldwide influence. There is also the Philippines to think about, they are schooled in American culture, love American movies, and are taught to use American English.

3. British English is more tightly structured and quite different from American English. When sourcing English teachers, many companies advertise for American English speakers.

As an English writer, if you are talented enough to write a great story and present it to an American company in their preferred written style, then you will be sought after.

For American writers, there is also the concept of learning to use British English when selling their writing. India is currently in the grip of a new fascination with all things comic and graphic novel. New comic conventions are springing up all over India. With a population of over a billion people, who wouldn't want a slice of the profits?

In certain parts of the world, wages are beginning to rise and with that inflation will continue to rise. If you think about the potential customer base, then the possible profits are truly mind-blowing. Think about the amount of money the last Mission: Impossible movie made, and now think that cinema tickets in many large countries are not far behind American prices, and that is a lot of money.

As a new writer, getting a first book published abroad may prove to be easier than breaking into your market. Once you have a few books in print, nearly all publishers are more receptive to giving you a chance to publish your new graphic novel with them. So, please do consider researching the foreign market – they may need more writers than you might think.

If you are an American, and you decide to try and publish elsewhere, then please remember that your material may need to be in British English. There may be one or two publishers who are happy to convert your American English to British, but to widen your net I would suggest you send your material in British English and see what the response is.

If you are interested in submitting your work to a foreign publisher, then please make sure you do your homework. One or two of the giants of comic and graphic novel publishing have targeted Asia in the past. They didn't do their homework and tried to sell books they thought Asia wanted. As an example, in India the true champion of comics is Tintin. He is followed closely by the character Asterix, and the Indian market also sells a lot of Indian mythology titles.

In 2006, a famous entrepreneur invested in a comic book company in India. Unfortunately, despite some beautiful artwork and the employment of some very talented writers, the venture was not a success. I would suggest you research the history of Indian comics and ask yourself why the venture failed. My personal opinion is that some very good writers from the West were employed to write stories in the Eastern mindset, but it just didn't work. Do some research and see what you think.

The English speaking future of China doesn't seem to have decided on an American or British system as yet. The decision cannot be too far away, and China is now rushing to teach all its children to learn English while still at school. Their dedication seems to be paying off too, while in Shanghai one year I was amazed to find that nearly everyone under the age of thirty can speak excellent English. They may not use it as much as their native language, but it would not be surprising if China's trade in English language books is set to explode in the next few years.

For you, as a writer, this should be taken as excellent news. The market will get bigger and bigger, and that means more writing opportunities.

Please note that this book is in British English, as that is where I expect most of my readers to reside. On the other hand, if this book were to sell a million copies in America, I'd have an American English version out the same week. I am a patriot but also a businessman.

To be honest, I like the fact that we have both British English and American English. The resulting difference in writing styles fascinates me, and I am a fan of authors on both sides

of the pond. I also think that there is room in this world for two different spellings of the English language.

If India can manage to work with over three hundred different spoken languages, then I'm sure British and American English can peacefully coexist.

How To Turn A Rejection Into An Acceptance

Throughout this book, I've been trying to give you an impression of the mindset of editors and publishing houses in general. Rejection is something that can not only break your career as a writer but also make it.

How is that possible? You may be thinking that a rejection letter means that a company is not interested in either your story or you. This may be true of some firms, but many publishing houses see the rejection letter as a way to test your resolve. How you respond to a rejection letter will tell a publisher a great deal about you.

As an example, let's look at the stories of Jim and Tim.

Jim's Story

Jim is new to the concept of selling a story to a publisher. He has spent much of his time reading books about how to write great stories. He feels he understands what comic and graphic novel publishers are looking for, and he is convinced that his story will be quickly snapped up by an eager publisher. Jim decides now is the time to send out his masterpiece. He prints out his whole script forty times. He has written down the addresses from the internet of forty publishers that he thinks might want his script. Jim carefully crafts a letter to be sent with each script advising how much money he would like to be paid, and how his story will set the world on fire.

Jim visits the post office and the postal charges are a lot more than he thought, he pays on his credit card and goes home for a cup of coffee and a moment in which he dreams of making his first million dollars. Two months go by, and Jim has heard nothing. He picks up the phone and calls a few publishers. The response he receives from each publisher seems the same, they seem annoyed that he is calling them, and they inform him that a response is on its way.

Undeterred, Jim realises that it may take longer than he thought to get that first big offer for his script. To hedge his bets, Jim decides to print off twenty more copies of his script and posts them to another lot of publishing houses. When he checks his credit card account online, Jim realises that the postal charges and printer ink do not come cheap at all.

Another month goes by, and Jim begins to receive responses. To Jim, the responses seem a little personal. They tell him, in no uncertain terms, that sending a full script should be avoided. He should have either sent one excerpt from his script, or a two to three-page synopsis with a cover letter.

It seems that Jim's dreams have taken a small hit, but to Jim, it is the end of the world. He goes back to his word processor and fires off one angry letter after another. He tells all the publishing houses that he has sold his script for a lot of money and it is no longer on the market. It's all lies of course, but Jim is desperate to hold on to his battered and bruised ego.

Jim's response is something I would strongly advise you never to do. It will make you no friends, and if the publisher has a *cranks* file, then you will most certainly end up in it. I would also ask you not to max your credit card out on heavy-duty postage charges and excess ink which you didn't need to use in the first place.

What is the best way to handle such rejection? Please read on.

Tim's Story

Tim, just like Jim, is new to the idea of publishing his stories. His girlfriend is impressed by the stories he makes up for his two young children (Tim's wife died a few years ago in a juice blender accident). Buying Tim a new laptop, his girlfriend tells him that he could be the next Frank Miller and it is time to try his hand at getting published.

Tim isn't so sure, and he is a little nervous about rejection. He decides to do some research before approaching the publishers. He buys a book on the subject of getting published and reads carefully about the approach that publishers prefer.

He realises that the postage and ink charges could soon add up, and taking a tip from the book, he decides to send a single-page letter to some publishing houses. Tim has only sent letters to publishers that produce the kind of material he writes. He gives them his full

name, address, telephone number, and email details so that they can contact him how they prefer.

His letter is short and to the point. He explains that he has been a technical writer for a few years, but dreams of writing books for children. Telling them that he has a lot of stories that he often reads to his kids, Tim explains that his kids like one story in particular. In no more than a paragraph, Tim explains what happens in the story. He then asks the publishing house if they would like to read the full story, and should he send them a copy? At the end of the letter, Tim thanks the publisher for their time and that he is looking forward to their response.

Two months later, Tim receives an email from a publisher. They like the idea behind his story, but their firm always wants to see a three-page synopsis. The publisher tells Tim that if he drafts a synopsis and emails it to them, they will read it and respond. As you can imagine, Tim is thrilled. He now has a chance to sell his story, and better yet he can email it. Judging by their response, if the publisher wants to see a full script they will ask Tim to email it, which will save him a lot of money in ink.

Out of the two men, I am sure you can see that Tim's strategy was better and more cost-effective. He took the time to think about which publishers would want his script, before bombarding it to a bunch of people who didn't want it. He also managed to keep his credit card in his wallet. Many new writers do no research, and it costs them a lot of money in postage and ink. Even when publishing houses put adverts in the writers and artists yearbook explaining that they are not taking on new clients, they will still be deluged by people who send things to them anyway.

If a publishing house has shut its doors to new writers like you, then they are fools. Nevertheless, don't try to break into their ranks by bombing them with scripts and letters. Save your money for when it's needed, the postal service is great but you are not a shareholder.

Okay, So How Did Tim Get On?

Another month has gone by since Tim sent his synopsis to the publishing house by email. In a book that Tim read, it mentioned that publishers can often take a long time to respond to writers. Tim decided not to waste that time, and as he enjoys using his new laptop, he has drafted another synopsis for a new story he has come up with.

