

## **Shady Publisher: Five Things to Check**

by Chazda Albright -

<http://greatstorybook.com/shady-publisher/>

This entry is part 5 of 22 in the series [Publishing Biz](#)

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**Publishers of illustrated storybooks for young readers and pre-readers will require that writers submit a complete manuscript for consideration. If you send in the cow, how do you know you'll get any milk?**

Wanting the full manuscript from you makes sense, because the stories need to be told within a [very limited number of pages](#) and relatively few words. The only way for a publisher to know if the book's

any good is to read the full story from beginning to end, to see if the writer has crafted a complete story, [one that is memorable](#) and has *impact*.

Artwork by Ryan McGuire.

**How does an illustrated storybook have impact?** What I mean by impact is that the story should affect the child in a positive way, and in [the manner it was intended](#). For example, if it's a going-to-bed story, it should calm the child - maybe even put them right to sleep. If the story is funny, the child should actually laugh, and laugh loudest at the climactic moment. If the story is an educational one, the child should learn something from it.

Accomplish this, and get your work out. The most obvious route is a publisher, but **if you send a stranger your work in entirety, how do you know you're not going to get swindled?** Couldn't it get stolen? Of course it can. Consider your credit card. I doubt you'd send that through the mail - to anyone, for any reason. But we send our complete creative works to people we don't know and we don't suspect for a minute that they mightn't simply put it on the market and cut us out of it.

*Exactly that can happen.*

But there are some easy things you can do to protect your work and make sure that you don't get ripped-off. [To be very clear: even if you have officially purchased a copyright, that will not protect you from someone who wants to take advantage of you.](#) If you sign the wrong piece of paper, or click the wrong box on a Submissions Form, you can easily and unwittingly take a pass on your copyrights. You need to be aware of how to prevent someone from legally tricking you into giving them your work.

## Shady Publishers for Children's Books?

As you embark on the many possibilities of publishing options, you'll find that there are some people who are quite willing to take you for a ride. Don't be fooled into thinking that "certainly no one who publishes children's books" could be a con. It doesn't matter if the publisher is looking for religious or enlightenment materials, doesn't matter if they publish stories for children. A con is a con, regardless of where it happens. There are certain warning-signs to take note of before deciding if you want to trust someone with a copy of your complete manuscript.

**Here is a list of what to do to protect your work and your copyrights. Read carefully.**

**1. Look for Copyright Swindles.** Always read the publisher Submission Guidelines very thoroughly. They will often explain the legal conditions of your submittal to them. It SHOULD state very clearly what sort of [copyrights](#) they are interested in purchasing and that the copyright will return to you, the creator of the manuscript, once that contract has been fulfilled. If the publisher claims that they take over the copyright of your material indefinitely upon your submitting it to them, then DO NOT send it in. They have no right to claim ownership of your work for having had it sent in the mail to them. There are indeed some publishers who claim ownership of [your copyright](#) upon submittal and that the rights will only return to you once they have [officially rejected it](#). Ludicrous.

**2. Check for ratings and lists.** When considering a publisher, you will be able to find only certain types of information on their website, but that isn't the only place to look. Look for [writer's chat rooms](#) online where they have posted warnings or praise about publishers. There are even rating websites for publishers. Do not expect to find a downloadable Sample Contract on the publisher's website (unless it's a POD publisher), but do expect that they at least provide a basic explanation of their philosophy and business. If you're unsure what to think of a publisher, check them out on Amazon and other online book outlets. If they haven't published anything in the past year, tread cautiously.

**3. Check their Contests.** If the publisher is looking for young blood and hosts a writing contest, be careful. I don't want to suggest that all writing contests are just a way of swindling you out of your money, but they unfortunately often are. Ask yourself what real benefit winning the contest will bring you. Who will be judging the materials? If it's the editing staff, is it the same group of college kids who weed-out regular submissions as well? How much does submission to the contest cost? If it sounds like too much money, then it probably is. The most important thing here is to comb over the Submissions Guidelines and look for copyright information. Make sure that winning the contest does not mean you no longer own the rights to your work. You should at no time whatsoever relinquish your copyright by submitting to a contest. If you are considering a publisher, check to see if they also host contests. If they do, use that as a way of testing-out how trustworthy they are.

**4. Name.** If you've never heard of a publisher, check them out. Find out who they are and what they have done so far. This is not to say that [larger publishing houses](#) can be trusted, but get informed. Going with [a small publisher](#) can be a great way to get your work on the market, but don't just submit blindly. Educate yourself about them beforehand so that you can go into the deal with accurate expectations.

**5. Media.** Today, there is an increasing number of publishers who are interested and informed about interactive ebooks for kids. Do not be shy about investigating these publishers. If you are also submitting (or have already done so) to larger houses that do not yet take this publishing route, make sure that you have only sold to them whatever they are going to actually deliver. In other words, sell the copyrights for a printed book if that is what they are bringing to the market. Do not allow the publisher to come back to you once you've managed to bring other versions of the story ([such as ebooks](#), audiobooks, interactive ebooks or novelty items) to the market and claim that they have a right to the profits. Well-known and widely published authors have had to fight their long-time publishers on exactly this point. Be thorough in making sure that your contract is very clear about copyright and distribution. If you can't really understand legalese, get an agent. This is their forte.

Trust your instincts, but [only after you have done your research](#). Get online, absolutely, and track down any articles you can about the publisher, but also go to your library. Find out what local [librarian is savvy](#) to such things and get to know her. A librarian is an incredibly powerful, incredibly helpful person – and what's more, they love books. Do not underestimate a librarian! Some are knowledgeable about publisher contracts and some have friends who are editors and publishers. Chances are, they know other writers as well, and can introduce you.

*Get out there.*

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