

First, congratulations on the success of your John Rain series. Much, much deserved. John Rain is one of my all-time favorite people in the world. (Bummer that he's not real.) In fact, that series has catapulted you into the kind of top-tier that writers only dream about. You no longer write in a particular genre, you've become a genre. Stephen King doesn't write horror stories, he writes Stephen King. JK Rowling doesn't write fantasy, she writes JK Rowling. Your name has become a brand. But with any brand and label, there must be pressures associated with that. Do you feel like you can only write a certain way from now on? That you can only write about a particular character?

Branding is one of my favorite topics, and I could go on and on about it (and for anyone who wants just that, you can find articles on branding an author on the [For Writers](#) section of my website, and on [politicians and brands](#) on my [blog](#)). The short answer is, I feel I've developed a solid brand whose core is John Rain, the half-Japanese, half-American assassin who specializes in death by "natural causes." Surrounding the core is a slightly more general brand, which is about thrillers with realistic action, exotic locales, and steamy sex. And one layer out from that is my own name. I don't feel the brand inhibits me (I hope not—I've worked hard to develop it); rather, I feel it provides a foundation I can build on. You can't extend a brand too fast, and you can't extend it in directions it doesn't organically go, but what you can do as an author—the ideal, in fact—is, over time, shift the core of your brand from what it originally was to your own name. At that point, you can do whatever you want. Stephen King is the best example I know of this phenomenon. His original core was horror, but over time, he was able to get his fans to think of him as a superb storyteller, with horror becoming a sub-brand of his name. In other words, in the minds of his fans, "Stephen King" came to stand as much for storytelling as it did for horror. And now, he can write anything he wants, which no matter what you write I think is the ultimate goal for a writer.

As we're talking about brands, so often an author is cast in one particular role: romance author, mystery author, YA author, etc. Why is it that authors are so unfairly boxed in? A musician is free to cross-over to many genres and collaborate in many styles. An actor does all she or he can to NOT be typecast. Yet authors, if they try to venture out to different genres and styles, either have to change their name completely or be at risk of "career suicide". Why do you think that is and do you think that will ever change?

Well, again, I don't really think of brands as boxing people in—or at least they shouldn't, if the author develops the brand with some foresight. Brands are good. Brands work (do I sound like Gordon Gecko?).

Let's back up for a second. Simply put, a brand is the emotional connection a consumer feels to a product or service. It's what the product or service stands for in the consumer's mind. What does Apple stand for? Virgin? Marlboro? Harley Davidson? Generally speaking, if you can easily and simply answer the question of what a company stands for, you're talking about a strong brand. If you can't, the brand is weak.

So I don't think the "boxing in" is unfair—rather, it's a natural, unavoidable process, a kind of shorthand trust that coheres between a consumer and a product. It doesn't only affect authors. For example, a jazz musician who puts out a heavy metal album will probably see her sales plummet because her fans don't trust her with heavy metal—heavy metal isn't what she stands for in their minds. Actors can face a similar situation—for example, Jim Carey's audience for dramatic roles is much smaller than his audience for comedy. And I think Jerry Seinfeld would be a tough sell as the lead in a straight tearjerker.

The trick, I think, is to develop a relationship with your readers where you gradually introduce them to the idea that you can do more than what they expect of your core brand, where over time you get them comfortable with an expansion of the brand. Again, Stephen King is the best example I know of this. It's not easy, but it can certainly be done.

And in the meantime, what's there to complain about? Sure, a brand involves limitations, but it also involves tremendous opportunities. No one would want to buy a hamburger from Apple or a computer from McDonald's, but each does very well within the "confines" of its brand.

Sorry, I told you I could go on and on about this. And we've just scratched the surface! Again, there's a lot more on the [For Writers](#) section of my website.

Authors, I believe, are entertainers in their purist forms. They are literally just telling a story, from their mind to yours. It harkens back to the times of cavemen sitting around a campfire. But there have been a lot of new developments in the publishing world, what with the emergence of the Kindle and other e-readers. How much do you think that affects a writer's career and a writer trying to break into the business?

I've only been in the industry for about six years, which isn't that long to assess the way it's been changing. But my sense is the main change is that it's more important than ever for writers to understand that they're not just artists, but businesspeople, too, and to behave accordingly. At the risk of sounding like a nonstop advertisement for my website, I recommend the [Marketing](#) page of the For Writers section, especially the article [The Writer as Entrepreneur](#). There's a tremendous amount all writers can do to market their books regardless of changes in the industry. And speaking of those changes, try naming an industry that hasn't changed in the last decade! You can't. Technology affects everything. Nothing is static or stable. The key is to understand the fundamentals and execute well.

You're an author known for staying in touch with fans. In fact, you have a blog, discussion board, Myspace, and a very cool, very detailed website www.barryeisler.com. The extracurriculars of your life—book tours, signings, interviews, staying in touch with fans, etc.—I imagine can be distracting from the actual writing. How do you prioritize? Obviously, it's important to maintain

contact with fans, but it's important to have a product, too!

Yes, this is probably the most challenging aspect of the business. You have to be an artist, but then you also have to do a tremendous amount to sell your art. Well, let me rephrase that: if you want to maximize your chances of commercial success, you have to do a tremendous amount. But there's no right or wrong answer there; it's a balance people have to find for themselves based on their own commercial ambitions. I think in this regard the Internet has been a tremendous opportunity, but also a tremendous burden. It creates almost unlimited marketing reach—but with no external limits on how much you can do, you have to find the right balance within yourself.

Society right now is extremely fast-paced. It has, of course, extended to the arts as well. People want fast-cuts and instant gratification. Is it possible for a person to just settle in with a good book anymore, or has the approach to writing changed along with everything else? Is it still about the stories, the art of creating worlds and the people who inhabit them, or is it mostly about production speed and bottom lines?

Well, certainly there's pressure to turn out product, but I doubt that's anything new. And the stories have to be good—if they're not, people won't read them, no matter how slick the packaging (and anyway, slick packaging isn't one of the industry's strengths. For more, see [How to Package a Book](#)).

Barry, there's no doubt that you are wonderful at what you do—a natural born storyteller. Now, success in writing really isn't that quantifiable. It's an extremely subjective art form. Do you feel successful? How do you measure success?

My definition of success has always been: finding a way to get someone to pay you to do what you would pay to do. By that measure, I'm thrilled with my success. I love writing! And in addition to the actual writing, I do a ton of research, involving travel all over Asia and Europe and once to Brazil, conversations with experts, combat shooting courses... and, with a background in law, sales, and marketing, I love all the business aspects, too. Sometimes I pause and think, holy shit, they're paying me to do this! As long as I'm at least making a living doing what I love, I don't think I could reasonably ask for more.

Finally, you are one of many authors attending the Romantic Times Booklovers Convention in Pittsburgh. What are looking forward to most?

The madness! The spectacle! I've heard so many wild stories about RT, it's going to be great to finally see it all close up.