One day, Tim is contacted by the publishing house. They have rejected his story, but have taken the trouble to tell him why. Tim reads through the criticism, and he feels that they have been honest about some of his shortcomings. He looks over his new synopsis and tinkers with it and changes some of his synopsis to match what the publisher liked about his other story.

Tim sends a new email to the publisher; he thanks them for their criticism and says he has taken their advice on board. He tells them that if they would be kind enough to give him another shot, he has attached a Word document with his latest story as a three-page synopsis.

The publishing house reads Tim's new synopsis, and they love it. They also like Tim's attitude, and if he can consistently crank out new stories in a short space of time, then they feel they could develop an excellent business relationship with him.

I may have made Tim's story a little sugary sweet, but he is the kind of writer that I often look for. If you have been sending material out and feel like you have spent months waiting for a rejection letter, then you have not been busy enough. Turn your waiting time into your winning time. Do not wait for a rejection letter, or sit by the phone. Try to get busy on your next great story, or if you are lucky enough to receive feedback from a publisher – work on your weaknesses.

When a publisher provides you with feedback, you should take it as a great sign. They do not send such encouragement out to everyone, and it is their way of telling you how to improve. It could be they think you could be great for them if you can only improve your grammar or perhaps even something like characterisation.

Never take feedback personally, think of it as a door that is half open and could be wide open for you in the future. If you are given feedback, always reply in kind to it. Tell the publisher that they have raised a valid point, and you will seek to improve your shortcomings. Do not act like a diva or a child who cries when he is told no. Show that you can take criticism and that you are professional in all your correspondence, even when it is bad news.

Rejection is never the end of a career. A writer who throws down his pen in frustration is usually the end of his career. I know that you are working hard, and probably holding down a full-time job too. Sending out letters and scripts and often not even getting a

response can be very damaging to your psyche. If you feel frustrated to the point of quitting, do not quit but take a time out. Go out with your friends and have a beer, do not lock yourself away and become more frustrated. Enjoy life, and let off some steam. Your writing will always be at home waiting for you, and a time out may make you realise what you are doing wrong or try to come up with a new winning strategy. Please try not to take writing so seriously, there is more to life than sitting at your desk and wondering when you will get a break.

Never degrade yourself by writing angry letters to publishers, or pretending that someone else bought your story. Stay cool, and focused. You may lose a few battles, but if you're a fighter then you will win the war. It may also help to find friends, online or offline, who share your passion for writing. When you explain your rejection frustrations to mum, dad, or even other friends then they may not be able to understand your anger. They have not sat at a desk and devoted hours and hours to a cause they are passionate about. Perhaps some of them have, but writing is a unique business. So, please unwind and keep going. I am counting on people like you to overcome all the obstacles and keep publishing firms in business.

They may often send you badly photocopied rejection letters, but the publishing houses do not want you to quit.

The Different Kinds Of Editors You Might Work With

The relationship you have with an editor is down to you, but the editor will be chosen for you – whether you like it or not. Your first foray into publishing may be down to either good luck or bad luck. To give you an idea of the characters you can meet in the editing department, the following list, although it contains many stereotypes, is worth noting:

1. *Shakespeare editor*: raised on the classics, this editor hates nothing more than mass-market fiction that sells a million copies. Yes, even though the publishing firm makes its bread and butter from fantasy fiction, science fiction escapades, and even chick-lit, this editor will decry them all in favour of real books. You're most likely to spot this editor by their tone of condescension. They talk to everyone as if they are the only person who ever read Shakespeare. It's as if they were chosen by a god to decry modern literature in favour of the classics.

This editor is hard to please and even harder to understand at times. I've often been amazed by their attitude to the market. They prefer to ignore it or pretend it doesn't exist. The kind of fiction they want is something obtuse that will be recognised by the minority of high brow art critics, but ignored by the majority of customers. Now, please don't misunderstand me – I hate clichéd work, and I look forward to receiving something with a little bite, but art house books need to be accepted in equal measure with the kind of fiction that sells millions, and means I still have a job to go to on Monday morning.

2. *I'd sell my mother to publish a book editor*: if you are outside the publishing house then this editor might be very good for you. If you are on the inside, beware of poisoned coffee. The *I'd sell my mother editor* makes life difficult for themselves in the editing pool. They become seldom trusted, loathed, and virtual outcasts who are suspected of ousting anyone they can get their hands on. This is a real shame as most of them are very talented indeed. Their one major problem is their inability to work as part of a team, which is the single most important skill for an editor to possess.

   Nonetheless, if you are a writer working with this editor, you will see none of their social problems and face only their skills. You will be encouraged to death and helped to get your book out as soon as possible. There will be times when they seem almost obsessive in making you feel like you are their only writer. It's more likely to be that you are their first writer, and as they take other writers on, you may begin to lose touch. As they say, make hay while the sun shines as these kinds of editors don't last long in the business. This is not due to their lack of talent, but the fear they provoke in their colleagues and sometimes even their bosses.

3. *I'm just not that interested editor*: I've always found these editors hard to fathom, as I am often left wondering why they took a job in publishing in the first place. They often have no interest in the job and are just waiting for their next paycheque. The work they produce is often uninspiring, and for that reason – they too never last long.

   It is usually the case that what goes on outside the office is far more important. These editors are hugely likeable for the reason that they do not take life too seriously. Some of them never face the chop as they are on good terms with most staff, and are never looking to push for a promotion or boast about their work. Rival

colleagues never see them as a threat, and when you fancy a chat in the office – they make splendid company.

Now for the bad news, if you are a writer – this is one of the worst editors you could hope to be given. Your emails, letters, and calls go unanswered and when they work with you, it's as if they go out of their way to avoid you. Try not to be surprised when they appoint someone else to communicate with you on their behalf this is a better arrangement for the two of you. If you're lucky, their assistant will push them to get your work out faster and will probably end up doing the editor's work for them. Once they leave the firm, someone like me will often find that a dozen writers are asking where their project is up to, only to be told that their projects were never developed.

4. *Enthusiastic editor*: they are great for the writer but are often the target of office politics. Why is that? Well, they tend to be highly intelligent and often very productive editors.

   They make everyone else in the office look positively snail-like, and this makes a lot of people uncomfortable. They are never too busy to say hello, but conversation is not for them, they have a wide list of authors they are nurturing and a never-ending list of good books that they have coming out. It is for this sad reason that they often have a target on their backs. It matters little if they are the most successful editor in the publishing house, even their boss is glad to see their demise. Their skill at looking as if they have everything under control is often the target of jealousy.

5. *Office politics editor*: they specialise in asking about any gossip you might know, and who has the power in the office. They never really get much done, and if they are working remotely, then they can be a real drag to work with. Steam will come out of your ears when you send them numerous emails asking where projects are up to. You'll get a response asking about what's going on in the office, and who the next editor-in-chief might be.

6. *Toxic editor*: this is the worst of the bunch and everyone's nightmare. Their schemes are so cunning and evil that it will only be months after they leave the firm that their web of deceit will be uncovered. The toxic editor is all about power. They want the job title and not the reputation, and they couldn't care less about literature. They'll promise the earth and deliver a piece of cheese, but that won't be uncovered

until it's too late.

The worst thing about toxic editors is that they exploit the publishing industry's biggest grey area: that all literature is subjective, and that it is all down to personal taste. With their constant shouting and attention-seeking antics, they try to convince everyone in the office that they know best.

Of course, there are politicians in every office. The above list of characters will have been in every office you ever worked in. Even if you take a job shifting camel dung, there will still be office politics: your spade is bigger than theirs, you wear gloves which means you think you're above the job, and so on. The above list is obvious to most people. The fact remains that you should never let anyone's games stop your work from being published. If you feel so frustrated or feel your time is being wasted, thank the company for its time and move on.

