

## **I Thought She Said 20 Questions: How to Break Into the Publishing Industry**

By Connie McKenzie

Laura Resnick's "20 Questions: How to Break into the Publishing Industry" answered many more than 20 questions, but opened the door to thousands.

On the question of whether or not to have an agent, Laura was quite clear—maybe. She explained that having an agent does not make it any more likely that you'll be published, only more likely to be read. Some publishers require you to have an agent. Some, especially small presses, prefer that you do not. An agent sometimes knows which editor will love your work, but sometimes an agent will give up after submitting to that editor and being rejected. The question, although thoroughly answered, left us wondering if we were going to make the wrong decision about an agent and end our careers before they even started.

Then, Laura shined a ray of hope. As anybody who isn't currently residing on Venus with no satellite TV knows, the economy isn't exactly booming at the moment. However, books tend to do well in a depressed economy, since they are a relatively inexpensive form of entertainment. Romance books do extremely well, since people love a happy ending.

Publishers, apparently, are quite timid and afraid to take risks. Laura explained that no publisher really likes to start a trend—they prefer to be second. That way, they can cash in on the herd-like tendencies of the book-buying public without the risk, because the failure of a new twist on the genre could cost them big. Of course, the time between a manuscript being picked up by a publisher and actual release is about a year, so unless your editor is psychic, the chance of cashing in on a trend is...well, just really small.

If a miracle on the scale of parting the Red Sea occurs, you get the call from an editor telling you that they like your book and really want to publish it. Now what?

According to Laura, when that phone call comes, show your enthusiasm, take notes, and don't agree to anything until you have had a chance to think. If you have simultaneously submitted your manuscript, be sure to let the other publishers know that you have an offer and see if they would like to compete for your masterpiece. Be aware that the contract offered by the publisher is not the one you have to sign. Negotiation is expected, and it's certainly in your best interest. The most important thing to remember is that money should flow from the publisher, make a brief stop with your agent if you have one, and finally to you—never the other way around.

Laura said she was happy that everyone asked good questions and remained engaged throughout the presentation. Answering those questions showed us "newbies" that we have a long way to go before being published, and a lot more than 20 questions that need an answer.

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