

## **Interview with Entrepreneur Nick Thacker**

Nick Thacker was recommended to me for his skillful book and cover design through his company, [Turtleshell Press](#), and in the process of collaborating with him, I came to appreciate how multitalented he is. He is an artist who has worked in many aspects of the publishing industry.

### **You are a professional musician, an illustrator, a writer – how did that come about?**

I believe it all started with the idea that people can create “something from nothing” — a song, a book, a picture, etc. I didn’t know what that meant, and I didn’t know where it would lead, but I always gravitated toward the kinds of things that allowed me to “create.”

After college, I worked at a marketing company designing websites and graphics, and while I didn’t end up staying there, I learned a lot of great systems and workflows that I still use to this day.

When I started writing books, I realized quickly that the process of creating a book is a culmination of all these skills I’d been working on – cover design, text formatting, layout, etc. Book packaging is still one of my favorite types of projects to work on, whether for my own books or for someone else’s.

I was always interested in music — the idea that you could pick up an instrument or just start singing and affect someone’s emotion with sound. I pursued that, eventually getting a degree in music (composition). I still compose, but it’s a hobby for me, not a job. I disliked the “academic” nature of university-taught composition, so I began expanding my interest in business and marketing, as well as writing fiction.

### **You have come up with a unique concept of creating the music of books, as shown in your [SonataandScribe.com](#). Can you elaborate on that?**

I always write to “epic” soundtracks, typically Hans Zimmer or John Williams. I realized earlier this year that every book I’ve written has a particular “sound” to it – the collection of songs and styles of music that I was listening to and allowing to inspire me.

When I stumbled onto the idea of composing an actual “soundtrack” for one of my books, I pitched it to a friend. They immediately wanted in; now I’m producing a full album of custom compositions for their book series. They’ll be able to sell the tracks as their own, retaining full rights.

I decided to begin work on a company called Sonata & Scribe to do this same thing for other authors. I believe there is demand for just this sort of work, but we’ll see!

### **Why did you start Turtleshell Press?**

Turtleshell Press was solely created to publish my own books, in order to make people think I was a bigger deal than just “published by Amazon” or “published by CreateSpace.” I was naive then (and now), but I had always wanted my own little slice of the publishing industry.

When I began producing more books, I began getting requests to help other people with theirs. I realized I already had a venue to do this — and the client-facing side of Turtleshell Press was born!

### **What has that journey been like?**

Honestly, the journey hasn't been a separate one from that of my own life. I built TSP as things were needed — relationships with editors, cover designers, web developers, etc. If I needed something done for a client or for my own work, I sought them out and found them, and then tried to build it into my pool of offerings. I never approached TSP as a business that I had to build for an income stream, as I always wanted to be a fiction author first and foremost.

That said, as things began ramping up, TSP became more and more popular and I found myself doing all sorts of “business”-related tasks that I loved. As long as I can keep TSP fun, I'll keep doing it!

### **You also released a few nonfiction books related to the publishing industry. Did this come about as part of your work with Turtleshell Press, and working with other authors?**

In part, yes. I started writing about the process of producing and marketing a book after I began work on my second novel. That blog became [writehacked.com](http://writehacked.com) and it grew to a point where I couldn't manage it any longer. Some of the original posts I'd written I expanded into nonfiction guides and books, and as I began helping other authors, I collected all of the work under the company name “Turtleshell Press.”

### **You designed the cover for our first novel, *Eye of the Moon*. What was that process like?**

Most of the time I spend hours creating about ten or fifteen “iterations” or complete designs, only to return to the first option (part of why I don't charge by the hour!). For *Eye of the Moon*, there was a serendipitous alignment between what you (the client) was looking for and what I was envisioning. To put it simply, I feel like I got lucky. The design process was a breeze, and though I spent a considerable amount of time on the project, it was a blast, as I was making a good thing better, not reworking and starting over!

### **As a husband and father to two girls, how do you juggle it all?**

The girls are my life. Period. I didn't realize it before I had them (how can you?), but the day Whitney was born my entire world shrank. I politely declined new web design offers, “fired” (again, politely!) old clients, and explained to everyone that my life needed to be focused in on my family for a time.

I received gracious praise and understanding, and my books continued to sell.

Now, I spend my days working from 9 am to 5 pm, writing books and doing a bit of client work, from wherever I feel like writing that day – typically a coffee shop, but sometimes it's a brewery or bookstore!

But I'm home for dinner and bath time and bedtime and all the insanity that comes with that. We take walks, we wake up together, and we spend just about every hour of the weekends together. Best of all, if I'm missing them, I take a half-day or a day off and we do something about it!

Yes, I feel the "guilt" of not working or writing the next book in those times, but when I see their smiling faces it makes it all okay!

### **Please share with us your thoughts on publishing independently versus using the traditional route.**

I couldn't tell anyone to do one or the other in general, it's really all about goals: do you want to retain control of the entire process? Or would you rather put it into someone else's hands? What are your long-term plans?

People often forget that the choice is not between "traditional" or "indie:" it's between "self-publishing your work and building an author career" and "*hoping* that a traditional publisher picks you up." Even then, if they do pick you up, are they going to pay for any marketing? Are they going to guarantee you a decent royalty rate?

I'm not anti-traditional, but it is true that the two options aren't mutually exclusive: if you can be successful as an indie-published author, how much more clout would you then have with a traditional publishing house?

### **Where do you see the publishing industry going from here?**

The publishing industry, by definition, is a bridge between a producer and a consumer. That bridge often feels like a gate, but the point is that it is shrinking. Authors are finding ways to reach readers without needing a bridge/gate between them, and readers are realizing they don't need a publisher to tell them what is good.

We will always tell stories, but the power of publication will morph into an unrecognizable form, and it will happen in our lifetime. Readers will seek out the stories they want to read and pay the least amount needed (in time, money, effort, etc.) to get those stories. If authors can place themselves at the other end of that desire, great. If a "publishing" company can do it, great. But it's not going to look like the 18-month churn cycle of slush-pile winners we currently have.

### **What is your ideal scenario as an artist?**

Interesting question: I believe my "mountain" is freedom. I want to be free to pursue the dreams and passions I've always had, and help my family pursue theirs. Anything that moves me closer to my mountain is worth doing.

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For more, read Ivan's [interview with Nick Thacker](#) as an author.

