

# THE ELEVATOR PITCH

By Alex Auclair

**WHY I LIKE IT: Guest editor/author ROBERT P. BISHOP writes:**

*Writer Tom Thomason is desperate. He ambushes publishers in elevators, telling them stories of drug-dealing alligators and alien females with eight breasts seeking reproductive partners. Eight breasts! That's an image guaranteed to stay in the mind. Alex Auclair writes with a style that is lean, trim, unburdened with needless descriptors, and easy to read. The story flows well. Any writer who has a collection of rejection notices knows the torment main character Tom Thomason lives every day. Despite twenty years of ceaseless effort, Tom Thomason remains unpublished. His friends tell him, "Why don't you grow up, get a business degree, work in a cubicle for forty years and die." Thomason dismisses this deadly advice and goes to New York City where his quest takes him on an improbable and humorous journey in search of publishers. Along the way we are forced to ask, "My god, will this man ever get published?" Then we read these lines: "You want a good elevator pitch?" he screamed. "I'll give you a good fucking elevator pitch! How about a book based on a writer who has strived to be successful his entire life. He has given up everything to be a writer, to bring people joy, to create worlds that the reader can get lost in. And he's good... and so is this story. Tom Thomason is finally published.*

## The Elevator Pitch

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Tom Thomason was a writer. Not just any writer, Tom Thomason was an unpublished writer. A special breed of the noble and elite class of professionals that put words on paper and paper on fantastic journeys. There were two kinds of writers; published and unpublished. Both could be geniuses and both could be failures. The only difference was published writers could buy a nice house and drink fancy wine, while unpublished writers could buy a nice night on a friend's couch and drink fancy Bud Light. It was very hard to have a family and a life as an unpublished writer. All of your time was spent writing to get published. It is what it is.

This was the dilemma of Tom Thomason. He had been unpublished his whole life. And life was not forgiving to unpublished writers. "Get a job," they told him. "Why don't you just write

as a hobby,” they suggested. “Why don’t you grow up, get a business degree, work in a cubicle for forty years and die,” The Man said. The American dream. But Tom Thomason would not get another job. His job was as a writer, and to be a writer one must devote one's life to the cause. Tom Thomason was not about to give up on the cause.

So he wrote short stories and sent them to literary magazines. *Sorry, please submit again in the future.* He wrote longer stories and submitted them to contests. *Sorry, please submit again in the future.* He wrote entire books and submitted them to literary agents. *Sorry, please stop sending us your writings, we can not take it anymore.* It is what it is.

Tom Thomason decided after twenty years of trying to get published the traditional way it was time for a new approach. It was time to take drastic measures. It was time to start breaking and entering. Well... sneaking into publishing agencies to try and pitch his writing, so breaking and entering that’s pretty low stakes.

He packed his bag with everything he owned and moved to the book publishing capital of the world, New York City. The bag was not very big and there were not very many things within. It contained two pairs of pants, four solid colored shirts, three pairs of underwear, and five socks (one of the socks lost their companion in the Great Eviction of twenty seventeen). He arrived in The Big Apple on a Tuesday. He had found a nice subway car to sleep in overnight. The last car of the A train goes from the top of Manhattan all the way to Far Rockaway deep in Queens. It’s a long way. No one to bother you and no one to tell you to get a job on the A train. It is what it is.

The next day (Wednesday for those of you who are keeping track) Tom Thomason found a gym and got a free one day membership. You know, just to try it out. He took a shower in the locker room, freshened up, and left for the first day of his new job of breaking and entering. He decided to start small and work his way up. He went to a publishing house in Brooklyn that was mostly responsible for erotica and some sci-fi... but only if it had space sex in it. He went into the building and sat patiently in the lobby.