Please Don't Preach

How does a writer ensure that her published book resembles her original material? The answer to that is that she doesn't. If you expect your early work to be unchanged and to be published in its very first incarnation, then you are going to be very disappointed. The publishing industry is built on a firm foundation of compromise.

When a writer decides to try and take her material elsewhere or quits the project – I am never happy about it. I find it sad that a great idea was offered to my company, but the writer is unwilling to polish the script until it is acceptable to the general public.

I would imagine that some very talented writers have missed out on great careers due to their lack of compromise, and unwillingness to put in a little more elbow grease. I have worked with many writers who tell me how much they hate rewrites, or scream and shout when asked to change the pace of one chapter.

I've also lost count of the number of times I've received an angry email from a writer which reads a little like the following and contains just as many spelling mistakes:

Dear editor,

I'm writing in response to your email concerning my story: Joe and Dave fight the

Chemical Zombies.

I realise you've asked me to change certain things about my story, but you know what – I WILL NOT! I understand I've never been published before, but I know what sells because I know the market. I've read Superman number one. That leads me to ask: HAVE YOU??! Probably not. While I'm here wasting my time with you – let me discuss the changes you proposed.

1. You want me to change the last name of the character from "Finklefurter" to "Thompson". Are you nuts??! That is the STUPIDEST thing I ever heard! The name you've suggested does not stand out at all. Are you telling me that you never heard of, or met, someone with the name "Finklefurter" before? Man, I would suggest you get out of your office more often. Where in the world are you from?

2. You've suggested a dialogue change when the professor's daughter dies? When the professor's daughter is shot by the gangsters because they want the anti-matter device and won't take no for an answer, what's wrong with the professor saying "golly gosh, what am I to do?" I think this dialogue is perfectly acceptable and more importantly realistic. Man, I've heard New York cops find a dead body, and nearly all of them say "golly gosh". The simple dialogue I've suggested shows a truism in human beings, that is that they are often lost for words when faced with such atrocities. When my pet cat Reggie died, I couldn't stop saying "golly gosh" all day.

3. You state in your email, and I quote: "The last ten pages are a little slow in terms of action, can we reduce the number of pages to six or seven?" Mr Editor, let me be honest with you and let you know that these ten pages to me, are more important than the Ten Commandments. AND YOU WANT TO SMASH MY TEN COMMANDMENTS!!! I will not allow that, and I will divide the waters of the Red Sea in two before I allow you to do that!

4. You tell me that the character in the story known as "Slim Fatty" dies of a heart attack on page fifteen, then turns up in the story again on page sixty and dies when a truck falls off a building and lands on top of him? Mr Editor, you misread it or perhaps you got one of them email viruses on your computer. The character that died on page fifteen was 'Slim Chops', the missing half brother of 'Slim Fatty' – please get yourself some new glasses.

5. You've asked me to rewrite two lines of dialogue on page forty-nine. Are you asking me to do that for free?? All these revisions your asking for need to be paid for. I know I signed

a contract promising to do any rewrites when needed, but PLEAESE – look back at the points I've already made, as an editor – YOU SUCK! Please appreciate my god given talent, and get your boss to write me another cheque for fifteen hundred dollars or don't bother to write me again.

6. I've said all I'm going to say. Go get my money, little dog. Otherwise I'll go over your head and sort this out at a higher level than your pay grade.

Yours sincerely,
Davey Wilks

P.s. I am now working on the sequel to Joe and Dave fight the Chemical Zombies. If you want to stand any chance of being offered my next master-work, I would suggest you up your game and change your tune. Otherwise, I'll offer it to Marvel for a cool one million dollars. Please think about that when you go home to your mother's apartment and eat that bread and water she's left out for you.

I may have exaggerated a little with the example letter above. To be honest, I've received stranger responses than that. If you want to be a writer who works often, then please avoid sending emails like the one above. If you are so angry about an editor's feelings towards your work, then take a time out and go back to the email in a day or two when you've calmed down.

As a writer, I have never sent anything out like the above. However, I have rushed off emails without rereading editorial comments and I have lived to regret it. Editors are often very good at understanding how the public will react to your material. Their suggestions are to keep you out of trouble and to get your material in front of as many eyeballs as they can.

The trick is to try and compromise. If you have had your work read by friends and family, most of whom will not want to upset you, then you may have unrealistic ideas about the quality of your work. Editors will be honest with you, and that doesn't mean they will be brutal or go out of their way to upset you. A good editor will give praise and criticism in equal measure. Please don't think we give you sweet news so that the sour news won't taste so bad. When I praise someone's work, it is genuine praise. If I thought your work was so bad and was not worthy of praise then I would not work with you, to begin with, and I would not continue a relationship with a writer who I do not think will sell

any books.

If you have been trying to get some work published for quite a long time, I know exactly how that feels. You know you have the talent and you just want a small break to prove it to everyone. It sometimes feels like no one will even give you the chance to express how much you want to be a published writer. There are times when I have had expletive-filled emails from writers who are eager to get their stuff out to the public and as quick as possible.

Unfortunately in publishing, resources are often limited and the publishing house would not dare have anything printed that it doesn't think will sell. Even once your script is accepted, there is a long journey where you will have to perform rewrites if needed, and perhaps wait up to eighteen months or longer to see your work on the shelves. You may also be dismayed by the company's reluctance to spend money advertising your book. It seems very unfair that a well-known author has a giant publicity campaign when you – an unknown newcomer – are lucky to get a few reviews on amateur comic review websites.

Now comes the second letter I want to discuss with you. This will benefit you by looking at some of the references made in the email to movies and television shows. It seems highly probable that most publishing houses will now keep a separate department of artists in a country where wages are lower and more competitive than that of either America or England. Please look at the references mentioned in the email, would a young eighteen-year-old artist in India, or China, have heard of these movies or television shows?

Dear editor,

I have received your recent email concerning my script. Let me begin by saying that all of my art references for your artists are easily found on the internet. I know that I have included five hundred references, but to say that your artists won't know these movies – is COMPLETELY ridiculous! I have outlined my points concerning this below:

On page fifteen, there is a panel where I have described the action as thus: "We see the character of Ian Diamond raise his sword and go batwings on his enemies! This is real Michael Cimino style violence, with a touch of Paul Shrader's 'The Yakuza' thrown in!" I don't understand the problem that your artist, Rajesh, has. Are you telling me he never sat through the movie 'The Yakuza' before! That movie is a classic, and one of Robert Mitchum's best! I would suggest you give the project to a better artist, and one that is

better versed in American culture!

On page nine, are you trying to tell me that the artist has never seen a Yakuza documentary on National Geographic!! Are you totally nuts! I can't think of a single person in America who hasn't sat in his living room and been thrilled with tales of real life vendettas and forced prostitution. And, I'm sorry – but I will not suggest a suitable documentary that he can watch. I am not being paid to educate people so ignorant of world affairs.

Thanks,
Lloyd Cheeseman

Again, the example email is exaggerated, but I do often receive such emails. As I mentioned before, there is a chance that the artist is located abroad. More and more publishing houses will continue to outsource work. Good artistry is not as difficult to find as people who understand the English language perfectly.

To make your relationship productive with the artist, from the beginning, please leave fanboy style writing at home. You should describe what is happening in the panels in plain English without name dropping numerous action movies or little-seen television movies from the 1970s.

Please ask yourself if an eighteen-year-old artist will have seen quite an old movie? If the movie was made nearly forty years ago, the answer to that question is probably no. Also, the artist will be under a tight schedule, even if he wanted to sit and watch the movies and television shows that you've name-dropped in your script, he wouldn't have the time to watch all of them.

If there is a particular scene or visual from a movie, try to describe it as simply as possible. Better yet, refer to one or two movies only – the artist may be able to watch those and genuinely learn from them what you want your work to communicate. Avoid sentences like "Jimmy raises his shotgun, and goes at them Charles Bronson style." Someone unfamiliar with the movies of Charles Bronson, or whose grasp of English is not so advanced, will struggle to understand what you are trying to communicate. As an example, simply write "Jimmy, now full of anger, raises his shotgun and fires in the direction of the villains."

