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A Librarian's Perspective: Getting Your Book on the Shelves!

By Kimberly Knight

Your book is complete, bound, and back from the printers. How do you get a self-published book onto the shelves at the library?

As a selection librarian in a moderately sized library system, I have been approached by self-published authors to purchase or add gratis copies of their books to the library collection. Honestly, I have accepted a precious few of these offers. With limited time, budget, and shelf space in the library, I need self-published authors to sell me on the quality, timeliness, and appeal of their work before I will acquire it for the collection. From my perspective, here's what you can do to improve your chances of seeing your book on the shelf at the library.

(1) Learn about the library's Selection Policy.

What are the criteria for materials to be added to the library's collection? How does the library handle gifts? Do they have what some library's call a "Local Author's Shelf"?

Most library systems have a Selection Policy. It is a guideline for what they seek to acquire for their library collections, how, and why. The policy generally speaks to the scope and goals of the collection. Often the goals include phrases like "to meet a wide spectrum of demands from a diverse population including the best quality, accurate, classic, and up-to-date materials." It often includes statements about gifts and donations. Tell us how your work fits within the selection policy. Sometimes the policy is on the library's website or available upon request.

(2) Try to get your book reviewed by a professional reviewing source. If you are not able to get the attention of a traditional reviewing journal like Publisher's Weekly or Library Journal, be prepared to tell the selector where they might read about your work. A website like [BOOKS OF SOUL](http://BOOKSOFSOUL.COM) could help.

Selection librarians rely heavily on reviews of

Continued... See Librarian's Perspective on Page 4

Comic Books: More Than Pretty Pictures

By Gary Phillips

Right off let me say that writing for comics is harder than it looks. It is and isn't like writing a prose short story or novella. A lot of people figure it's just these crazy panels with word balloons and captions getting in the way of the cool art, right? To an extent, that's true. Because I'm not kidding myself, comics are a visual medium, but a good script can suffer from mediocre or inappropriate art. Yet it's the art that makes the script come alive so unless you're among the ranks of the talented few who write and draw their own stuff like Frank Miller or Jim Starling, then you as the scribe better have it tight on the page for the artist to have something to work with, something to get excited about.

The match between writer and artist is key. Take for instance R.M. Guéra's dark, moody art on the



crime comic book series *Scalped*, created and written by Jason Aaron. Can you imagine that cat drawing a Flash or Batman story? Okay, well, you can imagine him on a certain kind of Batman story but you see where I'm

going with this. Conversely, it doesn't seem in this day and age, given everyone and they mama is blogging and sites like newsarama.com, comicbookresources.com and others where comics are critiqued, you can get away with a sappy script

and cool art. The fans are too sophisticated and too opinionated to go for the okey-doke.

In a standard comic book script, the writer describes, economically and clearly, what takes place in that panel. You don't over-describe and crowd it with too much, and also keep in mind your job is storytelling, maintaining flow and pacing as well as drawing in the reader like Paris Hilton to a camera.

For instance: Largish panel, medium shot as Matt Murdock walks into the courtroom, sharp in a three-piece suit, take off his dark glasses and looks with his blind eyes at the jury – a mixture of various races and garb. Behind him at the defense table, Foggy Nelson wipes his brow, with their client, the manacled and subdued Mr. Hyde, seated next to him. Near to Foggy, the window explodes inward, the glass billowing everywhere. Matt's dialogue will be cut off as there is a boom from the exploding window.

The rewrite would be, bearing in mind the axiom that a panel is frozen action, Largish panel, medium shot as Matt Murdock, sharp in a three piece suit, stands before the seated jury, his dark glasses in one hand as he stares at the jury – a mixture of various body types and races, with his blind eyes. Foggy is behind him at the defense table, wiping his

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About Gary

Crime and mystery novelist Gary Phillips' short stories have appeared, most recently, in *Los Angeles Noir* (Akashic) and in *Full House* (G.P. Putnam's Sons). He is a member of PEN and past national board member of the Mystery Writers of America. Phillips previously wrote the comics series *Angeltown* for Vertigo as well as *Shot Callerz* and *Midnight Mover* for Oni Press, but he is best known for a series of mystery novels featuring private eye *Ivan Monk*. He's also currently writing *Citizen Kang*, a weekly prose political thriller hosted on The Nation's Web site. *High Rollers*, a new four-issue comic series detailing the rise of a Los Angeles gangster, debut in June 2008 from Boom Studios. Visit his website, www.gdphillips.com, to peruse more of his work.



Bad Girls Burn Slow and What it Takes To Write / Promote

By Pam Ward

First off, let me put my saw and chisel down so I can shift from the hard work of promoting and talk about how I wrote **Bad Girls Burn Slow**. In developing my second novel, I did a ton of things before I actually wrote. I did loads of research, took copious notes, viewed pictures, took virtual tours of actual cremations and went on field trips to various cemeteries around town. LA is loaded with them. Since this book is a period piece, which takes place in the eighties during the McMartin Preschool Sex Scandal, I had to also research that event to make sure it worked with what I wrote. After I had a huge pile, I was still hunting for more until I realized I was actually procrastinating and had better sit down and write this baby!

