Event Title: Play Nice: How to Get Along in the Publishing World

Event Description:
Publishing is about relationships. Writers who approach editors and agents with goodwill, courtesy, and a readiness to jump with both feet into the publishing and marketing processes are more likely to form long-term professional relationships—and sell books. The panelists, hailing from both sides of the writer-publisher dynamic, will talk about what can sour a relationship and what can help it thrive.

Moderator: David Ebenbach (see below)

Panelists:
- David Ebenbach
  David Ebenbach is the author of nine books of fiction, poetry, and non-fiction, including the novel *How to Mars*. He teaches Creative Writing and Literature at Georgetown University and is a project manager at Georgetown’s teaching center, the Center for New Designs in Learning and Scholarship.
- Jaymee Goh
  Jaymee Goh writes, reviews, and edits speculative fiction. Her work has been published in *Science Fiction Studies, The Los Angeles Review of Books*, and *Best American Science Fiction & Fantasy*. She is a graduate from the Clarion Workshop and works for Tachyon Publications.
- Delaney Heisterkamp
  Delaney Heisterkamp (she/her) is a digital marketer at Sourcebooks Fire, where she works with YA bestsellers like *Night of the Witch* and *If He Had Been With Me*. Previously, she was at HarperCollins Children's Books, where she created content for EpicReads, the Internet's largest YA book community. Her work has been published by the *Academy of American Poets, F(r)iction*, and *Indiana Review*.
- Margaret Luongo
  Margaret Luongo teaches creative writing and contemporary literature at Miami University, where she also serves as assistant director for the Literary London study abroad program. She is the author of two story collections, *If the Heart is Lean* and *History of Art*. 
• Amy Toland
Amy Toland is a poet, editor, and English department administrator. For the past decade she’s served as managing editor at Miami University Press, a small publisher of poetry, poetry-in-translation, and novellas based in Oxford, Ohio.

Outline:

Opening remarks (5 minutes): We’ll introduce the panelists and talk about the origin of the panel idea. Margaret and David had heard a number of surprising stories about writers whose actions had soured relationships with publishers, and we wanted to have a conversation about the importance of those relationships.

Moderator Q&A (55 minutes):

Putting on your writer hats, can you think of a time when you didn’t play nice with an editor and which left you with some regrets about how the interaction went?

David:
• At the beginning of my career I was impatient, and I checked in with editors too often about publication schedules and things like that; annoyance ensued.

Margaret
• In the past, I’ve failed to promote my books as proactively as I could have, in very basic ways (did not send email announcements to my contacts, for instance).

Jaymee
• I have always erred on the side of caution and come off too busy and standoffish, which led some editors to think I didn’t have time to participate in projects I would love to have been part of.
Amy, Delaney, and Jaymee, can you give some examples of the kinds of things writers should avoid doing in order to have a positive working relationship with publishers?

Jaymee:
● On an extremely micro level, I find it super annoying when authors mess up the formatting that I’ve painstakingly put together in the Word document. It’s house style! It’s that way for a reason! Your font preferences do not matter! I also do not think it is wise to compare your small press publisher to a larger publisher.

Delaney:
● Unfortunately, it’s possible to over-communicate and under-communicate with your editor/publishing team. Some tips to avoid that:
  ○ If you’re doing something to promote your book, it never hurts to send just a quick FYI email to your editor. Your publishing team wants to help amplify your efforts! And the last thing they want is any rogue surprises.
  ○ You can always ask your publishing team for help, but there is a limit to what they have the bandwidth to do for you outside of the marketing and publicity plan. Having your hand held is fine (esp. for debuts!) but know the more time they’re spending hand-holding, the less they’re doing for your book elsewhere.
  ○ Think about the timing of your asks—what makes sense? Half a year out is typically too early to see consumer-facing promotions for your book. Design teams can work on anywhere from a 4-10-week turnaround.
● Situate your asks with a level of realism—don’t ask for things outside the scope of your marketing and publicity plan, as the answer will not change.
● There’s a level of trust and grace necessary to any publisher-author relationship that is absolutely a two-way street. Tone over email never stops being important. The publishing
worker on the other end of the email is probably overworked and underpaid—y’all are in this together, not against each other.

Amy
- Know the scene you’re entering — Don’t enter into a book contract without doing your homework and being aware of the press’s place in the publishing world.
- Be realistic about the publishing team and your own reach when marketing the book from the start.
- Make sure you’re working in tandem with your editor/publishing team. It is so good to give a heads up about readings, publications, etc. before they happen so the team can help promote and support. Your press will appreciate being included/reciprocated on social posts and coordinating release.

Writers, what do you try to do to nurture a positive relationship with your publishing team?

David:
- Follow submission guidelines/rules
- Understand how busy editors are, and how many submissions and authors they’re dealing with
- Be grateful for feedback, and see yourself as part of a team trying to make the work better
- Promote the work and the journal/publisher

Margaret
- When I get feedback on a story/book, essay, or review, I consider it carefully (and with gratitude).
- I’m responsive to requests for information or anything else.
- I carefully consider where I send my work and whether or not it’s right for that publisher or journal.

Jaymee
- I do want to echo promoting the work and the publisher. Science fiction magazines are legion, and every venue that’s published me
has done me a solid, so I return the favour by repeatedly reminding people my work exists in such-and-such magazine, the entire issue (and backlog) of which is well worth checking out. Talking up your peers who have been published by the same folks is a rising tide that lifts all boats.

For Amy, Delaney, and Jaymee, what sorts of things can writers do to nurture a positive relationship with the publishing team—and to help them sell books?

Jaymee

- I will not say no to chocolate chip cookies. We have a publicity team at Tachyon that busts their heinies finding a way to promote our authors, and we like it when an author is clear about their limits of what they can and cannot do. We do love it if the answer is “I’ll do all the things!” but we don’t love it that much when you actually can’t deliver all the things.

Delaney:

- Learn how to be a savvy self-promoter! Show you know where your audience is and how to engage them.
  - Is it on a particular online platform? In academic circles?
- For many categories, this means social media, but not everyone needs to be a viral TikTok sensation.
  - Think about what your strengths are: public speaking? Dishing about craft? Fandom? Photography? Put your energy where it’s most natural, rather than trying to force something. Try things as you’re querying, as you’re revising, as your manuscript is out on submission. It’s never too early to build a presence—waiting until the year your book comes out is too late!
  - Social media is great for connecting not only with your audience, but with other authors and industry professionals in your genre. Follow authors and community hashtags, join discord groups. Being well-connected within your
community also makes you a great ally to your publishing team.

- Make local connections! Introduce yourself to the independent bookstores in your area, as well as your libraries.
- Know the tentpole moments of your pre-publication cycle (cover reveal, 1 month til on sale, etc.) and tag your publisher when you promote.
- Don’t be afraid to ask your publishing team where the best fit for your energy is! They don’t have the bandwidth to create your own self-promotion campaign for you, but they can help point your ideas in the right direction.
- This doesn’t mean run yourself ragged doing everything—you only have a finite amount of energy! Use it wisely.

Amy

- Advocate for your work. This is a collaboration. This is your book, and the editorial/marketing teams will respect you for standing up (with grace) for yourself. Find middle ground if there is conflict.
- Get to know the team and press. A phone call and/or zoom is recommended. Read recent publications.
- Know your communities and strengths when it comes to marketing and work organically with them, making sure to include your publishing team.

Audience Q&A (15 minutes): We’ll open the floor up to questions from the audience.