Please also do not use slang in your panel descriptions to the artist. It may be the artist is

foreign and not up to date with all the latest slang sayings. When you tell the artist: “Jimmy relishes a moment that is proper sick and hangs with his hoe.” The artist may be very confused by what you mean. Keep all of your panel descriptions in simple, easy to read, English. You may not like the fact that a lot of artists who work on American comics are based elsewhere, but if you want a long career in graphic novels – please get used to it.

As most editors abroad speak and write excellent English, they are the ones who will bridge the communication gap between you and a foreign artist. So, right from the first page of your script, make it easy for yourself and your artist. Please don’t quote scenes from movies unless you have to. You should also ask yourself if you want to look like a hack writer who steals from others? Try to come up with your original action scenes or montages, don’t produce work that is clichéd or lifts scenes directly from the Matrix. I think the original Matrix movie with Keanu Reeves is a classic. There have been many other movies that have tried to copy it, but have any of them succeeded? I don’t think so, and the fact is that the Matrix will still be watched twenty years from now, and all the movies that copied it will be forgotten. Do you want your work to be so easily forgotten? I thought not...

My best piece of advice would also be regarding the structure of your email responses to editors. Do not sit at the computer and just type up whatever comes into your mind. The result will be unreadable, often pointless, and a waste of not only the editor’s time but also your own.

Please check any emails that you send to publishing houses. You may revise your story over and over again, but the quality of your emails also counts. Sentences that do not make any sense, together with the often done mistake of confusing “your” with “you’re” is unlikely to impress the editing department in any disputes. All an editor will have to do is show a copy of your messy email to his boss, and you will lose the argument every time.

Also, please do not CAPITALISE any words. It looks aggressive, ignorant, and also condescending. You need to maintain a good relationship with your editor at all times. There will often be points that you do not agree with, but make your argument sound but not loud.

Do not try to bully the editor into agreeing with you, or expecting him to bow down before your ultimate comic book knowledge. No one likes a bully, or a know it all, who is acting like a diva and wants everything his way. He or she will also not care about what happened

in issue fourteen of Batman. They will simply want a well-written story, and nothing more.

So, check your spelling, check your grammar, and check the substance in your email. Is it easy to read and, more importantly, does it make sense?

Would You Pay For A Bad Hamburger?

Imagine that you are starving. You've driven two hundred miles in your beaten up, ten-year-old, car. The destination you are heading for is a large publishing house that has decided to give you ten minutes of their time. Along the road, you see a small cafe, so you pull in and park your car.

When you sit down in the cafe, you place an order for the super burger and large fries. The picture in the menu shows the perfect hamburger, it has lettuce, tomato, cheese running down the side, and under the bun, there's probably a nice dollop of ketchup. You cannot wait for this burger, and it is the perfect snack before that showdown with the publishing house.

When the waitress brings your order, you realise that the super burger is far from super. The bun is dry as if it has been sitting in a heating tray for three hours, and when you lift the bun, the salad is so old it's turned brown. Added to this are the fries you ordered, they are greasy and cold.

So, what would you do? Happily, eat a poor excuse for a meal or complain that what you've been served does not match either the picture or its text description?

I have had many writers try and serve me a bad hamburger, and nearly all of them see nothing wrong with giving me a substandard product. I never raise a stink or shout down the telephone, but I do send a polite email or letter which contains words such as "disappointing content", "the story doesn't rise to the heights of your wonderful idea" and my most used sentence is usually "with a little work, this story could meet both our expectations."

What do I receive in response to those politely worded statements? Well, usually a torrent of abuse, such as the following:

"You said you wanted a ghost story! I delivered a ghost story to you??!! Why in the world

should I rewrite this script, and are you going to pay me more?"

"I read your letter requesting a rewrite of my material. Let me respond by telling you NO!! I agreed to all your suggestions at the synopsis stage! Do you remember that, Mr Editor?? The SYNOPSIS stage?? Where I told you EXACTLY what would be in my story??"

The fact is I do remember the synopsis stage very well. The problem I usually have is a manuscript that has been rushed, contains many mistakes, and worst of all – the actual synopsis has been ignored by the writer. Please, if you are going to change your script after you have agreed on the content in a synopsis with an editor, then you must tell the editor before delivering the script, better yet email the editor in advance. If you have had some amazing ideas, then the editor will want to hear all about them, and they are usually very receptive to changes.

If you send a script to the editor and surprise him with the fact that it is nothing like the synopsis that you both agreed on, then you will be telling him you are unprofessional and a bit of a tyrant.

I once worked for around four weeks with a writer who wanted to write a suspense story. We spent a long time on the synopsis, as I have always believed that the synopsis provides a fantastic blueprint for a good script and makes the writer's life an easier one. With this particular project, we had even worked together on a page by page breakdown (or a *beat sheet* as some writers like to call it).

A page breakdown is where the writer explains what will be on every page in the graphic novel. It gives the editor a great sense of how the story will unfold visually and is usually a good indicator of the pace the story will have. You needn't cover every page, and often the writer can indicate an action sequence that takes more than one page. This would be written as:

Pages 5 to 11: this is where Dr Voltage and Captain Alternator fight. The fight begins at the top of a mountain on the planet Mars. As the two villains battle, they continuously fall down the mountain together until, by page 11, they are back on their feet at the bottom of the mountain. They face one another and their facial expressions tell us that they know their fighting is futile. They decide to talk about creating a meritocratic society on Mars.

The description in your page breakdown really can be that simplistic, and the length of the paragraph is enough, as you may need to write a page breakdown for a very lengthy graphic novel at some point in your career.

Now, I thought that I had a very good relationship with the writer. We had the same interests in literature, and I was very excited to read his upcoming script. What I received was worse than substandard. There seemed to be no dialogue, no descriptive captions of any kind, and the worst part of it was that we had agreed there would be a narrative from the main character throughout the graphic novel.

When I sent my politely worded email, asking what had happened to the story we had agreed on, I received a defensive and aggressive email. I was told that the narrative we had agreed on was not needed. Furthermore, the minimal dialogue represented what was currently popular in the marketplace.

Now, try to imagine a graphic novel where the characters speak in one-word responses, and what was supposed to be an atmospheric suspense story was going to be nothing but some pretty pictures with no text.

From working with other writers before, I can offer an opinion on what I think happened. Namely, that the writer was in the business for a couple of bucks. That may sound harsh, but now and again we give a writer a shot at a script and all they care about is the paycheque. I am not naive, and I do agree that people expect to be paid. However, if you are going to treat the craft of writing with no more importance than chopping some wood for the fire, then please get yourself another job. Writing will not be either a pleasure or a financial reward for you.

Too many new writers want to rush out scripts as quickly as they can to get a few cheques in. This approach doesn't work and don't be surprised when the publishing company refuse to pay for what you have served them.

Whenever I've talked about rewriting with new writers, nearly all of them complain about having to perform rewrites. The hamburger story may seem a little odd, but it has been one of the clearest statements I can provide to writers that we will not accept or tolerate bad service.

If you are more than happy to send out bad scripts, and bad synopses, then you are in for

tough times. Only a very poor publishing house would accept your first version of the script, and unless you own the publishing house, it is more than likely you will be asked to rewrite your material.

Now back to our friend with the suspense story. I am a fair guy, and I wasted hours on emails with the writer, trying to persuade him to at least try to do some rewrites on his material. In the twelve months that followed, I never received one rewritten page.

Just like many of you, I have a boss and he had questions that needed answering. Why had we given a shot to a writer who was lazy, sloppy, and arrogant? I spent an uncomfortable afternoon printing off the synopsis and page breakdown and showing that the script was nothing like what we had ordered from the writer.

