

## **Interview with Senior Editor Melissa Ann Singer (TOR)**

by Dianna Love Snell, 2007

### **Bio:**

Melissa Ann Singer has been a Senior Editor at Tom Doherty Associates, LLC for over twenty years. She works in a wide variety of genres, including women's fiction, horror, fantasy and science fiction, and mystery. In her wild, impetuous youth, she could periodically be seen chasing people through Central Park with sword in hand. Though she hopes to return to such pursuits one day, she is now the mother of a pre-teen and is apparently known in her daughter's social circle as the "weird mom." This is apparently a good thing.

Prior to joining TDA, Melissa Ann Singer worked in the science fiction department at the Berkley Publishing Group. She is a native of New York City and has lived in the same neighborhood most of her life.

### **Your publisher name and location:**

Tom Doherty Associates, LLC

175 Fifth Avenue

New York, NY 10010

Publishers of Forge, Tor, Orb, Starscape, and Tor Teen

### **How long have you been an editor and what was your path to being an editor?**

I've been working in publishing for nearly 30 years, all of it in editorial, and for only two different firms. I originally had no intention of working in publishing; I was studying computer engineering in college. In the middle of my sophomore year, I had a nervous breakdown. As part of what I intended to be a year of recovery before returning to college, I worked at a temp. agency in New York City (my hometown). The agency primarily supplied workers to law offices and publishing companies. Over the course of several months, I worked for a number of publishers and thought that perhaps when I went back to college, I would do so with an eye toward working in publishing.

Before I could really even begin to plan for that, I was offered a full-time job as an editorial assistant in the science fiction department at Berkley/Putnam. I jumped at the chance, since I was a science fiction geek of the first water—I've been reading the stuff since I was about 8.

It seemed that every time I started to think about going back to college, I'd get promoted or we'd go through a merger or move offices, and I'd get side-tracked. Eventually I decided learning on the job was more fun than going to school. And I fell in love with editing (actually, that happened pretty fast, about the time I realized I could get paid for reading/talking about books and hanging out with writers!—before the cynicism set in, obviously).

I've been at Tor since the mid-1980s, since Tor consisted of fewer than 2 dozen employees and the office space was so small that I, another editor, and our art director came in on alternate days because we were all using the same drafting table as a desk!

Now we occupy one and on-third floors of the landmark Flatiron Building in NYC and Tor Books is an international brand in science fiction and fantasy. Forge Books is the home of numerous bestselling authors.

### **How many authors do you have and would you care to list a few?**

#### **What is the majority sub-genre you represent?**

To answer the second question first, I have no majority subgenre. I am an editor of all work. There are some genres I haven't tried, but one of the great things about working for Tom Doherty Associates is that Tom lets his editors work in a variety of genres—whatever interests them and they are good at.

So, let's see, some authors I work with, along with categories:

Kate Brallier: women's fiction

Ramsey Campbell: horror (supernatural and psychological)

Tori Carrington: female PI mysteries with humor

Bill Evans and Marianna Jameson: thrillers

Elsa Klensch: women's fiction/mysteries

Mercedes Lackey and James Mallory: fantasy

Tobsha Learner: women's fiction

Brian Lumley: horror

Shannon McKeldon: women's fiction with humor

Christopher Pike: young adult fantasy, adult thrillers

Kit Reed: sf

Aimée and David Thurlo: Native American mysteries

Chelsea Quinn Yarbro: historical vampire

### **What variety of stories are you acquiring and are there any specifics about those genres you'd like the writers to know?**

As you can tell by the previous answer, I'm acquiring lots of different kinds of things. I'm particularly interested in buying more women's fiction of all sorts, but especially books targeted for readers over the age of 35 (see attached guidelines); more of what's now being called urban fantasy, and more horror. I also like science-based thrillers—not weapons-oriented stuff but things like our upcoming *Category 7*, which features weather science. (no erotica)

### **How do you prefer submissions based on a conference appointment request?**

If I have a pitch session with a writer and I want to see her project, I will tell the writer exactly what to send. Most of the time, I ask for a proposal—3 chapters or roughly 50 pages, plus a synopsis for the complete work. Sometimes I will ask for 100 pages. Rarely will I ask for the finished work. But I am always specific at the end of the appointment.

I always ask for hardcopy. Anyone who is interested in the specifics of what editors at Tom Doherty Associates consider to be essential to a proposal packet can check our

FAQ at [http://www.tor-forge.com/Faq.aspx?#ctl00\\_cphContent\\_ctl21\\_lblQuestion](http://www.tor-forge.com/Faq.aspx?#ctl00_cphContent_ctl21_lblQuestion). There's a lot of useful information there.

## **What is a pet peeve to do with submissions and/or working with writers?**

People who don't follow our guidelines!

Seriously, and I know people hate to hear this, but we literally receive around 15,000 submissions a year that are sent in accordance with our guidelines. All those people get an answer, though it's usually No. If you don't follow the guidelines, you're not going to get an answer. Following the guidelines is sort of the first test. If you follow the guidelines, you pass and get considered. If you fail, well, obviously you're not smart enough to be published by us (joking here).

Every day I get email queries and proposals direct from writers. I delete them all. Unread.

It gets to me when people call to check up on submissions (which we ask people not to do) and expect me to remember, from their name alone, what their submission is, when I received it, when we met, when we last spoke, etc. I hate to sound petty, but even though I personally deal with only a fraction of the 15,000 submissions mentioned above, I simply don't remember every person I've met or project I've agreed to look at. I can't tell you how many phone conversations I've had where the person on the other end says, "Hi, this is So-and-so; I'm just calling to check in!" And I say, "Check in on what?" and then there's silence . . . because the other person is obviously stunned/offended that I don't remember them right off the bat.

Another thing that always strikes me as odd is when people call and say, "I'm So-and-so from Pensacola/Portland/Podunk." I've never understood what conclusion I'm supposed to draw from their location.

A pet peeve: people who complain about receiving form letters in response to unsolicited submissions.

See 15,000+ submissions? See small staff? (Our total full-time, in NYC, editorial staff is about a dozen people.) See the rest of our work? See form letters.

## **Is there anything you'd like to add that you were not asked?**

If I come across as crabby, hard-bitten, and cynical, rest assured this is a temporary condition caused by overwork, lack of sleep, and the pressures of raising a pre-teen. When that all goes away, I'll be just fine . . . .

