

tale of two cities art

*Image scanned by Philip V. Allingham*

## A Tale of Two Authors

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.

What stretches before you is not an examination of a 167-year-old novel, as much as you would like it to be, and as much as I would enjoy writing about air black with coal dust, revolutionary tumult, and street urchins.

Instead, I offer you the story of how two authors published novels and how that experience was flavored with paradox. Best/worst of times might be an allusion too far, but could I sell you on exhilarating/deflating? These guys say so, and I believe them. I had an uncommon vantage point, having had a hand in editing their novels. I returned to them later—ink dry, electrons in place, cover art chosen, books available for sale—to ask about their journeys.

[Ian Lazarus](#) and [Mike McBride](#) are Southern Californians whose paths to publication differed significantly. Ian has self-published three crime thrillers featuring Richard O'Brien, an irrepressible FBI agent who works his way into risky investigations across the globe. Mike signed up with Full Quiver Publishing for a book that captures a fundamental human contradiction—the battle of good and evil—in the person of George Abiola, a sweet-natured cleric from Africa.

One of the first things a would-be author must do is prepare an answer to the question that surfaces immediately in conversations. So, what's your book about? It's about life, everything I've ever learned or known, a story that hasn't been told, it's captivating, unusual, wait till you get to the part about the aardvark, I've used words in innovative and inscrutable ways, it's a masterpiece.

But the author doesn't say that. The author presents something that resembles the so-called elevator pitch, the brisk summary intended to interest a publisher should the author have the statistically faint chance of ending up in an elevator with the CEO of Simon & Schuster. What an author says to those who ask is calibrated for normal human

interaction.

Ian said he struggles when he gets that inevitable question.

“The first words out of my mouth are usually, ‘I write crime thrillers,’” he said in an email exchange. Still, that doesn’t capture the essence of what he does. “No disrespect to other authors, but I know many writers take great literary license to produce a product. And many of those novels are fantastic. But for me, a novel, like a film, must be believable and grounded in as much reality as possible. So, I invest a ton of time in researching the subject I am writing about, sharing factual details with the reader that make the narrative more authentic and believable.”

Explaining that quickly is tough, especially to someone you just met. Ian Rodney Lazarus said the social-media abbreviation IRL (in real life, for those behind in their study of social media’s confounding language shortcuts) could come in handy. “I would love a new genre to be coined, maybe ‘IRL thrillers,’ which would be great, as those are my initials.”

Mike tells those who ask that his book is about a Nigerian kid nicknamed Blos, which is derived from blessed little old soul, because he is wise and kind.

“He comes to America to live with his grandmother. Blos becomes a Catholic priest. He has life-and-death adventures, including those with a warlord and another with a street gang leader. In bad times for Blos, an evil mystery ‘person’ pops up. As Blos becomes famous, his antagonist is further motivated to destroy him.” Confrontations erupt, as you might imagine.

Where did this story come from? Mike is uncertain. “I did want to write about salt-of-the-earth people—folks that want to give more than receive and those that don’t expect to be handed things they don’t work for,” Mike wrote in an email.

The publishing process presents experiences a writer might never have expected when the urge to write a book took hold.

“I tried to find representation by outreaching agents through public listings. I thought my bona fides (over fifty published articles in print magazines) would have conferred some street cred where I would be eventually engaging directly with agents and publishers,” Ian said.

Between one hundred and two hundred emails went unanswered. “I gave up and went the self-publishing route.”

“I was naive for sure,” he said. The hunt for an agent or publisher was like looking for a job, he said. “It was pretty demoralizing.”

But self-publishing was easier than he expected. “I have heard from other self-published authors that getting their manuscript and/or cover art to be accepted on Kindle’s portal was a pain, but it wasn’t for me. And creating the cover art was definitely a fun process.”

He also explored a fundamental publishing issue. Most new authors don’t have a powerful promotional apparatus, and it’s an enormous factor in selling books today. Shrugging off pursuit of a big publishing house meant Ian wouldn’t have access to corporate marketing machinery, but he didn’t have to cede control either. “Writers need to examine their motives for writing in the first place. That will guide many decisions about their process, as well as set expectations.”