The publishing house decided not to use the writer again unless he provided the rewrites as asked. We never did get anything more from the writer, other than some emails asking if we could pay half the money for his script. I would suggest you look at a standard writer's contract, which will tell you the answer that the writer got.

As an editor, I want nothing more than to launch the career of an exciting, and talented, new writer. The only thing stopping me is often the writer's inability to compromise. This doesn't just apply to new writers either. If you look through publishing history for the last thirty years, many a famous writer has fallen on hard times or is just about managing to publish utter drivel, usually in a publishing company that they own.

What I would suggest is that if your favourite writer has gone off the boil in the last few years, check out who his publisher and editor are. As writers become famous, some of them, unfortunately, become megalomaniacs. They fire the editor who originally worked with them, and install someone who wouldn't dare argue with them, or will tell them what they want to hear. As you can imagine, this often has fatal consequences to a writer's career. The writer's substandard stories that their editor fought hard to stop being printed, are on the bookshelves and this often results in some very disappointed fans.

I think the worst is when a writer abandons his publisher and starts up his own publishing house. In his own publishing house, the writer becomes a god and all dissenting voices will be ignored.

I hope that you have one bestseller after another. I also hope that you keep people around

you who are not just yes people. Keep the dissenting voices heard, as they are often the ones who will steer you away from the rocks.

If the subject of rewrites horrifies you, then it may be that you are in the wrong business. Be realistic when you read your material, is it as good as it can be? A good writer will never be satisfied with his or her work, and hopefully, the editor will have to pull it away from him to get it published. That is the way that, like all great works of art, excellent graphic novels and comics are produced.

Time And Distractions

PlayStation, Xbox, iPhone, iPad, cable television, movies on demand, soap operas, podcasts, internet blogs, and ebooks.

There is now an endless list of technologies, some old and some new, which can be used to fill your day and night. The problem of choice is not a problem anymore, and many of the best things are now actually free. You can get podcasts on subjects as diverse as the Roman army or how to clean your toilet properly, or you can even watch the video on YouTube along with a lot of movies that are now in the public domain and free to watch.

In an interview, the famous British fashion designer Vivienne Westwood once mentioned that the biggest problem young people face, in being creative, is all the many modern distractions. Regardless of your age, there has never been more content to explore, and most of it is very high quality.

In general, we should count ourselves lucky. With an internet connection, you really can choose what you want to watch or listen to. In my younger days in England, we only had three television channels and a few radio stations. Before the invention of the Walkman cassette player, a bedroom record player was the closest thing you got to a personal stereo and there was no chance of walking down the street with that in your pocket or listening to it on the bus to work.

So, we are lucky but also cursed. How are we cursed? It’s our attention spans that are being punished by the onslaught of paid and unpaid content. From my previous

experience, I have given many a new writer a shot at the title, only to find that he or she doesn't have time for me or the publishing business. They miss deadlines or refuse to work to deadlines because they say they are too busy, and their poor concentration is reflected in spelling mistakes, bad structure, and generally incoherent material.

I once rented a room from a guy who was immersed twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week in today's technological marvels. When I woke up to go to work, he was at the television playing on his video games console, when I came back from work he was on the internet for several hours, and then it was time for a cable television movie.

Please don't misunderstand me, I love to be entertained by gadgets just as much as the next person. On the other hand, if your relationships are not what they used to be, or you find that you have less and less time for your writing, then it may be time to deal with your distractions, and consider the subject of time management.

Matters have now become even worse with the social networking craze. Now, thanks to websites such as Facebook – you can check for email messages all day, and receive them in the *instant messenger* chat boxes.

I was once fairly addicted to a social networking site myself, and I know it is not easy reducing the amount of time you spend online. The good news is that there are ways in which you can get back to your work, and write that best seller you have inside of you.

To begin changing your life, all you need to get started is a pen and pad. Preferably a pad that you can keep in your bag so it's within easy reach, or grab your tablet computer, mobile phone, and start keeping some records of the time you spend on distractions.

Now, when I use the word *distractions* I do not mean close family members or your husband, girlfriend, or even your best friend. I have spoken to a lot of writers, and they often tell me that they now lock themselves in a room to get their work done, or even worse they have split up with their partner, and barely see their family anymore.

As a writer, shutting yourself off from the world is the worst thing you can do. It is a total myth that solitude produces great writers. I am sure there are exceptions, but try reading about some of today's bestselling authors. You will find that they have both an active social life, and also a very happy family life. Your creative powers will not be dulled by interaction with other human beings, if anything your understanding of your literary

characters will be inspired by those around you, and they will be more believable to readers as they will talk and act like real human beings and not robots.

So, how can you make more time for your writing?

First of all, start keeping a diary of how you use your time each week. If you are anything like I used to be, it may be something like the following:

7 am: got up for work and then checked email, and read the newspapers online before jumping in the shower and rushing to work. I was told off by the boss for arriving late at work, and asked myself why time goes by so quickly in the morning?

1 pm: took my one-hour lunch break and checked email on my tablet computer, then read some movie reviews and made a list of DVDs I want to watch. I bought the latest DVD box set of my favourite television show from Amazon, then rushed across the street to the supermarket and bought a sandwich. I managed to get back to work on time.

5.30 pm: I went home on the bus, and read a magazine for the whole thirty-minute journey. When I got home it was 6 pm, and I turned on the news channel and caught up with all the headlines for about thirty minutes. I made something to eat at around 6.30 pm and then checked my email once again. I was looking through the newspapers again and I spotted one of those celebrity stories that I like. I decided to Google the celebrity and found four other articles that told me where their love life is up to, and what new fashions they wore this week. When I looked up at the clock on the wall, it was about 7.30 pm. I was feeling a little tired so I curled up and watched a pay per view movie. The movie was a real epic, about three hours long. I got in bed at 10.45 pm, after I had checked my emails again. Before turning the light out, I watched the television news channel that I like for about thirty minutes and then, it was probably about 11.15 pm, or 11.30 pm when I fell asleep.

Okay, so outside of work how many hours were used up on everyday distractions? Seven maybe even eight hours a day? That would add up to something in the region of forty hours from Monday to Friday. Many writers tell me that they will have that synopsis or script ready for me after the weekend, as Saturday and Sunday are when they do their writing.

The idea is a fair point, the writers decided to keep the midweek for themselves and

watching movies and going online, but is that the right way to manage your time? Well... I don't think so. With some nifty time management tips, it might be possible to get all your writing done midweek and then you have all weekend to play your video games, read the newspapers, and spend time with your family.

Does that sound too good to be true? Well, it all depends on what you are willing to sacrifice and what time in the morning you are willing to get out of bed.

Let's look at the list of distractions that we saw in the previous list:

1. Email: contrary to most people's beliefs, email is just not that popular as an important communications device. In a recent newspaper article, it was stated that a major manufacturer of information technology products was going to ban email from its working practices. In other words, employees will phone each other rather than send emails.

That's a rule that I can agree with. In my new job, my boss has done the same thing. No one can email us, and any calls or enquiries are directed to the reception desk. Your call will be taken and, depending on the importance of it, the appropriate worker will be asked to call you back. This method eliminates so many pointless emails asking for information that is not relevant to my actual job within the company. It also prevents my returning to work, and spending hours reading through hundreds of emails, many of which will not be worth replying to.

It's not that I think email has no place in the world, but ask yourself the question – how many important emails do you receive per week? Other than family members dropping you a line, you probably don't receive one email a month that you could say is worthwhile reading. Yet, millions of us seem to be addicted to logging on and checking our email boxes, and why? Are we about to get an email telling us we have been selected for a prize? Even if we did, we would most likely ignore it as email has become a target for fraudsters and con artists.

The present reality of email is that it doesn't need to be checked dozens of times a day, it needs to be checked once a day or even just once a week if you have the discipline.

