

Book Reviews - BookSpot.com
 Book Reviews by Book Review Cafe
 Salon.com Books
 BookReview.com
 Nabou.com - Book Reviews
 Welcome to ChoiceReviews.online
 Fallen Angels Reviews
 Love Romances
 The Romance Studio
 Sharpwriter
 Romance Reviews Today
 EBook Reviews Weekly
 Romantic Times Magazine
 In the Library Reviews
 Scribe's World

On-line Booksellers.

(Most of the POD and electronic publishers, and many MMPB publishers, sell their books directly from their site.)

Amazon.com, plus all foreign affiliates (.ca, .uk, .au, etc.)

Fictionwise.com (electronic edition specialists)

Borders.com

Barnes & Noble.com

Chapters.ca

Indigo.ca

...there's more, but if you can't find what you want at these, or at the publisher's site, then I'd be very surprised!

Try a search for "booksellers" if you're really desperate!



Good luck, and
have fun!

A Readers Roadmap For The 21st Century

Sick of reading re-hashed versions of last year's best seller?
Tired of reaching page 20 of your favourite author's latest, only
to realize you've read something like this before?

The maverick's guide to finding
damned good fiction --
no matter where you are!

by Tracy Cooper-Posey



About the Author.

Tracy Cooper-Posey has been writing what she likes to call “damned good fiction” since she saw the original *Star Wars* movie and was so moved by it, she wrote an unofficial sequel. She’s been trying to move audiences the way George Lucas touched *her* soul, ever since.

She had the great good fortune to have been born in Australia, travelled extensively, and lived in two other countries, besides. Now a resident of Canada, she has been able to dig deep into English-speaking popular fiction around the globe.

She’s a national award winning author of twelve novels (number 12 will be released in late 2005), including e-books, hard covers, POD titles, a mass market paperback, and two trade paperbacks released by the Canadian publisher, Turnstone Press.

You can find details about all her novels at her website: www.sashaproductions.com.

You can email her at tracy@sashaproductions.com.

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Lulu
Outskirts Press
PageFree
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Prairie View Publishing
Protea Publishing
The Writers' Collective
Trafford
Triskelion
Universal Publishers
Unlimited Publishing
VirtualBookworm
Wide Thinker Books
WingSpan Press
WritersWorld
Xlibris
Xulon Press
YourBookPublisher

Review sites on-line.

Most on-line publishers and booksellers also have reader reviews for each title they sell. There are so many sites that offer book reviews, that the quickest way to find a handful you trust with reviews on books you’re interested in, is to search for “book reviews” + your special interest (romance, children’s, fantasy, etc.)

Caveat: Make sure that the review site or reviewer does review *all* types of fiction, including electronic and POD, not just the mass market paperbacks issued by New York, or you’re going to end up reading the same books you’ve always been reading. Check the publishers’ names of the books the site reviews. See if they cover everything.

The New York Review of Books: Home
BookPage.com - book reviews, author interviews
ALA | Booklist
Bookwire Home
Midwest Book Review
BookSpot.com: Book reviews, book awards, poetry, literary ...
H-Net Reviews
Multicultural Book Review Homepage
electronic book review
Book reviews - Detailed Author Book Reviews
Reviews of Books - Book Reviews
Midwest Book Review.

Resources.

Rating the publishers on-line.

Please note; these publishers are absolutely *unrated*. There's both stinkers and delights in here – I dumped them all in so you could see for yourself the range and number of POD and e-book publishers out there.

If you'd like a way to figure out who is good and who isn't, there are many others who have already attempted to rate the on-line publishers. Here's a handful to get you started:

<http://www.booksandtales.com/pod/>

<http://www.writers-publish.com/print-on-demand-publishers.html>

http://www.writersweekly.com/whats_new/002529_03302005.html

For more, do a search with your favourite search engine for “e-book publishers” or “POD publishers” and go from there.

Publishers in alphabetical order.

All of these publishers have websites. Your favourite search engine will pop them up for you instantly.

This is not a complete list and I made no attempt to be comprehensive, because the field is constantly changing. New publishers are debuting all the time. Also, many publishers fail quite early in their history and disappear. It's a raw frontier out there.

As you get into the habit of trying new authors and new tales, you'll discover new publishers for yourself. Note: Nearly all on-line publishers sell books directly from their site as well as other booksellers.