Ian later used Draft2Digital to create books because it offered access to retail sites beyond the Amazonverse. He also has dropped off copies at his local library branch, “and they are offering my books in the San Diego area and listing them on their virtual card catalog.”

Mike admits that he was a neophyte when it came to publishing. “As a first-time author, my experience level was zero. I sent out feelers to publishers that accepted manuscripts from nonrepresented authors. I started this process before having the manuscript professionally edited.”

After editing, he was back in the hunt and “came upon a website for Full Quiver Publishing. FQP was interested in the basic story and took me under their wing. My book centers on a Catholic theme that fits FQP’s mission model.”

Publishers usually have their own editors to unleash on manuscripts they accept, and what those editors think may differ from the advice of a previous editor, your early readers, or your Uncle Patrick who had a letter to the editor published in *USA Today*.

“One chef prefers less paprika, and another chef wants more salt,” Mike said. “Since writing is an art, there is no correct answer—just different ones. FQP advised me that the process would be a long one,

and it was, but they stuck with me. I wonder if finding a small family-owned publisher provided me with more assistance, access, and patience than I would have found with a large company—I don't know. I do know things worked out for which I'm grateful."

Mike said he didn't expect to feel so helpless while searching for someone to accept a manuscript; how much the word count of the finished product matters; and the starring role that an author plays in marketing books.

The hardest part of all for Ian was the total absorption that comes with writing a book.

"Writing a novel is like having your conscience hijacked. I found myself constantly thinking about the story, how to advance the plot and how to resolve any inconsistencies. On *The Wine Broker*, which I worked on for two years, I once found myself exiting the shower with my head full of shampoo, oblivious to the fact I forgot to rinse it out. I often ignored family conversations in front of me because I was thinking about the book. I had trouble sleeping if I got stuck and couldn't advance the plot. None of this is healthy. But I think it comes with the territory."

Authors naturally think that making a book is about, you know, writing. But it's writing-plus. "Authors are not trained in sales and promotion, and I probably failed to pursue many commonsense strategies to get my books in the hands of more people."

The toughest part for Mike was something that affects us all.

"Change," he said.

"I think change could be recognized as one of the hardest, or at least most frustrating part of the process. Change usually occurs due to the vigilant and discerning editor or in some cases, editors."

Deletions, revisions, additions. What else does an author have to do for these people?

"Bottom line: The tough editing times make the result much better," Mike said. (1) "Also, most, if not all of us, get a bigger kick out of accomplishing something challenging than finishing something simple."

Despite pummeling from editors, query letters no one answers, and the strange world of book promotion, the spark remains.

"I would absolutely do it again," Ian said. (2)

"I have published three novels in the crime thriller genre and learned a lot about writing from one of my mentors, John Cannon, perhaps you've heard of him. If I write another book, I want to try my hand at nonfiction since I enjoy the process of researching my subject."

Mike enjoys the feeling of accomplishment that settled upon him following the publication of his first book and said he doesn't have plans for another. But neither does he forget the uncommon joy of writing. "I could imagine getting the novel-writing itch again."

He has a good relationship with his publisher, and "I would have a realistic opportunity with them evaluating/considering a second project of mine. Of course, that's not a guarantee, but it's vastly better than starting from scratch in finding a publisher."

Writing and publishing a book is like airline travel. You miss a connecting flight, the plane has to be de-iced three times before takeoff, and then the airline loses your luggage. But you eventually get somewhere you want to be.

"If I knew the challenges that faced me before starting *A Serpent's Pursuit* I doubt that I would have begun," Mike said. "But I'm sure glad that I did."

*1. Technically, this should be wrote rather than said, but don't bother me, I'm working.*

*2. This too.*

[IRL pic](#)

*Ian Lazarus*

[McBride Book Cover](#)

*Mike McBride*

\*\*\*

**Kind regards**

**jcannonbooks**

February 2026



©2026 jcannonbooks | 9245 Twin Trails Drive #721492 San Diego CA 92172

[Web Version](#)

[Forward](#)

[Unsubscribe](#)

Powered by  
**[GoDaddy Email Marketing](#)**®