2. Online newspapers: I love the news as much as anybody, but how much of it is relevant to me? Hardly any at the moment due to the increasing popularity of

celebrities, I don't subscribe to celebrity gossip. The unfortunate thing is that our national newspapers seem even more obsessed with it than we are. Perhaps it's down to the lazy journalist who wants some young kid to take a photo of a celeb in some unflattering jogging shorts so that he can then write a criticism (maybe include a short life history of the celeb) and publish an article. This saves him the trouble of being a real journalist and getting out and doing some research. Why leave the office when you can do your work with a roof over your head and a cup of coffee in your hand?

Strangely, I have nothing against the modern-day celebrity. They're making a pile of money from the newspapers and magazines that keep on publishing stories about them.

My problem is if you are reading the stories, rather than getting on with your writing. By clicking on a newspaper story, you are giving them what is known as *web hits*. These are indicators of how many people have looked at a story and are closely examined by the guys in marketing. So, if the Kardashians are receiving lots of web hits, then their stock goes up and they get offered more television shows and the people who complain about them being on television have to grin and bear it.

If you are a Kardashian *clicker* and you want to be a writer, think about the fact that rather than lining your own pockets by publishing your work, you are happy to give your time to making celebrities richer.

What about you?

What about getting food on your table, and picking up some tickets for that holiday you and your partner have wanted for some time? Thinking about one's own monetary needs can often reduce the amount of time you waste on celebrity stories and their television shows, biographies, and fashion labels.

3. Television: right now television has never been better. As Robert McKee mentioned in an interview, the golden age of television is now. There are so many good television shows you'd need two or three recorders to store them. Again, the quality is also killing your writing career. If you find yourself saying that you will get on with your writing once you have sat through season four of your latest addiction, then it will not be long before season five is on DVD and your graphic novel is still nowhere to be seen.

4. Epic movies: keep them in the DVD box until the weekend, or think about splitting the movie into a few pieces. If it's a three-hour movie, split it into pieces that are twenty minutes long. You'll save yourself money on DVDs in the process. Treat yourself to twenty or thirty minutes of the movie each night, and then get on with your writing.

5. Bus journeys: with portable video games, kindles, and all kinds of tablet computers – riding a bus isn't the chore it used to be. The bus ride to and from work is an excellent time to reread your material looking for mistakes, or thinking of ways you can improve it. I can't say I recommend writing on a bus, my journey was on a bus that bounced up and down a lot. But the bus is a great place for casting another eye over your script. If you can type on a tablet computer without being disturbed, then go ahead and write your material on the bus. Try not to let a handy thirty minutes sitting on the bus go to waste.

Early bird or night owl? We're all different in this respect. In my case, I am an early bird, and I find late nights not only ruin my sleep pattern but my next day is written off yawning and trying to concentrate because I stayed up late. If you have traditionally burnt the midnight oil and worked till four in the morning, try going in the opposite direction and working in the wee hours before your partner and the kids wake up.

You will have to decide which method works for you, and there have been many times when I wish I was a night owl. I have tried it and failed.

To give you an insight as to how I work, please see my schedule below. It is the truth and it keeps me sane. For you, another way will be better. Nevertheless, what counts is eliminating as many distractions as you can, to ensure your time and attention are focused on your work.

My Weekly Schedule

Monday to Friday

5 am: get out of bed and have a very strong cup of coffee.

5.30 am: go for a thirty-minute jog.

6 am: jump in the shower then get dressed.

6.30 am to 7.45 am: grab the second cup of coffee and work on my material for one hour.

8 am: go to work.

8.45 am to 5.30 pm: at work all day, with a short lunch break of thirty minutes.

6.15 pm to 7 pm: have some dinner, and check my emails.

7 pm to 8 pm: work on my material for one hour.

8 pm: relax and enjoy being at home.

10 pm: in bed and hopefully fast asleep.

I only work for two hours per day on my material. So that's a midweek total of ten hours. How much work do I put into my material on the weekends? If I can help it, absolutely none. I am a firm believer that the weekend is for friends, unwinding, relaxing walks, and movies. I am quite happy to work on my private material in the ten hours I use up midweek for that purpose.

That may not seem a lot to some people, but for me, it is enough. The funny thing is that there are people out there who get up later than I do, have fewer working hours than I do, and will struggle to get three or four hours of writing done midweek. It's all down to distractions, and I took steps a few years ago to minimise my distractions and focus on what is important to me. I also find it wonderful that I don't sit at my word processor all weekend, please believe me – it is very uplifting.

Look at what you can minimise and maximise in your life. Do you need to clog those vital hours of your day staring at a screen, and logging in and out all day? Please take some time out to consider it.

Your time is important and, as with all human beings, it will be a finite resource. Try not to waste precious hours stuffing cash in the pockets of Z-list celebrities, when you can be dedicating your time to a great bestseller written by you. I have total faith in you, but have faith in yourself and focus on your bank balance.

The Sensitive Artist

While working abroad, I once sat in a meeting with an artist who had a problem with my work. He was showing his rough sketches of several pages. The panels within the pages seemed cramped and overloaded. When I saw them, I was very confused. The pages didn't look like what I had written.

That's because they were not what I had written. The artist had decided to change the pages by increasing the number of panels. I was careful with my words and stated that the problem seemed to be the additional panels. What I suggested, as a compromise, was that I rewrite the pages, and spread an action scene across a few more pages. This would allow the artist to insert more panels, and pace the action how he would like it.

There were some grim faces around the meeting table, and I realised something had gone wrong. The meeting was over, and I was later told not to speak to the artists like that again. Where had I gone wrong? Well, nowhere really. A lot of artists are extremely sensitive and have to be handled with kid gloves.

Unfortunately, the meeting was not forgotten by the artist and I would be hearing from him again.

Two months later, the company had decided to adapt a classic book by Mark Twain. The plan was to sell the book within America only. The language used in the graphic novel was straight from the book and was the dialogue of Huckleberry Finn.

The artist who I mentioned before was asked to illustrate the script. I never heard anything from him about the script, whether he liked it or not. Instead, he had a meeting with the company owner's wife. He told her that the script contained problem sentences and even seemed to be spelt wrong.

He had never heard of Mark Twain's book before and did not understand that Huckleberry Finn's dialogue is not meant to be grammatically correct. The problem for me was that the owner's wife hadn't read the book either.

I had a meeting with her, maintaining a poker face, and calmly explained that the book was to be sold in America and would contain the original dialogue. When I showed her a text copy of the novel, I pointed out the "mistakes" that Twain had incorporated

on purpose.

What I then heard was quite a shock. The company was no longer targeting America. All of the books would now be released within an Asian country. So, the spelling mistakes and sentences of Twain would have to be changed.

I found it incredible that no one in the editing department had been told about the company's new release strategy. I certainly didn't have a problem with it, but what about all the other scripts we were working on?

I suggested we rewrite the script into plain English, and I am sure that one day a Mark Twain super fan will track me down and make me pay for those changes.

As for the artist? Well, for some reason he was always given my scripts. I never had a problem with that, and I certainly never had a problem with his work. There was also no reason to amplify the situation into an ongoing argument.

I figured, the best thing I could do was to win him over with my work. Luckily, that is exactly what happened. To the point where the artist would often ask what I was working on next and could he illustrate it?

This is a short little story to point out that in publishing, a lot of people play games. I also remember that one day an editor marched down into an art department to make her complaints known. Her problem was that there was no space left in the illustrations for dialogue balloons or captions.

Later that day, she was repaid in full. Three artists walked into the editing department and pointed out problems in the work of the editors and also a desktop publishing worker.

I never understood these retaliatory strikes or what good any of the employees thought they would do. When working with creative people, always be on your guard and do not allow yourself to be drawn into an argument or rivalry.

What Not To Do At Book fairs

You've had that killer idea and worked it into a great synopsis and script. Still, no matter how many letters you send, no one seems interested or even bothered to respond. Well,

not to worry – there is always the book fair circuit if you have the courage. In the next few pages, I'll point out what you should avoid doing and give pointers as to what might make the rusty gates of a publishing house open up and let you in.