BAD GIRLS BURN SLOW is about identity and people hiding who they really are. The novel started off as a piece of a short story I was working on about a pathetic momma's boy who, at almost sixty lived at home, was forced to brush his mother's hair. He grew from a man my mother knew. All my characters are pieces of real people. My favorite part of writing is character development. I write my character's names on a big piece of butcher paper and list their individual characteristics. It is so much fun to be multiple personalities on the page where you can be as rude, nasty, or comedic as the predicaments you put them in. I'll use historical

particles and weird facts like a man constantly scratching his hands from over use of embalming fluid to customize individual lives. After I have their traits down, it's just a matter of what I want them to do. That's the fun part. I don't use an outline but I do know what I want to convey. I write the last scene, then the first scene and then work towards the middle. Like the hair weaves that appear in this story, I weave and twist my tales. Since I am a visual artist, my work is very visual. I can actually see scenes in my mind. Sometimes I don't know how it may come out myself and I love that!

As far as promoting, it helps that I am a designer and can make publicity items like postcards but it is a real hammer and chisel job that takes lots of blood and sweat. Some people hire publicists and now I see why. There is so much to getting the books to stores, radios and magazines, etc. Some people think after the book is printed they're finished. But getting the book sold is the real job. I myself am still wetting my toes in this regard. One writer suggested hitting as many book clubs as you can. That's a good idea since there is nothing as powerful as word of mouth. I would suggest making a plan for the media outlets you want to hit. First write your own press release or obtain the one provided. Create an exciting headline, write a stellar release and send this out. Convert these items into virtual form as in

Continued...See Bad Girls on Page 5

About Pam

Pam Ward is a UCLA graduate and recipient of a **California Arts Council Fellow in Literature and New Letters Literary Award**. She is the author of two novels, her first, **Want Some, Get Some**, published in March 2007 by Kensington and her second, **Bad Girls Burn Slow**, published in August 2008. She's edited five anthologies including, **The Supergirls Handbook**, and has had short stories printed in **The Best American Erotica 2002**, **Men We Cherish**, and **Gynomite**. Visit Pam at www.pamwardwriter.com



Librarian's Perspective (continued)

books from professional journals to aid in our selection. (Books that have been hot in the media or from established authors can be an exception to this rule.) Last year, my library system purchased thousands of books. For every book we purchased, there were at least 3 or 4 we decided against. These were just the items that came to our attention! There is simply no time for each selector to read completely and personally critique each book. That's where professional reviews come in. Reviewers are often professional librarians, authors, and other literary experts, who read the entire book, write a short synopsis, point out its strengths and weaknesses, and often compare it to other works in that genre or subject area. While selection librarians know that the ultimate decision is ours, we read reviews closely to get insight into the quality of the literature we acquire for the collections.

Unfortunately for the self-published author, the books that are most often distributed to reviewers are those from traditional publishers. When a selection librarian is contacted directly, it can feel like we are being asked to serve as agent, reviewer, and/or marketer—roles that fall outside our responsibility to authors. If you do track us down, you may get lucky to find a professional reviewer in that person who has the time to read extra material! More than likely, you'll find a librarian who will ask where your work was reviewed or where they can read more about your book. Again, a review on a site like [Books of Soul](#) could help.

(3) Be prepared to give a no-strings attached copy to the selector. If we can, we will try to get that

material back to you. However, most likely it will get in line behind all of the other review copies we're reading and considering. If we choose not to select your book, it might find a home through the Friends of the Library book sale. If we do add it to the collection, most likely it will be subject to our regular weeding guidelines. This means that if it doesn't circulate at a minimal rate within a set time period, it will be removed from the collection as with all other items in the collection. If you put stipulations how your book is to be handled, the selector is less likely to accept it.

(4) Try to have your book available through traditional library vendors. With shrinking materials budgets, many libraries rely heavily on the deep discounts afforded us by our vendors. Also, these vendors offer others services such as free shipping, covering, stickering, etc., that help libraries get books on the shelves in a timely and cost-effective manner.

(5) Never give up on getting your work picked up by a traditional publisher, if that is your goal. Generally, books from established publishing houses are taken through the initial editor or agent selection. Then, the books are edited, fact-checked; mock-ups are made for review, and marketed. These are the books that are most often reviewed for professional journals and get the attention of libraries and booksellers. With persistence, this could be your work.

