

Starve Better: Surviving the Endless Horrors of the Writing Life

Nick Mamatas

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Nick Mamatas can speak from experience about the horrors of the writing life. Like most writers, he knows what it's like to live without a steady paycheck, have no health insurance, and be without savings to fall back on; and as an editor, he is well aware that much of the work writers submit ends up in the dreaded "slush pile." He also knows the exhilaration of making a story come to life on the page and how this, one of writing's greatest joys, can keep a writer going regardless of the suffering that freelancing invariably entails.

Based on the author's blog entries, lecture notes, and published essays, *Starve Better* is not a guide to publishing success and stardom, but rather a survival guide that suggests ways, some of them less than savory, to generate both ideas and income when the rent comes due. Part one, "The Book of Lies," deals with writing short fiction, and part two, "The Book of Life," discusses writing nonfiction for publication. The appendix touches on survival strategies that could only have come from one who understands writers and the writing business from the inside out, including the truth about content mills, writing term papers for hire (academic ghostwriting), and print-on-demand. Mamatas's prose, peppered with expletives, is lively and often irreverent, and the book offers much useful information on making one's writing not only great, but marketable. While some aspiring scribes may be scared off by the author's realistic look at what a writer's life entails, others will find encouragement, challenge, and potent advice on how, at least, to "starve better." One comes away from reading this book convinced that, as Mamatas wrote in a pre-recession, 2005 essay, "... if you could not make a living as a freelancer it is because your standards were too high, both for what counted as writing and what counted as living."

Mamatas is the author of three novels, over seventy short stories, and hundreds of feature articles. His editing earned World Fantasy and Hugo award nominations for *Clarkesworld* magazine, and his reportage, short stories, and essays have appeared in publications including *Asimov's Science Fiction*, *The Writer*, and *Poets & Writers*, and in anthologies including *Supernatural Noir* and *Lovecraft Unbound*. He teaches in the MFA program in Creative and Professional Writing at Western Connecticut State University, was a visiting writer at Lake Forest College and the University of California, Riverside, and runs writing classes in the San Francisco Bay Area.

KRISTINE MORRIS (July / August 2011)

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