Archebooks Publishing Inc.
 AuthorHouse (was 1stBooks Library)
 Authors Online
 Aventine Press
 BiblioBooks
 BookBooters
 Booklocker
 BookPublisher
 BookSurge Publishing was Global Book Publisher was GreatUnpublished
 Cerridwen Press
 Cork Hill Press
 eBook Stand
 Ellora's Cave
 Equilibrium Books
 FirstPublish
 Foremost Press a.k.a. Action Tales
 Golden Pillar Publishing
 Gom Publishing
 Hard Shell Word Factory
 Heliographica

Welcome to a Brave New World.

As you're taking the time to read this, I feel safe in making some assumptions about you.

You're one of possibly two types of people who may chose to read this.

It may be that you don't read fiction very much, but the title of this booklet has tweaked your curiosity. Possibly, you're sitting in a doctor's office or (worse!) dentist's office, desperately looking for distraction before a moment of pain. (Sorry about the reminder, there!)

It's the idea that you were going to read something about the state of popular fiction in the world today that made you flip the cover. That means that you like reading fiction and probably did read it regularly a long time ago. These days, however, you believe you don't have time, or have simply got out of the habit for one reason or another. You've drifted away from a pleasant occupation and this little booklet has just reminded you of those hours you once spent daydreaming.

If this isn't you, then....

You're a fiction lover. You've been reading novels for years and years, probably since you were turned onto them as a kid, or else you got the bug when you happened to read a damned good novel.

Despite when you started reading fiction, the fact is, you can't quite bring yourself to stop reading. Despite busier days, distractions like TV and movies and every electronic device known to man (and if you spotted the circular logic there, you're keeping up with me) – despite these busier times, you still manage to make your way through a novel or two.

You're probably not reading as many novels as you used to.

And you've noticed that your keeper shelf is the only thing that hasn't been super sized recently. (If there's one thing in common with habitual readers, it's that we've all got some sort of “keeper” shelf – even if it's room-sized.) In fact, it's been a while since you read a book that grabbed you so hard you rushed out to buy anything else by that author, now, *at once* – and told everyone you know about the fabulous book you just read.

Actually, come to think of it, it's been a long while since you were thrilled by even your favourite authors.

You keep going back to your keeper shelf and re-reading the oldies, sighing over them. You may even have vaguely wished these authors would hurry up and write another one as good so you'd have the pleasure of reading it. But some of your favourite authors seem to be off their stride lately; nothing they write seems to ring with the same joy as the older ones.

You wander the aisles of your local bookstore, probably a superstore chain, and lately, you wander with an unsettled feeling; where are all the good books? How am I going to find them in this morass of paper? Why don't I enjoy reading the way I used to?

Did I guess right?

I know I did, because I'm you, too. I'm a dedicated reader of damned good stories. I read across the genres; science fiction, romance, mystery, spy thrillers, horror, fantasy and lots in-between and around them.

There is nothing, *nothing*, that equals that blown-away-by-a-book feeling that chokes you up when you finish a great read, is there? Even good sex fails to match the power and compulsion of a tale and characters that linger in

your mind for days and weeks. Years later they will pop back to remind you of that fabulous story.

I'm like you because I, too, got tired of the same-old-same-old that appears on the bookshelves as the "latest release".

I had a small advantage, however. I'm also a writer, so I could *write* damned good stories and get my fix that way. But I still missed the joy of reading a book with an ending I didn't know.

Because I'm a writer, though, I learned very quickly where all the good books hang out these days. That's why I'm writing this little essay. I want to pass the information along. I want readers to find new favourite authors and damned good stories.

And there is hope.

Why you can't find anything new on the shelves.

Let me give you a nutshell explanation for what appears to you to be a dearth of good books out there.

First of all; IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT! You've not got too old and cynical to enjoy fairy tales anymore. It's not because you're too busy to slow down and savour the tale. Turkey droppings. If the story grabbed you enough, you'd enjoy it no matter what your day has in it. There isn't a single one of us here who hasn't been grabbed by the throat by a really good book and managed to creatively duck commitments and responsibilities until the book was done. So it's not that. The fault doesn't lie with you.

The *real* problem.

The fault doesn't lie with you.

The problem stems from the structure of the book publishing industry, which has its roots clear back to medieval times, when Guttenberg set up his first printing press. Copying books suddenly became a mechanical and speedy possibility. Before then, monks used to copy books by hand, hunched over parchment lit by tallow and scratching away with quills. Guttenberg changed all that and created the seed that would sprout into the modern day book industry.

