fought its way through three rounds of cuts. You can imagine my disappointment when it was dropped in the final round of the award process, especially since I had allowed my hopes to rise (against my better judgement) as I survived each of the first three sessions of culling! After giving into self-pity for a day or two, I reluctantly realised that there *was* another way of looking at this. The in-depth critiquing process that the story had survived for so many rounds could actually be taken as a quality endorsement of sorts. At least it meant that 'Tangled Threads' was reasonably well-written. I will admit that I still feel an occasional twinge at the memory of that near-miss. But I'm definitely getting better at reminding myself about the quality endorsement part.

Facing up to rejection isn't made any easier by the success of others. It is reasonable enough to feel envy when someone is doing particularly well, to think "I wish that would happen to me". We all go through that; on a fairly regular basis, even. But it becomes something else entirely when you allow it to dominate your thinking to the extent that you are in a constant state of frustration and anger. Not least because such a frame of mind, however understandable, is deeply counter-productive. I was struck by one of Buddha's sayings, which applies here: "Holding on to anger is like grasping a hot coal with the intent of throwing it at someone else; you are the one who gets burned." Occasional envy is natural, but a writer indulges in wholesale negativity at their own peril – at the cost of their peace of mind, and possibly at the cost of their creativity.



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Put it out there: We no longer live in an era when writers can expect to be 'discovered'. Promotion is a reality that every author has to face up to, but there are very different ways of doing it. As is the case with the entire publishing process, there are that things we can control, and things that we can't. I find it useful to focus on the former. So, at the risk of being considered an idealist, I will confess that I do believe in the "build it and they will come" approach. It's worth remembering, though, that creating something of value is only the first step. You have to make sure that you actively put it out there for editors and publishers to discover. But do that only *after* you have done a thorough quality check of your own work.

In summary, while monitoring industry trends and developing your own strategy for publication is all very well, I'm inclined to think that the most important part of any writer's path to being published lies in the hard work an individual puts into writing and re-writing. The publishing industry is undergoing a massive transition, and no one quite knows where things will end up. So any predictive exercise is likely to be a matter of second-guessing.

Personally, I write about the things that move me, the things that are important to me, and the stories that drive me to tell them. I very much hope that someone will be interested in reading them once I have finished, but I never write them with an audience in mind. If I did, I would worry too much about pleasing that audience and not nearly enough about pleasing myself. And judging from my own experience as a reader, I suspect that trying to guess what readers want – unless you decide to go for the lowest common denominator – becomes a form of Russian roulette.

I also believe that whatever the gimmick of the season might be, readers will always want a good story: something they can relate to, and something that touches them in some way. That story can be about almost anything – but it needs to be convincingly written, preferably without hidden agendas or speculative intentions.

David Foster Wallace has claimed that all writers are slaves to "an overwhelming need to be liked", and perhaps that is precisely what each of us needs to battle against. Because no story will be liked by every reader, and the attempt to cheat the odds may mean doing an injustice to the story you are trying to tell. Speaking for myself, I am perfectly happy to settle for pleasing some of the people some of the time. Especially if they are the right people: the readers who understand my work, and enjoy the stories that I am trying to tell. The ones who 'get me'.

Try out your luck with these folks (no entry fees or reading fees required!):

http://www.openroadreview.in/guidelines/
http://www.desiwriterslounge.net/papercuts/submissions
http://www.earthenlampjournal.com/submissions.php
http://sharkreef.org/submit/
http://themissingslate.com/submit-work/
http://www.sugarmule.com/details.htm
http://www.commonwealthwriters.org/prizes/

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