

## The Freelance

This is the first printed *Freelance* for a while, due to the change of régime at the *Journalist*, together with which we're mailed out to save costs. Please keep an eye out for "virtual Freelance" emails with the contents of online-only *Freelance* editions and Branch meeting details. And please update the *Freelance* with your current email address, using the form at [www.londonfreelance.org/linkup](http://www.londonfreelance.org/linkup).

## Journalists freed

British journalist Paul Martin was released from detention in Gaza on 11 March. Paul, who was in Gaza giving evidence for a Palestinian accused of spying for Israel, was himself suspected by Hamas of spying for Israel, and held for a month and interrogated but not charged: see [www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1003gaza.html](http://www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1003gaza.html). And Iranian music journalists Behrang Tonekaboni and Kayvan Farzin, who were arrested in January were both released on bail in March, although their whereabouts are unknown, and Amnesty International are still concerned for their safety and calling for international support – see [www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1002iran.html](http://www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1002iran.html).

# Reasons to resist rights grabs

**WHY should we resist contracts that grab all rights in our work – such as that which magazine publisher Bauer is currently trying to impose? In particular, when we feel less secure – as a member of a writers' discussion group felt when saying: "those of us who are quite young in the game can't really take the 'sod them' option." An older hand replied:**

I don't want to appear to be condescending or pulling rank by dint of being (alas) no longer young, but I would like to respectfully point out that younger people have much more to lose over signing up than us old farts do – and you absolutely can do that.

**F**irst, if you're nearer the beginning of your career than the end, and agree to sell all rights now, that means that you won't be able to earn additional income from the majority of work you do over the course of your lifetime.

Contracts of this type are rarely retrospective (would that be legal?) Those of us who've worked for longer will therefore have back catalogues of work, built up over that time, which aren't affected by the current grab, and which we're still free to derive further income from.

Such income may be minimal, but it does exist – one member reported to LFB that he'd earned more money in January from re-selling one ten-year-old feature to a US magazine than from all other work that month.

Had he, at the beginning of his career, been presented with an all-rights contract, and felt his need for the exposure and the immediate work outweighed other considerations, and signed up, he would have had dramatically reduced income in January 2010. Something you feel you can't fight today might well leave you unable to pay your mortgage in 15 years' time.

**S**Second, rights grabs of this kind rely on the publisher being able to tap in to a pool of keen young writing talent to plug the gaps that will materialise as extant contributors refuse to sign up. If the talented young writers are able to hold their nerve and agree that their work is worth at least the same as the work of their older peers (which it absolutely is), the company will be forced either to lower the quality of their product by further stretching in-house writing reserves and accepting work from beyond the pool of writers they would otherwise consider, or they will be forced to negotiate something fairer.

**T**Third, while age and experience may bring a certain degree of self-belief and fortitude when it comes to standing up to this kind of thing, please don't assume that it's easy for someone just because they've been doing it a while. Whether you're renting a flat or the sole breadwinner in a mortgaged-up house full of kids, the balance between paying your way and not is extremely delicate. Few of us will truly be able to afford to lose work, and that holds true just as strongly

for the oldest and most experienced among us as for those only just beginning their careers as journalists.

**F**Fourth, you have to – I'm afraid – also consider not just those who've gone before and the people affected at present but also those who will come along afterwards. If we don't collectively take a stand now, then the beginners of tomorrow will come into a realm in which all-rights is a non-negotiable norm, and earning an acceptable living from writing is going to be impossible. We all know how hard it was to get in and make an impression and earn a bit of money from doing this – not standing up to it now makes it even harder for tomorrow's newcomers to journalism.

Publishers rely on and want you to feel like you have no option. They've got you where they want you if you're thinking that you need them more than they need you.

Without good, knowledgeable, capable writing, they don't have a product to sell, and they know it; just as, without their marketing expertise and ability to sell advertising space as well as physical copies of the magazine, we don't have a means of deriving income from our work. It's a mutual dependency, and that's why, whoever you are at whatever stage of your career, you have as much of an ability to wield power in that relationship as anyone else. Don't let them browbeat you into thinking otherwise – at least not until you've given it a good hard shot.

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## Packages are no holiday

**THE PRACTICE of "packaging" – outsourcing up to but not usually including actual printing has been rife in book publishing for years. Jenny Vaughan describes the effects on authors, illustrators and editors.**

The processes involved have changed with the technology, but the principle remains the same. A book is produced by a "packager" who takes over the production process for a book or series of books to be sold under the publisher's imprint. Rights may be retained by the publisher or the packager. They almost always demand that authors sign away rights to royalties. The packager makes a small profit and may occasionally collect royalties.

Although it's done mainly to save publishers' overheads, the addition of an extra layer means less money available to the workforce. Freelance writers and designers fre-

quently receive less from packagers – even the best ones – than directly from the publishers. The problem is compounded when – and this really happens – packagers themselves outsource to other packagers.

Packagers can be strong-armed by publishers into agreeing extremely tight schedules – which cause more problems for authors and editors when both publisher and packager want to oversee every stage of production.

Interminable checking and re-checking by several people can put freelance writers and illustrators under extra pressure. Endless sets of proofs provide endless opportunities for further comments – and more mistakes.

The downsides for freelancers are obvious. And editorial staff, instead of getting the chance to become "involved" in book production, are reduced to overseeing many titles,

none of which can command anything like their full attention. Their jobs become pressured and administrative rather than creative.

Packaging in books, however frustrating, is here to stay. I suspect modern technology will tempt other parts of the media too. We had, I suppose, all better get used to it.

What can we, as freelancers, do? Whenever we can, we should push to get paid what our work is worth, or at least not let rates fall too far.

More entrepreneurially-minded freelancers could seize the opportunities packaging offers and team up with others with the right experience and talents to become packagers themselves – whether in book publishing or in other areas of the media. I hope the union will be able to offer advice and training to assist those taking this path – if you let us know the demand is there.

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