

Podcast Fiction

Thanks to the wonders of the Internet, many things in life are now free--whether they were originally intended to be so or not. Most people object to having their stuff put online, free for anyone to download. However, more and more authors are turning to giving their work away in order to garner an audience.

In 2005, three authors started distributing audio versions of their books through RSS feeds. Tee Morris, Mark Jeffrey, and Scott Sigler started podcasting their novels. Since then, these free audiobooks have been dubbed 'podiobooks' and a whole new generation of writers have started to embrace the medium as a way to get create a fan-base and get their name out there.

Since 2005, podcasts have become more and more popular. Podcast novels benefited from the rise in popularity, bringing a number of the more prominent fiction podcasts to the iTunes featured podcasts sections. Some of the most popular podiobooks, such as Scott Sigler's *Nocturnal* and Mur Lafferty's *Playing for Keeps* have thousands of subscribers--and that's not counting those who can't be bothered to mess around with RSS feeds and download the files directly from the author's site.

Now, the main podcast novel directory, Podiobooks.com, has about 200 titles available. The works on offer range from public domain classics (although a much more extensive collection of classic literature can be found at Librivox.org) to modern noir crime stories. The focus is mainly on speculative fiction, though. One thing all the podcast novels have in common is high production quality: in order to be listed on Podiobooks.com, the podcaster has to submit some test episodes to the site's maintainers. Only when they've gained their approval will they be added to the podcast novels already on offer.

It might seem like an ambitious but amateurish way to go about publishing. After all, why

not simply submit your work to the established publishing houses? That's how most aspiring writers go about it, after all.

Scott Sigler did do that. The first novel he released as a podcast, *EarthCore*, was originally picked up by an AOL/Time Warner imprint, iPublish. However, after the 9/11 attacks, the imprint folded before Sigler's book could be published.

Frustrated, Sigler decided to take things into his own hands. He took a gamble in giving his novels away for free, but it's more than paid off. His novel *Infected* was recently picked up by the Crown Publishing Group, a subsidiary of Random House. The hardcover edition of *Infected* was released in America at the beginning of April, after an intensive advertising campaign and a book tour.

Other authors who have garnered a following through releasing their works in podcasts have also been booking successes, although usually on a smaller scale. Another of the podiobook pioneers, Matthew Wayne Selznick, has had his novel picked up by a small independent publisher, while prolific 'podfic author' Matt Wallace has had a collection of short stories published by the respected genre publisher, Apex.

The big difference between these books and truly traditional publications, however, is that the free audio files will remain available for whoever wants to download them. Scott Sigler managed to convince Crown to allow him to continue giving away his novels for free--in fact, he's currently podcasting his latest novel, the techno-thriller *Nocturnal*.

Given the recent developments in online media, many are predicting that the publishing industry is due to change dramatically. Nothing is certain however, except for one thing: the reader is benefiting from a large group of talented authors dedicated to presenting their audience with free content.

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