

# I-Robert and Publishers

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## *The Autobiography by Robert Rankin and what happens when you finally get a publisher*

### *The Ultimate Objective of every Author?*

Mr Rankin's autobiography is essential reading for any true fan. If you have all his books, (and who wouldn't have?) the sections on the individual titles are a revelation, as also are the insights into the way a successful writer has developed over the years.

Robert's autobiography charts his development from boy to man to author to genius creating a new genre of writing - he calls it Far Fetched Fiction, having its roots in the Brentford Griffin hoax that he and a minion created and perpetuated: (<http://beastsoflondon.blogspot.co.uk/2007/04/brentford-griffin.html>). He has taken the concept to new levels with such concepts as the Garden of Eden being in Brentford (and not Bedford as the Panacea Society would have held), the relocation of the Great Pyramid and the concept of Russian Spaniels (inside every spaniel is another one and so on...).

It is well known that authors have a number of common traits: to paraphrase 'Higher Perspective' (see the Inca Facebook page - <https://www.facebook.com/IncaProject>), they are easily bored, risk takers, think with their hearts outside the coffin, make mistakes, hate rules, work independently, are always changing their minds, are eccentric and they dream big. Knowing this, one could have pointed at the Boy Rankin as he grew up and said, 'Forget trying to get him a job; just make sure he has training in English and punctuation and lock him in the back room of the Flying Swan until he completes 40 books.

Grinding to an impasse with his usual publishers, a new regime unable to accept that readers like to be amused, he was forced to branch out on his own. With many conventionally published books to his name, Robert has now taken the major step of publishing his own work. This autobiography, without the censorship of those dinosaur publishers tells it like it is in that world - an eye-opener.

"Dinosaurs?" you ask. Read on for insights gleaned from I-Robert

The dream of every writer is to become attached to a publishing house. This is how you know you've made it... well, isn't it? Sadly the real world fails to be quite as utopian as you would like to think. Where you of course get support for publishing and marketing, and you might get an advance and a contract (although don't count on it in these austere times), there are a few downsides to take into consideration:

A contract means that you are paid to write a book, or perhaps a series of books. If the creative marmalade is flowing, that will pay your way for a contracted period, but what if you put everything into your masterpiece and have nothing left? Robert quotes Terry Pratchett, who told

him to never put more than four main ideas into a book; a wise statement and something to consider. Getting the first book written is a big step, but without a sequel or 39, you are quickly forgotten - as with music, you are only as famous as your last masterpiece (unless you've written 'I wish it could be Christmas Every Day' of course). Books are more obscure than music or films, which can be recycled, and even the paper and electronic forms of 'Harry Potter' and '50 Shades' will be forgotten in time.

So you've written your book, and it's pretty good. Even your mum has read it and says it's great apart from the saucy bits. Your publisher receives the manuscript (or file) greedily and passes it on to the editors. The editors are paid to make your book a commercial blockbuster (or what they think they can brainwash the public into buying), so to justify their existence, they take up a large red pen, a dose of bile and start hacking. If you write humour, forget it - editors will tell you that humour is 'largely subjective', with an undertone that they left their 'subjects' in a closet long ago.

You might get away with your own words for your first book - after all, they have accepted it on the strength of your submission, but then you are contracted, and they have you by the Short Sunderland. When they have finished with the butchery, your second work is but an approximation of what you started with.

Your third book might also be there by contract, but you have used up your ideas, and are now struggling. You have to force the story through and the stress is building. You can see from the third paragraph above that having a dictating publisher is suppressing the basic concept of being an author. You are being channelled by the process into restrictive mediocrity, much the same way as the education system is attempting to turn out identical robots. If you follow that trend, you can only ever hope to be average.

Contrast this with self-publishing. You are writing what you want to write, you can proceed at your own pace and you are your own person. You are an unconventional author, and yes, you will probably not make pot-loads of Drachma, but what you write will be from the heart.

**And how do you promote yourself?** Libraries, local bookshops, local newspapers... a load of legwork and you will need a paper version and be prepared to give it away. Also, you will need to write at least two books in the series. You promote the second by giving the first away - cunning huh.

So now you have some insights into what it is to be a writer. Pick up your keyboard/voice-recognition/fondleslab/quill and get writing. Do not (as the Hugo Rune says) 'pause beneath the cocked leg of the giant spaniel of opportunity' while you wait for that big break.