

I read a book recently from one of the new publishers that have sprung up on-line. They don't pay their authors advances but do a print-on-demand program. I'm not sure what kind of editorial support they offer. Or what kind of eventual payout these authors earn. I hope it's worth it. Frankly, I was disappointed in the editing that had been done on a book that I saw had real potential to be fantastic. The concept was good. The characters were interesting. Unfortunately there was so much repetition that I couldn't stand the pacing. Hmm.

Now don't confuse good editing with copy editing. A copy editor is simply looking for grammar, spelling and punctuation. These are simple errors that I can look past. A good editor of the other kind will read your manuscript for pacing, characterization and plot. Let me give you an example. My own personal hang-up is that I do tend to repeat myself. In actuality, this is treating my audience like idiots. Oops. If I keep repeating information, it's like I didn't think the reader understood it or noticed it the first time, or second or... You get it. My editor once asked me to take out an entire scene. It wasn't moving the plot forward and telling the reader the same things she already knew. You see what I mean? The goal is always to pull the reader through the story. Pacing should move quickly. Not too fast, but fast enough that your reader isn't skimming to get to the "good stuff".

Your editor should also be checking to make sure your characters are well-motivated. Ever hear that phrase "Too stupid to live"? If a character does something that is wrong for him or her, doesn't make sense or is just plain dumb because you want or feel like you need your story to go that direction, your editor should make you stop and pay attention. It's a mistake. Characters must be motivated. The girl that goes down into the basement when she hears a funny noise and knows there's a serial killer on the loose in the neighborhood? She'd better be armed with a machine gun and know how to use it. And have good reason for the equipment to be in the house and in her hands. Get it?

Your editor is also always on the lookout for the right ending. My editor once made me end my book differently. I had chickened out at the finale. She wasn't happy. So I blew up some things. Big finish. We were both happier with it. Fans loved it too. That's what counts. She had read the whole book in one big chunk. That's what made her find the problem. My critique group helps me tremendously, but they read a chapter a week. It's impossible for them to get the big picture. My editor always catches things they don't. Now I do make a point of reading my manuscript through before I turn it in, but I'm not objective. My imagination or wishful thinking sometimes puts things in that aren't there or skims past things that shouldn't be in the story. An objective editor is golden. I hope you get one.

One final word on this. You must be sure that your editor is qualified. Beta readers(Personally, I hate that term. Reminds me of those beta fish in a bowl with nowhere to go.) may be nice but are they just a fan who loves your work anyway? Not editors. An editor should be someone who reads widely in your genre. Someone who has the education necessary to know when a book works or doesn't. They should have editorial experience and not be afraid to hurt your feelings if they sense there is something wrong with the book that needs fixing. That means don't ask your best friend to edit for you. It's not going to help your friendship if they must tell you a hard truth. Better to ask for recommendations from seasoned professionals who have been in the business for a long while.

If you are "selling" to a publishing house, ask about the qualifications of the editorial staff and what kind of help you will receive. I am sad for the author whose book I read. She has the potential to be a bestseller. But until she gets the expert editorial help she needs, I doubt it will happen. Frankly, I couldn't finish the book.

There are many "publishing" houses springing up on-line. Some have even been around a while. Please do your homework before you "sell" to one of them. It takes a lot of blood, sweat and tears to write a book. Do you want to give it away to a company that will not treat it

respectfully? Even worse, prevent it from being the best it can be while keeping a big chunk of the potential profits from it. That's the difference between a book that has been edited properly and one that hasn't. You want your best book out there for everyone to read. I know that's what I want the world to see. Because once a product goes public? It's out there forever. I used quotation marks on purpose. If a "Publishing" house "buys" your book but doesn't have to pay an advance, there is no initial investment for them. No reason for them to pay a qualified editor to make sure you are producing a good book.

Yes, there are exceptions. I can think of three on-line houses that don't pay advances right now that offer support to their authors so please don't tar and feather me yet. It can be a way to get your foot in the door. So can self-publishing. I am not against it. I'm just cautioning you to look hard before you give your book away. Study the track record of other authors with that house. Ask around. If no one will talk frankly with you, I think that's a red flag. If none of their authors have qualified for PAN, that's another one. Take care of yourself and your creativity. Don't be in such a hurry to be "published" that you sell yourself short. I'm a great editor on other people's work, but not on my own. Keep that in mind. And good luck.

Gerry Bartlett is the best-selling author of the Real Vampires series for Berkley Publishing. Book 9, Real Vampires Know Hips Happen, just hit shelves on March 5. She was thrilled when her editor said, "No changes."