The book industry is *very* peculiar. Booksellers (that includes your favourite bookstore) can order in books by the dozens and if they don't sell, *they get to return them*. Bizarre huh? Can you imagine your local Canadian Tire store returning spanners because they didn't sell? Or the local art gallery trying to return a painting to an art dealer because nobody except the gallery owner took a liking to it? Yet that's exactly what happens with books.

Worse; it's not the books that get returned, it's *just the covers ... which get torn off the book*. The guts of the book, minus the cover, gets thrown away so that nobody else can use it, read it or sell it.

That's where the industry tips over into the realms of la-la-land. Is it any wonder the book industry constantly teeters on the point of going belly-up and doomsters have been crying the end of the traditional book for a couple of decades?

The real wonder is that the industry keeps ticking along at all – but that's

If you really did like the book that much, buying the author's next book is a natural reaction. And bingo! You've just discovered a new favourite author!

If you make sure to always feed and encourage good work, then the system takes care of itself in a pleasant circle of reward for everyone involved. If you don't feed back into the system one way or another, then authors doing good work fail to be "fed" and eventually, are forced to stop writing. Don't want them to stop? Then pay the piper. It's that simple.

The same system works for books you buy at secondhand stores, books you borrow from the public library or from friends. Any book or work of fiction, no matter what its form, should be rewarded if it pleases you. That's all you have to remember. You can adjust the degree of reward depending on how strongly the book pleased you. But even if it was just a little, then there should be some small morsel given to the author.

The more readers feed and care for the authors that please them, the more the best authors will be rewarded and will thrive. Those that aren't fed will eventually diminish. What you're left with is authors writing books that please the greatest number of the most important people in the world; the readers. *You*.

And no editor can replace a perfectly natural selection system.

Put it into practice now.

If you've read this far, it's likely that you agree in principle about most of what I said. If so, pass this booklet along to friends and people you know who might benefit from having their fiction reading muscle restored.

If you're reading a paper copy in a waiting room somewhere, leave it behind so someone else can read it. You can pick up your own copy via my website whenever you want to.

My website is printed at the bottom of every page of this booklet. Also, if you do a search for "Tracy Cooper-Posey" the site will pop up, and now you don't have to remember the URL.

This copy you're reading is the print version. You can get the electronic files for this print copy from the site, too. Feel free to print it off and leave copies lying around in public places where fiction readers might find it, for that's the piper's payment for this little essay; spread the word. I've even made it easy for you to do this; the "ready to print" version on my website comes with instructions.

buying and selling means that many artists that should be well-fed aren't, because the audience has no say in what gets published.

On-line and elsewhere, fiction reaches its intended audience easily, cheaply and in a vast range of different styles, giving the reader lots to choose from. If you, the reader, continue to choose only those books that please you and *reward the artist for pleasing you*, then you're helping to keep the industry alive and producing good books.

Now, I'm not nearly as naïve as the lovely theory above would seem to indicate. One of the flaws of e-books is that they're so easily replicated. You can slip a copy of that fabulous book you just read to your best friend, and still have a copy for yourself. You can send it to a dozen friends. In fact, if the book is good, it's difficult NOT to send it to everyone you know, with the exhortation to read it as soon as possible. With all the peer-to-peer file swapping programs and sites out there, the trade in "free" e-books is a tidal surge. It's possible you've already got several, if not many, e-books on your hard drive that you didn't pay for.

I'm not saying "don't do it!" Yes, it's illegal. No, I don't think my saying "don't!" is going to stem the tide. What I'm saying is; if you'd like that author to keep writing books like the one you just *had* to share with all your friends; if you'd like to keep reading more from that author, then you need to reward her for her good efforts.

If the book came to you without valuta changing hands, then there are some alternative ways you can reward the author directly, instead:

- Put up a glowing review of the book on its Amazon.com page, and copy that review on any other page where the book is officially for sale; try the publisher's website, the author's website; websites devoted to reviews of fiction. Do a search on the book's title, and see what comes up.
- Post the same review or a casual "loved it!" note to any email discussion groups, notice boards or message centres you frequent.
- Tell all your non-computer/e-book oriented friends about the book.
- If you think the author has done a good job and deserves actual money, go buy the paper copy and put it on your keeper shelf.
- Send the author a note or email and tell him what a great job he did, and that he should keep doing more.
- Buy his next book.