A man walked in with a briefcase. He had his pant cuffs rolled up to his calf, a plaid button up, a handlebar mustache, and large round glasses. *That's a publisher if I ever saw one*, Tom Thomason thought. He stood up and sauntered behind the publisher man. They got to the elevator and the man hit the up button. It lit up like a firefly on a warm August night. There was a ding and the door opened. The man stepped in. Tom Thomason followed.

"Good morning," Tom Thomason said.

"Morning," the man replied.

"You wouldn't happen to work at the publishing office on the seventh floor would you?" asked Tom Thomason.

"Yes..." the plaid man said a little uneasily.

"Well do I have an elevator pitch for you!" exclaimed Tom Thomason. "I am a writer! Unpublished, but a writer nonetheless. I have this wonderful book that would fit right into your repertoire. It's about a race of aliens that are all female. They scour the galaxy looking for males of any species to reproduce with, you know, so they can continue their race. And they have eight breasts that..."

"Let me stop you right there pal," the publisher said. "We aren't really looking for anything in that genre right now."

"I see... well I have another..."

"Listen. I'm not going to lie, books are becoming a hard sell at this point in time. People seem to be more interested in bingeing the next show or immersing themselves in social media on their phone. It's a bad time to be a publisher... or an author. I am going to have to pass."

"Oh, I see," said Tom Thomason.

The door to the elevator opened and the plaid shirted man with a handlebar mustache and large round glasses stepped off. He turned around and put out his hand. Tom Thomason walked right into it. The publisher's hand hit his chest and stopped him from stepping off the

elevator. "Listen buddy, nothing personal, but we have to try and salvage this company and your story isn't great. An elevator pitch doesn't need to be in an actual elevator... just so you know."

"Haha," Tom Thomason laughed, shifting his eyes from side to side a little uneasily. "Of course it doesn't, that'd be crazy."

"Why don't you head back down to the lobby and try writing something new."

"If I could just talk to another agent or a publisher, I have a million ideas."

"I really don't want to call security, but I will."

Tom Thomason looked down at his feet. "Okay." He stepped back into the elevator and hit the "L" button. The doors closed and the elevator descended. *It is what it is*, he thought.

A writer never gives up. Tom Thomason took out a notepad from his back pocket and a pencil from his front. He licked the tip of the pencil and crossed out the first publishing company on the list. "On to the next one!" he said aloud to himself.

Tom Thomason hopped on the subway and rode it into the Financial District of Manhattan. The next publishing company was a couple of blocks from the Fulton stop. He walked down the sidewalk and looked for the next publishing office he would sneak into to pitch his ideas. He came to a skyscraper made of white brick. He entered the revolving door and entered the granite filled lobby. He walked up to the security desk with purpose.

"Hi I have a delivery for Treehouse Publishing Associates," Tom Thomason said. "We messed up the first order, so I just need to run it up real quick, I know what office it belongs too."

"Alright, go ahead," the security guard said without giving him a second glance.

*That was easy*, Tom Thomason thought. He walked over to the elevators and sat on the wooden bench that was along the back wall. It was more for decoration than actual use, but that didn't bother Tom Thomason. He waited. And waited. And waited some more.

Eventually a woman in a grey pant suit pushed the elevator button. *That's a woman who is definitely in charge of publishing books*, Tom Thomason thought. He stood up and walked

over to the elevator right as the doors opened. The pant suited woman walked in. She pushed the button for the eleventh floor. The doors began to close.

“What floor?” the woman asked without looking at him.

“Actually yours,” replied Tom Thomason.

“Oh... really?” the woman asked a little uneasily.

“Yeah!” Tom Thomason said excitedly. “I’m a writer... unpublished, and do I have an elevator pitch for you!”

“Please don’t,” the woman began to say.

“Now I know your publishing agency deals with a lot of historical fiction and romance. I have this book I’ve written about Cleopatra gaining the ability to time travel on the back of a sphinx. She goes through history exploring cultures and societies she could never even dream of! But here’s the kicker... she falls in love! And you’ll never guess with who!”

“Sir, I really don’t have time for thi...”