The following advice is from a book fair I attended and the different personality types you can expect to meet. For the sake of anonymity, I've decided to call them Ted and Lucy.

Ted: he's a guy in his late thirties with a good sales background and a smooth tongue. He likes the job for the travel and expenses, but the chances are he probably isn't all that interested in the comics and graphic novel business. He's probably been smart enough to read one of those *beginners* guides to graphic novels. He's good for name dropping famous artists and writers, but that's about it.

Lucy: She's a young woman in her twenties and working in the marketing section. Again, like Ted, her interest isn't all that peaked by things such as comic books, but she likes travelling, and she'll endure being hit on by greasy men all over the world to pick up a pretty good salary from the publishing house. You might also bear in mind that she probably gets paid double what most editors do.

So... you walk into the book fair and you're about to approach either Ted or Lucy to sell them your masterpiece script or show them your amazing artwork. Well, before you do that, let's look at what you should do in logical order.

You should go dressed in jeans, sneakers, and your favourite X-men t-shirt so that they know you're an expert in your field and love all things graphic novel, right?

Wrong. Wear a smart shirt, with a tie if possible, and a nice pair of trousers and appropriate shoes. Events such as the London book fair are not full of comic book groupies, and graphic novel writers being treated like rock stars because they turned up wearing a Batman t-shirt. The London book fair and similar events are where the marketing and salespeople turn up to hobnob with international distributors who will hopefully buy thousands of their books and sell them in countries such as Singapore, parts of the UAE, Turkey, parts of Europe and perhaps even countries you can't find on a map. They have not gone to the book fair to meet with artists and writers, they probably get several emails and letters a week from the writers and artists – the last thing they want is for you to turn up and hound them at the book fair. If you think about it, Ted is in sales and Lucy is in marketing. They will not be chapter and verse experts in the career of Superman, Green

Lantern, or any other superhero you can mention.

That doesn't mean you can't win a good contract or get them to open the back door of the publishing house for you.

When approaching bookstalls, think about who these two people are. They are sales and marketing, and you must keep that in mind at all times.

Let's think of the best strategy to win Ted over. When Ted sees you in your shirt and trousers, he is going to think you're a rich distributor looking for many of his titles to carry in your suitcase to whatever country you've come from. If you want a ton of books for free, make up some fake publishing house cards for someplace in Uzbekistan, and explain you need samples for inspection. You'll leave with more books than you can carry.

But if like me you are honest, then your sole purpose is to get the door at the publishing house open. First things first, don't start talking business right away. Get into some small chit chat and let Ted talk about what his stall is selling and the company he is working for. Then get Ted to talk about himself, and get to know him on a personal level.

The chances are that Ted might hate comic books. He is in his job for the money. So, do your best to repress extolling the work of Moore, Miller, et al. Good topics to get on his wavelength are asking him how his fourteen-hour flight was, as Ted will relish the chance to complain about air travel, airports, and those little bags of peanuts that even Houdini would struggle to get open.

Just have a nice chat, and talk socially. When you feel the timing is right, hand Ted your business card. The card should be simple and say "Freelance writer" on it. Please don't put "Chief Visionary", "Comic Book Genius", or "The Next Alan Moore" on it. The best thing is to make the card as unpretentious as you can. When he gets the card and realises you're a writer, he'll be pleasantly surprised and also interested. Why are you dressed so smartly? Why didn't you geek him out, like all the others, with background information on all the characters in the Marvel universe?

My basic advice is to act like a friend and not a nerd. As criminal as it is, I have seen so many utterly garbage writers get published because they are good socialisers. It may make your blood boil, but it is the truest thing you'll read in this book.

Now, if you handled Ted in the manner listed above, you may get lucky and Ted may talk to his boss about you. His boss may decide to get in touch because you sound like a fun person to work with.

On the other hand, it may be that your card is put in a small box that gets handed to the editing department after the book fair finishes, and you never hear anything about it again.

My advice is to wait one week, and let the dust settle in the publishing house's office. They will all have been rushing around to make posters, finalise flyers, and get some books printed to show off at the book fair. It will take them a few days to get their house in order. It may be that Ted is not back in their office for a few days either.

After one week, ring the publishing house and ask to speak to Ted. It may be they don't want you to talk to him, but they will ask him about you. So you have far more chance of the editing team giving you a call and a minute of their time. If Ted has told them you are a reasonable guy, a good speaker and well dressed, that image will be burned in their minds. Many editors dream about an author who is easy to work with, will compromise when needed, dresses smartly and is articulate enough to peddle his wares on the Oprah Winfrey show. Curiosity will cause someone to pick up a phone and make contact with you.

If you happen to approach Lucy at the book fair, then the best way to convince her is to speak about your passion for the craft of writing and your commitment to delivering high-quality manuscripts. Please don't give her the story about how Captain America number fourteen changed your life forever; she will not be able to relate to you at that level.

Just show Lucy that you are an honest person who wants to sell great books for a living, and she might do you the favour of waving your card at the editing team.

For success at book fairs, just remember the rules above – the people there are not obsessive about comics or dazzled by comic knowledge. They are professional business people interested in the result, which should be a large amount of money by their reckoning. For you, it may be the chance to enchant readers and whip up enthusiasm, but remember to compromise and also learn how to tell people what they want to hear.

For the artist, please carefully consider the advice above. I would also like you to leave your laptop and portfolio at home.

Leave my portfolio at home!

Yes, it will tell the stall who you are before you get one minute to sell yourself. Just dress smartly and do what I mentioned earlier. I would also advise that you get to the book fair early in the morning. If you turn up during the rush hour, with your portfolio in tow, then you are telling them there and then that you are an artist trying to make a sale. In their tiny stall they will have people who want to buy thousands of books at a time, and talking to you will not be of interest to them.

If you turn up at their stall when it is busy, seriously think of coming back when it is a little quieter. Your first impression counts, and you want to get as much of their time as possible. I would strongly suggest leaving the laptop/iPad at home. My reasons for this are that you often have to wait for the laptop to boot up and the silence can be painful when it takes longer to start up than you thought, and it isn't necessary to take it with you. Ted and Lucy are not artists, and probably have no interest in art whatsoever. You need Ted and Lucy to get the email of the art director who might email you for a sample of your work. Showing samples to Ted and Lucy is a total waste of time. It is better to impress upon them what a cool person you are, and you will have more chance of a sale than pointing to a screen and telling them how long you spend perfecting your work.

Book fairs are a great way for you to make contacts. On the other hand, getting the right contact is what matters and the sales and marketing people can pass your name on, but they will not be the ones to hire you or buy your work.

Please always bear that in mind. I don't want you to waste all your money travelling to a book fair and making all the wrong moves. I wish you all the best of luck at any book fair, and my advice is to help you maximise your chances.

Conclusion

I hope you have enjoyed this look into the mindset of publishing houses. The single biggest lesson that this book has offered is compromise. I am sure you feel I have rammed it down your throat throughout this book. Please note that my intentions are honourable and meant to give you the best possible chance in your career.

From my point of view, I feel that the publishing industry is incredibly satisfying. For all the work, sweat, and politics, there is nothing like having a copy of the completed book

in your hands. From there it can only get better when you see good reviews and the faces of kids light up when they buy your book.

I've been incredibly lucky to have been involved with a startup company based in Asia. We were often short-staffed, but for me, that was a fantastic advantage. Although my job title was *editor*, I also got to write, attend book fairs and perform mall promotions, and get to meet a lot of interesting people.

The purpose of this book has been to try and change your way of thinking. If you have been working very hard, but seeing no return – then I know exactly how that feels. It is frustrating, hard, and can often leave you feeling a little depressed and also lonely. When the gates of the publishers finally do open for you, it can almost be overwhelming.