I thought up all these with a mere 60 seconds of reflection. There are a lot of people out there a lot smarter than I, that could figure out a dozen more ways to pay the piper. You can probably come up with some on your own.

Remember, paying the piper doesn't always have to involve cold cash. Cash is a means for the writer to feed himself and his family while he's writing more stories, but there are other things a writer needs in order to continue writing stories. All the versions, above, encourage the writer by making sure more people hear about his work. If these others agree with you that he's good, they will hopefully pay him for the work as you weren't able to (this time around).

You can add and delete from this list of possible rewards as inspiration strikes you.

When you read a damned good book, do one or all of them as the book deserves. It's up to you.

because readers will never give up buying books and hoping they've found a damned good story. I won't. Nor, I suspect, will you.

One of the results of this peculiar way of doing business is that traditional publishers (the sort that get their products – books – onto the shelves of your local Chapters and Barnes & Noble superstores) are very wary of, or downright allergic to, taking a chance on what they publish. There's two reasons for this reluctance.

First up; It's horribly expensive to print and bind books (I know this because I worked for a national printer for a couple of years and I've seen the bills). Paperbacks are cheaper than hardcovers, but the printing of paperbacks is still a giant's bite out of the cash flow. Paper isn't cheap any more. In addition, the publisher must pay that stiff printers' bill before the book is officially "released". It's not wise to schedule the print run too close to the release day in case there's a problem with the printing, or the flaky author doesn't turn the edits in on time, or a dozen other potential problems flare up. A publisher can't afford to miss their scheduled print date, because getting back onto the print schedule could take another month or more. (Printers lose money if the presses aren't running, so those print schedules are booked weeks or months out.)

Second: once the book is printed, and even if the publisher gets thousands and thousands of orders from bookstores that they ship off immediately... they *still* don't know if they're going to make any money because the bookstore might yet rip the cover off, return it to the publisher and demand their money back.

Eewwww!!!

Therefore, most traditional publishers tend to accept manuscripts from authors who already have a track record for selling well. They'll buy manuscripts from unknown writers that feel and smell a lot like books that have already sold successfully. Taking a risk with new authors or stories that are even a little bit different is just not worth it these days. It's the price of doing business.

The modern bookseller has a similar dilemma. Your average bookseller is often a Chapters or Barnes & Noble supergiant big-box chain. These chains usually have one national or regional buyer that buys *all* the fiction for the entire country or region. It's from these bulk buys that they get their savings and higher profits per book sold. The store managers get to put on their shelves what the national buyer gives them to sell. Sometimes they may have some latitude when it comes to buying books with local content, but that's it.

As for your local independent bookseller...well, do you have one? These last bastions of tradition and lovers of well-crafted books are a dying breed. There's two (count 'em) in my entire city, for instance. The independents must also abide by natural economic laws, which means making a profit or perishing. So, although they will stock some titles just because they like well-written books, they will mostly make choices based on what they think will sell. And what they think will sell is the safe stuff that looks just like that megaseller from last year....

This presents a problem for the reader. How can anything different sell if publishers and booksellers don't offer it for sale? How can readers buy anything else if all that is offered is the safe, formulaic stuff? So what appears to be reader resistance to anything that isn't safe and familiar is actually a self-

perpetuating spiral into secure, banal book selling.

There's another limitation faced by every bookseller across the globe: Shelf space. There are more books published every year than any bookseller can carry. They just don't have the physical space for all those books, even if they were to stock a single copy per author. So choices have to be made and often those choices are generic: "We'll only carry paperbacks." "We haven't the shelf space for in-dependent press books." "None of those tacky romances, thank you!" And so on.

The average reader (yes, that's you) is also economically driven. Books can be damned expensive to buy because the price of paper is passed on to the reader. Thanks to environmental concerns, growing scarcity of trees and wood pulp, and the cost of farmed trees, paper is no longer cheap and represents the major portion of the wholesale cost of the book. If you're a compulsive reader of anything except those skinny little category novels that come out by the dozen every month, then you're often looking at double figures per paperback, which quickly spirals up into the stratosphere.

I've had readers at book signings ask me just to sign my name and not include theirs. "So, if I don't like the book or don't want to keep it, I can sell it to the secondhand store and get most of my money back." Yes, they say that to me with a straight face, and why not? I used to be shocked by statements like this, but not any more. I'll talk more about readers' attitudes like this one, later. For now, it's simply a demonstration of the necessary economies that regular readers are forced to, these days.