“Hitler!” Tom Thomason blurted out. “She falls in love with Hitler! Who would have thought that historical fiction and romance could come together to produce such an unlikely love story am I right?”

“Sir!” the publisher yelled. “We are not looking for new authors right now. It is getting harder and harder to sell books. And if I am honest with you, your elevator pitch wasn’t great. You kind of blindsided me there.”

The doors opened. The lady in the grey pantsuit hurried out. She turned around and looked at Tom Thomason. “I think it’s best if you just head back down to the lobby and leave, I really don’t want to have to call security,” she said. Tom Thomason stood in the elevator with a frown. He slowly reached out and hit the “L” button. The doors began to close. “An elevator pitch doesn’t need to be in an actual elevator... just so you know,” the publisher said as the doors snapped shut.

*Yeah, that's what I've been told,* Tom Thomason thought as the elevator began to descend. *Oh well, it is what it is, on to the next publisher.*

Tom Thomason rode the subway to the Upper East Side to a publishing agency that specialized in crime novels. He waited for the right opportunity, which finally came when an old man entered the elevator and pushed the button for the fifteenth floor. On the ride up Tom Thomason pitched his book.

"It's about a cop who follows a drug dealer into the New York City sewers to try and unfurl his operation only to find that the drug kingpin is a mutant alligator that has been living in the sewers of NYC for over a hundred years! The old man publisher (who kind of looked like an alligator with his old leathery skin) did not like the idea. He threatened to call security on Tom Thomason, but before he did Tom Thomason pushed the "L" button in the elevator. As the doors closed, he was told by the alligator: "an elevator pitch doesn't need to be in an actual elevator... just so you know."

Tom Thomason rode the elevator down to the lobby. *It is what it is.*

He took the train across the East River to Astoria where the next publishing agency on the list was located. He got off the train and walked five blocks to the building that housed the company. Tom Thomason saw the name of the publisher on the frosted glass door. He looked up at the old brownstone building. It wasn't very tall. He opened the door and walked into the humble lobby. Tom Thomason looked around and walked up to the security desk. "Hello," he said.

"Hi, how may I help you?" said the gentlemen behind the desk.

"I am looking for the elevator," Tom Thomason said.

"We don't have an elevator in this building. It was built pre-war and it is only five stories high, so under city regulations at the time, there didn't need to be an elevator. It's not too bad walking up the stairs..."

But before the security guard could finish his sentence Tom Thomason had turned around and walked straight out the door. *No elevator?* he thought. *That's crazy! Stupid elevator pitch.*

Tom Thomason visited six more agencies that day. He went deep into Queens. He went to the Bronx. He went to Harlem. He went to Upper West Side. He did not go to Staten Island. Who in their right mind would go to Staten Island? There isn't even a train that goes there! You have to take a boat!

Every publishing agency Tom Thomason went to said the same thing. "Thanks, but no thanks." Oh, and: "an elevator pitch doesn't need to be in an actual elevator... just so you know." He knew, at least he thought he knew. But he definitely didn't like it. Every elevator ride down to "L" he kept telling himself: *it is what it is.*

Tom Thomason had one last publishing agency to visit. It was in the center of Manhattan, smack dab in Times Square. The core of the Big Apple if you will. The sun was beginning to set. Billions of lights and screens lit up the area as if it were still high noon. Tom Thomason filed into the building with a large group of people. He snuck past the security desk and found his way to the elevators. He waited and waited. He watched people go up and down in the gravity defying mechanical boxes. He was getting really good at spotting potential publishing agents. He used clues, like if they were holding books, or if they had reading glasses, or the telltale sign of ink marks on their hands. People who worked in publishing always unwittingly revealed clues of their profession. "Elementary, my dear Watson," Tom Thomason chuckled to himself.