I previously talked about acting like a diva. Please avoid doing that at all costs, and don't stick so close to your material that you are unwilling to change anything about it. That will create a lot of problems for you, and also hinder your career.

When I travelled throughout India, a few years ago, I read a great deal about Hinduism. There is a text known as the Bhagavad Gita. One of its messages is that you can love things, but try not to become attached to them. I feel this is a good lesson regarding your writing. By all means, love your work but do not become so attached to it that you will fight anyone who suggests changes.

If you are a good writer, then your next story will always be better than your last. You should learn to let go of a book once you have published it. Move forwards, and don't complain about what went wrong with your last work but start working on your next project. If you become bitter about the way your work was treated, then you will not be fully concentrating on what is more important – your work today.

You need to keep busy. With the emerging global market, there has never been a better time to be a prolific writer. Despite the impression given in the media, writers are now being paid more than ever. There seems to be more respect for the craft of writing than I can remember in years past.

So, please make compromise your greatest tool and moving on your best idea.

I also want you to make time for life. Please don't shut yourself into your bedroom and

bang away at the keyboard twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. That is not how great ideas are born. Innovation of any kind is from looking at the world around you and immersing yourself in it. Make time for your family and your friends. Take the night off from writing if you need it, and grab a beer or watch a good movie.

If you feel that your writing is lacking in one area such as grammar, then identify the books that can help. Don't lock yourself away to read twenty books back to back. Take your time with such measures, plot out what you will do over three to six months, and how you can do it at a leisurely pace.

Perhaps you have been beaten down by a lot of rejection letters. If this is the case, then take a total time out from your work. Go for a walk; think about your current strategy and the quality of your writing. Is it really good enough? Are you perhaps writing too much? It could simply be a case of quantity over quality. Take a time out, and think it through carefully. Have a break for a month, or even six months, from your writing if you need it.

Whatever you do, don't work yourself up over it. Make time for life, and your writing will improve significantly.

Thank you for taking the time to read this book.

Afterword

I originally wrote this work back in 2010. I never tried to get it published. Looking back on it I realise it is a very cutting memoir and often stereotypes. I honestly think I was very arrogant in the way I wrote it. I was also short-sighted in that I couldn't see I was getting a lot of frustration off my chest. But I decided to leave the arrogance and frustration in as I think it shows the industry can be stressful and make some people a little angry. The reason for that was my feeling of being both attracted and repulsed by how the publishing industry worked.

So the question is why would I bother to write this book at all? The intention was to genuinely help others. I understand we live in an age of Machiavellian selfishness, but I look the other way, to be honest.

Some will not reveal their secrets as they don't like competition. This kind of goes the way of seeing lack in the world: there are more people and therefore there will be a lack

of opportunities to be published. I find this type of thinking to be baloney. Right now there has never been a better chance for a hard-working writer to breakthrough. There is more advice on hand to help you succeed, and a great deal of it is free.

There is also less competition. Less? Yes, less. The truth is that there is a growing swell of entitlement festering into the media world. Whether it be books, music, or movies there is far less quality product than there used to be. In 1970s cinema, there seemed to be a classic film out each week. Now, in these bereft times, we are lucky to hear of one film a year that is worth watching. How did we get to this point?

Excessive marketing and rushed distribution are how we ended up with second rate material. Look at any great book or movie and you will see years of planning and writing development. Now the thought is that a book should be written and marketed to take quick advantage of a new fad. The problem is that a new fad is seldom bettered and fades fast.

Quick distribution is always a money decision. Think of great artists and writers over the centuries, their pockets were certainly lighter but their shoulders were too. They did not have to carry the weight of box office success around with them. Now, a quick buck is all that matters. I had said in a previous section that certain genres are looked down upon by traditionalists. You might remember that I also said these lower genres were how the publishers broke even. I stand by that, even today. My main point would be that a tremendous amount of time and effort went into genres considered lower. Far more work than many A list products. I'd even go so far as to say that B-Movies from forty years ago were more polished than anything Hollywood releases these days. In striding for a quick buck, many artists are missing a profitable stroll in a beautiful park.

And it's not about politics for me. Your politics is your business. I'm old enough to remember when you simply walked into a booth and chose the vote you wanted without having it discussed or questioned by anyone else. I don't feel politics has ruined the arts whether it be books or movies. I still also don't believe in mega million-dollar marketing campaigns. Look at any number of high profile flops in recent years and you will find humongous advertising budgets.

Word of mouth is still the key selling point. It always was. A friend tells me a movie has come out which is better than *The Matrix* and *The Godfather*, then I will be lining up to see it. For years I never got around to reading *Gone Girl* by Gillian Flynn. But I've read it since and I was completely hooked on it. I often think of the numerous people who

recommended it to me and ask myself why I didn't read it sooner. And that is where your work needs to be: in good *word of mouth*. Make your books, poems, songs or whatever else you do have that fantastic effect on people. Create something that makes them run to every friend and family member they have, to tell them you crafted a masterpiece that has to be experienced. We both know it is the only way you are going to succeed.

So, how do I feel about this book more than ten years later? I think it's alright. I don't use those awful dashes and much as I used to. My sentences also got shorter. But not today. Why's that? Well, I feel this new afterword should match the style of what passed before it - even if the old work was substandard. See how I put one of those awful dashes into a sentence? Shameful.

So what about you? What's your story and where do you go from here? I think you should plough headfirst into becoming a writer and never giving up. Deep down inside you know what to do. If you still don't, then pick up the guides and biographies of other writers. Look at Stephen King's approach, how did J.K. Rowling make all that money and entertain millions into the bargain? Also, find out if all authors were born with a silver spoon in their mouths. The answer is that most didn't get that kind of a break.

How do most writers succeed? With hard work and determination that could make soldiers in the special forces jealous. They also didn't do it by sitting on Twitter at 2 am. Many of them didn't have the option to publicly broadcast when things didn't go their way or when a big break fell through.

Please decide where you are going and make it happen. There are millions, possibly billions, of people out there waiting for you to do it. You can see that in the faces of people who queue up to have their pictures taken on Platform 9¾ at King's Cross Station. It's written all over the faces of people who call at Stephen King's house hoping to get a glimpse of him, or maybe even speak to him. All the fans of literature have one thing in common: they want more of it. They want someone like you to sit down and put together an epic series that they can read while sipping their coffee. Decide if that person to make that come true is you.

Also, remember that no one cares who writes a bestseller. Whatever your skin colour, gender, religious or political beliefs - you deserve a shot at success and don't let anyone tell you differently. That's the only way wars against racism or any other kind of discrimination will be won. I looked forward to seeing it.

My final word is on the topic of being positive. This is not to single anyone out, but to simply ask them to think of how they are spending their time. If you're not happy with how things are with the *Star Wars* franchise, then please get off YouTube and stop complaining about it. Create your sci-fi saga and fill the void which you think you can see. Take your complaints and turn them into creativity. Our lives on this planet are far too short. No one will remember your tweets, camera reactions to movies you don't like or hate mail you send to someone who has made it. Remove yourself from poisonous negativity (whether online or offline) and get on with your job. Immerse yourself in creativity and you will see the world with new eyes.

And please don't worry about perfection. The great thing about writing is that no one masters it. There is so much to learn and do that it is a fantastic lifelong hobby. Behind every great master is a long journey of learning and immersion in an enjoyable craft.

Whoever reads this work, I hope you gain as much pleasure from writing as I have. In this afterword, I think I have found the answer to why I wrote this slim volume in the first place. The answer is to encourage more people, and in doing so to enjoy their literary output in the future.

Thank you,
Mark Jones
Saturday 1st of May 2021

P.S: To help me publish more free books on the topic of writing, please buy a copy of my next children's book: *Rita Wong and the Jade Mask* which will be published on the 30th of September 2021. The ISBN is: 978-1-911427-18-6.