

## Welcome to the Jungle

By F. P. Dorchak

It took me 42 years and 17 conferences to snag an agent, but I finally signed on with the Cherry Weiner Literary Agency this past December. How'd I do it?

You have to write something, and you have to pitch it. I've done this for 21 years. I've had varying degrees of success in the short field, but none in novel length. I've heard it all but mostly "not for me," or "don't know how to market." Perhaps that's evil agentspeak for "you suck," but I prefer to take those statements on face value, you know? Easier on the soul.

Okay, enough whining.

I went to the 2008 PPWC ready to rock. I had two manuscripts to push. One, my new UFO story; the other, a gritty supernatural tale. When the agent and editor list came out, I researched everyone. Found out who might best suit my work. Attempted to psychically connect with each "target." Then I worked my pitch. To death. In my sleep. In restroom stalls. Memorized it until I bled. Then, as I have for the past umpteen years, I volunteered to help out at the conference. I've done everything from gophering to presenting, but I prefer chauffeuring—driving our VIPs to and from the airport. Besides the obvious, I like to learn about these VIPs as people.

So, you get these name cards, and you go to the airport and stand around like a totem pole holding your sign up with your insanely huge (hopefully charming and sincere) grin. Usually I'm met by tired individuals who've already put in a full day's work. But this time I'm met by the whirling twister known as Cherry Weiner.

Oy!

It was like she'd just woken up and downed a pot of espresso! Mind you, at around 11 p.m.! That impressed me.

So, we're driving to the hotel, merrily talking away, me listening to her conversation and running my pitch over and over in my head. Don't get me wrong, I was listening to her every word—you certainly don't wanna sound like an insensitive jerk by answering "Sure! Love to!" to her statement about just having lost her beloved dog of 15 years—but I'm a whiz at multitasking. Then—I don't know exactly how she did it—she slyly and très slickly weasels into our conversation the question of what my book's about. It's not the standard, "Yo, Upstart, why am I here?", but it totally takes me off-guard and puts me at ease. Pitch flies out the window. Now, I'm just talking about my story, as if I were talking about someone else's book or movie.

The other thing I really like about Cherry is her flat-out spunk. Her energy. It's not that wired, ADD, caffeine-fueled fury that passes for lively vigor these days. She doesn't act jaded or disaffected. No, Cherry has an internal drive. A passion. She seems to really care about people and sincerely wants to find good stuff. I've met lots of agents and editors over the years, and I never hit it off with them like I did with her. We just got along great, and I hoped it wouldn't end too soon or ignominiously.

I've been dealing with Cherry since that conference, and I like how she worked with me along the way. She read, gave great comments, and took it back for another read. Then asked if I would be interested in taking her on.

But I wasn't through with her yet. No, not that easy.

You see, something many fail to realize first time in is that we—us Upstart

Writers—are actually hiring an employee. Okay, it's actually more like we're both interviewing each other, but you get the point.

I e-mailed her a list (well, two lists) of questions. Twenty-four to be exact.

The reason for the e-mail was that I happened to be sick and didn't really want to be on the phone that long writing out her answers while dealing with bodily fluids and all. Cherry was so dang gracious (and I'd already asked her if an e-mail would be all right and explained why I was doing it), she responded **THAT DAY**. I, sick or no, immediately gave her a call.

The long and the short of it is...I like her experience, her responses to my grilling, her personality, and the way we get along. Now, the rubber meets the road—we'll see if she can convince others I'm worth the investment.

But none of this—none of it—would have been possible had I not attended the PPWC and gotten involved. Felt that “click” or “skip” that only occurs with live contact. It's good to get out of our comfort zones every now and then, out from behind our desks. Go meet other animals like ourselves—and, eventually, become part of that predatory food chain. That is the goal, right?

Welcome to the jungle, Baby.

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