It was getting late and Tom Thomason was beginning to get nervous that he wouldn't get a chance to pitch his greatest book yet when a gentleman exhibiting all of the characteristics of a publisher entered the lobby and walked to the elevators. Tom Thomason pushed off against the wall he was leaning on and strode up behind the man. They entered the elevator. The doors closed.

“You going to push a button?” the man asked.

“Nah I’m going where you’re going. I’m an author! Unpublished.”

“Damn it,” the man said.

“I have a great book that I’ve written and it’d be perfect for your publishing agency! It’s a play on Jack and the Beanstalk that takes place in modern London. It has suspense, magic, and talks about current issues such as climate change. It is the perfect book for...”

“I really don’t have time for this. And I’m sorry, but the book industry is...”

“Yeah I know, we’ve hit hard times, but I’m telling ya this book is great! It has every...”

“Honestly, I don’t really care. I mean I get hundreds of manuscripts to read through a day, and at this point... I just don’t care,” the publisher said punctuating each word. “Plus, it wasn’t even a good elevator pitch.”

Tom Thomason stood in silence. He did not move, he did not make a sound. “You want a good elevator pitch?” he screamed. “I’ll give you a good fucking elevator pitch! How about a book based on a writer who has strived to be successful his entire life. He has given up everything to be a writer, to bring people joy, to create worlds that the reader can get lost in. And he’s good... he’s reeeeeeeal good! But no one will give him the time of day, so one day he loses it and walks his sorry ass over to a huge publishing company. He gets into an elevator with a big wig publishing agent and pushes the stop button. He holds the publisher hostage until he promises to publish his book! But the publisher doesn’t agree and the author can’t take the rejection any more so he climbs out of the elevator and cuts the cable! They both go plummeting to their death! How does that sound for an elevator pitch?” Tom Thomason was breathing very heavily and staring directly into the publisher’s eyes. His chest heaved up and down as he wiped spittle from his lips and chin.

The publisher furrowed his brow and held eye contact with Tom Thomason. The elevator was completely silent for what felt like an eternity. Then the publisher’s lips curled up and his mouth turned into a great big smile. “I love it!” he boomed. He grabbed Tom Thomason’s hand

and began shaking it like a jackhammer. “When we get up to the office we will print out your manuscript and read through it. I think it’ll be a great story about the frustrations of a genius author. It’ll be a hit!”

“Print it out when we get to your office?” Tom Thomason stammered. “But I just...”

“Don’t worry about it, I am sure our editors will fix any little misspellings or grammatical errors you have. The important thing is that you have the story down, and what a story it will be from how you just explained it!”

“Uhh, but...” Tom Thomason whispered.

“What is the title of the book my boy?” the publisher asked.

Tom Thomason shifted nervously. “It is what It is?”

“Nah, I don’t like it... let's call it The Elevator Pitch.”

**AUTHOR’S NOTE:** *The Elevator Pitch is my first published work of fiction. Oh the irony! It is not easy being a writer, but for a lot of us it is something that we can’t control. This story is meant to make the reader laugh. If it came off as me whining or complaining about the writing industry that was not my intent. Sure it sucks getting rejection letter after rejection letter, and I’d be lying if I said I wrote this just for fun (it was written out of frustration because of aforementioned rejection letters). But a little frustration is good for the soul. This story was influenced by the writings of Kurt Vonnegut. I am under no illusion that this story, or any story I will ever write, will be comparable to Vonnegut. But his satire makes me laugh as I hope The Elevator Pitch made you laugh, or at least smile, maybe just a smirk? Thanks for reading and remember when life throws absurdities at you, it is what it is*

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**EDITOR’S BIO:** *Robert P. Bishop, a former soldier and teacher, lives in Tucson, Arizona.. His short fiction has appeared in The Literary Hatchet, The Umbrella Factory Magazine, CommuterLit, Lunate Fiction, Flash Fiction Magazine, Fleas on the Dog, Corner Bar Magazine, and elsewhere. His story **Cat Food** appears in this issue (fiction).*