Because of the expenses involved in feeding the habit, readers will hesitate over taking chances with new writers. This makes all sorts of sense. Why buy an unknown author that will probably just end up being a pale imitation of last year's megaseller? Especially when you could buy the new novel by last year's megaseller author? Much safer to buy the known author than spend \$15 on a completely unknown writer, right? Especially when most novels these days are a disappointment....

And so the vicious circle continues to feed on itself and tighten up even more. If there's no new, original novels out there, then no readers can buy them. And they wouldn't buy them anyway – not at the price of current paperbacks. Why risk the money?

The few (very few!) publishers who take a chance with a new author often find that, regardless of how brilliant the author's story may be, they're losing money on that author. That's because a) not enough booksellers will stock him and b) the readers won't take a chance on him because it's too damned expensive and they've been disappointed in the past with too many pale imitations.

This, in part, is the reason why the rate at which you have "discovered" new authors at your traditional bricks and mortar bookstore has sharply subsided. I'm sure you've noticed this yourself.

So what must a desperate reader do to get a decent fix?

Go elsewhere, of course.

Is there an elsewhere?

Absolutely.

How your local bookstore can help you.

Local bookstores do have a use in your search for great fiction. Sometimes they actually have good fiction on their shelves. New York does occasionally get it right; it's the odd book that they do get right that go on to sell trillions. It's those megasellers that finance the rest of the books they publish. Of course, you can do all your research on-line first, before plunking down the credit card at the store. Takes a lot of the risk out of buying the few new authors with unique stories that you do find in bookstores these days.

The local bookstore is also completely plugged into the ordering and distribution system that serves the fiction world (including e-books and POD titles).

Armed with an ISBN number, publisher name, author name and book title, you can ask your local bookseller to order in any book from anywhere, and there's no physical reason why they can't get it in for you. Please note, I said "physical" reason. Some booksellers refuse to sell books from anything other than publishers they personally recognize. If you live in Canada, for instance, the Chapters/Indigo/Coles/Smithbooks behemoth will not list POD titles in their database — and they won't order books that aren't listed in their database.

But if you like the idea of your local store taking care of all the hassle for you, it might well be worth your while to cultivate the manager, train and educate him on how to obtain these books. This pays off for everyone; other customers coming into the store get the advantage of a greater range of fiction and the bookstore makes money from your transactions, too.



Paying The Piper.

I mentioned second-hand bookstores earlier, and promised I'd get back to the subject. Now is that time.

As a dedicated reader, I just know you adore your local secondhand bookstore. You can buy dozens of books for peanuts and it's a fabulous way of trying out new (to you) and different authors. I know, because I've done it myself.

But I stopped doing it when I became a published author, because I suddenly realized that none of the money I spend on those books goes back to the author. Nothing. Only the secondhand bookstore is reaping any profit.

I'm a great believer in paying the piper. Or to put it another way; rewarding the artist's effort to please you, the audience. There's a line in the movie *Out of Africa*, where Dennis Finch-Hatten tells Karen Blixen; "We pay our story tellers here."

Right on.

But only if the artist has pleased you should they be rewarded. In this way, natural selection gets the last laugh; those artists (writers) who fail to please their audience die a nasty death through lack of food/money/valuta. Which is just as it should be. The traditional New York business model of book-

whoever will listen. Yes, this is a good thing. If no-one is going to shut up the crazies, then you know that no-one is shutting up those people who DO have something interesting to say. In other words, you're not hearing only one side of an argument, or only the "right" opinion chosen by a small group of people for the "greatest good". While the crazies are chattering, all is right with the world, so far as free speech and freedom of opinion is concerned. Right?

This applies directly to the crud that is laughingly offered for sale as fiction, via some e-book and POD "publishers". While they're producing crud, you know that there are other publishers out there, using the same venue and facilities to produce good fiction. The system is making it possible for large numbers of people, including the crazies, to publish novels. *That's* the part you should celebrate because you get to pick from a vast range of fiction, instead of the few that New York can afford to produce with the traditional model.

However, as most people scream louder about bad deals than perfectly good deals, the small group of on-line vanity and pseudo-publishers has given "POD" a bad name.

