

5 Reasons to Wait for the Big Time

By Fleur Bradley

If you've been at this writing thing for a while like I have, you've probably heard that the odds of getting published by one of the big NY houses are not so great. Dismal, is more like it—and it's just as hard to get an agent to notice you in their giant slush pile (don't you just love that term?). The truth is, there are many, many writers, and not enough slots for us all to get published—even if our books are brilliant. Being good is rarely enough. I'll share with you my story of still waiting-to-be-published: I've written five (yes, five) manuscripts. The first two were not good enough—experience has taught me that. The next two were good enough to be published; both got me (different) agents, but neither made it into print. My latest manuscript, a YA suspense, is now almost ready for my new (third) agent to submit.

Sounds pretty awful, right? Yet I'm still waiting for that publishing contract, even after five manuscripts, three agents, and years of querying. Sure, I could self-publish on Kindle or some other e-book format, and I'd probably make some money since I've spent my share of time networking and building a platform. But

I'm holding out for the big time, and I'll tell you why:

Respect

I'll be blunt: self-publish, and you'll get no respect in the publishing community. I know there are a host of ebook success stories, but the most successful e-books are written by authors with a very strong (mostly nonfiction) platform, or authors who built a reputation with a traditional publishing house first. Because it's so easy to selfpublish, lots (and lots and lots) of people are doing it—so even if your book is brilliant, it'll be associated with books that, quite frankly, should never have seen daylight. When you mention your book to fellow publishing professionals, mention you published straight to Kindle or with iUniverse. They'll smile, and inwardly dismiss your work, no matter how great it is. I'm being tough here, but it's the truth, so be ready for this if you decide to self-publish.

Advertising Power

You may have heard that big publishing houses do nothing to promote their authors anymore, unless you're Stephen King or J.K. Rowling. Let's say for argument's sake that's true, and assume you get no promotion help from your big NY house because it's just little ol' you. Still, book reviews, bookstore shelf space, bookstore signings, conference panel slots, speaking invitations, teaching opportunities, and interviews—all of these promotional opportunities will be difficult for you to access if you selfpublish.

And those are all available when you publish with a big house. As an author, you're expected to market your work; the days of hiding in your little writing room are over. If you self-publish, you just make this job much harder, because so many doors are closed to you (see reason #1 for why).

Longevity

I'm in this for the long haul. I hope to write many more books, build my audience, and grow as a writer so I can support myself by writing fiction. It's a lofty goal, I know—and it's one I can't achieve if I self-publish. To promote my work adequately, I need that big publishing house to back me and allow me to launch my career with as many opportunities to find readers as possible. If I self-publish, I will always struggle to grow my career—it's not impossible, but it's a seriously steep uphill climb.

Money

You probably know the odds of getting that six-figure advance are tiny, and I'm certainly not counting on a big advance once a manuscript of mine does make it that far. But you'll still see some sort of book advance if you sign with a big publishing house—money you can use to support your family, or to fund promotional expenses you'll have once the book is published. If you self-publish, you may even have to pay to see your name in print, and you'll certainly not get a check beforehand. Advance money is another opportunity you won't have if you self-publish.

Opportunity to Grow

I'm writing YA now, but I also like to write short stories, and I'm plotting a middle-grade novel as you read this. If I sign a deal with, say, Random House, I might get the opportunity to be in an anthology, or write a series for one of their houses. If my books sell, this might lead to other book deals. In short, a book contract with a big publishing house can be the foundation for the growth of a great career. If I self-publish, I would have to build my own opportunities, and the odds of being a big name author in ten years are next to nil. Don't get me wrong, I don't think self-publishing is evil. I have many author friends who chose to self-publish, or publish with tiny presses that forced them into a position that was just like being self-published: in charge but also responsible for their own success, from the ground up. Self-publishing is a great solution for those with a strong platform (in non-fiction, mostly), or writers who aren't interested in growing a career for personal reasons. But most of my self-published author friends struggle to build a name for themselves, and have often closed the door to traditional publishing. So I'm waiting for the big time, knowing full well that the big time is not glamorous or big-time at all. It'll be just another chapter of hard work and new challenges. But waiting for a big NY publisher to offer me a book contract is the best chance for me to grow into the author I know I want to be, so I'll wait, patiently and persistently. Even if it takes a long time.

Originally appeared in The Pikes Peak Writer, Volume IX, Issue 4, July 2010.