

## THE PERILS OF BEING PUBLISHED: Reading Your Own Reviews by Gerry Bartlett

I love the Internet. Seriously. It has made my life so much easier when it comes to research. And I can connect with fans and my publisher in a way that was never possible in the old days. But there's a tool of the Devil on the Internet, and it's known as Google Alerts. If you're published, you probably already know about it. You can set up a Google Alert much too easily. You just put your name or the name of your book in quotation marks and Google will "alert" you whenever you are mentioned on the Net. Of course this isn't instantaneous. Sometimes it lags way behind. Like the alert I got the other day.

I'm working on book 7 of my series. Book 6 comes out in December. Yet, lo and behold, an alert arrived in my In Box concerning REAL VAMPIRES HAVE CURVES. This was book 1, which came out in the spring of 2007. This was a while ago. It got good reviews at the time. It was a bestseller at Barnes and Noble and Borders and launched a series that has rolled along nicely, thank you very much. I've had many Google alerts in the three years since it came out. Most of them let me know that some pirate or other is giving my book away free. I grit my teeth and delete. You can waste a lot of energy trying to chase these fiends down. They just pop up with a new name and website overnight. Not worth my time.

Anyway, here's this new alert. I make the mistake of clicking on the link. It's a review by a blogger. She hated, I mean, really despised the book. It was a chick lit knock off of Sex In the City with fangs, only poorly done. Everything she said was like an arrow in my heart. I couldn't go back to my work in progress. I drowned myself in chocolate, Blue Bell ice cream and an orgy of reading bestsellers by authors who obviously knew how to write way better than I did. Did I reread any of the great reviews I'd gotten before? No. Did I pay attention to the glowing fan letter that had arrived the very same day in my In Box? Of course not. Poor deluded fan. How could she have wasted so much money on that dreck?

Wait a minute. Who is this blogger? What are her credentials? Sure, she could spell, but does she like anything other than literary fiction where the heroine dies from a wasting illness? How many people follow her? Oh, great, seventeen people including her mother, her sisters and her BFF. Now maybe I can breathe again. Or not. Certain things she hit on are haunting me. As I sit down at my computer I analyze every phrase before I touch the keys. Is this word right? Is Glory too stupid to live? Should she care about her shoes? Do I care about mine? Of course I do. I never leave the house without my face on and neither would she, vampire or not.

And then there are those bestsellers I am reading. Are they perfect? Not exactly. But they do have one thing in common. They are master storytellers. They pull me in with their imaginations and their great characters. I am inspired. I want to stretch. Make Glory smarter, make her story better, more compelling, and, oh yeah, still have some of the funny she's known for. A challenge? Sure. But this is why I get paid to do it and bloggers usually don't earn a dime. Oh, was that mean? Tough. Let them eat chocolate.

Bottom line: For your own sanity, take reviews with that cliché--a grain of salt. Yes, I read them. And pay attention to what they say, the good and the bad. I write humor and there's nothing more subjective than the decision about what's funny, or not. But you want a reaction. Trust me, if you get a tepid reaction to your work, you're not making enough of an impact. It's kind of like those rejections that say "I just couldn't get enthusiastic enough to take on this project." Don't you hate those?

Be sure to always consider the source. When I calmed down enough to examine my alert more closely, I realized this person had no real credentials. It was one person's opinion. Fine. I can live with that. Of course it's still out there where anyone can read it. At least she hadn't posted it on Amazon. Don't **you** love the Internet?

Gerry Bartlett is hard at work on REAL VAMPIRES DON'T WEAR SIZE SIX, due out August, 2011. But, first, don't miss REAL VAMPIRES HAVE MORE TO LOVE, coming in December, 2010 from Berkley Publishing.