In actual fact, "POD" is merely a type of printing. It's an acronym for Print On Demand, an economical way of printing very short runs of books (down to a single copy, should you so desire). POD is used by hundreds of publishers ... *including the mass market paperback houses in New York.*

Not all POD publishers are con artists. Not all of them offer crud for sale. But, to bring this back to the free speech analogy, so long as crud IS being offered for sale out there, you can sleep easier, knowing that there is not a small group of people who get to decide what you can and can't read.

This is why the existence of the crud should be celebrated. What you're offered on the shelves of your local, traditional bookstore is warmed over look-alikes ... and with very few exceptions, that's all that's offered.

POD and e-book publishers offer everything else. And to quote another piece of gossip that is supposed to be criticism; YES! Authors who publish with e-book and POD publisher are most often rejected by New York first! *Ex-actly!!* These are the authors who colour outside the lines, that don't want to write pale imitations of Stephen King or Nora Roberts for the rest of their days.

And not all authors publishing via the new style publishers are there because they can't get published by New York. They're there by choice; they *prefer* the freedom of writing what they want to write (and read) and were smart enough to avoid New York in the first place.

Why isn't everyone doing it, then? Because the readers haven't figured out where to find the good books yet, so authors can't make money this way. My first royalty cheque from my first e-book publisher was enough to pay for my lunch ... at a sandwich shop.

But over the years (and I've been selling to on-line publishers now for over half a decade) the cheques have been very slowly growing larger. They're still not even close to what I could earn if I sold to New York. But I have hope.

(If you're just itching to get to it, I've listed some e-book and POD publishers at the back of this essay. Yes, all my own publishers are listed there -- but not only my publishers.)

Where to find damned good fiction.

Everywhere.

The trick is to stop thinking that bookstores are your only source for books. Your biggest source for books is on-line. No, I'm not just talking about e-books, so bear with me a moment more, while I explain.

You can buy paper/printed books via on-line bookstores. You can also buy them directly from the publishers, usually for less money. You can also buy them from re-sellers and sometimes from the author herself.

You can also buy e-books on-line and be reading the new book within minutes of finding a title you'd like to buy. No schlep to the mall. Nice when it's 10 below, or the mall is five hours away. Yes, it's not a paper version, but there's one huge advantage to e-books because they aren't paper; they're *cheap*.

I can already hear the cries of protest from those of you reading this who like their paperbacks. I suspect many of you who protest now have never bought a book on-line, either the paper or electronic version. Don't worry, you're far from being the only one who hasn't. From long experience, I can predict that your hesitancy and discomfort fit under the umbrella of two central questions:

1. Why would I want to buy paperbacks on-line when I can get them from my local bookstore?
2. Why would anyone want to buy an e-book when the paperback version is available?

Let's take them in order.

Buying Paperbacks On-Line.

On-line bookstores like Amazon have far, far more shelf space than your biggest Barnes & Noble. And if they don't have it on the shelf, they still have all the information about it for you to consult and they can go get it for you.

In other words, all the books that your brick & mortar stores refuse to stock are available on-line.

Even better: you can, often with a single click of the mouse, connect to reader reviews and official reviews of the book, to see what everyone else, all of them readers like you, thinks of the book. You can also read a very lengthy excerpt, sometimes as much as the first three chapters. No pushy salesperson will nudge you towards the cash register, either. You can also see if the book has any sequels or prequels and read information about the author.

That's the immediately available information. And that's about eight pieces of fairly essential information you just don't get when you pick up a novel on the bookshelf at Borders. (By the way, if you still prefer to buy the book at your local bookstore, you can — and still get the benefit of all the support information before you plunk down your money. You just can't buy *all* the books you read about on-line at your local Waldens, not by a long shot.)

Back to on-line stores: With a couple of clicks, you can find the author's website and learn, perhaps, what prompted them to write the book and other

background information, plus more and better reviews, excerpts, etc. The same information can often be found at the publisher's page for that book.

And if you're still unsure about whether you want to buy the book, you can do two more things:

a) do a search on the book title with your favourite search engine and see what pops up. You'll find comments, gossip, review sites and more that are talking about the book and these may help you decide. If that still doesn't sell you on the book, or make you firmly decide to avoid it, then the other option you have is:

b) Join and/or contact an email group or bulletin board of like-minded readers and ask them for their opinions. In this way you'll get to-the-point answers to your questions about the book, which should finally help you decide if you want to take a chance on it or not.

