AGENTS: PITCHES AND QUERIES
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All right. We've finally narrowed the pile down and got some great prospects to send things to but just how do we go about sending things to agents? In the first PDF I spoke about how you can gain the option of going to a convention and there look to pitch your story idea to an actual agent face to face. This isn't the most common of methods used but is one you could explore if so led. This PDF, however, is going to operate under the assumption that you aren't one to do this and are going go about this "the old fashioned way", which means sending out queries.

Now a query is simply a letter that is sent out to an agent in which you talk about your book, yourself, and why they should take a look at what you have to offer. You'll find there is no real official way to write a query as all agents are going to be a little different on their preferences in what they like to see. The general format to follow is something along the lines of:

1) Why you are contacting them?
2) What your book is about?
3) Who you are?

In general it should all fit on one page or less.

Some agents prefer a little more in the front section, others a little more in the back section (namely who you are), or even more in the middle. Again, this varies, but if you keep it simple and professional you'll find most agents we be able to read your query just fine.

So let's take a look at what is in each of those sections. First off, we have what could be called a pretty simple concept of telling the agent where you book lies genre wise, word count, and why you are contacting them. It doesn't have to be long and it doesn't have to be really detailed, too flowery, or fawning either.

Something as simple as:

Dear Ms. Smith,

I happened to come across your interview today in *Big Blogger* and after reading what you had to say about death ray wielding steampunk werewolves, thought you'd be interested in taking a looking at *Growler*. This 95,000 word tale of urban fantasy is the first of the *Darkness Duology*, for which I'm seeking representation.

The middle portion would just be a short summation of your story. Note, this isn't the synopsis per se but more like back book copy—meant to share the story but to do so in a way that's enticing to the reader. You don't want to drone on about all the details and you don't want to try

and make it seem like a high pressure infomercial either by trying to make it something it isn't by using phrases like "this instant bestseller" or "…this will be bigger than *Potter* and *Hunger Games* combined."

The last part of the query letter is really just something short and sweet about you. This is where if you're a published author you make mention of it. If you have awards or other things that tie into the subject matter or tale you're promoting it would be a good place to add a note here as well. So, if you work at a death ray manufacturing plant or deal with werewolves in the wild, such things would a good fit for a small inclusion. What you don't want to do is treat this like a personals ad or really even too much like a resume. If what you have done and are doing now work wise isn't connected in any way to this project your soliciting then you don't want to include it.

Finally, at the end of this, you want to make sure you provide a way for them to get back in touch with you, this means providing your contact information. Phone number, name, and email are the prime things to send out but if you have a blog and/or website and you want them to read it, then put these in as well—but again, only if you want them to take a look.

And that's pretty much it when it comes to queries. Now, if you want to see what some queries looked like that landed agents you can check out this site: (http://www.writersdigest.com/editor-blogs/guide-to-literary-agents/successful-queries). If you want to actually see what goes through an agent's mind while they read a query you can check out this page: (http://writeoncon.com/2011/04/live-query-event-with-literary-agent-roseanne-wells/). In it literary agent Roseanne Wells reads through a selection of queries and shares her reply real time, showing just how fast an agent spends looking over your query and what gets their attention or turns them off in the process.

Finally, make sure you go through and proof your query—reading it out loud—to make sure it is as clear and clean as possible. You don't want to put any wrong foot forward as this is your first and maybe only opening to get said foot in the door with them. You want to make sure this is something you do to the best of your ability.

Partials, Sample Chapters, Synopsis and More

Some agents won't just want a query but a sample of your work as well. This might be the first five to ten pages, the first chapter, or even up to the first fifty pages. On rare occasions some agents even allow the whole manuscript (called the full) to be sent along for consideration. Added to this sample or just on its own some might want just the synopsis of the work.

Whatever is requested, make sure you've read how they want it sent. Some want it as an attachment in a certain format. Others want it pasted into the body of the email. Following directions on submissions is another good point for your scoreboard and makes sure you get the whole process moving forward in the right way from the get go.

The Subject Line
While you're certainly free to do what you think works best for you, the easiest way to fill out the subject line of an email is to just put in:

QUERY—Title of Book—Genre---Your Name

So it could look like: QUERY—GROWLER—Urban Fantasy—John Smith.

Many agents and agencies have spam folders and filters that catch certain things that get to them that don't have query in the title somewhere so it's probably best to opt in to using this format for submitting your work.