Until that day, be prepared before contacting a library selector. When you call me, let me know

Continued... See Librarian's Perspective on Page 5

About Kimberly

Kimberly Knight received her M.L.I.S. degree at UCLA. She has worked as a Children's Librarian in Los Angeles and the D.C. Metro area for 10 years. Currently, she is a Youth Services Collection Development Specialist in the D.C. Metro Area

Librarian's Perspective (continued)

you're aware of the Selection Policy and how your work fits within it. Be prepared to point me to a trustworthy review of your work by a knowledgeable third party. Let me know how your work has been edited and marketed. Why will the library patrons

want to check it out? At the end of the day, we will have done our best selection if we acquire informative, interesting, books that check out rather than sit on the shelves—no matter how they were penned or published!

Comics (continued)

sweating brow, seated next to a manacled and subdued Mr. Hyde. Matt begins his final arguments.

Second panel, pushed in as Foggy, still with a handkerchief to his forehead, now looks toward the window near him that's exploding inward, the glass going everywhere. Mr. Hyde holds up his arms to shield himself from the flying glass. Matt's dialogue will be cut off as there is a boom from the exploding window.

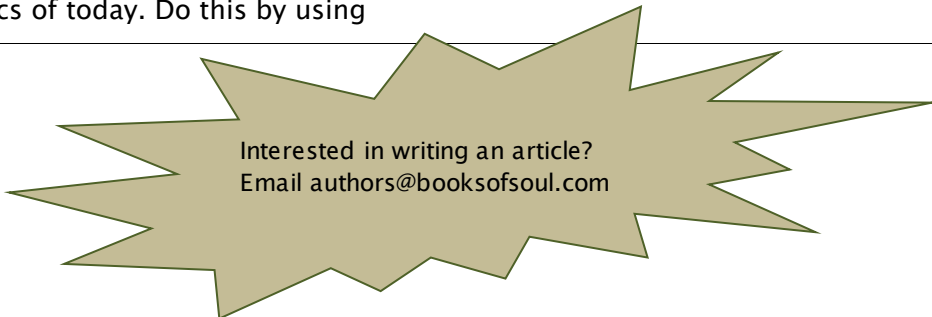
The over-arching idea here is the comic book script is about sequencing, what follows what and when do I need to better isolate an event and when is it better for the story to move along, to jump cut us forward?

For more on this I recommend Will Eisner's **Comics and Sequential Art** and his **Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative**, the **DC Comics Guide to Writing Comics** by Dennis O'Neil, and the print versions of Charles Fuller's play, **A Soldier's Story**, and David Mamet's **House of Games** and **Glengarry Glen Ross** – What can I say? I'm big on dialogue. And, while you can't go crazy with dialogue in a comic book, you want your characters saying just the right words at just the right moment. While you're at it, read a couple Walter Mosley's books as well as Ross Macdonald's Lew Archer books for their elegance of using dialogue to reveal, and not reveal, characters.

Bad Girls (continued)

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Google alerts. Bottom line is, even if you are with a large publishing house assume you are alone and get busy. I acted like Kensington didn't exist and in these tight-belt days, most houses are as hard to reach as the heavy graves buried in **BAD GIRLS BURN SLOW**. I say get your shovel and start digging now!



Interested in writing an article?
Email authors@booksofsoul.com

About Books of Soul – Getting Your Word Out

By Eric Brasley, founder of BooksofSoul.com

Thanks for taking a look at our first newsletter. I am very appreciative of the efforts of old friends, Kimberly Knight and Gary Phillips, and new friend, Pam Ward. They took some special time out to share their words. And, it only took a gentle nudging or two.

The purpose behind BooksofSoul.com is to help new authors share their works and to give readers another avenue to find these new works. African American books appear in so many forms. Plus, the opportunity to produce books does not have to follow the traditional means. Nevertheless, the ability to connect reader to writer can still be lost if we can't get the books to our local bookstores and libraries, or find our local bookstores and libraries. I'm hoping that BooksofSoul.com fills the gap by promoting not only our authors and their works, but also our bookstores and libraries who share a similar mission.

Kimberly Knight's and Pam Ward's articles speak to this purpose. It's great to have a librarian and a writer commenting on what will work for new writers. Their experiences and suggestions should be guideposts for authors who are attempting to get their works into the hands of the public. There are so many things that writers can do *after* their works are in print. I hope that we will get more writers, new and established, who will be willing to share their insights as well. I'll be happy to provide the nudges.

I take a special delight in Gary Phillips' article, Comic Books: More Than Pretty Pictures. Some of my favorite African American comic book characters (okay, they were “black” back then....) have been re-invented and re-interpreted. And, as Gary suggests, their dialogue reflects how we talk, not “someone's” interpretation of our vernacular. Plus, their stories and conflicts are sophisticated, reflecting the “novel” in “graphic novel.” The standards have risen and continue to rise. **Cage** by Brian Azzarello and Frank Miller's graphic novels got me back into the comic bookstores. You might give them a try, too, by looking for Gary's **High Rollers**.



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