

Surviving Rejection

By Maria V. Snyder

Rejection is something that every writer encounters. Okay let me specify — every writer who wants to be paid for their writing and isn't one of the lucky two who received an acceptance/contract/millions of dollars for their first efforts without a single rejection lurking in their mailboxes. There are always exceptions and they will always be hated . . . envied . . . looked upon in amazement. (Whew - I think I managed to recover from that one).

Almost every author has their “rejection” stories. We've all read about Stephen King's railroad spike (you haven't? go buy his book, *On Writing*, it's great) and J.K. Rowling's ordeal (I wonder if she ever did a “In your face!” dance at all those other publishers? I hope so!). There is even a book titled, *Rotten Reviews & Rejections* that lists rejections for some very notable authors like Dr. Seuss, Agatha Christie, Mary Higgins Clark, E.L. Doctorow, William Faulkner, and Ernest Hemingway (to name just a small fraction). So you can safely assume that you are not alone when one of those form rejection letters are delivered to your mailbox - though frankly it doesn't help dull the pain, but it should make you pause. Because, after all, Mary Higgins Clark might have been devastated by the note, “We found the heroine as boring as her husband had.” But she didn't let it stop her. Nope she kept submitting and kept writing and now she's a best selling author and I hear her “In your face!” dance was quite something to see (kidding, Mary!).

My own experience with rejection spans eight years. (Are you comfortable? Have plenty of coffee/tea/hard liquor in hand? Good you'll need it!) At one point during those years my husband attempted to make me feel better by pointing out that his sister — who is a perfect mother who never left her kids home with dad to go to a writers' convention or parked her kids in front of the TV so she could finish writing a page — didn't have as many rejections as I did. After I knocked him unconscious, I realized what he was trying in his own way (warped, I know) to tell me. That I was at least trying. That I was submitting stories and my novel and I should be proud of that effort (and you all will be happy to know my husband did awake from his coma and has just relearned how to tie his own shoes - yes, you're a good boy, honey - now wipe that drool off your chin).

I started looking at rejections as a necessary step towards eventual publication. Each form letter, sticker on my submission with “return to sender”, and two words scribbled (always “no thanks”) on my own cover letter was a step in that staircase to heaven - publication. I would send out a submission and then prepare the cover letter and envelope for my next market - so when a reject came in, I could glance at it and then stuff the story into the next envelop and mail it out before I could think about it too much.

With my novel, *Poison Study*, I tried to get an agent without any luck. Then I contacted publishers that would look at it without an agent. I made a list of every single publisher and was determined to send the manuscript (or three chapters and a synopsis) out to them all before I threw in the towel and put the novel away. I received some very good

rejections - you know the ones that want to see your whole manuscript only to reject it after you paid for all that shipping. One editor even called, said his company would most likely publish it - just had a few questions about the plot - only to reject it in the end. And let me tell you, those types of rejections - the ones where you actually get your hopes up - are the worst. If I didn't have my list and my "I'm going to send it out no matter what" stubbornness, I would have stopped submitting *Poison Study* that day. What I did was stop writing fiction and switch my energies to writing nonfiction articles (yes, Chris, I know my travel article is due today, but I'm a guest blogger!).

After 17 publishers said no - I finally, finally got a yes! And although I was thrilled to have an acceptance, there was a small (tiny, really) part of me that thought (with a smidgen of disappointment), "But I still have three publishers on my list!" And with all those rejects - I couldn't help but feel the story was deficient in some way - I worried that I would get the "Oh, we're sorry we made a mistake and we're not going to publish you after all," phone call.

Instead, the publisher, Luna, decided to print the book in hard cover. It received a starred review from *Publisher's Weekly*, won the 2006 Compton Crook award for best first novel, and was nominated for a Romance Writer's RITA award. All totally unexpected and wonderful (I did my "In your face" dance 17 times and it was considered the most original and best butt-shaking that the NY publishers had ever seen before security threw me out. Now you know I'm kidding because I haven't made it to J.K.'s or Stephen King's status - but I'm practicing my dance daily).

And the moral of the story is - (well, you know what it is - unless you had too many cups of coffee/tea/hard liquor). Okay I'll quote the movie *Galaxy Quest* because my husband's watching it in the next room (coma remember?) - "Never give up! Never surrender!" And you too may be doing the jig on some editor's desk!