This is the single major advantage of the Internet for book lovers; you don't have to take a risk with the books you buy. You can research them thoroughly before committing yourself and your money.

The second major advantage is the answer to the second most frequent question: Why would I buy the electronic copy when there's a paperback available?

Answer: Because it's cheaper and therefore not as much of a risk if you're still not sure whether you'll like it.

Some people can't abide reading electronic books. Often, that's because they're trying to read them on their computer screen, or else they're spending a fortune printing the books out. Printing defeats one of the purposes of e-books, which is their size and portability. If you own a Palm Pilot or other handy-dandy organizer, you can read books on that. Even write them. (I'm actually writing this on my Palm Pilot with a fold-up keyboard, while I'm waiting for a friend at a restaurant.)

There's also dedicated e-book reading devices, but unless you really prefer reading your books this way, I don't think they're the best value for the money they cost. (Hint: try renting one for a month, see if you can get to like it.)

But you don't really *need* any of these devices. You can choose to read your book on your desktop computer, too. And you should absolutely read books this way if you're simply figuring out if you like a new author or not. The true value in electronic books is that they allow you to try new authors and different types of stories with minimal risk. If you like the author and/or the book, you can go buy the paperback version for your keeper shelf, or else hunt up the author's other books in paperback. Takes the pain out of finding damn good stories, huh?

And, of course, the third major advantage to buying your fiction on-line, or anywhere else but your local bookstores, is that there are books available on-line that your bookstore is never going to offer you.

Primarily, I'm referring to e-book and POD publishers, that have sprung up by the acre-load over the last five years. There are literally dozens of them, publishing every conceivable category of fiction, and every type of cross-genre you can dream up. Some publishers specialize in a sub-genre. Others have several genres.

It is a veritable smorgasbord out there. Are you drooling yet? You should be. Remember the earlier discussion about the dearth of decent stories on the

shelf at your bookstore? Brick & mortar publishers and bookstores can't afford to take chances with strong, different stories.

But POD and e-book publishers can.

As a consequence, authors who don't quite write within strict genre limitations, or otherwise would be turned down by traditional publishers, are finding a home with these new publishers. Here is where you'll find stories that are strong, original and emotionally satisfying because they aren't last year's best-seller warmed over.

Then there's the on-line outlets of bricks & mortar bookstores in other countries. If you're sitting in the US reading this, then you may not have realized that Australian and UK bookstores sell a whole range of fiction that never makes it to the US. And vice-versa. I'm Australian, and grew up reading a swathe of excellent UK and Australian writers – Desmond Bagley and Ethel Turner are two names that spring to mind that are not readily available in the States or Canada. I've looked without success. But I could flip over to the Angus & Robertson site (Australia), or even the UK Amazon site and buy them. Yeah, they'll take a few weeks to reach me, but oh! the anticipation!

Again, if there's English or Aussie (or Singaporean or any other nationality, for that matter -- international borders don't exist on-line) authors that I'm curious about, I can often buy the electronic version first, be reading it instantly and after that figure out if I want to commit time and money to a "keeper" paper copy.

And with only one exception that I can currently name (Ellora's Cave, the romance/erotica publisher), none of these on-line publisher's books are available at your local Borders, Chapters or Barnes and Noble. And if the buyers for these chains have their way, they never will be.

Non-Internet sources for books include second-hand bookstores (and I'll have something else to say about those, later), book swaps, and any stores that aren't primarily bookstores, but happen to have a shelf or two of novels (for instance, your local 7-11). These places sell books, but don't offer the range of current novels that the Internet offers.

Lend Me Your Ears.

If you haven't already heard, let me pass the gossip onto you. E-books and POD books, if you listen to enough people, have a totally crappy reputation. They're labelled as badly-written vanity-published pieces of rubbish that are a complete waste of your money.

Let me reassure you on this point. Yep, there absolutely *are* piles of crud out there that some people have the effrontery to call novels. And this fact is something you should celebrate with cries of joy. Note; I'm not saying you should *read* the crud. I'm saying you should sleep better at night knowing the crud is out there.

Lemme explain.

As a near neighbour of the United States, I get to watch their politics from a close, neutral position. And I've grown to appreciate their constitutional right to free speech. The right to free speech means that no-one is censored, no truth, opinion or gossip is suppressed. And that's a good thing.

The side effect of this lack of censorship is that there are some total crazies out there, standing on their soapboxes, screeching their wacked-out ideas to