



The Writer's Primer:

A Practical Guide for Aspiring Authors Seeking Publication

*** Excerpt ***

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Tabalt Press

ISBN 978-0996785426

Available at Amazon in print and Kindle

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Introduction

"You know, I have a great idea for a story ..."

For many authors, this single thought is the start of a complex journey. Today's publication world offers more opportunities than perhaps any previous time, thanks in large part to the Internet and the open accessibility of numerous self-publishing outlets. Online journals exist alongside print journals, small publishers and self-published authors are listed beside large publishers and A-list authors, and a wide array of bloggers and reading communities are looking for the next great author to follow. Nevertheless, with so many options and variables, the marketplace itself can be daunting.

The intention of this book is to introduce aspiring writers to the rich landscape of the publishing world. Whether you're looking to publish a story or book, or have yet to put a single word to paper—or keyboard—I've assembled this primer as a practical guide to the realities that await you. From basic considerations of how writing can find a place in your life to rudimentary mechanics of proper literary technique; from short story publication, book publication, and finally to marketing, this primer aims to provide you with a walking guide.

Consider it a source of things you might wish to have known in hindsight, which is the perspective I took when deciding on the sections for each part of this book. The information shared in these pages would have been a very welcome companion when I took my first steps—or stumbles—into the publishing world.

In regard to semantics, I use the words ‘primer’ and ‘guide’ in the title and subtitle of this book for specific reasons. As a *primer* it’s meant to introduce those unfamiliar with the publishing world to the situations they will most likely encounter; as a *guide* it’s meant to give fundamental and practical advice on taking the first steps into that world. There are numerous books on writing and publishing, many of which claim to be definitive guides. Unfortunately, given the dynamic nature of the publishing world, any “definitive” publishing guide is most likely obsolete within a year of its own publication.

This primer is different from other how-to books in that I present material from the perspective of a fellow author in the trenches of the publishing industry. While there are many volumes offering advice from the upper reaches of success, few books address the pragmatic demands of fledgling authors who enter the publishing world without the benefit of a Masters in Fine Art and who have to balance their literary pursuits, family, and an existing career.

So you may ask, who am I?

I wrote my first short story when I was sixteen, and I knew in that moment writing would be my creative passion. Pragmatism guided me toward a more stable career path in healthcare, yet I never stopped writing. I didn’t have the benefit of creative writing courses, so I studied every book I read to discern the shape and sound of different literary forms. After years of accumulating finished stories, books, and several half-hearted attempts to secure an agent, I

decided to approach publication with the discipline of a part-time job. I devoted a certain number of hours each week to submissions, proofreading, and publication research. Several months later I had my first publication credit.

Since then I've gone on to publish fourteen short stories and, to date, three multi-award-winning anthologies. *Remnant*, my first book, combined speculative fiction and science fiction. My second book, *Oddities & Entities*, bridged the supernatural, paranormal, and horror genres. My third book, *Prism*, combined my award-winning, previously published short fiction and new, unpublished pieces to span a wide array of genres and narrative forms. In addition to those three titles, there is this primer and, looking forward, several more completed fiction books that I'm preparing for publication.

One of the interesting things about hindsight is that it makes things sound easy. When I consider that I can sum up what I've done over eight years into two little paragraphs, it makes me wonder why it took so much work to get where I am today. This holds true for any author's story because nobody likes to talk about the labor required for any measure of success in the publishing world. A common thread to every author's story is a long path of hard work and diligent research, two ingredients that don't have much public appeal in the recipe of success. "Success," however, is a word with as many definitions as there are authors who claim its label.

Before my first book came out, I built my website to establish a central presence for my publishing pursuits. Authors are always encouraged to have something on their websites to distinguish them from the crowd, so the course I followed was to include something I hadn't seen on other author sites: essays on lessons learned from someone coming into publishing from the outside. Inspiration struck, so I added a page to my website called "For the Writer". I

continue to maintain the page as an evolving source of information.

This book grew from those essays, allowing me to cover not only more topics but also cover them in greater depth. Specifically, Part I concerns the literary craft, Part II explores basic writing mechanics, Part III looks into short story publication, Part IV looks into the world of book publication, and Part V concerns marketing. Some of these sections inevitably overlap, but that's the nature of the beast.

Certain keywords will come up again and again in the course of these discussions. Perseverance, patience, and discipline are essential elements any writer must possess. The market can be unforgiving and, at times, downright brutal. It will test your resolve and your sensitivities to their very limits. Despite these characteristics—or perhaps *because* of them—the publishing world can also provide an unparalleled sense of accomplishment.

One of the little analogies I like to share with people is to imagine sitting in a room among a crowd of strangers. Now imagine that someone takes the stage and asks for a show of hands for a series of questions. Who has written a short story? Who has written a book? Who has been published? Published twice? More than twice? Won an award? Won two awards? Done an interview? Sat at a book signing?

Now ask yourself: how many times do you want to raise your hand?